

# profile

## Rick Burstell

*Program Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Greene County*

I am a Program Assistant with the Agriculture Department at Cooperative Extension. Recently, they have been calling me a Program Educator. I am not exactly sure what the difference is in the terminology. My actual job is program assistant. I have been in this position just over four years. I work for Greene County Cornell-Cooperative Extension (GC-CCE). Greene County is in the upper part of the Hudson Valley in the northern edge of the Catskill Mountains.

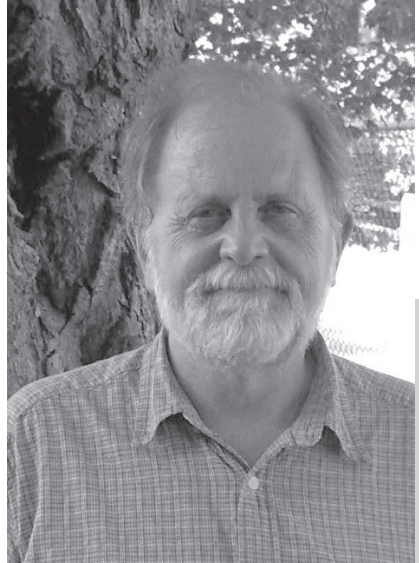
**INTERVIEWED BY**

**Jean Griffiths**

**December, 2003**

When I initially took the job, it pretty much revolved around providing a service to the local citizens in regard to gardening and wildlife issues. I would answer people's questions. That is what I was doing when I first got involved. Since that time, I have been involved with the Master Gardener program and a few other programs in the local area. I'm also doing some teaching in some of the local elementary schools. Now we are in the process of expanding our Lyme disease education program. I will be doing a lot of speaking around the county to different people about Lyme disease.

With this particular job, my responsibilities change often, but Extension's mission is to try to improve people's lives by helping them make informed decisions about different things. One example would be Lyme disease. Lyme disease and deer ticks are endemic in this county. I still find there is a lot of ignorance about how you



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acquire Lyme disease and what to do if you are bitten. You still hear horrible stories of people who are misdiagnosed. So my campaign this year is to make sure that every citizen in our county is aware of as much information as possible, as much as they can consume without overkill, about Lyme disease and deer tick issues.

My personal goals have changed over time. I have two children, and they were my main goal while I was raising them. They both have gone on to college and moved out of the house, so my main goals are different now. Now I am basically trying to deal with the local citizens, my neighbors and the people I come in contact with every day. I am trying to make Extension a life-affirming place. I'm also trying to get everybody on somewhat the same page about the things we need to do. I personally think we need to evolve if we are going to survive as a species. I just want to bring awareness to as many people as I can. I want people to think about the little things that they do and how that affects the whole world.

Most of my career life was with a totally different type of occupation. I worked as a diesel mechanic. I worked on big trucks, bulldozers, buses, and all types of vehicles. I never really found it that fulfilling. I didn't feel that I was providing that much of a service, except maybe to tune things up a bit and make them run more properly. I am actually able to do constructive things in the community with this job, and I find that very rewarding. I am passionate about quality of life and environmental issues. I am also passionate about democracy and self-governance. My passion is appreciating as much as we can of life while we know it.

How I got involved with Extension is an interesting story. My wife and my boss's wife worked together at a local nursery, and they became very good friends. I ended up being introduced to



## **I am trying to make Extension a life-affirming place.**

Bob Beyfuss [GC-CCE agriculture issue leader] through my wife. Bob and I became very good friends over the course of eight years or so. We saw each other on weekends and in the evenings. We didn't really have much in common in terms of employment, but we had a lot of other things in common. Later on, I ended up in a position where I wasn't physically able to maintain my other occupation. At that time, Bob had some openings on his staff, and he thought that I would be an ideal candidate. Regardless of the fact that I was a mechanic, he always thought that I was very intelligent. The perception many people have of people who work with their hands is that they do not necessarily think that much. But that is not always the case. I was a diesel mechanic for just over twenty years. When Bob explained what this part-time position was like, it sounded like something I would be interested in. I was very excited, but I didn't really think he was going to consider me as

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a candidate for the job. So I just kept poking my nose back into it, and eventually, he was really serious. He was willing to give me a shot at coming in here and trying something different. I had been toying with several other ideas in the private sector with some of my transferable mechanical skills, but it wasn't really what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something that was life-affirming and positive, something that would have some kind of effect.

I grew up on Long Island. I would have to call it metropolitan New York. When I first moved there, it was a farm area, but by the time I left there in the early 1970s, it was very congested. That is really why I left. It was a great place to grow up. I always thought that I got a lot of education just from being in the metropoli-

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tan New York area. Plus, it was very close to the water. I grew up on the Long Island Sound and did a lot of fishing and boating and things like that. I always really enjoyed that.

I started college down in Farmingdale, but dropped out. The late sixties and early seventies were a confusing time for me. It was right in the middle of the Vietnam War. I was draft material, 1-A, and there was a lot of pressure there. I had a lot of friends who joined the Marines and went to Vietnam. I was involved in a lot of the protesting that went on at that time. My friends had come back and told me that it was absolutely not a good idea to go there. They started filling me in on what was going on. So as far as my first college experience went, it was not that nourishing to me.

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The reasons why I became a mechanic had more to do with the fact that I wanted to live out in a rural area. I wanted to be able to make a living somewhere away from the confusion of mankind, so to speak, far from the city. I had been living around the city for quite some time, and I found it to be not that fulfilling. I wanted to live out in the open spaces. When you live in the city or the suburb for most of your life, and go out to the open air, it is such a refreshing thing. You just don't want to leave. I find it can be the opposite with the local kids around here. They grow up in the open space; they don't mind going into the city. I guess it's a change of pace.

So I planned on moving off of Long Island. I thought that mankind was going in the wrong direction. It seemed to me, and it still seems to me, that mankind is trying to dominate and conquer our own environment. That didn't seem like a practical thing to me. I thought that a lot of people were missing the point. And I thought that if I got myself away from all of those things that I would be able to raise a family and do things in a healthier environment.

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I started college again in the mid-eighties, while I was a mechanic. I came up here and started going to a local community college, Columbia-Greene Community College. I really loved it. I was so surprised that I was an older student returning to college and my brain actually still worked. I could learn things. It was so refreshing. It felt like I could actually see my head expanding with all of the information that I was consuming at the time. I remember some of the professors would keep me after class and say that they really enjoyed talking with me, but that I needed to give some of the other folks time to talk once in a while: "You cannot dominate every class." My attitude at the time was: "I am paying for this, and I want to get as much at of it as I can." A lot of the students who were there were quite a bit younger and did not seem to have that need that I had. But when I got to about thirty-something credits, I found it was just too overwhelming being a diesel mechanic and a student at the same time. My kids were young, and my boss was not sympathetic of my education. I would stay up to about 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning writing papers, and I'd be dragging the next day. So that did not work out. I ended up leaving school again. However, while I was in school, I found out that so many of the students were there just to get a job like the one I had. This was disturbing to me. Apparently they thought that I had reached some level that they wanted to get to. I always felt that I had never actually reached that level. I was a returning student. It wasn't just about making money; it was about expanding my education.

My parents were a good influence on a lot of the things that I did. I also had a friend who was the same age as me who was brilliant. He was reading people like Buber and Russell when he was twelve or thirteen years old. He was a brilliant young man who influenced me quite a bit to look around the world and see things a little differently. And of course, I became a reader myself and was very influenced by lots of different types of things that I read. I read many different topic areas including science, politics, philosophy and eastern philosophy. Writers like Martin Buber, Alan Watts and Bertrand Russell influenced me.

My life path definitely evolved over a long period of time. I can remember, even from an early age, looking at the stars maybe a little more often than I should have. And I remember trying to figure out exactly what was going on. In the course of your life, you become more and more aware of things, and you are influenced more and more as you get more information. When I was seventeen or eighteen, I realized that I was alive, that I was a multi-cellular organism. I started putting all these things together and realizing what this all meant. It was much more than academic; it is something that goes right into your soul. I would have to call it like "born again," but it's not necessarily a religious experience.

The Extension project I want to talk about was focused on teaching fourth

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graders at the local elementary school some relevant information about their environment. I was going in one day a week for about eleven or twelve weeks. I taught them about how plants grow and how important it is for them to respect their environment. We talked about plants and about their relationship to the sun and the earth. We talked about the trees and the forests. We talked about things that they would do in their yard. We would talk about how they would actually have an effect down the road somewhere.

It was great to be around little kids again. My daughter is almost thirty, and my son is in his twenties. I missed having the little guys around. They are so fresh and open in their thinking, no big biases or prejudices. They are like a clean slate that hasn't been filled up with all the serial killings on TV and those other things that we all get exposed to on a general basis.

The original motivation for the project came because there was some grant money available through the Catskill Watershed Corporation, a Local Development Corporation that was established to protect the water resources of the New York City watershed West of the Hudson River. We thought, "Hey, there is actually some money here; maybe we can put together a pilot program at one of local elementary schools. Then, maybe, over time, we could enlarge it a little bit. Maybe we could do it in all the local school systems?" That was initially how things got started.

The nutrition people in our office already had a connection with some of the young people in our local school. They had a summer garden program going on there. That was when we saw the grant. We asked the nutrition person for the name of the principal, and we pursued it. The teachers and the principal were extremely receptive to having this educational program. They were all very eager to have us come in. So were the students. It seemed to me that the students liked the change in pace of having some different folks come in and teach them. We were in the classroom for most of the sessions until the last few weeks, when we were in the garden then.

The program started with myself and Bill McIntire, a 4-H guy who is no longer working here. We sat down and talked about the possibilities of doing the program. We talked about how he could help with some of the planning, and I could help with one of my Master Gardeners doing the teaching. The Master Gardener program is something that I am sure anybody that is connected with Cornell University must know about. The program was established to help the Cooperative Extension offices throughout the country get information out to citizens. Because we do not have large staffs and large bank accounts to do this work, we actually need help from some of the local citizens to get as much information as we can out

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to the public. We offer training to the Master Gardeners, then expect them to give us that certain amount of time back as volunteers.

So for the school program, I got two of my Master Gardeners who had some experience teaching children. Grace was a retired school teacher. The other woman has a lot of grandchildren and has been around children most of her life. She was very good with children. As it turned out, she ended up not being able to participate with the program, so I only had Grace. I ended up having to do a lot of the program myself, which was great for me. I enjoyed it even though it was during my busiest season, which did put an extra strain on me. I was working a little more in the evenings, trying to get my telephone work done, calling the people who call me with these different concerns in the spring and early summer.

I relied on Bill to order the books and things like that, but it ended up falling into my lap because I was the one who had the staff to do the teaching. I was the guy who kept the whole program going and designed what we were going to do. It would not have happened had I not put it together. That was my specific contribution. For one, I like people, especially children. So I think that was helpful. In these times, when things are as tense as they are, I think that spending more time out in the garden with plants and soil is good therapy. I think most people get an incredible amount of awareness of miraculous things by just spending a little amount of time with simple plants out in the garden. I think that those are life-affirming types of things.

Grace Bowne, the Master Gardener, and I sat down and wrote up the program. We went through lots of different references. We tried to put together a program that would work in the northern Catskills. We ended up getting one of the neighbors to donate a small piece of property near the school to put in a butterfly garden. We had the students start their own plants, and we put some of them in the garden. The kids even took some of the plants home. The nutrition person had her own agenda; I think she had four sessions with the students on nutrition. There was another Master Gardener that I got involved too. His name is Dick Johnson, and he is a beekeeper. I had him come and do a class on honeybees. He taught all of the interesting things that people don't generally know about honeybees, or honey itself. The kids were fascinated with that. That was one of our better classes.

When we started the class, the one elementary school teacher who had been teaching for eight years said, "This is the worst class that I have ever had in all eight years." I was a little nervous at first since I had really never taught kids before, except for my own. I was nervous that maybe kids today were like *The Lord of the Flies*, unruly or really difficult. But I came to find out that even the ones who were supposed to be the biggest troublemakers were great. I didn't have one problem

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with them. It was enjoyable. By the second week, they were like kids we had known for a long time. They seemed to be comfortable with us and us with them.

One of the fun days was the day we were taking photos because the kids really like to ham it up at that age. They were all over me. I actually had them climbing up my back at one point. We had a digital camera, and we were taking a lot of great shots out in the garden. They were all over the camera. We had the truck there and all the tools, the wheelbarrow, and the mulch, and the plants. It was a little chaotic. But it was very enjoyable, too. The kids were having a lot of fun; they were laughing and having a great time. There was not doubt in our minds they certainly learned something.

Grace was an elementary school teacher and used to being around young folks. She was an enormous help to me. She took care of all the plantings. She'd even

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take stuff home. Some of the programs involved starting the plant seeds in the classroom. But we found that it wasn't working that well because the plants were on the windowsill above the heat radiator. So we ended up taking them home and nursing them until the weather got better and we could plant them outside in the garden. Grace helped with all the programs that we

wrote up for each day. She was just an enormously gifted and sweet person.

During the program, we talked about a lot of things. We were doing this program in cooperation with the Catskill Watershed Corporation. The main gist of our message was that young people will become the people who will live here in the future. They should have some consciousness of what they do in their yard will end up in the watershed. It does not really matter where you live. You are always in somebody's watershed somewhere no matter what you do. You may think that it's not that relevant to go out and do this or do that in your yard but ultimately it does end up as everybody's problem. So if you are conscientious of how you do things at home, you will have a positive effect on the world at large. The main point we tried to tell them was that there were a lot of things that they could do to make sure that they would keep their place safe, clean and pure. We taught them that in order for them to grow their own vegetables and flowers, they didn't have to go out and poison everything all the time. There was a better way to do it.

Money to do the program was a concern from the get go. We didn't have our own money here at Extension to fund anything. I suppose we could have gone out

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and solicited some donations from people, but it didn't get to that point. The initial turning point was when we got the grant from the Catskill watershed. We used that money to purchase some supplies—seeds, soil, and different things like that. We could then contribute the time and labor into the program.

It fell together really well. We started with the nutrition person who talked about the importance of food and vegetables, local food products, and even organic food. We evolved into growing the fruits and the vegetables and our beekeeper talking about the bees pollinating the fruits and the vegetables. They all were able to do a little composting and planting themselves—starting seeds and planting the things out in the garden. They also took plants home and planted them at home. It started from being not a totally organized plan, but everything essentially fell into place. It really turned into a nice little program.

The support of the school system and the principal was great. It turned out that a neighbor's donated garden plot was actually closer than the one the school offered. The neighbor had heard through the grapevine that we were doing this program. They were willing to give the children the garden for this use. We were surprised that the school was so eager to embrace the program. I know that part of the curriculum for that year had touched on all the things that we were touching on. In a way, a lot of the information that we were giving them was perhaps a little bit of a repetition, although we covered it in a different way and with more detail. At first, I wasn't sure if the teachers would embrace the ideas since it was stuff that they had already done. But they seemed to appreciate it a lot; their attitude was: "Repeating information would be a good idea for these kids; maybe some of it would sink in."

Both of my Master Gardeners were important to the program. Dick Johnson is a retired man from New Jersey. I think he was a chemist; now he is a beekeeper. He is just a wealth of information about any number of things, especially honeybees. He was a colorful character. People like Grace are a positive force on the planet. She always has a bright life-affirming way of looking at everything. I learned a lot from Grace. I think that has to do with her gentle style. She is such a soft-spoken and kind person. It was refreshing to watch her deal with the students. One of the teachers in the class was pretty tough; she was yelling and screaming. I would watch Grace take over, and the class would just mellow right out. It was an amazing thing. She was like their grandmother.

Grace went above and beyond the call of duty as a Master Gardener volunteer. She put in many more hours than she needed to. As a matter of fact, she is going to do more programs for us again this year because she wants to do something positive in her life. Volunteering for us is a great way for her to do that, and it is

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great for us also. She is giving something back, and I think that is the way that she looks at it. Her value system embraces ideals like that. Relationships with each other in the community are more important than having a huge amount of money and buying a huge house and big cars.

We also had discussions about all the other stimulants that kids get at this age today. In between the television and the movies, we get taken in by all these horrible images and versions of reality. Most of our realities are made up of all these phony Hollywood situations. We have so much of that in our consciousness. We need to have some other good information in there too; that people cooperate with each other and do good things. Where people are more concerned about helping their community than they are about building their bank account.

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We didn't really encounter any obstacles. We had a couple little issues with the maintenance department at the school. They offered to till the garden for us, but it never got done, which really wasn't an issue; we did it ourselves. They ended up having some equipment problems. No one was trying to give us a hard time. There really were no conflicts during the whole program.

The worst thing for me was that it was quite a distance away. It took place one day per week, and I am only a part-time person. At that time of year, probably in the course of April to July, I am dealing with 1,700 phone calls

that I get for people bringing in samples for identification, insects for identification, and all these different things that were going on in my life at the time. It made it challenging. I had to leave the office by 8:30 in the morning, and I wouldn't get back until 2–2:30 in the afternoon. By the time I would get back, I would have a million messages on my desk. But I got through it. I took a lot of the work home. I had to buy my wife flowers a little more often. I had to explain to her that this tough union mechanic was now working on his own time doing this stuff, which was something she just did not understand.

I enjoyed working with the youth. I also enjoy the phone calls. I like working with the public and with all the different types of concerns and complaints. To be

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honest, I think having both kinds of work makes me much more appreciative. It's like having summer and winter. If I just did the one all the time, I would probably miss the other. Sometimes it seems like we refer people to a lot of other places. If people don't know where to call, oftentimes they call us with a lot of different types of questions. We get calls if they have lead in their water. We get concerns with all different kinds of things.

At this point, we are not continuing this particular program. There are a lot of reasons for not continuing, and some of them are financial. I haven't actually spoken to the watershed people about the possibility of getting more money and continuing the programs. Initially, we wanted to go into two schools that are in the area, and we are still talking about it. We haven't given it up yet. We are also working on a few other issues right now. I need to expand our Master Gardener program and get some new volunteers, which is something we are working on now. We have about twenty-five volunteers, but out of that twenty-five, we only have about eight or ten who are active. Maybe ten of the other ones are active once in a while, but nothing on a consistent basis. So we need to get some more volunteers. I am sure that there are some people out there who are looking for something to do. That is one thing about the Master Gardener program. They are not only performing a service for us, but also, in a way, we perform a service for them. We give them something useful to do. We give them a way to participate with their community and improve their community. It is a win-win situation.

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I would do some things differently. I probably didn't do as great an evaluation as I could have. I could have had more on paper about the evaluation. We told them quite a bit on the first day of class, and we did the same thing on the last day of class. They pretty much got it, but whether they retained that I don't know. I assume that they did. We tried to explain different things about their relationship to the forest and how, basically, those critters out there in the forest have been there for a long time, and they had to be respectful of them. We told them that it was not just all put there for their disposal. It wasn't just their playground. We explained that this is their home, and you have to have respect. They understood that; at least they said that they did. We would have to see how that works over time.

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Like everything else in life, more planning in the beginning probably would have been better to get an understanding of the information that we were trying to get to these ten-year-old kids. I had books and books stacked up in my office for several weeks. I went through all different kinds of programming for children. I probably should have gone more with my instinct and experiences with my own kids in the garden instead of looking at so many different materials. I drowned myself in so much material that I found it difficult to decide what I wanted to teach. I worked that out. By the time we got done, we pretty much figured it out. We got it down to the science. As we got further and further into the process, we understood how much they would learn in a fifty-minute period. We learned how much we could actually give them. When we started out with the program, we were going to teach a certain amount in one day, but we would only get halfway through it. By the time we got about four days in, we were able to figure out how much we could get them to absorb in about fifty minutes of time. I don't know if that was anything we could have done before; it was something that we had to learn. I wasn't exactly sure how quick these kids would absorb the information or how attentive they would be.

I wanted to make the program as hands-on as I could. They had their hands in the compost, their hands in the soil, their hands in the seeds, so that they were participating. I always felt in the mechanics business that people never learned by watching somebody do something. They had to do it themselves in order to learn. I was very big on that; they had to have their hands on things. They had to seem like they were experiencing it themselves. This is something that I learned from experience. I was beginning to look at a lot of different projects that people had done in various places in the country with kids of this age. Some of them were pretty ambitious programs with a lot of information to be giving a ten-year-old. For me, I had to go back to the way it was with my own kids. They will take a certain amount of information and they will appreciate it, and then maybe you can repeat it once or twice. But you get to a certain point where they just tune it out. I had to be aware of when that would be so I could move on to the next subject. I would make it something that was hands-on and interesting, something that they could actually look at or touch. It had to be something that wasn't just me lecturing them. My kids have always told me, "Don't lecture me, Dad! Inform me, but don't lecture me."

This concept certainly works with adults as well. I have the same relationship with a lot of people; it is a relative thing. Some people can absorb a lot more than other people can, and you have to tone your presentation down to whatever your audience is. I get senior citizens in here who I find quite similar to the young people.

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They really don't want to get too much into the complexities of the issue. They just want to know what to do. You need to tone your presentation to the audience. You have to give them what they want and what they are comfortable with. If you start to get too technical, often times it just turns them off.

There is a role for the expert when we are dealing with people who are in tune with what they are doing. If we are dealing with somebody who is a farmer or making a living, that is a whole different scenario. They want to know the "meat and potatoes" of the whole issue. When we are dealing with a homeowner who has a concern about his rose or some tree in his yard, it is a whole different kind of relationship. They may not want to know all the science involved in it, and often times, you need to try to influence them in that direction. They may need to get to a little better understanding. If they live in an area where the soil is a low pH of 5, maybe they shouldn't be planting that particular variety. It all depends on the audience. I do get challenged quite a bit by some of the serious gardeners who really want to know what my expertise is. And often, they may have much more experience in that particular area than I do. But I am willing to learn; I am a fast learner. I also have a general idea of a lot of things so that helps. I learn something everyday. It goes both ways. That is what this job is to me: a learning experience. I am constantly consuming information. As a matter of fact, it is almost like information overload. I am reading four books at home. I have so much coming in to my brain; it is amazing that I don't just melt down.

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If there is anything that I regret at all about the program, it is that it is not an ongoing program at this point. I almost feel like I have neglected the kids. They are fifth graders now, and I feel like I need to go back and talk with them. I was there in September dealing with the garden, but I didn't deal with any of the kids. I felt like we should have an ongoing program there all the time. So that is my only regret. I hope that we get to the point that we will do that again.

I think that the other people who worked on this project learned to understand my passions. I was a little pushy about getting it going. I felt that if I didn't hammer away, it wouldn't have happened, and it was something that I wanted to do. I look back at times, and I wonder to myself if I was a little too forceful. It is a "type A" kind of a trait. We only have a certain amount of time to get things done. But ultimately, I have become a very good friend with Grace, so I guess she wasn't offended in any way. I feel bad for Bill because he no longer works here. He is left

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out of the entire loop now. But we all move on. It was a project that I put together and more or less got rolling. It wouldn't have happened if I had not done that. I initially looked at it as a pilot program. I wanted to test the waters and not just see how willing the kids would be, but how I would be, whether it was something that I wanted. I haven't been around young kids for a long time.

Those particular fifty kids in the fourth grade got some additional information from people who are outside of their normal experience. I am sure they all felt that we were passionate about what we were trying to teach them. I am sure that we did have an impact on those kids. What I need to do now is to present and plan this on a larger basis. I need to expand my volunteer base in order to do that. I have different agendas going on with the Master Gardeners. I am the Master Gardener coordinator. I want to get the program big enough to have some of the Master Gardeners taking some of that responsibility. Maybe we could break off into different groups in different directions. Since Grace is so knowledgeable about how we did the school program, she could help with some new folks to get a project like that going again. We have several other things that we are doing besides that program. Hopefully I will be able to empower these people to be more in control rather than having me lead everybody all the time.

I am a cheerleader, and I think that everybody in the office would tell you that. I am also the prophet of doom. It is kind of a dual role. This gets back to my

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personal philosophy of life. These are precious moments that we all have, and they are unique in time and space and God; these moments are what we make of them. That is pretty much it. No matter how bright it is, or how dark it is, it is what you make of it. I am forever pushing people to that kind of

understanding. We have nobody but ourselves to blame or praise. People take me different ways at different times. People say that I am too optimistic, and I have had people tell me I am too pessimistic. I have always thought that people are inherently good, but they can be led to do horrible things. I think that they can be generally good given the opportunity. I have always been an optimist in that way. So it is a paradox, which I think that most things in life are. I think I am also a therapist a lot of times because you get a lot of people who need to talk. I get a lot of senior women who call here. Their husbands have been dead for five or ten years, maybe longer. They are lonely and have all kinds of gardening things that they want to talk about for hours. I have actually been coaxed over to their house to help

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trap the mice or whatever the particular problem is. It really has to do with the fact that they don't have anybody.

We just had our big staff meeting the other day. It was all about our Extension mission and all the things that Cornell Cooperative Extension is going to be involved in here in Greene County. It was so impressive to me; it was all positive. When I was involved with private industry, we always had a graph on the wall with the numbers, and that was what it was all about. The only thing that mattered was the numbers. If the numbers were going up, everything was fine. It didn't matter if everybody in the place was suffering or not; it was all about the numbers. Here we want to improve this community. We want to make the people in this community more informed. We want to help them to make the right decisions in their life. We want to teach them to have a healthier attitude, to eat healthier, to be healthier towards their neighbors, and to embrace and protect the beautiful natural environment that they have around them.

I try to hook people up with other people because there are so many needs out there. There are so many things that could be done. In this county alone, 21 percent of our kids live below the poverty line. To me, being in the richest country in the world, that is just unacceptable. I just can't find any reason why those kids should be that way. I suppose we could blame it on their parents or something like that. But I don't think that the kids should be suffering for that. That is just my personal feeling. I think that we could do a lot better.

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What kinds of skills do I need for this job? You pick up skills in the course of your life and a lot of them are transferable, things you can take with you from place to place. In my career, I was always involved in the management of the union. I was used to dealing with groups of people and with people with different needs and interests. The difference between management and the labor force is pretty substantial, and I always thought that I was able to understand both sides. I think I have good people skills, which are important.

I look at it from an engineers' perspective. How relevant is that? We have had discussions like that around here. How relevant is anything? Life on the planet; is it relevant at all? We have these big philosophical-type discussions, and we always come to the same conclusions. That yes, we are looking at several million years of evolution and an amazing amount of circumstances that had to happen just the

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right way for today to exist the way it does. There is so much accomplishment. Even in this country, the populous struggles to make it what it is today. There were certainly incredible things that happened, and it is important to be thankful for them in order for all of this to happen. So it's not enough to just slough it all off and say it's not that relevant. It is relevant. It is millions and millions of years of work to get to where we are today. I don't see that as being in vain; I think we need to be doing something positive with it.

I am an analytical kind of guy; when I look at anything, I basically trace it back to its origin. That probably helps to some degree, especially when you are dealing with science. What other skills do I have? Communications skills, that is what I consider part of my people skills. That gets back to my general philosophy. It is hard to say things like this, but it started at a very young age. I can remember at fourteen, debating people about Christianity and issues like that. I can remember people always saying things like, "Who are you?" I was the talkative one in the family. I certainly got some of these skills from my family and from reading. I still do a lot of reading. Lately I have been concentrating on foreign affairs, political issues and American history. I'm trying to just get with the program of what is going on. And I'm getting kind of scared. It is not looking good out there around the planet right now. When 70 percent of the world's population is looking at us right now going, "Who are you guys?" It kind of scares me.

As far as community education, we don't often consider that there is a lot of collective education that goes on outside of the institutions of education. I have dialogues with people from all over the place and I find that I have common ground with them. It is always amazing to me; they come from totally different environments than me, but we can hit on the same idea. I come from metropolitan, strip-mall Long Island, which is basically an economics based on growth.

Greene County is a beautiful place. Right now we are in a transition. We have some serious changes going on in this area that are a result of 9/11. For instance, the real estate has gone crazy. There has been a rise in building development. Wal-Mart wants to move in, and Home Depot is moving in. All of this will have, in my view, a negative effect on the community. When we think of community education here, what I am talking about now is not necessarily what I am teaching people when they are calling here. This is stuff that I think is relative to our community. We are in a transition. How we all deal with it in the next five or ten years may have a permanent effect on this area. This is a beautiful area to live in. It has a terrible economy. The major concern here is the economy. If we develop our area to build the economy, let's make sure that we maintain the integrity of the environment at the same time, so that it doesn't become like where I came from, where it is so

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polluted. Out on Long Island, there are a lot of educational programs about pesticide uses. They polluted everything down there. There are a million and a half people who live on the eastern tip of Long Island who have been throwing things in their yard and their cesspools for the last seventy-five years. Then they wonder why all the ground water is polluted down there. In Greene County, it is a critical time now for people to understand that the things we do in the next couple of years will have a major impact on this place. If we are going to maintain it as one of the special places, we are going to have to take some steps to do that.

I get what community education really is from this office. I have always appreciated it, and I am one of those people who is similar to a lot of the citizens out there. I don't always believe what people tell me, regardless of whether it is the government or an institution of higher learning. I am a little skeptical of the information that is out there. I want to see some proof when people make general kinds of statements. I noticed that my clients here are the same way. I even have had people flat out say, "No, I do not believe that. That is not the case at all." As an example, someone will call up with a rodent problem and say, "I went out and bought one of those electronic rodent machines, and it chased every rodent away on my property." I will say to them, "I've got the research here that says that that's not the case." And they will not deny that it worked for them. They give me a little testimony regardless of what Cornell tells them. "This works." I remind them that it may seem it works, but that may not be the case. There may be another reason why they are not seeing any rodents right now.

If I were going to be involved in more community education in this area, I would be trying to promote democracy a little bit more. I would try to get everybody out to vote. Maybe get everybody to sit at the town board meetings and get them a little more involved in what goes on in their community. It is difficult. I know that when I was working my other job, I was basically working 24-7. I didn't have time to get much community education. I was working until I was exhausted. I was coming home and going to sleep and going and doing it again. There are people out in the community who are so busy that they don't have time to read the paper or listen to the radio, even the local station. Basically, they miss us here at Extension. I have been trying to figure out ways to get to those folks, to find some kind of a hook. Something like, "If you

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come to this class, we'll teach you how you can save \$200, and it will cost you \$5 to find out." That is the kind of hook that we need to get them to find the time. I think that once people get together—especially older people, because people are so isolated today—they find out that there are other people out there who are interested. They find out that others are trying to learn and trying to do better. I think it has a multiplying effect.

My general attitude toward humanity gives me a sense of hope. I think that people are not inherently evil, although, I often wonder about it. I never really believed in the concepts of good and evil anyway. I have always believed that was a human invention. I don't see much good and evil in the animal kingdom. It is either rational or irrational. So I am hopeful that, in time, we will see the errors in many of our ways. I was brought up Catholic, and we were taught that all of this stuff was put here for us to use. That was part of the education. There was some other parts that said that you shouldn't, but pretty much it was, "This was all put here for man." I have come to realize that man is not the big equation here. Man is just one of the many equations. It is all tied together. It is all connected, and one thing does come back and affect other things. I think that there is hope that humans will be more compassionate about all living things. Not just each other, but all the things that are out there. You can look at all the indigenous people all across the planet and listen to how they respected their environment. They respected even their enemies, and they respected all the other critters. They didn't have anywhere near the scientific information that we have to understand the complexities of all of these things. Yet they were able to have that kind of respect. I am hopeful that everyone will. I seriously think that time may be running out for that kind of thing to happen. It would seem to me that we haven't learned all that much. Even if we have all of this incredible technology now, we seem to be just as primitive as we were in the Roman Empire or any other empires. It pretty much seems that "empiring" is the same thing no matter when it takes place. It is all about possession and control. I think that we need to learn to live cooperatively with each other and learn not to destroy this place. Maybe we could all have some type of mutual respect with all the other living things out there.

This year I have several different projects going on in my work. Right now, I have a couple of programs for kids on spring break and a few more young people programs that I am trying to do. I am doing Lyme disease programs because we have a serious Lyme disease problem here. It is out of control. I have probably taken about forty ticks off of me in the past year. I take someone around my property, and we each pick off about five ticks. We also are doing a garden tour this year. I haven't done one in three years. We have done two before, and I did them pretty much by

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myself the first two years I was here. As much as I enjoyed it, it was a lot of work. This time I know exactly what I want to do. I know the places and locations to do it. I pretty much have it down to a science, so I am going to do another garden tour. People really enjoy the garden tours and I am actually going to generate some income. It is a double goal.

In my career I am looking forward to the planning process for this garden. We have a huge garden just outside of our building here. Our building is inside of a big park. We have this fairly large garden area that over the last few years has been used for different things. When Bob, my boss, had it about ten or fifteen years ago, he used to just grow corn and pass it out to everybody in the building. Somebody on staff about five years ago planted all different type of herbs, so it became an herb garden at that point. Unfortunately, a lot of those herbs were invasive, so they have pretty much taken over. The last couple of years, we maintained it the way that it was with the herbs. Then we put some ginseng beds out there because Bob is a ginseng person. Last year, some of the 4-H kids planted flowers and then sold them as cut flowers. This year I want to plow out the whole thing to plant food. I want to donate the food to the local food bank. I want to get the community involved, not just my volunteers. Like I said, about 21 percent of our young people are living under the poverty line. The people who are working here are not doing that terrifically. I want to help the food situation with our huge garden. I have spoken with a few people in the community who told me that they would be willing to come over and put some time into it. I see some kind of a little community garden to donate to the local food bank. And maybe I could get the community to actually help do it.