



Kevin Guyer and Kerry O'Donoghue

Poultry in Motion

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Interviewer: Sarah I. Rodriguez

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Sarah Rodriguez: Okay. This is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is August 3rd, 2023. I'm here in Water Valley, Mississippi. Do y'all mind introducing yourselves with your name and what you do?

Kevin Guyer: Sure. I'm Kevin Guyer, and I am officially—well, we'll pass that joke on later. I run Poultry In Motion along with my wife, Kerry. Poultry In Motion Farm is a small organic market farm, which includes breads and canned goods and many other little things. And Kerry?

Kerry O'Donoghue: And I'm Kerry O'Donoghue. My role in Poultry In Motion is to take care of the poultry—

[Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: —collect the eggs, and also to stuff things in jars. I do a lot of canning, jamming, pickling, things like that.

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Kevin Guyer: We have a fondness for word games, and so thus Poultry In Motion instead of poetry in motion. Her business card originally said Chief Eggsecutive Officer.

Sarah Rodriguez: Classic.

Kevin Guyer: And so when I had to get my business card, since I run the garden, I changed mine to Plant Manager.

Sarah Rodriguez: Perfect. Love it.

Kevin Guyer: And if we can find anything else to do plays on words, we will. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: That's fun.

Kevin Guyer: A lot of our products are named with very silly names. Sometimes we have to back them off—

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: —because people don't know what the hell it is.

Sarah Rodriguez: It's a delicate balance—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes [Laughter].

Sarah Rodriguez: —for sure.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you mind, for the record, stating where you were born and when you were born?

Kevin Guyer: Sure. I'm from Central New Hampshire, Laconia, New Hampshire. I lived there and on the seacoast of New Hampshire for 45 years, and then moved here. Kerry's from a bit more all over the place.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes. So you were born in 1958, by the way.

Kevin Guyer: I was, yes.

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Kerry O'Donoghue: I was born in 1960, which makes math easy, so I like that. I was born in New York City, and my family kind of moved around quite a bit: Connecticut, Florida. I went to—

Kevin Guyer: New Orleans.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, well, not yet. I went to college in Upstate New York, I went to Cornell, and then I went to New Orleans where my mom was after college, and then eventually made my way to Maine 'cause my sister was living there. And then I lived there for—Maine and New Hampshire area right on the seacoast. And I lived there for twenty years or so before we moved here twenty years ago.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, we moved here in 2003—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: —I think it was. Yeah. So pretty strong New England component for you too overall?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes.

Sarah Rodriguez: And how did y'all meet?

Kevin Guyer: I owned a record store, and she was a customer.

Sarah Rodriguez: This was in Maine?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Portsmouth.

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Kevin Guyer: Portsmouth, New Hampshire, actually, for 17 years. Kerry was a veterinary technician for about as long.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, I was a zookeeper and then a vet tech.

Kevin Guyer: When we got rid of the record store twenty years ago or twenty-three years ago, Kerry had already begun to move into the computer industry, into e-learning, and I saw her doing it, and I said, "Yeah, I'd do that, too." And it was back when the computer industry needed warm bodies that were trainable, and so we actually became e-learning consultants for the next twenty years, up until last winter—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: —when it pretty much ended, this round of contracts and—

Sarah Rodriguez: Y'all were doing this work while you were down here?

Kevin Guyer: We were.

Kerry O'Donoghue: For a while—

Kevin Guyer: Yeah—

Kerry O'Donoghue: —until we got—

Kevin Guyer: —off and on.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, we got laid off several times. This is the computer business. But we were—

Kevin Guyer: Outsourced several times.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right, exactly, outsourced.

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I always say that what we were doing was really more editorial than computer-based. We were doing a lot of quality assurance in online education. So it was kind of half copy editing and half clicking the buttons and trying to break the thing.

Kevin Guyer: That's early on. Later on, we were—

Kerry O'Donoghue: And then we started—

Kevin Guyer: —constructional designers. [Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: —building and de...right, exactly.

Kevin Guyer: And it was great job, it paid fabulously, spent all our time on a computer, and I don't really need to go back to that. When it ended, we were kinda like, "Yeah, do we really wanna chase another contract? No, not so much."

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, you're kind of forgetting my eight years at the university as well.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, there was that.

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: She was a learning— she was an instructional—

Kerry O'Donoghue: I was an instructional designer there after we got outsourced the next-to-last time. And so then I went and worked at the university for eight years doing the same kind of thing.

Kevin Guyer: But Poultry In Motion started fifteen years ago, about.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Fourteen or fifteen.

Kevin Guyer: We'd have to look at the exact date, but it started as a hobby.

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We had friends who had started the Taylor Farmers Market, which is no more. And they had this cute little market going with lots of live music, and just very cool people running it, and a very good vibe, underneath big, beautiful trees on a Saturday morning. But they called up in a panic after they started, because the thing that most farmers market need is vegetables because there aren't enough growers to produce consistent vegetables. It's easy enough to get—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, or you have growers who have a truckload of watermelons in watermelon season, but then they don't have anything else for the rest of the season.

Kevin Guyer: And it's easy enough to get somebody who wants to come treat it like a bake sale, and bring cakes and that sort of thing. That's not so hard to find. But having a good solid base of growers is what makes a farmer market. So our friends called up and said, "You guys have a really big garden. Would you come be a vegetable vendor?"

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And Kerry's like, "We don't have enough vegetables for that." I mean, we did have a ridiculously huge garden. We have been organic gardeners since we were in New England. We did 10 years in New England. Earlier than that.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Earlier than that, since in my twenties, that's just what I did. And then you had never done it until we got together, and then you get your first homegrown cucumber, and the world changes. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: So we came down here, and actually when we came down here, there were very few organic growers. This is twenty years ago. Walmart was not full of organic food. Kroger was not full of organic food. And organic was even treated with a little suspicion in the rural areas. So we came down, oh, and started growing right away. Our friends called up, and when they did, we said, "We can't just bring vegetables." We only had a little pile of vegetables.

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So Kerry took over. Kerry was doing this by herself.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, it really was. It was my thing that I did every other week, and partly it was my thing because Kevin's a musician, in addition to Plant Manager and everything else, and he kind of—when we moved here, we didn't know anybody, and we weren't going out to work, so we didn't really meet very many people either, and we were staring at a screen all day. So it was my way of getting out and actually being social and interacting with people.

Kevin Guyer: And I was playing the music.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And he was already meeting musicians and having gigs and stuff like that. And so it was kind of my deal, except that he would play the music at the market, so it was ours always from the beginning.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, but you were mostly the one vending at first—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: —and taking care of everything, and so—

Kerry O'Donoghue: So I had a little of everything. I had, you know, we had always had a garden that was too big. We would feed our starving musician friends, and give stuff away, and put a lot of stuff in jars because we had too much.

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We grew too much.

Kevin Guyer: I remember going to a nightclub with our friends for a Christmas party one time up in New England, and I had don't know how many boxes of crates of canned goods we hauled up two flights of stairs to this—

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: —to this party to give everybody their Christmas basket. So that's always been something that we did. And so when Kerry saw this challenge, maybe it's the Yankee in her, I don't know, but she wasn't gonna just show up with a few squash, and cross her fingers. She got industrious, and she started showing up with breads and canned goods and mosaics and flowers and—

Kerry O'Donoghue: And bags. It was fun because I got to do kind of— I don't think of myself as artistic, but I do have some kind of creative, practical outlets [Laughter], like the bags made from recycled animal feed sacks, and the mosaics that are mainly—

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Kevin Guyer: Trivets.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —trivets, you know, useful kind of things. Anyway, so it was a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

Kevin Guyer: And it was lovely feedback and fun.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And it was a beautiful little market, and it was a lot of fun, and it turns out we could actually make a little bit of extra money, and it was just—it was a great vibe.

Kevin Guyer: The Taylor's market, at the time, it was set up in a giant circle, and Kerry would be over here, and I'd walk in to come set up for playing music with friends. And there'd be one or two people at all the other booths [Laughter] around the thing, and there'd be a line at Kerry, because everybody else was doing one little thing, and she was pushing it, which we have become very good at. So we always said it's a hobby, and we could never do this for a living. This is just never gonna produce enough money to do it for a living.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Which it really is. It still doesn't really—

Kevin Guyer: It does not.

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Kerry O'Donoghue: I had—we had a friend who was an organic grower and was at Mid-Town, and she—when I—we got laid off at one point, ten years or so ago, and I was like, “Oh, Jenny, do you think I could do this full-time because it's so much more fun? It's so much nicer than staring at a screen all day.” And she said, “Well, the thing about this is it's a great second income, but you kind of need to have the first income.” [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: I was like, “Dang it.” [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: So, not accepting that as a good answer—

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: —about five years ago—

Kerry O'Donoghue: That would be Kevin for you, right there. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: —we had been doing this off and on, you know, every other week for a while. For you, it stopped for a while. Then we'd do periodically once a month or so or a pop up—

Kerry O'Donoghue: A makers market, we did pop-up makers market things, which were a lot of fun.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, things would pop up over time, and we'd get better and better equipped at it. So a couple years ago, we were doing it fairly regularly, and then I came to the end of a computer contract.

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And I was in the garden, cleaning it up in the winter, and I'm looking around, and I'm like, I really don't want to go look for a job. I really do not want to try something different. I don't want to go back to the computer thing so much. I'm like, what could I do? And I'm looking around, and I'm like, well, I have all the equipment to be a farmer, and I've got forty acres, and then I get some know-how. And then I'm like, wow, if only it could be a living. And I looked around, and I went, you know, I got forty acres. I can make it as big as I want. If I wanted to plant a field of corn, I could plant a field of corn. It would take some work. It's not—

Kerry O'Donoghue: It would be hilly fields.

Kevin Guyer: —bottom land.

[Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: It's very hilly. But it could be done. So I started looking around at it, and I said, you know what, if nothing else, it would be a nice second income for being retired, 'cause we're never gonna retire on what we've earned in our lifetime—

Kerry O'Donoghue: No.

Kevin Guyer: —and not work in some fashion.

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But we might take social security and do this. So I was out there, and I'm thinking, let me see what I can do. And I started pushing the limits of what we could do. And, darn it, the computer jobs came back, and they were really good. And so I said, well, every one of these little contracts only lasts a short period of time, and then I have to decide if it's ever coming back. So each year, I would ramp up the garden huge, all winter long, punching out fences, putting up new fences, making new beds, making it all bigger, better, and cuter, smarter, nicer. And I'd hit March, the computer contract would come in, and I'd be sucked in for seven months right during the farming season. So I kept trying to do both. I was stubborn. A smart person might have stopped the farming thing, and waited until he truly was retired. But I kept trying to build it up, and each year, it got bigger and bigger, and harder to handle.

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Each year, I kept trying to do—each year, the computer job came back.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And the market responded. I mean, he—

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —he would go to the Tuesday market. That would be—he would take the time off, schedule that into the contract, and that's what he did.

Kevin Guyer: Every year, it grew.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: And I could see the potential for it to grow an awful lot more. So I kept pushing it, pushing it, pushing it. Finally this year, the gap has come in that computer contract. Very unlikely to come back unless we go chasing it. So we don't feel like chasing it right at the moment, so we're full-time at this right now.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Kevin Guyer: So we've been doing it for fifteen years, but now it's actually been a business for five.

Sarah Rodriguez: And how did you, Kerry, learn how to get into organic growing? Was that something you were around growing up? What was food like in your home?

Kevin Guyer: Crazy boyfriend?

Kerry O'Donoghue: My first boyfriend was crazy.

Kevin Guyer: [Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, his mom—

Kevin Guyer: In a good way.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —and in a good way, he was a New Hampshire boy, and we met in college. And his mother—his parents lived through the Depression, so it was very much you do with what you do.

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And he brought—he was—

Kevin Guyer: You grow. You can.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right. And he was the organic guy, but I also was. My mother did garden, more flowers than vegetables, but some vegetables. She did gardening, but she was very Miracle-Gro about the whole thing. But she did garden and do well with it. But I went—when I went to college, I lived in a dorm called the Ecology House, and I went with my pet skunk. So I was kind of crunchy granola head anyway, and it just wasn't even—it never even occurred to me to not do things organically because—I think partly 'cause my grandfather was a big gardener, and there was no chemical, synthesized options when he was growing. And even if there were, he would've thought it was stupid.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

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Kerry O'Donoghue: Why buy stuff when you make your own compost, and use that, and it's so much better for the plants, and creates the soil structure and the microorganisms that will support your plants much better than the chemical stuff that gets sprayed?

Kevin Guyer: One of the fellow market vendors at Oxford Community Market, one time I walked up and I said, "Marilyn, I didn't know you were organic. Somebody just told me you're totally organic." And she said, "Well, yeah, why would I put poison on something I'm going to eat?" And so she had never touted herself as an organic gardener, but she just was never gonna use chemicals. So, yeah, coffee's ready.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: So, yeah, that's—we are not devout—what's the word?—evangelical about being organic. We think chemical farming is a really bad idea that came from bad origins.

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But if we need a poison to kill a fire ant far away from the garden, we can use that. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Kevin Guyer: We're not completely pure.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, although we do end up finding organic versions of these things that work just as well. Just last year, I found an organic version here—

Kevin Guyer: Oh, yeah, I did that very well.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —an organic version of Roundup that uses cinnamon oil and oil cloves and all these things. It actually [Laughter] smells great.

Kevin Guyer: And it actually works.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And it works really, really well. It's—

Kevin Guyer: Okay. I'm leaving room for—hang on, I'm gonna wipe this and leave the milk.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And so when you go looking for these things, you can find them. And I had only ever used Roundup anyway in very tiny areas for poison ivy that I could not mow, and that would be it 'cause I'm sensitive to poison ivy.

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Kevin Guyer: And even Roundup's not actually that bad, organic gardener-wise.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No.

Kevin Guyer: It does—

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, I mean—

Kevin Guyer: It acts differently than—

Kerry O'Donoghue: It's much worse for the—

Kevin Guyer: —fertilizers that—

Kerry O'Donoghue: —people but.

Kevin Guyer: —burn things.

Kerry O'Donoghue: But, anyway, this other stuff is better and—

Sarah Rodriguez: Really?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, exactly, and it's lovely.

Kevin Guyer: I see a coffee ground or two in there, sorry.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, no worries.

Kevin Guyer: It's authentic that way.

Sarah Rodriguez: Love some texture.

[Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: If you need water to [Laughter] dilute that, you let me know, 'cause I left it longer than I meant to.

Sarah Rodriguez: That's okay. Thank you so much.

Kevin Guyer: No problem. Sugar coming right up if you need it.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, perfect.

Kevin Guyer: We have Stevia, obviously, if you need that.

[Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: I don't—I wouldn't recommend using this in your interview, but my understanding of the origins of chemical gardening is that it comes from World War II, and that it was a result of—

Kerry O'Donoghue: You're gonna want some of that.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, you're right.

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It was the result of a massive ramping up of chemical factories for World War II, and when it was done, they had nothing to do. So, once again, corporate America came up with a solution. They convinced farmers that they could grow 10 times the amount of corn by simply using chemicals. And it's true, they can grow 10 times the amount of corn. But what that resulted in is a corn glut, where the government had to buy it up, where it got used in ethanol, where it ended up in high-fructose corn syrup. And so a good number of the things that are bad [Laughter] right now are courtesy of that one decision to make money out of chemical plants.

Sarah Rodriguez: Interesting.

Kevin Guyer: Now, I don't know if you really want to quote me on that, because my reading on this issue is sketchy.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. That's okay.

Kevin Guyer: Is that drinkable, by the way?

Sarah Rodriguez: No, it is perfect. Thank you so much. And what was food like in your family growing up, Kevin?

Kevin Guyer: It was canned.

Sarah Rodriguez: Ah, I see, because you said you were not familiar with organic growing kind of before you and Kerry...

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Kevin Guyer: Well, my folks would garden too, my uncle, my dad. When they did, they didn't—I don't think they reached for a lot of fertilizers. And I remember accidentally digging up a buried fish in my uncle's garden, because you didn't spray fish emulsion; you buried a fish. It was a Native American thing. You buried the—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right, the fish with the corn.

Kevin Guyer: —the fish guts next to the thing, and I accidentally dug it up once. It was extremely gross.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Nasty, yes.

Kevin Guyer: [Laughter] So anyhow—

Kerry O'Donoghue: But it's a great way to use fish heads and guts and all the rest of it.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, and they were all fishermen.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: So I wouldn't say no hist...my dad gardened for fun, and found it to be a nice release. So, no, I just never had done it, but I've always been fond of food, and I had learned to cook at an early age because my mother was a pretty wretched cook.

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It runs in the family somewhat. It was old-school, boiled to death canned vegetables, you know, not so far from an awful lot of Southern homestyle cooking, where you cook your green beans until they've been turned to mush.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Till they're gray.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. So I remember when my mother used to cook broccoli or cabbage in the house, and it would just stink to high heaven. I thought I hated cabbage and broccoli. I didn't realize she just overcooked them.

Sarah Rodriguez: There's a big difference.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And my mother was the same, well, my mother for totally different reasons was the same way, that she didn't learn to cook until she was in her seventies really. And then she finally learned to keep broccoli crisp, and all that.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. My mother actually did some canning.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, really?

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, actually, I haven't made piccalilli in a long time.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No.

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Kevin Guyer: Sorry, my mother used to make piccalilli, which is a green tomato relish. And so, yeah, I'd seen canning up close, for sure.

Sarah Rodriguez: Cool.

Kevin Guyer: But, no, it wasn't until we got together, we started gardening on some gorgeous New England soil, which is a whole different skill than gardening in Mississippi. New England, you're trying to save water, and you're trying to, well, you're trying to force things to grow rapidly because the growing season's very short. And so when we moved here and faced red clay—and we're on a hill. We're not a bottom. Most farms are started in the bottom. We were a

garden and started on a hill. We have some advantages. We dry out sooner in the spring, and we have great drainage, and so there's some ways in which it's a huge advantage over getting swamped in the bottom during a flood or whatever. But the soil has to be made instead of using what's there.

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You know what I mean? You have to keep adding things and compost mostly.

Kerry O'Donoghue: I remember when it took about seven years before the soil in the garden had turned from red to brown.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, it was—

Kerry O'Donoghue: And then we knew we were on the right path with enough organic material going into it.

Kevin Guyer: And it's a constant battle. One of the things I often say to my help is try to realize the difference between a chemical farmer and an organic farmer is that I'm raising soil, and they're raising plants. They can plant in anything, and they are indeed planting in dead soil. And through chemicals, the plant lives, and through watering, the plant lives. But an organic gardener is gardening his soil. He's trying to make soil structure and vitality and, by doing that, avoids the need for chemical pesticides and everything.

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A healthy plant—the default mode for a plant is to live. It's not to die. And so if you give it good soil, the plant will resist disease and resist bugs much more than it will if there's nothing for it to draw from.

Kerry O'Donoghue: It has a stronger root system, so it thrives through drought and it thrives through moisture.

Kevin Guyer: Soil is supposed to hold water.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right. It is naturally more resilient if you grow organically and do it well.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. It's a constant battle because the elements in Mississippi, sun and rain, take an awful lot of the nutrients out of the soil.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, they just beat it out.

Kevin Guyer: They beat it down. [Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: So it's a battle.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. What made y'all decide to move down here to Mississippi?

Kerry O'Donoghue: You can have the short version.

Kevin Guyer: The short version is fewer people—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Longer growing season—

Kevin Guyer: —land we could afford.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Land we could afford, that was pretty much it.

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Kevin Guyer: Well, there must've been something else. [Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, and—

Sarah Rodriguez: Did y'all move here to this house?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes.

Kevin Guyer: Just from New Hampshire to this house.

Kerry O'Donoghue: We spent a couple of year...we asked Kevin's traveling musician friends, "What's your favorite small town down south?" And we got this list. And so for two years on our vacations from work, we would travel around, and look at places, and see what hit us. And the only town on everyone's list was Oxford.

Kevin Guyer: But Oxford is a boomtown.

Kerry O'Donoghue: When we got there, we finally—it took us two years to get there. We finally got there, and we went, "Oh, now we understand."

Kevin Guyer: And we were leaving a boomtown where the parking meter costs 25 cents for 20 minutes, and the parking's miserable, and nobody can afford to live near downtown, and that sort of thing.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, certainly people who were musicians and artists and all of our friends, in other words [Laughter], they couldn't live in Portsmouth, New Hampshire where Kevin's store was. They can't live in Oxford either.

So we ended up living in the little towns next to them.

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Kevin Guyer: Everything that makes a boomtown cool has to kind of move out after it gets cool because everybody with money comes in, and then starts complaining about the noise. It's an old story, and our town was like that. So when we saw Oxford, we're like, oh, this place is right headed that same way.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you feel like you moved to Oxford kind of before a lot of that started to happen, or was that already happening?

Kevin Guyer: It was as it was—

Sarah Rodriguez: As it was starting?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: And we—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Like, Uncle Buck's [sp] Record Store was still there when we visited, and it was gone by the time we actually moved six months later. So [Laughter]—

Sarah Rodriguez: I see.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —it was like all of the—and some of those types of places that were cool and quirky and fun. But we never even really looked in Oxford.

Kevin Guyer: We wanted to be near it but not in it.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Exactly.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Kevin Guyer: And so that's— we looked at Water Valley. We may have moved a little further away from Oxford than we intended.

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Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, we didn't really realize this was—

[Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: —so far on the south of Water Valley. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

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So we're forty minutes from Oxford, so that's a little more than is convenient, but we're still not really regretting that.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No.

Kevin Guyer: It takes a little extra effort to go everywhere for groceries and stuff. But, no, still no complaints. And the land is beautiful. Nobody in New England thinks Mississippi is anything but the Delta. All they've ever seen in a movie about Mississippi is the Delta, and it's flat and hot and miserable, and they don't know there's rolling green hills in the forests, and that sort of thing. So the land is lovely, and the temperature's a little better than down the Delta or further south. Kerry wouldn't go any further south.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, there, that's the thing, you know, I had lived in various...in some areas in Florida and in New Orleans, that's zone 9 in the gardening zones. In Maine, we were in zone 5. So I was like, I don't wanna go to 9 again. He was ready to go to the tropics.

Kevin Guyer: [Laughter] Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And I'm like, "You're just as confined in the summer by the heat as you are in the winter in Maine by the cold."

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So we were really looking for zone 7. And in zone seven, which kind of swings down from D.C., and comes across the country, getting a little farther south as it goes, you can't be too close to a coast because then we couldn't afford it, and then there's too many people.

Kevin Guyer: And too many people, way too many people on the coast.

Kerry O'Donoghue: So we ended up—we thought we were gonna end up in Arkansas 'cause it's so gorgeous there, but it just was—

Kevin Guyer: Not as interesting as Mississippi—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, it wasn't as—

Kevin Guyer: —both good and bad.

Kerry O'Donoghue: It's not as diverse. It was not as quirky. It's not as cool.

Kevin Guyer: We felt better here.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: We felt more at home.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah. And I love living in New Orleans. I love the diversity. I love living where cultures are melding, and the different food and music and smells and sights and everything. And Mississippi had a lot more of that.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes sense. And so you said you started at the Taylor farmers market—

0:28:02

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes.

Sarah Rodriguez: —when it was starting up. Had you been to farmers markets before that?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Oh yeah.

Kevin Guyer: First thing we did when we got here. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, really?

Kerry O'Donoghue: First thing we did anywhere. When we visit—

Kevin Guyer: You see that's like—yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —when we vacation, that's where we—what we do too.

Kevin Guyer: Like seeks like, so the very first thing we did was find the—find and becomes friends with the first organic gardener at the Mid-Town Market.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Whose husband, as it turns out, was a musician [Laughter] so—

Kevin Guyer: Was a musician. He had a band [inaudible 0:28:24].

Kerry O'Donoghue: —they had a band instantly called the Okra Tones [sp]. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: So, yes, that was a big factor right away.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Mid-Town was great, except that where we are and where they are and where they close, or the time they close, it was hard for us to get there.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Kevin Guyer: I don't wanna wake up Saturday morning at six o'clock just to get to a farmer's market.

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter] Exactly.

Kevin Guyer: I want my coffee, and by the time we have it and drive forty minutes, you figure everybody's outta vegetables anyhow.

So we'd go, but we'd mostly go to visit our friend Jenny, and get the last few things at the market, and chat.

0:29:03

Kevin Guyer: So, yeah, we—like sought like, especially back then when there were only a few organic types. I think there were like two or three. And then times changed, and suddenly then you're starting to see Yokna Bottoms Farms, and you started seeing Native Son, and all that stuff, begin there. They started at Taylor. Native Son was in Taylor, weren't they?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yokna was, for sure.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, it was. So, I mean, they were beginning as we were beginning to sell.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, Taylor had a lot— it had more, in fact, almost all of the growers were organic at Taylor.

Kevin Guyer: Well, an awful lot of them in Oxford Community Market are, too.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember whenever you first got connected with—were you connected with the Oxford Community Market when it was Oxford City Market? When did y'all first plug in?

Kevin Guyer: I played in the tent at the old market—

Kerry O'Donoghue: He played—he's played all of them.

Kevin Guyer: —and our friends were all vendors.

0:30:00

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes, all of our friends were vendors. That was—the City Market started, I think, when I just started my job at the university. So the job at the university meant that I could never do anything on a Tuesday, 'cause the university is not very flexible. So that kind of—I couldn't do anything. And, in fact, it wasn't—

Kevin Guyer: And Tuesday's a weird day for a farmers market.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right, exactly.

Kevin Guyer: It turns out it's lovely for us now.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right. But I could go, and we had a couple of very good friends who were vendors there, so that was always fun.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. I can remember playing in the tent during a rainstorm with rivers running by me. And we unplugged everything, and Luke Fisher [sp] and I just played acoustic, and kept the vendors entertained while the customers bolted for cover.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: So, yeah, no, we liked that market a lot. And then when—I don't remember how we actually started going to this one.

0:30:59

I don't actually remember what caused us to do that.

Sarah Rodriguez: To start being a vendor at the—

Kevin Guyer: At the Tuesday market in the [Old Armory] Pavillion. I honestly don't remember the very first market.

Kerry O'Donoghue: I don't—

Kevin Guyer: We must've had something to sell [Laughter], you know, something we wanted to get rid of. I don't know. Maybe you did. Did you do it? We don't remember.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, I don't.

Kevin Guyer: And then—

Kerry O'Donoghue: I don't see how I could've if I was at the university.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right. Would it have been after you were no longer at the university?

Kevin Guyer: No.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No, no, no.

Kevin Guyer: That was up until—

Kerry O'Donoghue: That was—

Kevin Guyer: —just a couple years ago.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Maybe three or four years ago.

Kevin Guyer: So I started there apparently, and. I honestly can't remember why.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah, you must have.

Kevin Guyer: And I started with a small table of things, and then just kept expanding and expanding, pushing, and everything got bigger. And now we occupy two spaces; not quite full two spaces. We don't use it all. But we buy two spaces, and bring a ridiculous assortment of things that we spend the entire rest of the week producing.

0:32:04

Kerry's got jam on the stove right there to make strawberry hibiscus jam. And the rest of the time is spent growing. But my problem was for the last several years, I was juggling that other

full-time job. And so not only would I lose control of the garden in the summer, and weeds take over, but trying to squeeze in the time to make it happen. It was a mad house, and I was exhausted, and I was doing it alone 'cause she would still work—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: —full-time elsewhere, and I was doing it. I had a shorter job, a shorter contract than she had. She was working longer. And so I tried to juggle the two, and was stubborn about giving up the farming. I thought if I could keep it going, building, and be smarter, and then when the other job would go away, I'd be ready to go. And I think I was right, because we had pretty serious infrastructure by the time—

Kerry O'Donoghue: We did.

Kevin Guyer: And now we have a hoop house that we didn't have before, and we figured out an awful lot of stuff.

0:33:00

And now instead of bringing 20 loaves of bread and some—a few vegetables, we bring 60 to 80 loaves of bread on a given day.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Which, can I say, is nuts—

Kevin Guyer: It's nuts.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —because he bakes it all—

Kevin Guyer: It's two little ovens—

Kerry O'Donoghue: —Tuesday morning.

Kevin Guyer: —one big oven, and we don't use a mixer. I was gonna show you this since it was just being cleaned. We use old fashioned hand bread buckets.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh.

Kevin Guyer: We make European freeform style breads. They're not loaf bread. They're not done in pans.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Crusty artisan loaves is what we make.

Sarah Rodriguez: What? So you just kind of place open in the oven as opposed to like a bread pan?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Correct.

Kevin Guyer: I'll get this [inaudible 0:33:39].

Kerry O'Donoghue: And we do a couple of sweetbreads too. I tend to be the one who comes up with recipes, but Kevin executes most of it. I do the sweetbreads usually, and play around with that. And those ones we can do the night before because they're actually better after they sit and the moisture moves around for a night.

0:34:01

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. So overnight rises and hand-crank—

Kerry O'Donoghue: But, yeah, the rest of the bread has an overnight rise. Less yeast over a longer period of time adds a lot of flavor to bread.

Kevin Guyer: So not like—not a sourdough but sourer than—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, just breadier, really. And I'm like— [metal sounds from bread bucket mixer]

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you mind if I take a picture?

Kevin Guyer: Sure.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Unlike American style—

Kevin Guyer: I figured a photographer would.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, she definitely would.

Kevin Guyer: There we go. So the idea is that this would make about twelve loaves of our bread. The dough would go in here, and you just seal this off. It's the same kind of dough hook that's in a mixer.

Sarah Rodriguez: Right.

Kevin Guyer: But you don't have to blend it too smooth in order to make bread. You just have to [inaudible 0:34:50].

Sarah Rodriguez: So this works?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: So I have to make four or five—four—three to four of these per market—

0:35:00

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Kevin Guyer: —which takes some doing. We have large containers to store dough in fridges. Like I said, infrastructure, we have multiple bread buckets.

Sarah Rodriguez: Amazing. Well, and explain kind of how y'all have evolved over time, especially as you've—it seems like y'all have kind of been on track to grow, even with the other work that y'all are balancing. Kind of what has been your focus as you've grown?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Well, Kevin's focus is always in the garden area, and he has grown that astonishingly.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah, I found out when I first went to market that, you know, I thought, hey, I'm gonna ramp up. And now we make 10 of these. I'm gonna grow 50 of these. And I'd go to market, and they'd be gone the first day. And I'd like, okay, I don't need 50; I need 500. And so—

0:35:59

Kerry O'Donoghue: Like leeks, for instance.

Kevin Guyer: Leeks, for instance, yes.

Kerry O'Donoghue: He cannot grow enough leeks to keep customers happy.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: So had to learn how to—had to take the large garden that was trying to grow too many things already, and get it to grow quantities.

Kerry O'Donoghue: So quantities is one, and this year we're just starting to get into restaurant sales, particularly with fresh herbs, which apparently there's a need for that, this time of year with basil, in particular.

Kevin Guyer: There's a hundred and some odd basil plants out there cranking away, and restaurants that want to buy every bit we can produce—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: —so at good prices. Herbs are expensive.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah. So that's kind of where we see it going in the next few years. It's kind of exploring the restaurant side a little bit more, seeing what makes sense.

Kevin Guyer: There's not enough time in the week to do multiple markets with two of us, because it takes—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Plus, it's exhausting. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: It's exhausting. [Laughter]

0:37:00

Sarah Rodriguez: So y'all just do the Oxford Community Market right now?

Kevin Guyer: If it takes two and a half days to do a market, and you do two of them, there's not many days left for gardening again. I'm back to the same situation I was.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yes.

Kevin Guyer: I'd lose control out there.

Kerry O'Donoghue: We do kind of pop-up things as well. Like, Taylor had a pop-up last month. They're having a pop-up this month as well.

Kevin Guyer: We're trying to add odds and ends here and there to augment it without locking ourselves into losing all the time we need.

Kerry O'Donoghue: We talk a lot about going for a Saturday morning market because the Saturday morning markets are when people expect a farmers market to be. There's a huge customer base. I think we could do really well financially. But the bread thing makes it very difficult to schedule. He likes bringing fresh day bread.

Kevin Guyer: We bake it the morning of the—

Kerry O'Donoghue: He just really wants that to be. And I—when I was in Taylor, it was a Saturday morning market, and I would bake it the night before.

0:38:00

And really, the time difference wasn't—

Kevin Guyer: Not that much.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —that much different, but it's still the amount we're baking now.

Kevin Guyer: We literally run out of the door with warm bread sometimes. Like, we don't have time to cool it. We have a warm bread carrier, and I have—I packaged it at market because I couldn't wait another minute to get there.

Kerry O'Donoghue: So we keep going back and forth about the Saturday market. So the pop-ups have been great. We can do that and kind of explore what that looks like in other areas without committing full-time.

Kevin Guyer: Because we sell so many different things, we can actually push a Tuesday market to the kind of numbers that most people get out of a Saturday market. If you're gonna show up at a Saturday market with some lettuce and some squash and some other stuff, we can kick your butt because we are better at marketing, and packaging, and having multiple things to sell.

0:38:59

When we add up what we sell at the end of the day, it's adding in four dozen, four or five dozen eggs, a couple of tote bags, dried herbs, dog treats, all these things. And so we have learned to push the Tuesday market to sizable— to equal to what I would expect most people to make at a Saturday market if they were doing well.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Hard to say. We don't do Saturdays, so hard to say.

Kevin Guyer: No. I don't know what we could make at a Saturday market. I have no idea.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Exactly.

Sarah Rodriguez: Could you describe what it's been like to kind of connect with the community at the Oxford Community Market, whether that's other vendors, customers, etc.?

Kevin Guyer: It's got a big family feel. Also, again, my tie into the musicians, the musicians they book are friends and family, and the customers are friends and family, and the vendors, some of us have known each other for ten years now.

0:40:01

So, I mean, it's a community within itself. Yes. We also love the fact that it's a powerful force for social good. We love that Betsy spends the rest of her week taking vegetables, and she does it in smart ways. She leverages grants and donations to help the market by purchasing things, and to bring it out into the community and feed people. It's a powerful thing, and we're always gonna choose that market over any other for that—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Yeah.

Kevin Guyer: —if nothing else. It is truly a community market.

Sarah Rodriguez: Are there any particular memories of any cool interactions?

Kevin Guyer: I remember the bad times getting through COVID.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah. Could you talk a bit about what that was like?

Kevin Guyer: It was pretty miserable going to every market, and wearing a mask in 95-degree heat, trying to understand the customers wearing the mask.

0:41:00

But there were a lot of really great things. I mean, people were scared. They didn't know where the next food was coming from, and we were all just saying, "Relax. We still got food. Don't you worry." So that was cool, and everybody managed.

Sarah Rodriguez: Did the market take a break at any point?

Kerry O'Donoghue: It had—

Kevin Guyer: Short.

Kerry O'Donoghue: No. I think it had one or maybe two weeks where it had to cancel because a vendor had contracted. So it was a quarantine cancel.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Kerry O'Donoghue: But that was it.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Other than that, Betsy—

Kevin Guyer: We felt it was important—

Kerry O'Donoghue: —really researched it, and like spread people out more. And there were some rules about—I don't remember them all, but they were about—

Kevin Guyer: Distance, masking, time spent—

Kerry O'Donoghue: And something about money transfer was—they were supposed to put it on the table, and then we would take it off the table.

Kevin Guyer: Some people put their cash drawers out and told people to make the change themselves.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Right.

Kevin Guyer: I mean, we all adapted in great ways. I remember tattling on—well, not tattling.

0:42:01

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: I remember sort of pointing out that an old friend of mine had walked in without a mask. I walked over to Betsy. I said, “Do you want to tell him or I—or do you want me to do it?” She said, “Oh, I got it.” And she walked over and kicked his butt out. And he saw me afterwards, and I said, “Yeah, Stuart [sp], see ya. [Laughter] Nice seeing you, but we’re gonna enforce it here.” So, anyhow, we got through it. But that was an experience, and I was juggling that with the full-time job thing at the same time, so it was something.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Kevin Guyer: At that time, Kerry wasn’t coming to market. Kerry’s only been coming to market the last year and a half, I think.

Kerry O'Donoghue: Or three.

Kevin Guyer: Is it?

Kerry O'Donoghue: Mm-hmm.

Kevin Guyer: [Laughter] Who’s tracking?

Sarah Rodriguez: It’s hard to keep track nowadays.

[Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: And one of the memories, well, kind of memories I have, the thing that I like, one of the things I like about the market is that there are some customers and there are some market people who have become friends enough so that they’ll like—they—if we have a—

0:43:01

Kevin Guyer: We invite them over here.

Kerry O'Donoghue: —deck party or a pool party, they come out, and we get to interact outside of the market. And that's a lovely thing, too. That kind of shows that those connections go deeper than just a simple transaction.

Kevin Guyer: This kind of farmers market, if you don't like talking to customers, quit, because that's what you do. We spend the whole day talking, trading recipes, telling people about vegetables, describing bread—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Talking about my crazy jars.

Kevin Guyer: And then they come back with their, you know, what they grow and everything else. If you don't wanna be conversational, and a lot of farmers don't, a lot of farmers just want to grow their melon, then leave me the hell alone.

Kerry O'Donoghue: One of the fun things this year actually was the week—we had two weeks where I could forage for chanterelle mushrooms, and I brought them to market. And those are the only mushrooms that I will wild forage, 'cause I'm 100% sure of.

0:44:02

For forty years, I've been foraging these mushrooms. [Laughter] And, anyway, the first week I bring them, and people snap them up. And the next week, they come back and they were—they bought 'em again, usually. But even if they didn't, they wanted to tell me what they did with them. And that was just awesome.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. And then there was the woman who said—

Kerry O'Donoghue: They had all these cool things. [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: Then there was woman who said, “And I went out to forage my own, and it was hot, and it was miserable.”

Kerry O'Donoghue: “And I got ticks on me.”

Kevin Guyer: “Plus I got ticks.”

Kerry O'Donoghue: “And found one chanterelle,” she—

[Laughter]

Kerry O'Donoghue: And then she bought two boxes.

[Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: Yeah.

Kerry O'Donoghue: I said, “Yeah, it was hot.”

Kevin Guyer: And of course the feedback's lovely. I was talking to another vendor recently, Mardis Honey. Becca [sp] was talking, and she said, “The honey is one thing. The bees do the work, and people love your honey. The honey, that's lovely.” She said, “But I've been making this granola, and people come back and they tell me how much they love the granola.”

0:45:00

She says, “That's so sweet,” you know, just a feedback that she's never had before. And we love it when people come back desperate for a product. One woman this week had bought a small jar of pickled beets—

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: —which she proceeded to drink the juice of after she was done, as I think I told you.

Kerry O'Donoghue: [Laughter]

Kevin Guyer: But red wine pickled beets, and she came back, and she would take every large jar that we had, and we scrounged over four or five, and sent her home. That stuff's great. And so how much of a community is it? It's a big community. We feed each other. There were times last year when Betsy was doing tastings at 5:30. It was a lot of work. Everybody had to ramp up and come out with a tray for 5:30. But people came. They brought their kids. They sampled food and talked about it. Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: That sounds super special.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. It's not just come get your vegetables and go.

0:46:00

It's certainly not that. And some farmers find it annoyingly social. [Laughter]

Sarah Rodriguez: It is a very social environment, for sure.

Kevin Guyer: And sometimes we couldn't talk. That was one of the challenges with COVID. Everybody was so lonely and wanted to talk, but you had to hustle through, and it was tense. It was—everybody was jittery. It was really nice when that stopped. And, yes, still people come in masks if they're concerned about diseases in general. But now it's a normal thing to see people with a mask. But for that period, it was very tense and—

Kerry O'Donoghue: Pre-vaccine.

Kevin Guyer: Yeah. May I make a suggestion?

Sarah Rodriguez: Please?

Kevin Guyer: If you wanna pause that or if you want to keep it running, it's up to you. If we took the walk in the garden, you might have different questions. You might have variations on your questions—

Sarah Rodriguez: Maybe.

0:47:00

Kevin Guyer: —after seeing.

Sarah Rodriguez: Yeah, let's go ahead and take a pause.

Kevin Guyer: So I'm thinking leave yourself some time.

[End]