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The Center for Service &amp; Learning Newsletter



Margaux Frank milks a cow at Mesa Top Farms  
15 miles from Santa Fe, New Mexico

## Spring Break on a Farm

By: Sarah Rice

Introduction by : Eleanor Mulshine

### Introduction:

*This past spring break, eight students traveled to Mesa Top Farm, also called Beneficial Farm, just southeast of Santa Fe, NM to do eight days of work. It is a biodynamic farm, which is similar to organic farming, yet it involves uniting all aspects of the farm—most importantly, the animals and the crops. Biodynamic farming also focuses on revitalizing the soil through composting. We*

*had a fantastic time working, learning about biodynamics and living the 'farm life'. Our tasks included painting the inside of a tool house, spreading compost over the fields, cleaning out the chicken coops, collecting the chicken eggs and feeding all of the animals daily. Each of us had the chance to assist Annalise, one of the workers on the farm to do the feeding and we even got to milk the cow! Steve, the owner of Mesa Top, and Annie, the resident Renaissance woman/handy woman warmly welcomed us to the farm. They showed us how 'beneficial' it is to understand where your food comes from and if possible, to eat homegrown or local food. We were*

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## 22 CC Students Go to New Orleans

By: Brian Johnson with contributions from Preston Brasch

At the end of our trip, Shan Shan Chan, one of our trip leaders shared this thought, "If it looks bad and you have to see it everyday, you're going to feel bad, too. But, if it looks good, and you see it everyday, you'll feel better about yourself."

Over Spring Break, I went on a Service Trip to New Orleans. It started on a Thursday when we all piled into two white vans at 6am leaving from CC's campus. It was the first leg of a 20-hour car ride to the Big Easy. The ride passed by with the help of sleep, friends, music and lots of food. After stopping the night in Wichita Falls, TX, we arrived in New Orleans on Friday afternoon.

We stayed in Slidell, about 30 miles outside of New Orleans. Soon, Brother Jones greeted us with a great feast of southern food. Let me just tell you a little something about Brother Jones. He's a former Canadian league football player. He stands looming over everyone, gives high-fives

and hugs to everyone, and goes on long tangents that somehow always lead back to football. But Brother Jones has also done tremendous work for the Katrina relief effort. His church, the Bywater Church, has distributed supplies, including furniture and other essentials, to local residents. It has also housed several college groups in New Orleans for relief effort, like us.

Over the weekend we helped brother Jones clean up his church. With all of the donations they've given out, boxes had piled up in the church warehouse. Boxes and trash were piled 8 feet high and covered an area of about 20 feet by 15 feet. We filled 180 trash bags in about three hours. The next day we went to one of Jones' church services and checked out the city a bit. Finally, on Monday, we started working on the house. We worked through ACORN, a non-profit organization.

That day, we stripped lead paint off a house. By Thursday, after stripping, priming, and painting, the house was a beautiful Carolina blue, with darker blue window shades and white doors. Working under that humid Louisiana sun made the work actually pretty enjoyable. Because we finished early, the group split into two groups of 11 and helped out with

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other sites.

While in New Orleans, there was a lot that we learned. On the first day, we all noticed giant spray-paint “X”s on all of the houses in the area. We asked Joan, the owner of the house we repainted, who explained that these were left by the inspectors that came through after Katrina. On the top was the date of the inspection, on the right was the part of the house they entered, on the left the inspector’s home state, and on the bottom, the number of bodies that had been found inside the home. By repainting her house, we were finally remove that constant reminder of the devastation that had swept the region.

On Friday, we saw first hand the extent of this devastation. On tour of the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, we saw just how horrific the hurricane had been. The Lower 9th was nothing but empty foundations with an occasional home.

The community had been so tight knit before the hurricane, that the residents wouldn’t even use street names, instead identifying the roads by the families that lived there. I could just imagine someone

telling their friend to, “Turn left at the Johnson’s and right at the Smith’s.”

For the former residents, coming back is often times not an option. Many were old and have settled in with relatives in other parts of the South. Many can’t afford to rebuild their homes, and many won’t come back, because they don’t have anything to come back to.

A few people in the group cried when they saw up close, a home that had been abandoned. Mold grew on the walls, insulation was sticking out of the ceiling and falling onto sofas and the TV. Everything had a stench and a layer of filth that made the home a lost cause.

Even outside of the Lower 9th, one wouldn’t believe how many abandoned and deteriorating buildings are still left. On the side of the highway stood a huge Wal-Mart Superstore just abandoned, like a ghost town. Often we’d see homes with broken windows and caved in ceilings. Sometimes these would be right down the road from a brand new gated development with beautiful homes.

The dichotomy of New Orleans is perhaps unmatched by any city in this country.

The city itself has several low-income and high crime neighborhoods, and yet only a ten minute car ride away, would stand these immaculate southern mansions.

In the Lower 9th, however, there is evidence of hope and change. Brad Pitt, for example, has spearheaded a massive building effort in the Lower 9th. New modern and futuristic homes are being planned and built. As of yet, probably about 15 have already gone up.

On our last day in New Orleans. As a farewell, Brother Jones made us a fantastic dinner of gumbo, crawfish and chicken. He thanked us for our work and we thanked him for his hospitality. Later, we cleaned up the house we had stayed in and went to bed for the last time in New Orleans before beginning our 20 hour drive back to campus.

I must say, Alternative Spring Break was one of the best trips I’ve been on. It was a very fun time hanging out in New Orleans, talking to the locals and meeting new people from school. It was also fulfilling and eye opening, because of the service, and because we got to see a completely different part of the city that most people never get to experience.

## Quote of the Month

*“Almost everything that you do will seem insignificant...*

*but it is important that you do it”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*



Hannah Heckman, Alana Yurakir and Luke Parkhurst work the soil at Mesa Top Farms close to Santa Fe, NM

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*glad to contribute our services of physical labor and positive attitudes to the farm as well as helping progress the practices of sustainable agriculture. We will continue to promote the ideas we learned at the farm to the CC community and we hope to return to Mesa Top someday through more service trips at CC!*

## Participant Reflection:

On our last morning at the farm, we rise in darkness and fumble into hiking boots, mesa-bound to greet the sun. The roosters crow in vague belligerence from their coop as our footsteps crunch away up the hill. We turn onto the path beside the old mare's pen and wind towards the mesa at the edge of the farm's property. We follow the path easily; our bodies memorized the track two days ago by lugging a dump-truck-worth of loose stones off of it in buckets. We named the track "Broken-In Path" in homage to BreakOut, having rejected "Broken-Out Path" because it gave the wrong impression about the beauty of the setting. And the setting *is* beautiful—this landscape of red earth and juniper trees that cradles the farm beneath the wide sky. Walking here, I feel my edges blur and my consciousness expand; I feel as if I were drawing in a breath with infinite lung capacity.

We gain height above the land's spread as we trek on. The path steepens as we tip over the mesa's lip and onto its grand, flat top. Hot from climbing, we leave our jackets hanging on

outstretched limbs of the wizened trees. We will come back for them when the sun has risen and we have gazed out onto the fairytale-like motes of light streaming into our vision. Now, though, the sun is still just a bright blush at the edge of the distant valley. As sun slowly peeps above the land and turns from glow to orb, we hunt it through the scraggly trees, wandering across the mesa until we find a clearing where our view of the valley unfolds unimpeded. We sit in a clump and watch until the sun's orb grows full and finally ascends from the horizon, letting go of the land from which it has emerged.

One of the girls in our group is crying. I'm not sure whether she is really moved or just really allergic to the juniper all over the mesa, but I'm betting it's a bit of both. With one last glance back at the sun, we rise haphazardly, stretch, and start to chat as we head back to our jackets on the other side of the mesa. When I get there, the rest of the group is staring out at this western view, which at first I think is not so spectacular as the sunlit landscape to the east. Then somebody points out a particular patch of earth: our farm, seen distantly from above. I grin as I realize I can hear the roosters crowing faintly, even from here. If I got lost, I could follow that sound home.

From the mesa top, the farm looks like a perfect miniature of exactly what a farm ought to be. That is our work. When we arrived, the fields lay fallow and the garden teemed with weeds. Together we tilled the earth to new life. Dark rows of rich soil stretch out behind the farm's two main buildings; with shovel and wheelbarrow we have spread compost upon them to make them rich and ready for growth. The garden, too, sports dark rows freshly-broken. Its edges are clean of weeds and a new fire pit beckons at its outskirts for late-night camaraderie. Most striking of all, a new compost pile looms at the farm's limit, slowly turning into that fertile substance that will enrich the earth in years to come. The compost pile is our hardest-won achievement: the product of hours spent shoveling out the grime of the chicken coops, the air thick with dust and cloying with confined heat.

Our work on the farm, was not easy. But that is precisely what made it worthwhile. For a week, we traded the intellectual toil of academic life for the wholesome physical rigor of farm labor. As we make our way down from the mesa and back to our lovely little farm, we carry with us not only the beauty of the sunrise but also the wistfulness of knowing that the time has come for us to leave this place and return to our college lives. One thing is certain: we will return to college more anchored, more at peace, than we left. Perhaps the land has cultivated us even as we cultivated it.

## India Petition

You may remember last issue reading about the Service Trip to India. During the trip, the students witnessed first hand the poor education system found in the village. The village had one teacher, who in the entirety of the CC students' 10 day stay, only came once. When he arrived, the children looked scared and were physically dragged down the road to school. Upon arrival at CC, the students from the trip decided to do something about what they saw. Since then, they have been writing weekly to Indian officials informing them of the poor conditions and asking that they please give these children the education they deserve. Now, these Trip members are putting together a petition to send to the Indian Government. Recently, they received a response from an Indian official that they would investigate the issue, proving the power of individuals to have an influence.