

Dear Friends,

I want to thank Joan [Huntly] for sharing these remembrances with you today. I am her sister Charlotte. My husband and I ranch in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, and I am writing to let you know that my heart is with you today.

Our dad Charles was raised on a Vermont dairy farm where EVERYTHING was recycled. He met our mother Josephine while tending citrus groves for his uncle near Harlingen. They moved to Austin in 1940.

Aware of things agricultural, he became profoundly concerned over the high amount of chemicals being used in farming in central Texas.

To coalesce opposition to this, -- and educate the public in natural alternatives, in 1945 with his colleague Sarah Penn Harris and one other friend, our dad founded the Austin Organic Gardening Club. For many, many years he would quietly comment on how the club experienced a cool reception by members of other Austin Area garden clubs, who liked using the powders they could purchase to sprinkle on and prevent this or that. But nonetheless, our dad persevered tenaciously on.

It was a breath of fresh air to connect with Malcolm Beck, who farmed organically halfway between Austin and San Antonio. The two of them began ordering colloidal phosphate together, -- a carload at a time! Daddy and other members of the club would unload half the car into our garage onto pallets, where he distributed it at cost to anyone that desired it.

From Austin, the train would continue south where Malcolm Beck took delivery on the remainder of the carload!

In those years, there were not many organic farms in Texas.

Once our dad retired in the 1970's, he began making weekly visits to the extension service in Austin, bringing reports and literature, and speaking with them each week about the benefits of organic farming.

We owe Charles a great deal, for I believe his dogged perseverance in the face of resistance eventually contributed to Texas' being years ahead of other states when it comes to promoting the practice of farming this way. Our dad said the extension service in Austin had the ear of the State Department of Agriculture and "seeds were being planted."

The tide began to turn as Jim Hightower served as Commissioner of Agriculture from 1983 through January of 1991! It is my understanding that during that period, the State Department of Agriculture aided in the formation of a large network of farmers' markets in Texas, to give small farmers, including organic types, a way to sell their products. Of course this has raised public awareness and appreciation for organic farming in the State.

So as the Club celebrates its 70th birthday, I wish to give thanks to all the courageous pioneers, including Sarah Penn Harris and our dad, for bringing together like-minded individuals who are working to garden in harmony with the rhythms of this beautiful planet!

Warm Regards, Charlotte Huntley Orth