

# The Dirt on Chewonki Neck

## Invisible People

MEGAN PHILLIPS

*In memory of Kathryn Currier  
(Semester 44), who greets me daily  
from the rhubarb bed*

I work every day alongside invisible people. Having passed a few seasons on Chewonki's Saltmarsh Farm, I am increasingly aware of how layered my experience of place has become. One day in early August, chattering campers joined the farm crew in one of our main gardens to pick beans, a tedious and long-lasting task until many hands (and mouths) are engaged in the process. Although that garden was beans and boys in the here and now, I had vivid memories of a failed watercress experiment there two years ago, and a powerful and pleasurable Work Program one fall when students left their assigned projects to collectively move a table-sized rock we unearthed from that garden soil onto a nearby stone wall. There, too, I taught a student to cultipack a recently cover-cropped garden with our workhorse Sal, handing over the lines and watching a nervous smile transition to a confident one. I have had mundane and important conversations in that place, and they echoed in my ears while bean picking in August.



JOCK MONTGOMERY PHOTO

This is true of every place on this farm: people visit me as I work. In any moment, my experience in place is real and rooted, and my memories of shared conversations, births and deaths, weeding sessions and long harvests are equally present and valid. How sweetly deep these connections are; how much richer my experience of place is to know it in this way, with these people, here and gone before.

Surely connections to place—important ones—exist outside of experiences with people. I have spent hours alone on this land, learning its hidden rocks and noting changes in soil quality, disc harrowing gardens and setting up electric fencing. But here, too, I have met people, some known to me and some not. Evidence of so much work and care lives on this farm, details and systems and stories that tell of many individuals who so valued their own labor—and my future labor—enough to move rocks, make shelters, build soil, tend pastures, shepherd livestock, manage a woodlot. These people work alongside me, leading and teaching. “Gratitude” is not word enough for what I feel toward them.

Walk Whitman wrote of this connection, looking both forward and back, in *Leaves of Grass*:

To one a century hence, or any number of centuries hence,  
To you, yet unborn, these, seeking you.

When you read these, I, that was visible, am become invisible;  
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me;  
Fancying how happy you were, if I could be with you, and become your comrade;  
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I am now with you.)

I wonder: What is it to be worthy of these invisible people, to be open enough to learn all that this place and these people have to teach? What systems will I create that value my own labor and the idea of the future labor on this farm? What of me will live on in this place? ■

---

*Megan Phillips is Chewonki's farm manager. She came to the farm as an apprentice in 2009 after many seasons on the Outdoor Classroom and Wilderness Trips staffs.*