



Left to right: Laurel & Karen Harrison

A Harrison Holiday

By Claudia Marie Randall

Laurel Harrison is one of our newer board members having joined our board in January 2020. Who could have predicted what this year had in store for us, and we are sure glad Laurel joined our team.

Laurel has a personal tie to Yolo Land Trust as her family has a conservation easement on their family farm. The Harrison family of five moved to the farm after Laurel’s great grandmother passed away. Almost half of the Harrison Farm has a recorded conservation easement. Preserving the land was especially important to Mark and Karen, Laurel’s parents, so it can be permanently conserved as farmland.

The farm this summer was filled with bright yellow sunflowers planted by M Three Ranches, LLC. I was lucky enough to join the Art & Ag artists who captured these beautiful flowers in many different art forms. I enjoyed walking through the gardens on a warm summer day meeting the many furry creatures who call Harrison Farm home.



As the weather turned colder, I was invited back for a special tour of the farm accompanied by Laurel and her mother Karen. We kept our distance and our masks kept us warm as well as safe on a cold fall morning. Laurel remembers when her family moved from Woodland to the little cinder block house on the farm. It was definitely an adjustment to farm life! Laurel recalls having many critters visit them including a snake underneath the fridge and a bear (yes, a bear) at the back door at one point. Not long after moving in, the family had a major break in the plumbing in the 1940s house, and everyone had to get used to keeping the wood stove - at the time, the only source of heat in the house – stocked with wood. It was one of the challenges of adjusting to country living. Laurel told me that “it was a big shift in perspective and lifestyle and that we all really cherish.” She says it gave her a different view on life and the farm helped her understand how crucial the agriculture industry is to our livelihoods.



After living in the little cinder block home for four years, Mark and Karen built a home farther back on the property. But Great Grandma’s cinder block home remains there today.

The farm is now also home to some charismatic creatures. As I walked around with Laurel and Karen, we were followed by a very loving barn cat, a beloved farm dog, and fat and happy chickens. I also met friendly teddy bear lambs who love their mommy’s (Karen) morning scratches.

Laurel shared a few of her family's traditions during our walk. Thanksgiving is a time-honored holiday at Harrison Farm. The holiday festivities start early as Laurel watches her father and family head out for a thanksgiving turkey hunt. She said it was rare for them to come back with a turkey and speculated it was more of an excuse to visit with one another before the rest of the family would arrive. Back at the house Laurel and her mother would be busy in the kitchen baking pies for dessert. Thanksgiving was always filled with friends and family enjoying home cooked food and good company. As Laurel shared this story with me, we both reflected on the fact that this year's holiday season would present itself differently.

The Harrison family Christmas traditions are a little more mellow compared to their busier Thanksgivings. It starts with Laurel and her siblings waking up early to open presents and make breakfast for their parents. Then after everyone's food has settled, they join together on a family walk on around the farm. This gives the family a chance to reflect together on the past year. This year, that tradition will have special significance.



It was an incredibly wonderful experience for me to get a personal tour from the Harrison women. Watching Laurel light up as she remembered memories and Karen sharing little facts as we walked around was a truly humbling experience. We find ourselves in a world we have never seen before which can be unsettling with so much unknown. So, to be able to pause and appreciate the simple things in life was a breath of "farm" fresh air. As we said our goodbyes, we wished each other a happy and safe holiday season. I took one last look around at Laurel's happy place and listened to the comforting sounds of the wind in the trees and the birds singing above me.

At the Yolo Land Trust, we are very appreciative of families such as the Harrisons who are dedicated to the conservation of their farmland in Yolo County.

As we end 2020, we wish you and your family happiness and health, and we look forward to when we can celebrate holidays together again.