

Cindy Nguyen  
BRGA Field Notes

**Email, 09/01/17**

After deciding on the service learning option for the course and submitting the course responsibility and consent form, I emailed Professor about my preferred site: From the Bottom to the Top. Since the meetings times are Saturdays from 8 to 10 AM, I also asked her if we would be meeting tomorrow. I was half hoping that we wouldn't, since it was so soon and I was concerned about not being prepared, but she confirmed that, yes, we would be meeting. At least she ended the email with a smiley face—I suppose that made it better.

**Saturday, 09/02/17**

**From the Bottom to the Top**  
**7:50 – 9:30 AM**

Number of people present: 10

Descriptions of people present:

1. Professor – wearing a tank top, athletic leggings, and tennis shoes. Hair is in a braid. She's been coming here every Saturday if possible.
2. Anthony – Professor's brother. Wearing a red plaid shirt with overalls and boots, has glasses. His first time here but was ready to get down to business.
3. Mary – Anthony's partner. White woman. Wearing a blue shirt, jean shorts, boots, and mismatched socks. Short blonde hair and a nose ring. Also her first time.
4. Hope – White woman in her 20s I presume. Wearing a black camisole, black shorts, black Chacos, large hoop earrings. Light brown hair. Very familiar with the area and the plants
5. Emily – Another student in the class. Black woman, wearing a paint stained t-shirt and athletic leggings. In her 30s.
6. Megan – Professor's older daughter. White. Wearing a t-shirt and shorts
7. Nicki – Professor's younger daughter. White. Has braces. Hungry/hangry.
8. Kara – Megan's friend. Black girl. Braids. Sat in the car for the most part
9. Melvin – Professor's mixed son. Hair is tied into two poofs. Doesn't like wearing his shoes. Spends time in the car or on Anthony's shoulders
10. Me – 21 year old Asian girl, wearing old t-shirt and shorts. Glasses. Covered in bug bites, legs and arms white from scratching them. First time here.

Description of setting: On the corner of E. Washington St. and Thomas Delpit Dr., across the street from a mosque and neighboring a barber shop. At the front is a yellow sign that says "From the Bottom to the Top: Hilltop Community Garden" with paintings of fruits and vegetables. It is a rectangular area split down the middle by trees planted in old car tires. One half is open and grassy with three picnic benches and the other half contains seven garden beds. Four of the beds are made from cinder blocks, the other three are wooden. Behind the wooden beds is a wall mural: yellow and pink background with animals, stars, and hearts. The grass is a little overgrown. There is a bright red van to one side. In front of it is a "compost" area.

Field notes: I left the house around 7:30 AM, even though Google Maps said it would only be a 15-minute drive; I like to allow myself time for getting lost. My car's thermometer read 75 degrees, but I knew that it would get hotter later in the day. Taking exit 155C for Louise St., I noticed McKinley Middle on my right. I always notice the school on my way to my church, St. Anthony, but I have never been in the area. Rounding the corner of East Washington St. at 7:50 AM, I expected a bigger garden with maybe at least five people already there working, but I didn't. Instead I saw a blue buildings and stacks

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of car tires, but not much else. I figured I was in the wrong place until I saw the yellow sign. I pulled into the parking area of the barber shop and waited for the others to arrive. At 7:55 I thought it would be better for me to sit at one of the picnic benches. It was a little wet, so I sat on the corner. I saw a man riding his bike down the street. He had earphones in and was singing loudly. As he rode away, two cars pulled in; Professor was in one. She pulled into the grass and got out; she then asked me to park my car in the grass as well, explaining that the barber gets mad about people parking in his lot. She then introduced me to everyone there (see "descriptions of people present"). Emily was not here just yet.

Professor started by stepping into one of the garden beds to show me how to pull (and which ones were) weeds. After pulling them up, she shakes the soil out of its roots. "It's a commodity," she says. [I normally equate soil with dirt, so to think of it as something worthy was different for me.](#) Eventually, I also step in to the garden bed to pull some of weeds. At this point, Professor decided to warn me of fire ants; I didn't leave, but continued to watch out for them. [Professor mentioned multiple times that this is a learning process and that it was even hard for her to differentiate between plants and weeds, but I was still really nervous. I was afraid of pulling something I was not supposed to, ruin weeks and weeks of hard work, and be sent home.](#) I noticed some critters crawling around in the dirt as I pulled out the weeds and overturned the soil. As I continued to pull, a black man in his 40s came by. He wore a bright red shirt and was smoking a cigarette; his name was Todd. He was curious as to what we were doing, explaining that he often feeds birds on the other side of the fence and sometimes noticed people on this side. Professor tells him that it is a community garden and thanked him for keeping the birds away from the vegetables. He asks if people have to pay for the food. When Professor explained that everything is free if you put in the work, his face lit up and he said he would have to come by sometime.

Emily shows up by the time he leaves, and Hope gives us our next assignment: pulling loose bamboo from the plants that were no longer supported by them. We quickly finished that task and moved on to pruning leaves, plucking off all the brown and dead ones. Hope tells us that Bethany, another lady who comes frequently to work in the garden, says the dead leaves "suck the energy out of the plant." During this time, I also learned that what I thought were weeds was actually a dead tomato plant. Hope says it must be due to all of the rain we have been getting lately, so she begins to pull it out of the bed completely. It seemed as if everyone was a little sad to see it go, but ridding the place of the diseased plants is necessary. Despite the diseased tomatoes, the eggplants growing right next to them were doing just fine, as were the okra and pepper plants in the garden bed next to it.

Emily and I's next task, assigned to us by Professor, was to pick up some of the trash left behind. She gave us each a plastic shopping bag and we went around picking up soda cans, bottles, and even a roll of duct tape. There actually wasn't much trash, which was good. When we were done, Emily and I stood around for a bit, not knowing what to do next. Seeing us standing idly, she came over to ask if we liked sour food. I do, but I reluctantly nodded, not sure what she was about to do. She walked us over to an area with a few potted plants, which I hadn't noticed before. She reached down and plucked some long slender leaves off a plant and offered it to us. She explained that it's sorrel and is good in sprucing up salads. Biting into it, I expected it to be something like a warhead, but it was actually a pleasant sour. She then gave us red veined sorrel, which was awfully bitter. After our little taste test, we continued to pull weed and dead plants. I noticed snails living in the cinder blocks when I pulled weeds out of them. Hope said that some of the weeds produced pretty flowers, so we decided not to pull them. Hope also mentioned mowing the grass, which reminded Professor of one of the first times she came to a community garden. She was using a weed whacker to cut the grass and was warned of poison ivy growing. Wanting to power through and prove herself, she continued without much care, which, of course, led to a pretty bad rash for the next couple of days. While I continued to pull weeds, Anthony came by and pointed out

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all of the bug bites on my arms and legs. Professor then said that it might be because I have blood type O. I made a note to bring bug spray next week.

When we finished, I went to go stand by the lemon tree, growing out of a tire in the middle of the garden. Interestingly, all of the lemons were green. The ones that did turn yellow immediately went bad. No one there knew why, but it was possible that Stephanie, another person who often comes to the garden, would know. She works in the horticulture department at Southern. Anthony was sitting at the base of the tree, trimming off some of the branches that had grown too long or that started to overlap with others. Mary kept saying how the tree seemed to become more “breathable.” Next to the lemon tree was what Hope believed to be a vitex plant. She explained that the sweet-smelling flowers attracted pollinators to the area; marigolds serve the same purpose when planted next to tomatoes.

By this time, things started to wind down and we were losing energy, so Professor called it a day. Before we could go home, Professor called us over to one of the picnic benches for “circle time.” In this circle, we were supposed to reintroduce ourselves and say something we had learned. When it got to me, I said that I learned I might be blood type O and everyone laughed. After the circle ended, I stayed around for a couple minutes to take some pictures of the area. Melvin said bye to me as I was leaving.

#### **Instagram, 09/02/17**

I posted one of the pictures I took on Instagram. In it were two of the wooden garden beds and the mural in the back. I captioned it, “Spending the next 10 or so Saturday mornings at this community garden.” A friend of mine, who had recently graduated with a degree in sociology, commented asking where it was and that she’d like to help. I gave her the address and told her of our meeting time.

#### **Twitter, 09/02/17**

I posted a picture of the yellow sign on Twitter captioned, “Service learning classes are the best.” In doing some research about the Baton Rouge Garden Alliance, I learned that they work closely with Front Yard Bikes as well as Volunteer in Public Schools. I thought this was interesting as my last service learning course (BE 1252) required us to volunteer with Merrydale Elementary school through VIPS. I partnered with a second-grade boy to help him develop his math skills. As a final project for the class, we also had to design a playground for the school. Even after the semester was over, I continued to volunteer with VIPS as a math and reading friend. Since then, I’ve had to quit because of my own classes and availability, but [I do recognize that service learning class as the first monumental act of service I took part in during undergrad. In a way, that jumpstarted my desires to serve my community.](#)

[As a biology student first and foremost, I spent quite a bit of time connecting everything I saw and learned with my own studies. Seeing the ants, worms, snails, and other insects in the garden made me think of the micro-ecosystems that have been created in this garden. Besides the decayed tomato plants and the odd lemon tree, everything looked healthy and I knew it couldn’t be without the help of these organisms as well as the microorganisms we can’t see. I also recognized that this garden requires help from the surrounding community to maintain it. I hope to see Todd come back to help in the future. His conversation with Professor made me wonder how many people in this community actually know of the garden and its purpose. A lot of work needs to be put into making this place “breathable,” as Mary would say. Mary also said the thorns of the lemon tree “bit” her. It’s as if everything has a cosmic energy/life force, similar to some Native American beliefs.](#)

[I left the garden with two cuts and numerous bites, but I was genuinely happy to be there. I’m excited to see things grown and hopefully be able to take home some sweet potatoes. I currently feel out of place, though, and I’m not sure how helpful I can be. I’m still worried about messing up and ruining the garden;](#)

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I'm also known to have quite the black thumb. Professor's children seemed irritated for the most part about being there so early and without food so they didn't do too much work, but it is nice that she brought them along. It's important to start being involved in your own community at a young age. I hope to meet Bethany, Stephanie, and anyone else who frequents the garden one day. It'd be fascinating to hear their stories and learn how they arrived at doing this service work.

**Saturday, 09/08/17**

**From the Bottom to the Top**

**7:50 – 8:40 AM**

Number of people present: 2

Descriptions of people present:

1. Hope – White woman in her 20s. We've met before. Wearing a cropped New Orleans Saints sweatshirt over a black camisole, black shorts, brown striped socks, and shoes resembling nurses' clogs. We've met once before.
2. Me – Wearing black athletic leggings, a yellow t-shirt, and tennis shoes.

Description of setting: The grass has grown a little taller since the previous week. There are some new things planted in the garden beds.

Field notes: I get there around 7:50 AM and wait in my car for Professor. She never showed up, but Hope does come. She parked her car by the red truck instead of in one of the parking spots available. She gets out of her car, which was my cue to also get out and go talk to her. She tell me that Professor was not going to be here today. She then reintroduces herself and I do the same. She also asks about the other student in the class, so I tell Hope that her name is Emily; Emily never came so I assumed she was no longer doing the service learning. Hope then starts to walk around the garden beds, telling me what they did the Tuesday before; it was planting day. Swiss chard was planted in the cinder block bed closest to the red truck. The one next to it had mustard greens. In the last wooden bed was both Swiss chard and mustard greens. She told me that since so much was done Tuesday as well as the previous Saturday when there were so many people present, we would not have much to do today besides weeding and watering the plants.

When I started to weed the beds, I noticed that it became a lot easier for me to determine what a weed was and what a newly budding plant was. *Catching on so quickly made me really happy and excited for how my learning could progress.* When I was done, Hope told me I could begin watering the plants since they looked so dry and thirsty. *Similar to last week, I thought it was interesting that the plants are almost personified.* She directed me over to some buckets that are used to collect rain water by the first cinder block bed. There was a plastic cup inside. As heavy as the water bucket was, I managed to carry it over to a garden bed. I set it down and began watering the plants using the cup inside, making sure not to get any water on myself in the process. I water close to where I thought the roots might be, *though in hindsight I think I*

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could have watered a larger diameter around the plants. After I finish watering the plants, Hope begins to prune some of the larger ones. Without her having to ask, I picked up the pruned leaves and bring them over to the compost area.

We then go over to look at the vitex plant. She said it looked as if someone came over and dropped a bowling ball right down the center. I thought it was a pretty accurate description. The branches fanned out and there was a hole in the middle. While we were in this part of the garden, I asked her if she ever figured out what was wrong with the lemon tree. She said that when she took some lemons to a friend who knew a lot about plants, he told her that it could be possible the lemons are from last year. She told him that wasn't possible since she's watched this lemon tree grow from the very beginning. Her other option is to take it to a professor to have it looked at. She says there's a possibility that the tree might be grafted, which is a technique used to join multiple plants together.

As our work begins to die down, she came over to ask if there was anything about the garden that she could clear up. I decided to ask about Bethany since she was brought up last week but was not here this week. Hope tells me she's this 85-year-old lady that comes to the garden all the time. She's very dedicated and knows a lot about plants. Hope calls her a "character" multiple times. She recalls a time when Bethany was at the garden at 6 AM planting something. She reached too far over in the garden bed, fell into it, and broke her back. As no one was around to help her, she gets up on her own, walks to her car, drives home, and calls her son to take her to the hospital. Hope laughs as she's recounting this story but I am just in complete shock. Hope then tells me that Bethany will sometimes play up her age even more and say she's 87 instead to seem more authoritative. This comes as a surprise to me, since the way people talk about her and the story I was just told already paints her as the person in charge without a doubt. Thought I've yet to meet her, I know she's a fantastic woman.

Afterwards, Hope asks me if I've ever made fresh pesto. I tell her no, but in all honestly, I don't think I've even ever had pesto. She tells me that there is a lot of basil growing and it'd be a waste if it wasn't turned into pesto. She tells me I could take some to do so and hands me her clippers. I clipped about five bunches as she went to her car to get a paper bag for me to put them in. When she comes back she tells me that I'm going to need a lot more than that if I want to make pesto. She compared making pesto to cooking down spinach and how it shrinks. She takes the clippers back from me to go get more, but she ends up not using them. Instead, she begins to pluck large chunks of basil by hand. She says she isn't "orthodox" and I laugh. She also gave me some seeds and tells me I could grow basil at home if I wanted to. I consider giving it to my parents. They try to maintain their own small garden at their tailor shop. By the time she was done, my paper bag was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of basil leaves. She also tells me there is parsley and rosemary in the first cinder block bed that I could take. I say I'd love to, but wouldn't really know what to do with it. At this time we decide to leave and go home. Before leaving, though, Hope wanted to huddle and "break." She asked me to choose a word of the day. When I couldn't, she decided that the word would be "shiseido peppers." We were standing by the peppers at this time, so that explains that. "1, 2, 3, shiseido peppers," we say as we disperse. It

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was 8:40 AM by the time we leave. I'm excited that we left so early as I wanted to get home and prepare to go out to tailgate for the LSU football game.

I liked being able to work alone today since it was just me and Hope, but it was also a tad bit awkward that we didn't talk. She seems like someone I'd want to continue talking too though. I'd like to find out more about how she's connected to this garden. Was she once a student like myself in Professor's class? Was she one of the students that started this garden? I'm excited to make fresh pesto. This past summer I've been on a mission to eat cleaner and exercise more. Being able to take home fresh vegetables from this garden makes me really excited to continue this mission and might even make it easier for me to do so. (The basil actually withered by the time I got home so I didn't get the chance to make pesto out of it). I think this garden holds a lot of potential and it'd be great to see more people come out every weekend and take food home. I am curious about whether having more community gardens such as these could be the solution to food deserts around Baton Rouge. I've never had to go out of my way to purchase food before, so learning about that in class was a new thing for me.

**Saturday, 09/16/17**

**From the Bottom to the Top**

**7:55 – 8:45 AM**

Number of people present: 8

Descriptions of people present:

1. Professor – Wearing a green tank top and black leggings
2. Hope – Wearing an olive green shirt, black shorts, and brown clogs with black socks
3. Anwar – Black man in his 30s or 40s. Professor's partner. Wearing a red shirt.
4. Melvin – Wearing red plaid shorts and a white shirt with comic book superheroes on it in panels
5. Bethany – Old black woman in her 80s. Wearing a blue outfit and hat. Looked as if she was going to church
6. 2 other black men who I only caught quick glimpses of.
7. Me – Wearing gray gradient leggings, gray t-shirt, and tennis shoes.

Description of setting: The grass has since been cut from last week.

Field notes: I had to stop to get gas this morning, but was still the first one to the garden at 7:55 AM. About a minute later, Emily pulls up next to me. We both sat in our cars and waited for someone else to show up. When we see Professor, we both get out of our cars. It was at this point that I noticed the old black woman who I immediately figured was Bethany from the way she carried herself. She apologized and said that she couldn't stay because she had to go to Denham Springs with the nuns. Though she didn't say what she was going for, her formal outfit seemed to give it away. Before she left, however, she tells us not to cut her lemon tree and that it'll be yellow when it's ready.

After she left, Professor said the first business of the day was checking if the plants were watered enough from the rain the past day. She tells us that a good way to test this is by sticking a finger into the soil. If it felt wet up to about the first index of our finger, then the plant was adequately watered. After checking all the potted plants as well as the ones in the garden beds, we decided that everything was watered.

When that situation was cleared, Professor, Emily, and I began weeding. [I actually find weeding to be somewhat relaxing. It gives me the same satisfaction as tweezing my eyebrows. The simple, repetitive actions and being able to see the number of weeds dwindle down fills my soul.](#) I worked in my own bed while Professor and Emily worked in another. I heard them talking but waited until I finished weeding my own bed before I joined them. When I did join, Professor was in the middle of telling Emily how the class last semester and those who came to the garden during the summer did so much good work that our class didn't have to do as much. The only thing we would really need to do every week is weeding.

Once she was done weeding, Professor goes over to the okra plant in one of the wooden garden bed. She stands on the wooden planks to reach the plant. She prunes some leaves and picks some of the okra off as well and sets it down on the wooden bed. I pick up the pruned leaves and bring them over to the compost area. She also picks one pepper from the pepper plant. When she comes down from the wooden planks, she points to my left and asks if I want to take home some eggplant. I look around, and after not seeing any eggplants I ask her where. She points to what looks like green squash and goes over to the plant to pick it. It was then that I noticed they were indeed eggplants, but green. Professor says they'd be good fried and eaten with spaghetti; almost like eggplant parmesan. She also asked if anyone wanted to bring home the okra. Emily says she only knows of one way to cook okra: put it in gumbo. But she reasons that she'll never have the time to do so, so I take the okra instead. I figure I'll give it to my mom to make gumbo.

At last, Professor introduces Emily and I to her partner, Anwan. He seemed nice, but we didn't talk much after the introduction. Professor then tells us that Bethany believes strongly in not cutting the lemon tree during this day and that, during this phase of the moon, etc. When she told Bethany that Anthony cut parts of the tree two weeks ago and that he was an experienced farmer, Bethany relinquished some of that authority and trusted Anthony's opinions. When she finished telling us this, she began to wrap up a hose around her arm. Melvin tells us all bye and gets in the car.

Emily and I were still standing around so I tell her the story Hope told me last week about Bethany falling, breaking her back, and still managing to drive herself home to get help. Emily laughed and seemed excited to officially meet her some other day. We also talked about how we sometimes wish we could just be completely present in the garden and not have to worry about remembering everything for field notes. [It's hard for me to find significance in the work we do and think about how it affects the community when I can only think about my grades and how well I'll do in this class.](#) It was at this moment that she told me Professor's partner's

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name is Anwan; I originally heard Antoine when she introduced us. We then notice the rear windshield wipers on Professor's car turn on. Then the car alarm goes off. Professor runs over to the car with the keys she got from Anwan and takes Melvin out of the car. Once he was out, he starts yelling, "I want to go home!" Professor says he's starting to become like his sisters. Speaking of his sisters, Professor tells us that she won't be at the garden next week—Megan has a swim meet at 7 AM. She said that if another leader is unable to come, she'll send us an email and cancel next week's meeting. [A small part of me hopes it gets canceled.](#) We then leave around 8:45 AM.

[I never got a chance to cook the okra myself. Once I got home carrying the bag of them, my mom took them to steam and eat with rice. I'm glad it's still being put to good use, though. Professor was kind enough to send me a recipe for smother okra so perhaps I'll get to try that another time. I'm not sure how much stuff from the garden I could actually cook myself besides the sweet potatoes, but I sure would like to try. It also felt a little weird having the okra, eggplant, and peppers pushed on me. I feel like that was more food than I deserved. If I'm taking home all of the vegetables, what is left for community members?](#)

**Saturday, 09/23/17**

**From the Bottom to the Top**

**7:59 – 8:40 AM**

Number of people present: 2

Descriptions of people present:

1. Emily
2. Me – Large dark green t-shirt and black leggings, tennis shoes.

Description of setting: No changes

Field Note:

I get to the garden around 7:59 AM. As I was pulling in, I noticed a man walking down the sidewalk. He had a very puzzled look on his face when he saw me, as if questioning my presence in this area so early in the morning. I turned into the garden and parked my car as quickly as I could in an effort to seem like I knew where I belonged; I didn't want to seem out of place. Emily then shows up a few minutes later. Like last week, we both sat and waited in our cars until someone else showed up. We turned off our cars and cracked the windows. We were both playing on our phones.

Around 8:15, I leaned my chair back because I wasn't feeling too well; I woke up a little sick this morning. [I didn't want to lean my chair back in case someone did come and think I was rude, but my head was starting to hurt.](#)

At 8:35, I heard a knock on my window. Pulling my chair up, I noticed it was Emily and I opened the door. I asked her, "What, is someone here? Are we working now?" She tells me no and that she just called Professor to ask if anyone was going to show up. Professor said that she called Bethany and told her to be here, but she must have forgotten. There were plans to dig up the sweet potatoes, but since no one was here we could go home.



I was a little disappointed that we didn't get to dig up sweet potatoes, but I was feeling bad anyways. I feel as if I could have still gotten out of my car to do a little weeding, since I do think I've gotten the hang of that by now, but I still feel uncomfortable being here. I still feel like this is not my place and I still have to wait on a leader to come show me the ropes and approve of my presence there. There have been times where I wanted to take my boyfriend here to show him what I've been doing every Saturday, but I don't feel like I'm allowed to do that just yet. I can't take credit for any of this work besides doing some of the weeding.

**Saturday 09/31/17**  
**From the Bottom to the Top**  
**8:00 – 9:20**

Number of people present: 6

Descriptions of people present:

1. Emily – Black tank top, gray leggings, nicer white tennis shoes
2. Kim – Blue shirt, jean shorts, large sunglasses, and a Fitbit. Also about 30 years old.
3. Professor – Green tank top with gray sweatpants, hat.
4. Hope – Pink chiffon button down, shorts, clogs with gray socks
5. Bethany – Black and white patterned shirt with green pants, sandals, and hat. Very different from how I saw her the other week when she was dressed for church.
6. Me – Wearing a white t-shirt with black and gray striped leggings, tennis shoes

Description of setting: No changes except the large leaves of the sweet potato plants are gone.

Field Note:

I am the first person to get to the garden at 8:00 AM. I wait in my car for others to arrive. Soon, Emily pulls into the space next to me. Someone is sitting in her passenger seat. I then see Hope pull in so I get out of my car. I then see Professor approaching us. She says that we will dig up the sweet potatoes today as well as water some of the other plants, but by no means will this task take the full two hours. Emily and I both chuckle to each other since we thought the last few relaxed Saturdays would mean a hard working Saturday today. Emily then introduces me to the person who was sitting in her passenger seat—it was her sister, Kim. I also have a sister named Kim but I didn't want to mention it.

Hope heads over to the garden bed where large sweet potato leaves once were. She takes a shovel, steps into the bed, and begins digging up some sweet potatoes. Bethany tells me to go get a bucket to put them all in. I grabbed a shallow pink one next to the garden bed and put some of the sweet potatoes that have already been dug up in it. Hope tries to get either me, Emily, or Kim to join her in the bed to help dig. It seemed as if Bethany didn't trust us to dig up any sweet potatoes as she said something along the lines of, "Oh, you already know how to do it, Hope!" At this point, Bethany notices Kim texting on her phone and tells her to put it away.

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After a short pause, Bethany chuckles and says, "It's fine. It's your phone, you can do what you want with it." I thought it was considerate of her to not force Kim to get off her phone. It was her first time here and she was probably just trying to share the experience. It was refreshing to not hear something along the lines of "You kids and your phones . . ." I hear Hope mention rather quietly that "these potatoes weren't even planted," so I ask her about it. She explains that the seeds were planted a couple of years ago, but no new seeds have been planted since. The sweet potatoes just return on their own from the roots left behind. She brings up a National Geographic article she read about how sweet potatoes are the best crops to plant because they always come back and are so hardy. Bethany tells me to take out the smaller sweet potatoes from the bucket and put it back into the spaces in the cinder blocks so they can continue to grow and produce more.

Emily then picks up the courage to go into the bed with her own shovel to help her dig sweet potatoes. Bethany tells me I can go to the other half of the garden bed to start weeding the "grass." She comes along with me to help and she shows me how to properly use a trowel to dig up as much of the dirt as possible. Noticing Emily and Hope standing in the bed digging for sweet potatoes, she says that she wishes she could do the same because she loves to dig but won't risk breaking her back again. I tell her it's still amazing that she could even come back regularly to do other work around the garden such as weeding. She explains that she loves the work because gardening is healthy! I immediately assumed she meant that the fresh food picked from the garden is healthy and free of pesticides and fertilizers. She goes on to say that the dirt is healthy. "I've only been to the hospital once in my life and that was when I broke my back. I'm telling you, dirt is healthy. From dirt we came and to dirt we shall return." I've never met someone who embraced that quote wholeheartedly. If anything, it's used more metaphorically but dirt seems to be Bethany's source of life. There was so much conviction in her voice when she was telling me this that I couldn't help but believe it as well, even though I know there must be other factors at play here. Bethany then noticed that Professor and Hope were walking away from the plants carrying the hose and watering can. She yelled to ask them if they were done watering the plants and if they got everything. Professor and Hope reassure her that they did, but Bethany kept questioning them and pointing out that she had seeds planted in one of the pots in the back. When she still didn't believe, Professor and Hope went to go show her that the plants were watered, and Bethany was pleasantly surprised.

It was at this point that we hear Kim scream and see her jump out of the garden bed. She screams, "Ants!" and starts brushing away at her ankles. Professor comes over to investigate. Upon seeing the ants, she says she has grits in her car and will be right back. Emily and I look at each other, questioningly. I thought "grits" was just another bug repellent similar to "off," but lo and behold Professor came back with a tub of microwavable grits. She gives it to Kim and tells her that sprinkling it right on the ants will kill them. She says that it may just be a myth, but it works. Apparently, when ants eat the grits, it expands in their stomachs and will eventually cause them to explode. I don't believe something can be so simple, but it was entertaining to see Kim pouring grits on to the areas of the bed where there were ants.

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Once all of the sweet potatoes were dug up and the weeds were gone, Bethany told us to get a rake to smooth the soil back down. Kim handled this while Emily and I continued to look for things to take out, not knowing what else we could possibly do. Kim came upon more ants and wanted to sprinkle more grits on to them, but Bethany told us to finish raking before we did that. Kim was apprehensive about spreading out soil with ants in it, but did it anyway. When we were done with this, Professor comes over to sprinkle the rest of the grits over half of the bed. She says that this might lead to the ants moving to the other half, as she recalls something similar happening at her own home. She states that she'll need to bring more grits the next time we come back.

Lastly, we were able to take some of the sweet potatoes home. I went and got my phone from the car so I could take pictures of the oddly shaped sweet potatoes. I then chose 6 that I wanted to take home for myself. Emily got some for herself and her sister. Bethany told Hope to take a lot because she's a vegetarian. [I wanted to bring up that I am a pescatarian, but stopped myself.](#) Professor only took 2, which seemed to offend Bethany. "Two?!" she exclaimed. Professor explains that she would be the only person eating them so to take any more would be wasteful. Once the sweet potatoes were divided up, Professor mentions buying 13-13-13 and more soil for next time. But since Bethany wasn't going to be here next week, Professor decided to give me and Emily an off weekend ([Thank you!](#)) and that the weekend afterwards will just be a big work day. She also mentions the grass being a little overgrown again and that she should call Wally to come mow it. Bethany, almost taken aback, asks, "He actually responds to your texts?" Professor says he does most times and Bethany shakes her head. "He's always messing with me. Hugging up on me and kissing up to me." She then pretends to push him off of her. I notice Hope laughing behind her; this is exactly the character she was talking about.

We then leave the garden around 9:20 AM.

[Bethany really is the person Hope made her out to be and meeting her in person was such an amazing experience. I've never heard of the name Bethany before, but I know it fits her just perfectly. She talks so openly and genuine kindness pours out of her. I am still so blown away at the way she spoke of returning to dirt and how deeply connected she is to gardening. It was made even more special by the fact that we were digging into the dirt together on one side of the bed while Hope, Emily, and Kim worked on the other side. Unlike the past weeks' work where we just weeded and watered things from the surface, we actually got down and dirty, digging things up and overturning the dirt. I was metaphorically and literally going deeper than I had ever gone before in this garden. That realization took me completely aback. In just five short weeks and with the help of Bethany, I feel a connectedness to this garden that I didn't know was possible. I wasn't a part of the startup of this garden nor do I live in the community. I didn't even know what Old South Baton Rouge was until the beginning of this year despite being born and raised here! And yet I truly want to see this garden and the surrounding community thrive. I want to see more people come out to help and take home vegetables for themselves. I want to see something grow from beginning to end. Despite the very early and](#)

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groggy mornings, I'm excited to continue coming here for the rest of the semester to see how everything pans out.