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Comeback Kids: Sean Zigmund's homestead is all natural

There's still a lot going on at the Zigmund's Root 'n Roost Farm in White Sulphur Springs, NY—just not where you'd think



(/uploads/original/20190629-154758-lr-zigmundtwode.jpg)

TRR photos by Elizabeth Lepro

Sean, Escher, Keisha and Louie, in the greenhouse.

Posted Wednesday, April 24, 2019 12:16 pm

ELIZABETH LEPRO

Some people decide to stop using plastic or start biking to work. Other people, I guess, have a complete epiphany about their health and the planet and eventually spend three months retrofitting a '97 Chevy Express Van to travel 32,000 miles on waste vegetable oil.

"He's intense," Vinny Bonanno said of his boss at [Root 'n Roost Farm](https://www.rootnroost.com/) (<https://www.rootnroost.com/>). Sean Zigmund, who took the latter course of action in August 2008.

"I really kind of put myself to the test," Zigmund said. He traveled for 13 months in what had been a school bus, starting from Burlington, VT, heading to Burning Man in Nevada and stopping at

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Dr. Susan Bailey, an allergist/immunologist in Texas and the president of the American Medical Association, has reassured many people that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe. When your patients have allergies, it probably comes with the territory.

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numerous state and national parks. Zigmund then started “WWOOFing”—short for Worldwide

“As you can tell, this is not a normal greenhouse...”

Opportunities on Organic Farms—and spent time in California, Utah and Alaska. At the end of the trip, Zigmund had driven 32,000 out of 35,000 miles on waste vegetable oil alone, all while working remotely as a tech consultant.



Escher, 2, runs out of his dad's van with his "magic sword."

Picture Zigmund in 2008: late 30s, tall and lean, wearing cargo pants and a T-shirt. He would stroll into restaurants, asking for excess vegetable oil to pump into the tank in the back of his “crazy van.” At the same time, he had to nail down a wi-fi connection four hours a day to help hawk plastic products to Walmart and Bed, Bath and Beyond for an infomercial company.

Zigmund has often used his self-taught tech and IT skills to financially buoy his agricultural interests.

While honing his skills for permaculture and sustainable building, Zigmund worked on and off part- and full-time, eventually deciding to work full time as a tech manager, hoping to save enough money to buy a plot of land in California. That didn't work out. “Within three months... I said to myself, ‘I've got to get out of this place.’ I can't be a corporate stooge, polluting the planet with chachki products... I had just stepped back into that after doing this whole renewable thing and sustainable thing,” Zigmund said, “proving to myself that I could live very differently than mainstream society. I was like, ‘Oh, what did I do to myself? Why am I here?’”

After taking a class in square-foot gardening—using a small plot to grow a lot —Zigmund spent two weeks in Hawaii teaching that concept and then went back to Vermont and completed a three-month building intensive program at Yestermorrow Design School. He jumped back in the van and went to Missouri, to live for one month at the Possibility Alliance—a farm where people live completely without modern technology.

Zigmund's wife, Cheyenne, calls him the “ultimate jack of all trades”—someone who, when he decides to get into something, *really* gets into it.

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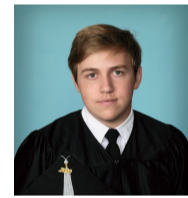
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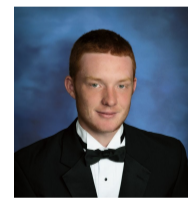
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NATIONAL HONOR



The painting on the side of the van is a funky barn, in front of Lake Champlain in Vermont.

For a while, Zigmund and I sit in his dining room, and he talks about agriculture in Sullivan County. He also talks about the outsourcing of material production to China, the tourism industry, zoning regulations and the economy of Burlington, Vermont. Everything relates to each other.

He put all of his know-how and interests into Root ‘n Roost, moving back in 2010 to take care of his mother and eventually transforming his childhood home and the property next door into a hand-built agricultural wonderland. At 47, Zigmund now lives there with Cheyenne and their two children.

The couple, who met while Cheyenne was interning at Apple Pond Farm in Callicoon Center, created what they called a “beyond organic” farm at the property. The dream was big, for both Zigmunds—a belief system built around self sufficiency and sustainability.

To make this dream a reality, the couple worked seven days a week, 16 hours a day for about five years on the permaculture-based operation, fueled only by handheld equipment and natural practices.

Had I decided to visit that farm four years ago—or four years in the future—this story would be different. At the peak of productivity in 2015, there were 12 interns and WWOOFers living there, along with pigs, chickens, turkeys and ducks, a trailer converted into a barn, trees of different varieties, a farm stand, bee colonies and a production garden bursting with life. The Zigmunds offered farm tours and classes on site.

In April 2019, the Zigmunds have scaled back.

At least, agriculturally. Zigmund has started his two other businesses—Zigmund Computer Services and Zigmund Landscape and Construction Services—while Cheyenne works on creating her own, selling upcycled products online. With the addition of new baby Keisha, “There just isn’t enough time in the day,” Zigmund says, standing with his daughter asleep against his chest.

We’ve spent the last 20 minutes touring the property, and he’s pointing out all the work that needs to be done. “Now I have three businesses, two kids, a house... two properties and property that I lease. And I’m just like... [what] am I doing to myself now?”

So, the farm waits.



Sean Zigmund and his children look out over the property.

The only animals left are a dog and some cats, which scamper around wood pallets stacked up on top of each other, makeshift dwellings that have taken a beating in rough weather, a glass pane shattered on the ground in front of what used to be a functioning outdoor kitchen and what's left of the foundation of the converted trailer, now that Sean has gutted the structure.

With two-year-old Escher in tow, wielding a plastic sword, the group looks like the makings of a fantasy novel—a boy and his pets exploring a kingdom of disarray.

In a greenhouse Cheyenne built, red Russian kale, chard, purple mustard leaves and onion shoots grow with the weeds. Zigmund points to a kale plant blooming with yellow flowers. “That is now going to seed... [it will] reseed itself.”

Nature does what it's supposed to at the Zigmund's.

“As you can tell, this is not a normal greenhouse,” Zigmund says. “It's not prim and proper... We went from that very mechanized thought process... to just sort of, let's let the greenhouse go and just see what happens.”

To see what's going on at Root 'n Roost this summer, click here (<https://www.rootnroost.com/>). Zigmund's computer services information can be found here (<https://www.zigmundcomputerservices.com/about>).

Keywords

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