

First Person Singular

Ben Allnutt,

farmer, Homestead Farm, Poolesville

WE HAVE 40-SOME ACRES OF PUMPKINS. We've never advertised, but we have over 10,000 school kids come through here. I tell people — adults who have children here — I say: "Oh, it's nothing. It's just like giving a birthday party for 500 kids. Every day for 30 straight days." And they go, "Oh my God, how do you do it?" People ask us why we aren't open in November — well, we all take a group trip to the Betty Ford Clinic.

Weekends in October, family and friends come out. It's kind of a racket 'cause the kid takes the pumpkin home, and soon his brothers and sisters want one, too. So they gotta come out and get another pumpkin. We take all these Washingtonians and Bethesda people out; we stick them in those wagons heaped up with straw, and they're all sitting against each other. They've got their feet up. Everyone's as happy as can be.

There's a lot of discussion and meetings about what pumpkin to get. You always wonder about these kids: They find a pumpkin, and it's shaped like a peanut or something — the vine has strangled it — and there's a little kid, a 7-year-old, saying, "I'm gonna make a skeleton out of this." I've got a four-acre patch of the wackiest-looking things you ever saw, and people like that. We have one variety of pumpkins like cookie

cutters. You'd go out there, and everyone of them [would be] exactly the same, and how could you ever make a decision? You could just pick any one up. You've gotta have some individualism. You don't want to have the same as the guy next door.

Tell kids to go out and buy themselves 200 acres in Montgomery County or Fairfax County and plant 40 acres of pumpkins, and they'll get rich. It can be done. You just gotta want to do it.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEKSEY TOLCHINSKIY

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