

Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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Potomac Vegetable Farms
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Tell about a practice or discipline that you have maintained – how does it relate to your current life?

Discipline Is In My Nature

By Ciara Prencipe

Looking back on my various practices, disciplines and commitments, I'm now noticing a trend, which maybe should have been obvious: I'm not much of a quitter (sometimes to my own detriment) and I'm a goody-two shoes. Or, to put it differently, I'm inclined toward discipline and commitments, and I follow directions well.

My mom, being a good suburban mom, signed me up for various activities, most of which I continued for years and years. Soccer, naturally for a suburban kid, was one of the first sports I played, from when I was very young until about middle school. I joined the swim team at my new neighborhood pool after we moved, when I was about 8 and continued until I was 18. Cross country I started much later, comparatively (junior year of high school) and I still run to this day.

All of these sports, but especially cross country, taught me the mental load of physical endurance, which as you may guess, is highly relevant to farming. My longest standing practice, though, remains playing the piano. I started piano lessons when I was 4. Weekly lessons, and as I got older, seasonal recitals, competitions, and many other performances were routine. Did I enjoy this style of playing piano? What specifically was I learning from these experiences? I'm not exactly sure, but I kept playing.

Not knowing what I wanted to do with my piano playing but knowing I didn't want to stop, I pursued a double major in music in my freshman year of college. That is really when I learned both discipline and useful practice on the piano. I spent more time practicing in the cramped little piano rooms in the music school that I did doing homework for the rest of my classes combined (not an exaggeration). At the end of the year, I was playing better than I ever had before, but I knew the time had come to stop playing piano at that level.



This is Ciara's creative outlet now.

Now that I've taken several years off of playing, I miss it so much I'm ready to buy an electric keyboard just to get my fix. But how does piano relate to farming? To quote Hana, "Everything has something to do with farming!" The constant use of the hand, the endless repetition (practicing the same phrase or measure or section over and over again), the mental strength to know that even though this practice is taking forever, you're making progress.

Where classical piano hurt me was in its rigidity. To play a piece well, you need to do it technically perfectly *and* have some ineffable musicality to your playing that transcends the notes on the page. In farming, we necessarily must fly by the seat of our pants. We must plant the moment before it rains, till when conditions are just right, pick just when something is ready, and hoe when the weed seedlings are just the right size (ideally).

Farming has been a practice of mine for several years now, and I hope eventually it will outstrip piano as the longest commitment of my life.

Short Hops, Repeated Through the Years

By Hana Newcomb

I have never attempted to maintain a practice for years at a time, although there are seasonal patterns that have repeated for decades. In the summers, the farm provides enough exercise. In the winters, I exercise like a regular civilian. In college everyone went running all the time, so I ran for many years. Then for 15 years my sisters and I put on a homegrown triathlon in the spring as a culmination of our winter exercise routines (very light-hearted and casual, but we did real sprint distances, swimming 1k, biking 20k, running 5k). Our motto was Start Slow and Taper. Then eventually my running days were over and I switched to walking. Then my walking days were over and I moved to swimming. For about six years I was quite disciplined about going to hot yoga, but eventually my knee was no longer doing its part and I couldn't stand on one leg. This winter I hope to switch over to a lower temperature of yoga.

The other discipline that I have pursued with some regularity all my

life is writing – letters and journals and essays and blogs and coaxing this newsletter into existence. In February there is a “writer’s boot camp” where you commit to writing 1000 words a day for ten days, sending your work in by midnight. I love that. Anytime someone says you don’t have to edit it, just write it, that’s my favorite recipe.

In fact, I don’t think I am all that disciplined. I have been taking piano lessons for about ten years now and I am not dependable about practicing regularly unless we are heading into a recital. I love to sing in choir, but I don’t do any outside work for that. I always finish reading the book just in time for book club.

I am attached to my seasonal life, where I know what each month will bring and how much discretionary time I have. I have loads of time in January and February (when I practice piano and exercise with a vengeance).

My most dogged commitment is to maintain the details of the CSA: registration, accounting, correspond-

dence, planning the picking, working with other farmers, creating the flow of the whole season. My other daily discipline is writing the work blog every single night from March 15 until Thanksgiving. But that is fundamental to the functioning of the whole farm enterprise, so I don’t know if that counts as a practice.

Weeks	9/8/19	9/15/19	9/22/19	9/29/19	10/6/19	10/13/19	10/20/19	10/27/19	11/3/19
Delicata									
Butternut	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sweet potatoes		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Potatoes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Asian pears		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Beans	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Onions	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Garlic	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Basil		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Medium		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kale		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Corn	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

The Weekly CSA Chart.

It all suits me, the way things are in a constant state of change. I would never survive in a job that had the same schedule around the year, or one that was immune to the time that the sun rises and sets. My practices depend on the seasons – I have a seasonal attention span.



Cam continues his education.

The Discipline of Getting an Education

By Cameron Gorby

One of the biggest disciplines I have in my tool belt of skills is my education. Like most I started young and graduated in my mid-twenties. Learning how to read and write was difficult for myself as well as comprehension. But with years of practice and discipline I have become fluent at both. I have learned that with these practices built into my system that I can maneuver within society fluently and build a life of happiness. I feel that the discipline of my education does roll over into our life of farming. Starting slow and comprehending how an action turns into a creation of food to eat. It’s almost as if our farming turns into a story like a writer turns words into imagination.



In early March, Hiu is back at work in the greenhouse.

The Joy and Promise of Exercise

By Mariette Hiu Newcomb

A few years ago I started working less and stopped doing things that hurt or were hard to do. When I got down to my high school weight, Michael Lipsky said he thought I might be losing muscle, not fat. Maybe I should consider doing some resistance training to rebuild strength and endurance.

Planting, weeding, picking and moving crates and baskets of vegetables had provided plenty of exercise for years. Fortunately, my back never complained, but eventually all that squatting and stooping used up the cartilage in my knees.

Six years ago, I found trainer Ellen and her small company N2Shape in a small gym at Tysons Corner. We hoped that building up leg and other muscles could not only put off surgery for a couple of years but would speed recovery afterwards.

My orthopedic surgeon said at

our first meeting in March 2016 that I was in good enough shape to have both knees replaced – not on the same day, but two weeks apart later that month. All went well and I was highly motivated to get walking better than ever. I listened to “Hamilton” CDs for hours as I did my PT exercises and was able to resume working with Ellen in four months.

Ellen is attentive, creative and dogged. Our sessions three mornings a week vary and include strengthening, stretching and restorative body work. We work 1:1 and sometimes with others. On another morning, I practice yoga 1:1 with Kathy who patiently gives me exercises to promote flexibility in stiff joints. And then I swim laps which is good for my breathing, which also needs help.

After living with asthma since childhood, and after a scary attack a few years ago, my pulmonologist put

me on steroidal inhalants which restored my lung capacity to 49%. Even though he said I could live with the equivalent of one lung, I recently enrolled in a rehab program at Inova Fairfax Hospital to learn more about COPD and see if I could breathe better. It means going to the gym at the hospital three afternoons a week and working with respiratory therapists. It's demanding, interesting, and lasts only nine weeks.

Even if I'm not around the farm most mornings, I enjoy being able to work in the greenhouse in the spring, working upright with the tomatoes, and occasionally at the farmers' markets. This summer I have become a regular presence in the CSA room on Sundays, which I enjoy a lot. I have also noticed in the last ten years of singing in a community chorus, that I have more air and voice and more joy.

Birth Doula and Case Manager

By Clarke Snell

Before working at PVF, I spent most of my working hours as a birth doula and case manager with a non-profit organization in Illinois that served young and underserved parents in my county. This work, as much of social work does, involved coming to meet people with completely different backgrounds, experiences, ways of doing things, and stories as my own. But pushing all of that aside, we always came together to create a birthing team that supported the end result - an informed and empowered experience with supported, encouraged, and educated parents. The services provided benefitted the families I served, but they also benefitted me - allowing me to learn how to hone my own communication skills, listening skills, and ability to serve others.

Here at PVF, I am not in the direct business of social work, but our work is very social by nature. Moving to a new state, starting a new job, and honestly, a new skill set, means I've had a boat load of opportunities to ask questions, try new things, and gain another new skill set. And thanks to this team, I've learned that there are countless different ways to cut basil, roll drip tape, harvest kale, squat or sit or crouch or lean to pick beans, bunch flowers, and a myriad of other skills. Much like my work as a birth doula and case manager, each day brings on new tasks that require me to show up, meet plant or tool or goal with a different and new story, and learn how to maximize success with it.

In my opinion, the ability to arrive at any job with open hands and say "how can I help, teach me", in both a setting as vulnerable as labor and birth, or a setting as focused as harvesting and growing, has served me well. But each time, it is the people I've met along the way that I have to thank for helping me practice those skills in different ways, settings, and situations so that I may truly make the skills my own.

Allis G. Chalmers – An Appreciation

By Dick Clement



Allis "G" Chalmers, born in 1949, out to pasture 2019.

She lived her life as a hard-working farm hand, becoming proficient working with many implements. Her final years were happily spent at Potomac Vegetable Farms in Vienna, VA. A rear-mounted engine provided the force to 4-foot diameter wheels, as well as visual access to how those attached implements were performing.

Gears and levers operated by a careful farm worker engaged the implements.

She was cared for, maintained, repaired, oiled, and greased for 70 years. Faded orange in color with a distinctive somewhat gangly appearance, she was a pretty sight on the farm.

She is now on display at PVF in Vienna. A photo album helps us remember Allis "G" Chalmers.



Carrie cultivating with the G.

The Circus Arts By Eleanor Clouet

I started studying circus arts (contortion, aerials, handstands) at a time when I wasn't very in tune with my body. Through the practice I learned how to listen to my body, how to protect and tend my muscles and joints. These understandings serve me well as a farmer~ I listen as my body tells me what needs to stretch, or how I can carry heavy loads in healthy alignment. There's also something in the discipline itself~ The enjoyment I built up in pursuing challenging, repetitive motions. Turns out, it's a similar determination and body awareness required to hold your own weight upside-down as to harvest a field of delicious winter squash.