



Vol. 22 No. 5

July 25 - 29, 2021



POTOMAC VEGETABLE FARMS  
[www.potomacvegetablefarms.com](http://www.potomacvegetablefarms.com)  
[pvfnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:pvfnewsletter@gmail.com)

## Playing Piano, Singing Alto, and Reading Before Bed

By Hana Newcomb

In truth, I spend just about every waking moment (and some of my dreaming time) working on the farm at this time of year. However, I do have a few non-farm activities that continue through the summer, even if I can't give them the attention they deserve.

I have been taking piano lessons ever since my piano-playing daughter went to college 14 years ago (leaving the piano in the middle of the living room, abandoned). In the winters, I have weekly lessons and in the spring and fall they are biweekly and in the summer I shift down to once a month. Every year at the beginning of June, all the adult students perform for each other at a "musicale" — something that fills us all with dread as we practice and practice, getting our short pieces ready for an audience. It is so stressful, but we are all glad when we learn a piece well enough to overcome our nerves. Each year we re-learn the joy of digging deep into the music and internalizing the dynamics and getting the memorized notes into our fingers. Last year during covid, we had Zoom lessons which was not nearly as satisfying as in-person lessons, and now that we are all vaccinated, it is so sweet to be able to go to our teacher's house so she can really

see and hear what we are doing. Needless to say, I am not practicing much this month, but my teacher knows how to make the most of our lesson time anyway.

My other ongoing activity is singing in the synagogue choir. We are starting to rehearse for the High Holidays — music we have been singing for years and years, but there is always more to learn. We have only been back together in the same indoor space for two rehearsals so far. The covid year was awful — we practiced and recorded our parts in our own bedrooms with our phones and computers. Our director magically put all the parts together and made us sound much better than we knew we did. Singing together in person is a joy and a privilege after that terrible, humbling year of hearing only ourselves.

And my third source of off-farm joy is book club. We read a novel one month and short stories the next. To tell the truth, I can't even remember what we read in June but it was good and I recommend it. Oh, it was *Anything Is Possible* by Elizabeth Strout who wrote the wonderful Olive Kitteridge books. It's like a kaleidoscope of stories about all the people who live in a small town in middle America — sad and funny and insightful and real.

## Dirt Under Our Fingernails

We started pulling onions, and now we're working to find a place to store them while they dry (but so they won't cook). Carrie is seeding about 4000 kale, broccoli, and cauliflower plants a week in the greenhouse, aiming for about 16,000 plants started by the end of July. We'll have to get all those in the ground and keep them alive during the hottest part of the summer.



Basil seedlings growing in the greenhouse.

# Vicarious Vacation

On a typical Saturday morning, you'll find Paul Mandell at the Falls Church Farmers Market, wearing a college t-shirt (each represents one of his children's alma maters) and hyping the Beyond Jumbo Eggs. He recently took a vacation to Corolla Island, NC. Here is his under-four-minute report back, as told to hc.

My wife and I went and stayed with my college roommate and his family on the beach for eight days. The weather was perfect with the exception of a tropical storm one afternoon. It was quite a show. The ocean rose to a high level and there were thunderstorms, lightning over the ocean, which was spectacular. It passed by in a few hours, leaving behind a double rainbow. It was a beautiful night.

A local well-known chef came

to the house, and she made an amazing three course dinner plus dessert. She cooked it in the house, served it, cleaned up, and took out the trash. It was phenomenal. She explained everything to us as we went along about all the local food she sourced. You know, I actually did [eat the vegetables she prepared]. It was such an expensive meal that I felt bad if I didn't eat it, so I ate things that I normally wouldn't, like fennel and other vegetables which never crossed my lips prior to that meal. The way she cooked 'em, you know, they were pretty good. Plus one for the vegetable team.

My wife and I took a huge detour coming home and drove through a bunch of Virginia Civil War towns to avoid the shore traffic coming back all at the same time. We stopped in places like



Eggplant Pal brought to life at the Falls Church Farmers Market on July 18, 2021 by Rachel Udall.

Gordonsville, which is considered the "Fried Chicken Capital of the World." Toured a few other small towns as well, had a lot of fun, bought a painting, just enjoyed our trip overall.

# To Far Away and Back Again

by Annie Manville

Though generally remiss in reading lately, my two forays into the worded-world have been to lands far away. The first is to Middle Earth, where I have reached the second book of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, *The Two Towers*. When I can muster the motivation to kick my streaming addiction and actually read, I am thoroughly enjoying the master class in fictional writing that is J.R.R. Tolkien's writing style. I am transported, charmed, completely enamored with each main character and their unique visions of what is good and beautiful — Gimli's love of fine craftsmanship and Middle-earth's geologic wonders, Legolas' fondness for trees and all knowledge that is beyond memory, the hobbits' adoration of laughter, banter, and joy. I find it all incredibly moving — in particular, Frodo's capacity for good and his acceptance of the destruction of the ring as his personal duty essentially without persuasion.

One of my favorite quotes from the first book: "'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo. 'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide.

All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'" Quite fitting for the current historical moment, n'est-ce pas? I suppose that's the beauty of fiction — to bring us closer to understanding humanity, our own world, while removing us from the intense anxiety that comes with thinking about real life global afflictions.

My second literary adventure is a subscription to the magazine *Foreign Affairs*. As antithetical to fiction as Orcs are to Ents, I still find it a relaxing well-written read despite its direct engagement with modern issues. I enjoy knowing that the articles are written by people who have spent decades studying the subjects on which they expound. Nothing like a thorough, non-partisan publication to help make sense of what's happening in the world.

In a grand twist, *Foreign Affairs* may actually do for me in some ways what fiction does through removal from the real world. This time, it removes me somewhat from the stress of domestic affairs, directing me towards the happenings in other countries and the global stage at large. With domestic news as stressful as it is, diversion tactics are often required. Luckily, a true escapist always has two exit strategies.



# Eating Books

by Sydney Morrison

I'm about to finish devouring S.A. Chakraborty's third installment in her Daevabad Trilogy. This epic fantasy fills new-world Middle East with very old magic. If djinn are your thing, and you've always wanted healing powers, get your hands on this series. The lush description of Chakraborty's world is enchanting, palace politics grip me like never before, and character development is anything but linear. Follow crafty young Nahri as she navigates her new magical world and Prince Ali as his tyrant father destroys their city. Witness freed warrior slave Dara fight for his own life in more ways than you could ever imagine. Chakraborty's world building is exquisite; her detailing of the rich aromas and flavors of Egyptian food, especially, speak to my soul. I have been cooking this recipe a lot recently, inspired by the heavily spiced rice dishes that keep popping up in Daevabad.

## Aromatic Rice (serves 2-4)

Ideally you want to use old rice for this recipe, as the drier grains will soak up more flavor. But fresh rice works just as well. Try cooking your rice in coconut milk or your favorite stock to impart flavor early on. After it's cooked, spread it out on a sheet pan to let some moisture escape.

### Ingredients:

- 3 cups cooked rice, I like basmati
- 1/2 cup ghee or coconut oil or avocado oil (any high heat oil will do)
- A two-inch piece of ginger, finely chopped
- 3-5 cloves of garlic, sliced
- Your favorite spices, preferably in their whole

seed form. But ground works just as well. This is the spice blend I like to use:

- ◊ 1 tbsp mustard seeds
- ◊ 1 tbsp cumin seeds
- ◊ 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- ◊ 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- ◊ 3-4 cardamom pods
- ◊ 1-2 tbsp harissa paste, or 1-2 of your favorite chilis
- ◊ Zest of one lemon or lime
- ◊ 1/2 cup of crushed pistachios, or peanuts
- ◊ 1/2 cup chopped dates
- Juice of one lime or lemon
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper
- Whatever amount of fresh herbs you like, from none at all to a whole cup of coriander or parsley, fennel fronds or carrot tops. Celery leaves and beet greens also work nicely here.

### Instructions:

1. Season your cooked rice with the juice of your chosen citrus and some salt. Let sit while you make your tadka (spiced oil)
2. Add your oil to a pan on medium-high heat. Wait until it's thoroughly heated. Add in all of your spices, sans harissa paste and lemon zest. Toss them to coat.
3. Wait until the seeds start popping, or if using ground spices till they are fragrant. 30 seconds-2 minutes. Turn the heat to medium/medium-low and stir so they don't burn. (Let it be known you COULD stop here and immediately pour this over your rice or favorite soup or stew!)
4. Add garlic, ginger, and harissa. Stir to mix everything and cook for about 7-10 minutes. Don't walk away! Add lemon zest, stir through and take off heat.
5. Pour this delicious golden juice all over your rice and mix through. Chop and mix in fresh herbs.
6. Devour a big fat bowl or use as a fragrant side to your favorite veg and protein.

### Belated Bio: Cat Baker, they/them

This is my first season with PVF and I've worked up some lovely tan lines already. From working on a horse ranch in the swamps of Chesapeake VA (Yeehaw!) to

building large scale festivals for years, PVF has provided me yet another study on how absolutely filthy I can get before noon. I'm lucky enough to have my summers off working in an elementary education and do

hope to spend future sweaty months with PVF. This summer, I hope to get to know the bees in the cucumber blossoms better, touch more horses (Giddy Up!) and make a better habit of scrubbing behind my ears.



# This Is Your Brain on Audiobooks

by Maggie Hirschberg

Farming is an excellent way to occupy the body, and audiobooks are a great way to occupy the mind. I discovered the beauty of audiobooks during my first summer farming. That summer I worked about 25 hours a week for over two months, and I managed to listen to more than 30 audiobooks. I love to read, but I sometimes find it hard to make time for it. Audiobooks changed all of that. Suddenly I was able to make a dent in my overly ambitious (and now much more realistic) to-read list on Goodreads.

My proudest audiobook accomplishment was listening to the entirety of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* — the 57 hours and 48 minutes unabridged version — in 3 weeks of farming. This was a book I'd always wanted to read as a huge fan of the musical (and specifically the original 1985 London cast recording), but had accepted I likely never would. I have a similar relationship with non-fiction books; I am an avid reader of fiction but often lack the motivation to read non-fiction with its hard facts. Audiobooks changed that for me, too. Instead of slogging through non-fiction books, I have found that listening to them makes it much easier for me to finish and often even enjoy them. Another trick I use here is to alternate realistic fiction and non-fiction audiobooks with heavier topics with lighter Young Adult, fantasy, and sci-fi.

Since starting at PVF in June, I've listened to *The Radium Girls* by Kate Moore (a great example of a non-fiction book I listened to but would have struggled

to read) and finished the second half of a children's book, *A Face like Glass* by Frances Hardinge, I'd put down in the winter.

The last audiobook I listened to was Patrick Rothfuss' *Name of the Wind* from the high fantasy *The Kingkiller Chronicle*. I am currently in the middle of *The Wise Man's Fear*, the second novel in the series. Both are narrated by the fantastic Nick Podehl who does such an amazing job that I almost don't want to read the paper copies of the books when I'm not working because I would miss his incredible narration. I highly recommend *The Kingkiller Chronicle* and Nick Podehl's narration for fans of high fantasy, exquisite worldbuilding, and the *Lord of the Rings*.

If you are someone who loves to read, but struggles to find the time for it, or someone who has a hard time getting through books when reading paper copies, I would encourage you to try audiobooks. (You can even speed up the narration if you really don't like a book but are too stubborn to abandon it!)

In addition to farming, I have enjoyed listening to books when cooking, washing dishes, driving, on long train rides while knitting, and any other time I need my hands but could use the entertainment. Library apps such as Libby/Overdrive and Hoopla make listening to books, and even reading e-books, much more accessible. I use Libby as much as possible for listening to audiobooks.

There's a world of books out there, and I wish you luck on your journey of discovery.



## Belated Bio: Maggie Hirschberg, she/her

I grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and graduated this past May from the University of Vermont with a B.A. in Environmental Studies and German, where I spent 3 of the last 4 years. My junior year I lived and studied in Freiburg, Germany until the pandemic hit (that second semester 'abroad' I attended German classes virtually from my childhood home in Arlington). After living most of the last 4 years a day's drive or flight away, I'm happy to be back in Northern

Virginia. I most recently worked as a food access and gleaning intern with the Vermont Foodbank, and previously spent a summer working on another farm in Virginia. My interests lie in food justice, regenerative agriculture, and local food systems. My hobbies when I'm not busy farming or otherwise running around include reading, spending time with friends and family, playing with my cat, and tending to my houseplants and garden. I love food and the community it creates, and I'm so excited to be a part of the PVF family!