

Notes from the garden

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I spent the last two weekends of February broadcasting, with shovel and wheelbarrow, 13 tons of compost on the 30' x 90' "yarden" behind my house. It is a late winter ritual I have followed every year since I moved to Mechanicsville in 1991. When I first tried to garden here, my roto-tiller only skipped and danced across the hard-packed, concrete-like clay soil of central

Virginia. 24 years later I can easily reach a foot deep into the rich and loose soil I have created.

The hard work of gardening parallels my professional experience in a great many ways. In 1991 I became a Licensed Professional Counselor in Virginia and opened Counseling and Human Resources Consulting, P.C. two miles from the airport. A published author, international workshop leader, consultant to governmental agencies and private corporations, and psychotherapist since 1973, I moved here from Northern Virginia to escape the crowded, expensive realities of Northern Virginia and raise my family in the charm and good graces of the south. But the environment was hard to till.

My background is in the field of Transpersonal psychology and my training is in a discipline called psychosynthesis. Altered states of consciousness are what we study. Techniques of hypnotherapy, breathwork and deep relaxation, visualization and mental imagery, symbolic and mandala art are some of the many tools we use to awaken the creativity and inner genius of clients who come to work with us in counseling. I found this approach to be a bit of a tough sell to my fellow citizens in what was once the Capital of the Confederacy!

From the end of February until frost I spend every weekend in my backyard sanctuary growing the food we eat and the 55 varieties of dahlia flowers I lovingly share with others. Gardening, like career development, requires a great deal of dedication, forethought, and careful preparation to augment the earth, to lay out the plots for the yearly crops, to bury soaker hoses, to put in the plant sets and seeds, to mulch, prune, trellis, harvest, enjoy and store. Starting from scratch, to meet my neighbors and build my counseling practice, I gave 150 seminars on a variety of topics related to creative counseling in and around Richmond in the first 15 years we lived here. I sat on the Board of the Virginia Counselors Association as president of the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in counseling. I continued to write and publish articles in peer reviewed journals and created dozens of programs for local public television. I am a graduate of Leadership Metro-Richmond's class of 2006.

Gardening is a fascinating hobby. Everything that grows has different needs and one must pay very close attention to maximize the potential of each crop. Onions, like dahlias, need a lot of potash and phosphate. Bone meal is a perfect fertilizer. Tomatoes require a lot of nitrogen and 10-10-10 works best. Carrots are thinned to four inches apart. Cabbage plants need two feet of space between them to spread out and grow. Melons run across the land. Cucumbers, berries, and even squash can be trellised and grow vertically. Every counseling client is also unique. Each requires rapt attention and special care to understand his or her background, trauma, problem, and challenges. It takes 100% attention 100% of the time to be attuned to them, to teach them how to use the techniques for better living they are willing to employ to awaken in themselves the desire to heal, develop or grow beyond the limitations in which they find themselves, to maximize their potential. Some, in crisis, come in on a weekly basis and need to be followed closely. Others need less care, are more self-directed, need less frequent contact, more time and room to grow.

I am in the office from 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM Monday through Friday. In that time I see, on average, 50 clients a week: children, adolescents, adults in individual, couples, marriage, family, and group counseling sessions. I am a one-man-show with, thank god, a one-woman assistant. Gratefully, my secretary Sharon Tuckwiller wrestles with the 25 insurance companies with which I am credentialed and manages the near psychotic process of verifications, authorizations, reimbursements, correcting the time consuming mistakes made by the insurance industry, and banking.

As I write this, from my garden my wife, children and I enjoy asparagus, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, broccoli, onions, beans and sour cherries. The tomatoes are fattening and the melons and squash are flowering. I brace for July when the blackberries will be ripe for picking. The prickly pear cactus, the fruit from which I also make jelly, will only be ready for harvest in October. Much has been done and there is much yet to do—in my yarden and in my private counseling practice.

I love every minute of it all.

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