Natasha Bynum

5 May 2017

Mid-Quarter Self Evaluation

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A Letter to Myself

Dear myself,

 Hello, old friend. It’s been awhile since we’ve gotten the chance to connect. I know you’ve been very busy these past few weeks. You’ve got a lot on your plate. (Pun intended.) Between three classes, an internship, your continuing work with the South Sound Food Systems Network, and your part-time job with the Food Systems Working Group, it’s amazing that you even have the time to read this letter I write to you.

 Anyhow, I know your work with Sustainable South Sound has not quite been what you initially expected, and we both know how much you love when things don’t go according to plan. But sarcasm aside, sometimes these changes can be better than what we initially intend. Your first love, of course, is political science and public policy. Being able to draft a resolution to increase the amount of community gardens within Olympia city limits is not only an important skill to learn, but fulfilling in a way that your soul most craves. Besides, you met with Mary yesterday to begin the Farmers Market project and although most people would feel the weight of yet another to-do list, you somehow felt lighter, almost childlike, as you skipped out of that meeting. It’s funny actually, and refreshing, that someone can get so excited about conducting a feasibility study.

Speaking of that enthusiasm, remember that quote from that book you read last week and so loved, The Lives of Animals?

“Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses?
 “No.”
 “Then why do it? You said that you were tired of clever talk about animals, proving by syllogism that they do or do not have souls. But isn’t poetry just another kind of clever talk: admiring the muscles of the big cats in verse? Wasn’t your point about talk that it changes nothing?”
 Later in the same conversation, Elizabeth says, “John, I don’t know what I want to do. I just don’t want to sit silent” (Coetzee 1999: 58).

 That one. Remember how you much you despised that Elizabeth character until that moment? Do you know why? I do. It’s because something fundamental within you deeply resonates with that final statement. That tantrum-like refusal to sit silently. That’s why you take so much on. It’s why you only feel complete when you’re spending every minute of your time “fighting the good fight.” It’s why you’re attempting to live by the covenant of The Local Food Revolution on a college budget.

 But that isn’t the only reason you took a liking to this meta-fictional novella, is it? No, you were deeply inspired by it for another reason, or you wouldn’t be using its bones as a model for your final project in your Community Resilience program. You’ve craved creativity ever since you were a child writing little stories by nightlight and drawing on your wall with colored pencils during naptime. You never would have been one of the “artsy kids,” or written a poem for your college admissions essay if you didn’t feel the need to create.

 So why, old friend, do you deny yourself this innate expression? When did you decide that your “clever talk” wasn’t worthy of being heard? I know you don’t like to talk about this with me, and even now I can feel tears swelling in your throat.

 While I have you in this moment of honesty, please allow me to advise you with tenderness and compassion. Firstly, moving forward this quarter I know that your work ethic and moral motivations will drive you to meet all of the responsibilities that you’ve committed to. I am not worried about whether or not your optimism will keep you fighting for a more local, sustainable, and equitable food system as an alternative to the global commodification it has become. But please, take every chance you can to emote your work, rather than report it - exercising the de-mechanized paradigm of knowledge that Shiva writes of, and with the honesty and simplicity of Smart-Grosvenor.

Secondly, make more time for me. Let yourself know that although you may struggle, I know you, I love you, and I don’t care if you’re perfect.

And lastly, whether you take what you’ve learned here and decide to become a farmer, a lawyer, or a writer, trust that you will make an impact. Please, old friend, remember that the passion that drives you to act boldly can also allow you to speak loudly.

With love,

Yourself

Citations

Brownlee, Michael. (2016). The Local Food Revolution: How Humanity Will Feed Itself in Uncertain Times. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Coetzee, J. M. (1999). The Life of Animals. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shiva, Vandana. (2016). Who Really Feeds the World? The Failure of Agribusiness and the Promise of Agroecology. Berkeley: North Atlantic Press.

Smart-Grosvenor, Vertamae. (1970). Vibration Cooking: Or, the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.