Growing Hope, Growing Food

September 1, 2009 By Crystal Hayes

When *The New York Times* first wrote about First Lady Michelle Obama starting an organic vegetable garden at the White House, I became quite emotional. And not just because I am an organic foodie. Seeing Michelle with soil in hand reminded me of my childhood and the solace and happiness I found in a simple hobby—gardening.

When I was 2 years old, my father, Robert Seth Hayes, a member of the Black Panther Party, was violently arrested and incarcerated. To escape from that pain, my mother moved me to Southern Pines, North Carolina, to live with my father's sister and "Momma," her mother-in-law. I don't remember all the details of my childhood, but my aunt told me that almost every day I wanted to wear my sundress and sun hat and rise at the crack of dawn to work with Momma in the vegetable garden—I never left her side.

At that age, I was getting a powerful lesson in self-sufficiency and in life's seemingly small, daily joys—lessons few have access to anymore. I'm convinced that what I learned then, about how food grows, gave me the strength to achieve a fulfilling adult life. It's been one marked by the richness of motherhood, a large family of friends and an integrated career.

Now, living in North Carolina, I spend every Saturday morning at my local farmer's market. While I plan to cultivate my own organic garden someday, the farmer's market—with its fresh produce and green foods—confirms the fact that as long as I'm able to visit a garden, I'll also be able to find peace and love wherever I go.

The Expert Says…

Adrian McInman, a New York City–based personal change consultant, offers tips on finding and sticking with hobbies.

To find activities you enjoy, first grab pen and paper. Take two minutes and write down what activities make you happy, in order from most to least important.

Commit to doing 10 of the pastimes on your list. Write next to them the amount of time you spent doing each one.

Ask yourself: "Am I as happy as I want to be?" Then explore the relationship between doing the things you enjoy and being happy.

Make setting aside time for hobbies a top priority.

Try banning television for

48 hours every week—you might find some free time for hobbies once you're unchained from the couch.

—LaToya Johnson

Seize the Day
How finding something fun to do can make a difference

Whether it's taking a dance class, playing basketball every Saturday with coworkers or helping the homeless through your church group, leisure activities offer more than just fun ways to find your inner passions—they are good for your mental and physical health.

Past studies show that hobbies can sharpen your mind, decrease feelings of isolation, connect you to others, reduce stress, improve self-esteem and help you find inner calm and happiness.

Make the effort. Find time outside your job, your family and your hectic schedule and do something for you.

—Kellee Terrell

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/hobbies-gardening-17192-2064