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Health and Wellness

The Secret Garden on My Street



By Julia Chiappetta

I recently connected with a neighbor of mine on Facebook; he lives on one of the most spectacular pieces of property in town and right in my neighborhood. I was intrigued by some of the pictures he had posted of his crops, his farming tools, and the baby turtles that wander through, and so I messaged him asking if I could visit. His response was very welcoming, so I stopped by and was met by his sweet doggy, Ellie. You could say that my jaw dropped and my heart raced with excitement upon seeing all the natural beauty, the cultivated farmland and homes hugging the shores of the Mianus River in Cos Cob. Wow... what a place!

David Drenckhahn's family has owned this property since the turn of the last century and he shared plenty of great stories about their history, which was intriguing to me, having grown up just up the street from him. He explained that the river had flooded in 1927 and it was then that the dam was built; but before then it was a much smaller river with easy access to the other side. I remember my mom and dad explaining to me

that Route One was actually a smaller road right over the dam, and when Mom and her friends walked over it to go to church they would feel the spray of water from below.

Generation to generation, David's family has grown crops, which they consumed, canned, and gave away to family and friends, and he and his brothers still follow in this generous and kind tradition. His brother Craig harvests the seeds and David plants and tends to them, along with working at their excavating business. Craig and another brother, Alan, run their boat yard on River Road in Cos Cob.

They all take part in cultivating the precious land they inherited, and they all support one another. On their mom's side, they are one of the 27 founding families in Greenwich, and very proud of their heritage.

As we walked and talked, my senses were on overload with the amazing sights, sweet smells of flowers and fruit trees and the sound of birds and other critters. There are two homes sitting on their property in which the family still resides, as well as greenhouses, small work sheds, garages where their equipment, including a shiny, bright red tractor, are housed, and many different garden areas.

David offered me some baby broccoli and lettuce, which I was more than happy to take, especially since the Drenckhahns do not use pesticides. He told me to come back at the end of June, when most of the gardens and trees would be in bloom, and I am eager to do so, since I can only imagine now what the explosion of colors and scents will reveal.

David and I sat at a bench near



David Drenckhahn and Ellie at the Drenckhahn family gardens in Cos Cob. (Photo by Julia Chiappetta)

the water with his trusty Ellie protecting him. I asked, "So, what do you grow here, can you give me the lowdown?"

He started with the trees: apple, pear, plum, lemon, peach and nectarine. Then onto the herbs: mint, basil, parsley, fennel, thyme and rosemary. Next stop, vegetables: varieties of onion, potato and kale, red cabbage, peas, cucumbers, Brussels sprout, red lettuce, salad bowl lettuce, garlic, broccoli, broccoli rabe, golden beets, purple beets, tri-color Swiss chard, leeks, spinach, New Zealand spinach, Danford carrots, tri-color carrots, rainbow beets, eggplant, butternut squash, pumpkins and rhubarb. And in the fruit family: blueberries, blackberries, white seedless grapes and watermelon.

Finishing off, he listed some of the beautiful flowers growing there: peonies, zinnias, snapdragons, adalias, marigolds, roses and sunflowers.

This is a special place, where special things happen, where special people live, like David's Aunt Marie, and where special friends like Lisa bring joy to David as he toils to carry on his family's

legacy.

This experience taught me that there are many special blessings that God has for us, and some might be right around the corner. Seeing and partaking of these special moments is only enhanced by taking good care of our bodies to enjoy them to the fullest. So... those of you who know me and read my column know that my hope is that you drink some nice organic greens, make good food choices, don't use pesticides on your lawn, bring a smile to a strangers, help a neighbor with a selfless act, and always reach out with love and encouragement to those around you.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob. More information and past columns can be found at JuliaChiappetta.com.

