

# Contentment

## **Victoria Meede, Semester 50**

*Editor's note: Victoria wrote this essay in response to the question, "Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?" Victoria is from West Bloomfield, Michigan.*

As the setting sun dips below the line of oaks that separates the fields of pasture from the salt marsh below, the sky erupts in the most vivid hues of gold and amethyst that I could imagine. It is irrelevant what month it is. Perhaps it is February and the winter darkness looms in the early hours of the evening. Perhaps I am squatting on a hay bale, bundled in my wool socks, winter boots, and warmest jacket, in the barn in front of Louise, a pregnant cow that I will later learn is a terror to milk. Perhaps it is April, and as the sun is setting later, I am missing more and more of study hours. I could be perched above the farm pond, full of nitrogen-rich matter and teeming with thousands of newly hatched wood frogs. Down in the pond side garden, Sal, the beautiful draft horse with an attitude, out to pasture for the night, canters along the side of her temporary paddock. While the spring season has melted away the harsh, biting air of February, I curl my bare knees underneath my favorite sweater.

Perhaps it is summer; perhaps it is July. I am no longer a student but a staff member, hired for the summer to work on the farm that I love so. Perhaps I am no longer idly observing the beauty that is Salt Marsh Farm in the evening, but taking my turn at barn check for the night. I wear my dirt caked shorts and my work boots, practically worn through the soles. First, I feed Leroy, Louise's calf, his bottle, and I cannot help but be amused at the eager sight of him prancing and wiggling around the paddock, slurping and suckling the bottle with eyes as crazy as his mother's. After closing the hoop house and shutting in the chickens, I make my way to my resting place until I must rise at five for morning chores.

The place where I feel perfectly content is Salt Marsh Farm. As a student at Chewonki Semester School, the farm was sacred in my eyes. I often spent my free time there reflecting on my experiences and reveling at the simplistic beauty of this place of growth for plants, animals, and people. Yet even more important than the peace and wonder I found there as a student, was the work ethic and happiness I encountered within myself during the summer. For me, the farm fostered a passion for sustainable agriculture, and therefore, an inner gratification knowing I was doing something positive for the land, environment, and the creatures that inhabit it. In June, my muscles quivered with the foreign, extensive physical labor. As the summer grew older, I grew stronger, and

suddenly the soreness transformed into a delicious stretch in my body. I was enthused to work hard and became confident in the work that I accomplished. I took pride in knowing the farm itself and being good at what I did.

Not only did this place give me a sweet satisfaction in my body and psyche, I was constantly challenged and stimulated by the people I spent those endless, sweltering days with. I was free: free to express what was on my mind, free to ask questions, free to be myself, free to discuss the topics that I find most pressing. Our laughter echoed through the barn, our sweat doused our precious crops, and our singing resounded through the pastures from dawn to dusk. I got little sleep during those spectacular weeks, yet every morning my body awoke naturally, keen to begin the day. Everyday was a labor of love and joy. I lived simply. And happily. I cannot consider myself to be a farmer; that is far more recognition than I deserve. Nevertheless, my humble service and life that existed on the farm is where I am fulfilled.