

NORTHWEST PASSAGES **Lifestyles**

FAVORITE PLACES

A place to haggle, schmooze, gossip, wander — and buy

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I don't know what my favorite spot in D.C. is called. It has no name, no walls, little respite from the elements. If you walk past it on a weekday morning, it has disappeared; pass the bamboo and flower stand, and you've gone too far.

This favorite place of mine is no secret. It's one of those outdoor vendors at the weekend Eastern Market on Capitol Hill. After surviving changes and a few near shutdowns, Eastern Market remains one of the only public markets left in Washington. The building, completed in 1873, houses food vendors every day but Monday. Outdoor vendors selling food, jewelry, antiques, clothing and lots of glorious junk populate the premises on weekends. Rain or shine, sleet or snow, the tough ones will be there.



Courtesy of Alyssa Kagel, right; File photo, left

Alyssa Kagel and Dan Donahue, the operator of Kagel's favorite place, a stand at Eastern Market

A weekend at Eastern Market offers more than shopping. It offers an *experience*. I get to haggle, schmooze, gossip and wander with the best of 'em. I most enjoy the myriad tastes,

textures and colors on a weekend morning, especially one in which I'm trying to wake myself up after too little sleep the night before. I breathe fresh air and fruit smells, whether I want to or not. If the sensory explosion isn't a sufficient caffeine substitute that day, I can buy a cup of joe at the bakery inside the Eastern Market building — and a slice of ginger pumpkin spice cake, while I'm there.

As a regular weekend patron of Eastern Market (rain or shine, sleet or snow), I now know the ins and outs of the food vendors. I know where to find the juicy, \$1.75-a-pound peaches (the cheapest by 24 cents), which is the best sorbet at the flavored ice stand (mango is to die for), and the reason some dude sits all day selling vegetable peelers (because they're the best vegetable peelers you've ever tried in your life, obviously).

As a regular, I also know my favorite food vendor, which also happens to be my favorite place in the city. Ask the other weekend regulars about produce, and they'll probably agree: The vendor on the corner of 7th and C streets SE has the best produce in Washington. It's an Eastern Market trademark.

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NORTHWEST REAL ESTATE

MARKET

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And nowhere else can I find green iced tea, Amish popcorn, dried cherries, horseradish mustard, homemade chocolate cookies and five types of mushrooms year-round. Everything is displayed in wooden crates, plastic coolers and bins that stretch a few feet across and a dozen feet wide. On a Sunday afternoon, Dan, the owner, doesn't close up early like some of the other vendors. He waits until the bitter end, and then he donates all unsold produce to the local soup kitchen. But be warned: If you get there late on a Sunday, there won't be much left.

Even when I'm not interested in buying, I'm always game for sampling (which, of course, always leads to buying). Dan doesn't mess around. No bite-sized samples here. Instead, he gives me chunks of fruit the size of my fist. By the time I've tasted the seven apple varieties and chosen which I like best, I'm full. But, lucky for me, the apples last all week.

Dan said he enjoys his customers and workers, is proud to sell quality produce at fair prices, and is happy to answer questions. Find me a Safeway checkout boy who's proud of his organic carrots, and

I'll give you a dollar.

John has big hands, a smart mouth and a round, deep laugh. His workers might have calloused fingers and crooked teeth, but they're smiling. The market, unusual within the power-hungry D.C. metropolis, is unassuming. It's got a rural feel to it, and that's part of its charm.

Stuff is cheap, too. I get my pound of green peppers for 99 cents, my dozen cage-free eggs for \$2.50, and my enormous pesticide-free head of lettuce for two bucks. Plus, my dollars benefit the local guy. And that's important. At present, only 20 cents of every dollar spent on food goes to the farmer, the Food Securities Learning Center suggests. When the small, local guy sells to me directly, he, instead of the Safeway and King Kullen tycoons of the world, profits from my business.

The truth is, I don't go to the farmers market because I'm some hip, socially conscious chick. I go because the food is typically fresher and less processed than the same versions sold at big

supermarket chains. And when I surround myself with colorful, appetizing produce, I'm more

likely to buy the five daily servings of fruits and veggies recommended by the U.S.

Department of Agriculture. At the produce vendor, I can't

steal away to

the middle aisle and sneak that chunky chocolate candy bar into my cart. (OK, it's true, I can buy the chocolate cookies or the pumpkin cake at the vendor down the street, but I can at least pronounce all the ingredients used for those sweets.)

Buying at the market helps the planet, too. When planes, trains and trucks don't have to travel long distances to deliver food from one coast to another, fewer emissions and greenhouse gases enter the air. I reduce my "food miles."

So you'll see me at Dan's stand every weekend, empty canvas bags and small wad of cash in hand. It's true, I eat a hell of a lot of free samples, and I dress in my sweats, but I do buy two canvas bags full of produce.



CONCERT

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you, dear friend. I am, as I stated earlier, an old man. What surprised me is that you were no whipper-snapper yourself. I'm guessing you and your buddy were about my age, maybe a couple of years younger. Isn't it time to start toning down the drunken concert revelry? Maybe try a nice refreshing ginger ale next time.

Personally, I'd be happy if I could just sit down at concerts. I know, purists like you think sitting is for losers. You'd rather stand there for two hours, packed in like sardines. It certainly didn't stop you from swinging your arms around like an irate baboon.

I've stood through enough shows in my lifetime. After careful consultation with my knees and lower back, I've decided to opt for a chair. I wonder how that massive security guard at the 9:30 Club with all the piercings would feel about me bringing in a stool and sitting it in the middle of the room. He'd probably force me to eat it.

Despite my cranky disposition and your buffoonish exuberance, I genuinely enjoyed the show. It only took me 30 minutes to realize that if I closed my eyes, I could still enjoy the music and not have to