

One month of 2020 is behind us now. While it may seem too late to make a New Year's resolution, it is never too late to set intentions. This month's inspiration comes from two sources: a quote in an email from a yoga studio and a posting on Facebook.

The quote from Neil Gaiman:

"I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes.

Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something.

So that's my wish for you, and all of us, and my wish for myself. Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life.

Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do it.

Make your mistakes, next year and forever."

A friend posted the hashtag #gosuckatsomething, describing the process of challenging herself to learn something new. She was referring to carving a spoon from a log using a machete, and described an important part of the process as keeping playing without judging. Note that she is not thinking of the process as working on making a spoon, but rather playing which adds a certain lightness right off the bat.

It is true for most of us, most of the time, when we try something really new to us, we may not do very well initially. This is not a reason to avoid trying to learn something new, just a reminder to be patient with ourselves in the process.

For myself, I have seen this recently in a few dance contexts. First, my zumba teacher regularly introduces new choreographies and is invariably cheerful and encouraging, saying "That's coming along. We'll get better." The second was in comparing my personal comfort levels at a music and dance camp with primarily contradancing, at a Balkan "dance every day of your life" event sponsored by the Deerings, and at a swing dance. I have done so much contra and Balkan that I feel much more comfortable than at swing. When I stop to examine that feeling, a lot of it is confidence that I will move through the "sucking" discomfort phase of any new dance into greater enjoyment and competence. The more experience I have with it, the more confident I become that I will get it eventually. I can learn.

This generalizes nicely. In my clarinet studies, early in a week's lessons I play more slowly figuring out the patterns, notes, accidentals, rhythms, and melodies. Typically as I practice daily, I get more facile and can speed up--even if only incrementally.

So, my encouragement to you is to try something new and challenging. Be extremely patient with yourself as you struggle to learn and master the building blocks. Dare to suck at something!