

Early practice.

When you have a hobby, and you want to improve your skills, you have to practice. There is no substitute for practice. Those of you who come from disciplined nations will know all about this. In the Western world, I think, dedicating ourselves to long-term practice is sometimes a challenge. It isn't in the fabric of our society. We are innovative, but not necessarily disciplined. Speaking from personal experience, and looking at myself, the practice of a hobby, whether it is a podcast or a musical instrument, a new language or a physical exercise, can be a painful process. Encouragement helps. For example, when I get positive emails from my podlisteners, I think, "Wow! People are listening! I must keep going!" Or if my violin teacher says that I sound better when I play, I feel so relieved that I am spurred on to continue practicing. My oldest son has shown some dedication recently that has reminded me of all of this, and I am impressed. He has basketball practice in middle school at six thirty in the morning, four days a week. Oooooo, now that's painful! I am barely conscious at that time of the morning. I drive him to the school, still in my pyjamas and slippers, wearing a big coat and an extra large scarf. The poor boy must think that his mother looks like a clown. The school is actually very close, but I choose to drive him because it is pitch black that early in the morning, and it is freezing cold, with snow and ice all over the place. As I watch him walk into the school building, I am encouraged that he is being consistent with his basketball. I know that he will see himself improve, and reap the rewards. When I drop him off, I see other boys appear from the darkness, and walk into school, their skinny legs only half covered by their long basketball shorts, and carrying backpacks that look bigger than they are. My heart goes out to them. Hopefully, they do it out of a love for the sport, and not just a sense of obligation. Either way, seeing them encourages me to keep going with my hobbies, and my efforts at self-improvement.

Grammar notes.

Related vocabulary: a substitute, innovative, to (be) spur(red) on, barely conscious.

1. You can substitute honey for sugar in this recipe.
2. Apple is a very innovative company; they are so successful because of their creativity.
3. We were spurred on by our teacher to finish our science project; he chooses just the right words to spur us on.
4. When we found the puppy in the snow, it was barely conscious. But after warming up in the house, he was soon running around and playing.

