

A Garden of Eatin’

By Bob Griggs

My dad was raised on a farm. Well, I was too, but I wasn’t really a farmer at heart like he was. No matter what other jobs he had, he liked to grow things, especially things to eat, so when World War II came along, Dad could hardly wait to get a Victory Garden started.

Although he had a second lieutenant’s commission in the ROTC, he had flat feet, a wife and four kids, and a fairly important job with the Oregon Milk Control Board, which kept him out of the service. Having a Victory Garden was his way of “doing his bit,” as he called it.

He got together with two other guys who were 4-F who also thought it was a good idea.

Near our home in northeast Portland, Ore., there was a well-off lady who owned a whole block of land. Her enormous house and yard occupied half of it; the other half was vacant. Dad made a deal with her to supply her with fresh vegetables in exchange for the use of the land. Then he and the other guys got shovels and started digging up the ground by hand.

That lasted for about a week, which was when the others dropped out. Somehow it hadn’t occurred to them that having a vegetable garden meant physical labor. That didn’t stop Dad for a moment. He was in his element. As soon as he got home from work on Saturday, after church on Sunday, and in the evenings, he was over there shoveling and raking and hoeing and planting. Do I need to mention that his eldest son, Bob—me—was drafted to assist with the project?

Well, that was some garden. Dad planted practically everything that would grow, and everything grew like crazy. Mom got the job of canning all that produce, which ranged from beans to corn to tomatoes, and even cabbage, which became sauerkraut.

The lady who owned the property was inundated with more vegetables than she could use. Dad even found a lucrative market for some of the surplus at a nearby grocery store where they were glad to get really fresh vegetables.

Dad was in seventh heaven; to his way of thinking, a farmer farmed so that he could sell his crop.

Me, I was getting sunburned and muscles from all the hoeing, watering and weeding.

Actually, looking back, it was kind of fun. I ate my fill of everything I liked, which was good for a growing boy with a bottomless appetite.



There is nothing quite like a perfectly ripe tomato right off the vine, or a radish or small turnip with a little salt. My favorite lunch was corn on the cob, roasted in its husk on the heavy mesh screen over the burning barrel and eaten with a bit of salt and lots of butter.

There was only one failure in Dad’s garden—cantaloupe. The plants came up, spread out, blossomed and the melons appeared. Dad and I watched them closely as they got bigger and golden and ready to harvest.

Finally the day came. Dad picked up a melon and a startled look appeared on his face. Slowly he

turned the melon over—and we looked at the neat hole a meadow mouse had gnawed. The interior was completely gone. All of the others in the row had come to the same sad end. Somewhere off in their burrows, little mice were picking their teeth and burping our melon. It was pretty disappointing; we'd had our mouths set for them ourselves.

Dad and I maintained that garden for three years, until we moved to the house the folks bought. There wasn't room for a real garden, so Dad had to content himself with flowers and a few tomato plants.

When the folks finally moved to Boise, he

ended up with another huge garden and a small greenhouse, which I helped him build. He was a happy man.

I, of course, had vowed that I would never, *never* plant a garden when I grew up, which makes it hard to explain why for some five years I've maintained several raised beds in which I grow a variety of very tasty organic vegetables, which we eat. JoAnn freezes the surplus. I do not raise cantaloupes; we have mice here, too.

That Victory Garden was a victory for my dad in more than one way. He got me started.

Thanks, Dad! ❖