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Victory Gardens and Tomatoes

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New Sheets

Karla Morton

It's a scent that reminds me more of her
than her perfume –
clean cloth and hot iron;
sweet steam permeating her face; her hands.

Saturday mornings, back aching
over the ironing board;
shirts, in queue on hangers
waiting for her touch...

I realize now, it was all for us – each
ironing, each call; each care package;
each Sunday dinner... Mom, we'd say,
why do you go to all this trouble?

18 years ago, I knew this day
would come, when the gift of life
welled up inside me like cool waters,
destined to be free.

What if he hurts? What if he needs?
What more can I give him?
18 summers pass
like constellations in the night.

I washed his new sheets twice;
pulled out the ironing board,
steamed tears into fresh pillowcases,
pressed my hands to the seams.

His first night away;
I'll think of his cheeks on the cloth;
his sleep, steeped, with the
sweet smell of home.

Victory Gardens and Tomatoes

Barbara Roth

The time was World War II and I was
in kindergarten. One spring day, just before the closing bell rang, our teacher
gave each of us a packet of seeds, "To plant a Victory Garden at home, to help
the war effort," she told us. A picture of a vegetable was on each envelope.
Mine was a shiny red tomato.

Clutching the packet and my drawings, I raced the three blocks home.
"Mom, Mom. Look! Seeds for a Victory Garden." The seeds rattled as I shook
the packet. "What's a Victory Garden?" I demanded. Mom explained to me that
if everyone grew their own vegetables, there would be enough food to feed the
soldiers fighting in the war. My Uncle Walt was a soldier in the war. He was
away in a far-off place called Hawaii. I did not like tomatoes, but I liked Uncle
Walt, and I was curious about how tomatoes grew from seeds.

"Can we plant them, Mom?"

"We'll talk about it over dinner."

Saturday morning found Dad straining to spade the stubborn earth in the
back yard. Soon taut white string marked straight rows. How tiny the seeds
were as they dropped into the fragrant, crumbly soil. Then came the watering,
the weeding, and the waiting. At last, slim fingers of pale green curved upward
through the earth's crust and strained toward the sun. The same miracle occurred
in each neighbor's backyard. Gardening hints passed over adjoining fences and
we shared or exchanged abundant crops.

Oh, those bountiful tomatoes. Everyone was trying to give them away.
There was no choice, but to can them. Mom found canning instructions in the
newspaper and bought two cartons of mason jars and paraffin wax for sealing.
Grandmother came by bus to help and Mom drafted me. We speared tomatoes
on forks and plunged them into boiling water to loosen the skin for peeling. The
juice stung as it ran in thin rivulets down my arms. The boiling water intensified
the already hot, humid kitchen and tempers became as acid as the tomatoes.
Mercifully, Mom sent me outside to play. At day's end, ruby jars lined the
countertop, Grandma had gone home, and Mom went to bed early. Patriotism
was not easy that day.

Years later, I learned that U.S. citizens grew over 40% of the nation's produce
during World War II.