

# Seeds of Victory

First grader's harvest included a bountiful sense of pride.

By Gladys P. Winterrowd, Oblong, Illinois

DOWN THE CINDER LANE and into our house I ran, the wood-framed screen door banging shut behind me.

"Mom, Mom, look!" I cried. "Seeds! My own seeds! Can I have my own garden, Mom? Can I?"

"May I," my mother corrected me, closing the door to the oven of our large black, wood-burning range and wiping her forehead with the hem of her apron.

I spread the tiny packets of seeds from my schoolteacher onto the red-and-white checkered oilcloth covering the kitchen table. The plain, brown government-issue envelopes were about 2 by 3 inches with black lettering. They weren't pretty, like the seed packages in the store—the glossy ones with bright pictures of white-tipped red-globe radishes or golden carrots—but they were mine.

It was the spring of 1945, the waning months of a long world war of which I was vaguely aware in rural Douglas County, Illinois. My one brother, Clarence, 12 years older than I, was no longer at the supper table each evening. He appeared from time to time, tall and handsome in a Navy uniform, to sweep me off my feet and twirl me around.

"These seeds are for your victory garden," Mother said, explaining that it took a lot of food to feed all of our sailors and soldiers and that the President wanted everyone to grow their own food to save more for the war.

Mother said that while we didn't have a place for my own separate

garden, I could plant my seeds at the ends of a couple of rows in the big garden.

I piped up that I wanted my own garden, but Mother said, “Don’t be putting up a tune. Daddy has enough on his mind without worrying about making you a garden.”

A few afternoons later, Mother called to me as I skipped up the narrow road from school, my black, metal dinner bucket bumping against my legs.

There, between the garden ditch and the fence, was a small rectangle of freshly turned earth, the clods broken and the soil raked smooth.

“Here is your victory garden,” Mother said. “Daddy spaded it up for you at noon.”

Each day, under Mother’s watchful eyes, I pulled weeds and thinned the carrots and beets. “These are from Gladys’ garden,” Mother announced on the evening that my first radishes were served at the supper table. I glowed with pride.

In August, I was with Mother in the garden late one afternoon when the 6 o’clock whistle in town, about a mile away, blew early. Then came an eruption of sirens, car horns and church bells.

My older sister ran out of the house and called out something, and Mother flung her hoe to the ground and clasped her rough, red hands to her breast, bursting into tears.

“What’s wrong?” I cried. “Mommy! What’s wrong?”

“The war is over!” she said as she wept.

“If the war is over,” I asked, “then why are you crying?”

“Because,” she said, “Clarence will be coming home.”