

“WALKING BASKETS OF NORTH AVENUE”

By Frank W. Santucci

During WWII in the early 1940's, most families in the United States and in particular Verona, PA, had Victory vegetable gardens. My grandparents were no exception, but they took the task to a new and higher level. Their modest home on North Avenue did not compliment the garden in the back, on its 30 degree sloping hill. Tomato plants, peppers, onions, garlic, corn and swiss chards seemed to stand at attention when my grandmother would greet them each evening with the water hose. The tomato plants seemed to turn to greet her as she gave them their quiet shower. The plants responded unconditionally to the water and heat of May and June, but come July, the fruit of the plants were on the move, not of their own volition, but from the command of Nana or Nanu.

In the same house, Pete, Jerry and John, my three cousins also lived there. My brother Ralph and I lived about 500 yards away and as the month of July appeared on the calendar, all five became basket carriers. As the plants surrendered their fruit to my Nana in the early mornings, she would gently wash and clean tomatoes and other vegetables like her little children.

She had a fleet of baskets measuring about one and one half feet long by eight inches and as neatly as possible, she would place her “valued treasures” in ten baskets and wait for the five of us. We were instructed to walk up and down North Avenue selling the little packets of onions and lettuce, large bright red juicy tomatoes and Christmas green peppers. The prices were cheap, memory serves me that everything sold for 10 cents each, very hard to imagine that price compared to today's market. Up and down the street we would toil. The anxious neighbors were eagerly awaiting. Sell out one basket then quickly return to 529 North Avenue for a refill. It was fun most of the time, but if we wanted to play baseball, we had to hustle and run our North Avenue route. On one occasion, would you believe, a woman paid me with a check for fifty cents, which my Nana did not appreciate receiving this type of payment. When the morning was done and all the vegetables were tucked away in unfamiliar Anglo homes, my grandmother would pay each of us fifty cents for two hours of selling her Victory garden prizes around North Avenue.

We grand kids, never complained. Are you kidding me? THAT WAS OUR NANA!

August, 2016