

Main Street Tomatoes

In the late sixties things were changing. I was off at a girls' school and I was intent on changing from the small town girl to something more sophisticated and exotic. It was the days of hemlines going up, up, up, but if you didn't want to wear dresses, by god you could wear pants. Thrilling.

During a break, I brought home a chic friend from our capital city. I was giving her a tour of my town before we kept going east to the beach, and I was horrified when I saw that Daddy had planted tomato plants in the front yard of his judge's office across from the county courthouse. If that wasn't country enough, I was further embarrassed to find that the tomato-laden plants were being tied to the stakes with the fabric strips cut from my dresses Mother had hemmed to keep me in style. The psychedelic prints screamed at passers by. Flower power right there on Main Street.

We went in Daddy's office and he pulled open his desk drawer and offered my friend pecans he had gathered from the ground under the tree growing outside his office. He would crack and clean the pecans during lunch breaks as he watched "As the World Turns" before he had to reconvene court.

Then we went outside for him to get some things out of his trunk for us to take to the beach, and there were dozens of cans of deviled ham, pork and beans, Vienna sausage, and sardines, his fishing trip staples. By now I was feeling like I was in a scene from "The Beverly Hillbillies." I couldn't get out of town fast enough.

I couldn't help but notice that my friend went on and on about how wonderful my parents were. Really? As I listened to her recap the visit later, I could gradually hear her describing something very real and warm and absolutely rooted in my family and community.

She speaks of that visit to this day, and instead of blushing with embarrassment, I smile a little.