

The Peppers

I opened the door to the refreshing cool air of the kitchen and was greeted by Grandmother carrying a face mask and soft chuckle saying, “You’ll need one of these”. As I looked around, glass jars filled the counter top and the kitchen table was covered in green from end to end... chili peppers! We sat down at the table and began the long process. The only warmth I felt was from my breath blowing back at me inside my mask. I slowly felt a burning start creeping into my hands and arms. I could feel my eyes begin to water and my nose started to run. I looked up in desperation for a simple fix, only to be given a chuckle and nod urging me to keep going. We finished the last jar and with relief I finally took my mask off to wipe my sweat away.

My grandmother and I chuckled at our appearance and discomfort. We must have looked silly sprawled out on the living room sofas in front of that clinking AC for relief. I’m still not sure why they held onto that old thing. My hands and arms felt raw, almost like a bad sunburn when the hot water hits it. I could do nothing but let the salt from my tears running down my puffy face as my eyes continued to water. I laid there quietly listening to my grandmother laughing and going on about her youth and her hope garden from the war. She couldn’t remember if anything grew, but she remembered tilling up their front yard. She told stories about the air raids and how lights out at dark, really meant lights out. The burning begins to diminish, but I don’t move, all I could do was listen and try to remember each detail.