

A GARDEN in the Ghetto

by Bobby Bostic

Growing up in the inner city ghetto of St. Louis Missouri did not allow our family to see many of nature's wonders. Our neighborhoods were full of vacant houses, broken down cars, drug dealers every which way you looked, gangbangers posted up and down the block, broken beer bottles loitering the sidewalks, yards with run down grass, streetlights that didn't work, etc. It was more like nature's curse rather than nature's gift.

There was, however an exception. Ironically it was right there in my own backyard. Yep, my mother had a small garden. When she first started this garden people looked at her like she was crazy. Her friends made comments such as: "girl what are you doing planting a garden in this dump", and Dee Dee do not waste your time because somebody will just steal your vegetables before you get them", "it will never work in this neighborhood, etc. Being the determined soul that she is, fortunately my mother ignored the critics. She wanted her garden and she got it. Me being the curious child that I was, I watched her every step of the way.

She went into the backyard and tilled the hard worn soil. First she would water it every day, then she purchased a hoe and started turning over the soil. Once she did this for awhile, she started planting the small seeds that she got from the local hardware store. There was seeds for tomatoes, greens, lettuce, cucumbers, etc. I looked at the little seed packs and started shaking them and wondering how could she possibly grow something from these seeds in these bags. My mother is a proud lady so she went out into her garden every day. She would put on her straw hat and be out in the blazing sun on her knees arranging the rows of the garden. She would spend hours out there while we were out front playing games. She would come in all sweaty to get a drink of water and then go back out there in her garden. People shook their head at her but my mother did not care.

When it rained outside she would just sit there staring out of the window at her garden. After the rainfall she would go back out there and adjust the soil. I never understood what she was doing. Nevertheless in a few months everything that she planted blossomed. Right there in the ghetto, surrounded by drive by shootings, drug deals, and extreme poverty my mother's garden got really big in our backyard. It took over 80 percent of the backyard. When you stepped back there all you could see was her garden. It was a beautiful sight. IN the backdrop of an alley littered with trash and cracked concrete stood her picturesque garden. It was many colors. The greens were growing everywhere. She had yellow flowers back there, cucumbers, lettuce sprouting everywhere, and other stuff that I do not know the name of. It sure looked good though. And it tasted even better. She would have certain days where we ate entire meals made entirely from what she cooked in her garden.

Lo and behold, those same neighbors who criticized her meager efforts started coming over asking her for some of the vegetables and other edibles that she was delicately growing. My mother never holds grudges and she was proud to share her fruits and vegetables with all of her neighbors. She would store a lot of what she grew in the house and give everything else away to her neighbors and her sisters. This became a sort of tradition for her. Despite how poor our family was, my mother would not allow

poverty to define her. In our concrete city streets she created her own personal paradise. Despite all the negativity surrounded us her kids could go into this garden and find some refuge of peace. It was our own little corner of the world. We did not do any of the gardening but just walking through it we felt part of her garden. She had the rows all neatly spaced. She kept the dirt moist, etc.

I would sometimes see her out there in her lawn chair, oblivious to the world, just sitting there drinking some tea, straight chilling. Mama would have on some sandals and be so peaceful out there in her garden. She always created little small miracles. Right now to this day, 30 years later I wonder how did she do it? She always use to say that she be at peace in her garden. It was peaceful back there. She would sit in the garden with her own thoughts for hours. She couldn't afford a vacation or go on a trip. Instead, she would get away from it all while sitting right there in her garden in the very troubled chaotic ghetto slum that we lived in. Like the rose that grew from the concrete, she defied the odds and grew a garden in a place where nature does not traditionally bloom. By refusing to allow the walls of hell to close in her, my mother created her own paradise right there in ghetto by way of her lovely garden.

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