

# BLAME IT ALL ON MY ROOTS

BY JEN GENNARO

"Taaaake this to the commmpostin' piiiile, dawwwlin," my grandmother would drawl every time I visited her house on Perkins Road. The little metal canister, dented likely from years of grandchildren hurling it at the ground in the general direction of the open compost pile, was a permanent fixture by the kitchen sink. Stuffed with coffee grounds and banana peels and other detritus of a home cook's kitchen, I would think to complain of the smell, but knew better than to refuse.

My grandfather farmed three acres on Perkins Road at Kenilworth for as long as I can remember; even into his late 80s when commercial development tried squeezing them out and a three story office building went up right next door to his garden, the ladies from the office complex would come buy tomatoes and

roses on their lunch break. He grew the most beautiful American Beauty roses you've ever seen and would send me home with an old bucket full of them every time I visited.

My dad and his four siblings raised livestock for 4H and for slaughter. (I won't go into the traumatic Thanksgiving story of what happened to the turkey he named after me, but you can probably put the clues together.) He grew every vegetable under the sun, and my grandmother lived in that kitchen, cooking, pickling, canning. There were vertical vines of grape leaves my grandmother used to roll the traditional Lebanese dish for Sunday dinner. He had the largest fig tree and the oldest mulberry tree in Louisiana. There were rows of tomato plants, and he sold them for 25 cents each. Customers constantly drove up, knowing to put the money for the tomatoes on the patio table if they couldn't find him.

"You want some citrus?" he'd say when I visited. "Sure," I'd say, knowing what was coming next. "Well you know where it is!" And he'd take me out to the satsuma and lemon trees to pick them.



**My grandfather Buck Bayhi at his farm on Perkins Road. The office complex can be seen in the top right.**  
*Photo by Tim Mueller Photography and reprinted with permission.*

# FIELD & GARDEN - ROOTS

When he passed away in 2018 and the fields grew over and the greenhouses came down, my cousins and I found new homes for the heavy signs that used to hang by the driveway on Perkins. FALL TOMATO PLANTS FOR SALE reads the one on our garden wall; ALL SAINTS DAY POTTED MUMS hangs on my cousin's wall in New Orleans.

That compost pile became soil that he'd pot his plants in, growing them from seed to plant. Thanks to my 15-year-old's newfound interest in environmental science (shoutout to you, Ms. Gautreaux at ZHS!), we've come to realize that commercially available "soil" is pretty devoid of nutrients. Combined with this info, the lovely spring weather, and nostalgia about my late grandparents, I'm finally making my husband the happiest man on earth...by helping him in the garden.



**Buck and his little dog, Maggie.**  
*Illustration by Mike Gennaro*

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