

‘Walking’ the Taters

By Fran Williamson, Jeffersonville, Indiana

ONE OF THE FONDEST memories from my childhood, of the late 1940s and early '50s, was watching Daddy prepare potatoes, which country folk called taters.

Daddy farmed for my aunt and uncle on their land between New Washington and Charlestown, Indiana. They allowed Daddy; my sister, Retta; and me to live in one of their rental houses.

In early spring, Daddy would bring out the basket of seed taters from the cellar to the porch. He'd proceed to quarter or halve the taters or leave them whole, depending on their size.

Seed taters were the ones allowed to start sprouting so they could be planted to grow more taters. Each piece had to have an eye, which was the start of a sprout that ensured the piece would root and grow. Old-time folks often waited for certain signs of nature to be right before preparing the ground for planting.

The night before the planting, Daddy would advise me that I'd have to get up early the next morning to “walk” the taters for him.

After a big breakfast, we'd head for the prepared patch of ground. Daddy would walk down a row, dropping the pieces of taters at intervals with me walking behind him and stepping on each piece.

By pushing the pieces of tater into the soft ground, I ensured that they would burrow in and grow where Daddy wanted them to. The scent of fresh earth and the cool softness under my bare feet, combined with the sounds of birds singing and a gentle breeze stirring my hair, enticed me to walk the taters slowly and carefully.

I knew we depended on a good crop for food through the winter, since we were very poor, but above all, I wanted to do a good job for my daddy. He always said we had the best crop of taters in the area, and I swelled with pride each time he added that it was because I walked them so well.