Garden Memories
by Garth Woodruff

My early childhood years were spent on a boat dock in Edgewater, MD. We had a home on a cove where I spent long summer days exploring the sandy shoreline. When I was about 6 my dad, the truest gardener I know, moved us a few miles away to a larger property where he could explore his farming desires and where we had more room to spread our legs as kids. Summers turned from childish ventures to lawn mowing and general chores. Assuredly, I never let it get in my way of explorations. His projects and produce were without a question sizable. He, never a man to think ‘less is more’, built gardens on almost every square inch of that 4 acres: grapes, fruit trees, a large strawberry patch, blueberries, brambles a huge vegetable garden, chicken coop and bees. The bees were to complete the environmental circle for our plant friends yet came with an interesting side product, honey. Every fall we would plastic the entire inside of our house, creating what looked like a crime scene from the God Father, collect the honey filled frames and begin the very sticky process of harvesting (hot wax knife, spinning caldron, strainers all included).

However, what I remember most of our bees was one late summer day, around this time of year that he and I headed down into our ravine to check on the hive as we planned its fall harvest. It was hot! We had on our silly bee suits, gloves, screened mask over the pith helmet and all. Popping the lid of the first hive, we quickly smoked the bees with our smoldering feed sack filled smokers and peered inside the hive. They had been quite at work. Honey was starting to fill every crevice. The bees were well under way with their seasonal project. Slipping one waxed frame to inspect the bounty I absorbed the scene. And, like any child my mouth started watering. Like any father, wanting me to fully experience the occasion, he offered a sneak taste. “Pull your glove off and stick your finger smack in the middle”, he says. I did, glove in one hand and warm fresh honey leaking from the tip of my other. My mouth was squirming in anticipation for the sugary treat. Opps, I still had that silly net on. Yes, tied tightly around my neck so to keep any misunderstanding workers from stinging me was my beekeepers mask. With sweat dripping down my face, hands full of gloves and honey I scrambled up and out retreating to fix my conundrum. I don’t remember if I ever did get that finger to my mouth. What I do remember is staring through my screen at a finger ripe for the sucking a wave of disappointment flooding over me and feeling rather separated from my opportunity and completely perplexed on how to resolve it.

The summer brings the random occasion when my kids tag along with me to work. It’s always a volunteer situation as they are of a fairly independent age. Yet this time of year when they do join me I find myself negotiating a trip to our
black berry patch before the day is over. Picking the fruit directly from the vine creates a wholly different experience. It’s exciting, enchanting and truly magical. Like the privilege of taking honey directly from the hive, an experience only Pooh and I get, picking the berry from the cane or the peach from the tree is an experience all children should enjoy. My boys bound down the hill to the berries, later to walk away with a purple smile from ear to ear. I’m sure they dodge a close call with a June Bug or two, head dug deep in the random berry and hind ends almost blending in with the dark purple fruit. But it’s worth it. And I, loving to be that same father, privileged to treat my children to the same magical joys and hopefully, a special connection directly with nature.

**DR. ZHIVAGO BORSCHT**

**Ingredients:**
- 10 cups water
- 2 tsps grapeseed oil
- 2 potatoes (medium sized)
- 1 onion (large, finely chopped)
- 1 bay leaves
- 3 beets (medium sized)
- 2 carrots (medium sized)
- 1 potato (large, 1 yukon or 2 small red)
- 1 celery (stalk, cut into thin moons)
- 1/4 bunch fresh dill (minced)
- 3/4 whole lemon (juice of)
- 2.5 tsps salt
- 1 freshly ground pepper
- 1 whole juniper berries (optional)
- 1.5 cloves garlic
- 1 tbsp sour cream (per bowl)

**Recycle**
As a reminder, egg-cartons maybe re-used for later use. Please have any available cartons for the driver.

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1. Set your pot of water on low heat. Add in 1 tbsp of oil, chopped onion, bay leaf and juniper berries. Peel the beets and cut them into halves if they’re small enough or into thirds or quarters if they’re very large. You want them to be of relatively equal size. Drop them gently into the water as you continue working on the rest of the vegetables.

2. Peel and cut the carrots into rounds, and for the potatoes, cut them into 1/2” size cubes or small chunks. (I prefer my vegetables small as I find they distribute a lot better into individual bowls.) Add them to the pot as they're ready. Then add the chopped celery and the juice of 1/2 of a fresh lemon. Bring your heat up and cook the soup until a fork easily pierces through one of the larger beet pieces; this should take about 15 minutes on medium low heat.

3. While the beets are getting tender, you should skim the soup from some of the foam that will form. By doing this, you will inevitably be taking out some of the oil along with it. Once you’ve skimmed it, put in an additional 1/2 tablespoon of oil.

4. Once your beets are done, scoop them out of the soup (bringing back into the pot any vegetables that might have clung to the beet) and let the beets cool for 2 minutes so you can handle them more easily. At this point, you can turn the pot to low heat. I’d advise wearing gloves for the next part so you don’t have to take beet stains off your hands. Using the large holes on your grater, shred your beets. Once you’ve grated all the chunks, carefully put all the shredded beets back into the soup pot and let this cook for an additional 10 minutes.

5. The soup should have a sweet tart taste. After the 10 minutes, add in the dill and taste the soup to adjust flavors accordingly. Add salt, a tad of pepper, and if the soup is still too sweet for you, another tablespoon or 2 of fresh lemon juice. Remember that if your soup is very hot, you will not taste the actual level of salt, so err on the side of less, as each time you reheat the soup, it will get slightly saltier. This soup is the perfect example of melded flavors getting better in the following days.

6. Notes: Serve hot or cold, with sour cream or not, but eat this with black bread. If you want to make the soup a bit spicier, add thin slices of garlic to the soup before serving. If you want just a hint of garlic, then rub a cut clove over the crust of your bread. In the Winter, if you want to experience an even more authentic Russian meal, serve this soup with a side of mashed potatoes topped with sardines. Let the juices of the sardines drip into the butter- or milk-mashed potatoes. If you cook this in the Summertime, omit cooking with juniper berries and use a topping of cubed persian cucumbers or a hard boiled egg split in half.