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Canning Love – Generations Later

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Staff Creative Residencies Summer 2024 Self-Assessment

Canning Love – Generations Later

Dakota Robertson, Academic Advisor at FASTrack Learning Community, learned the art of canning fresh produce as an act of homesteading.



When I applied for this creative residency, I thought this would be a great way to remember my Granny and relive some of my fondest childhood memories. It quickly became so much more in ways I never expected. When my confirmed mentor underwent immediate open-heart surgery, my Mother-in-law (my husband's grandmother) agreed to teach me the basics of canning. Then, she had a car accident and was no longer able to help either. Getting started with canning can be expensive. I used the stipend to buy a water bath canner, jars, lids and bands, other canning utensils, sugar, fruit pectin, and vinegar. I spent the first day getting everything washed and prepped and finding recipes to try

before I started with a batch of plum jam. I felt so much joy and relief when I heard the lids popping.

The next day I bought a 50-pound case of peaches from the farmer's market with the rest of my stipend, and my mother-in-law asked me to make pickled peaches. I had never heard of pickled peaches, and she didn't have a recipe to share. She only knew that her grandmother made them, and they were her favorite growing up. This was from four generations prior, and I was intrigued by the idea of bringing that memory back to life for her, so I did research in older canning books for a traditional recipe. This residency opened the door to connecting with my in-laws on a deeper level and learning even more about their family history. My husband's great uncle even walked me around the family property in Waterford, Mississippi, to show me all the different fruit trees and bushes as well as the jar house (never knew that was a thing). I was able to use several jars and get two gallons of fresh blueberries.

During the week of my residency, I canned peach, blueberry, and plum jams, as well as peach slices and homemade peach pie filling that made the freshest-tasting peach cobbler I have ever had. I also have plans to make pickles and relish before my garden stops producing this Summer. This is a work of love, as it does take time and care to make the recipes unique to our family but also still following safety guidelines for preservation. I want to create a beginner's manual with pictures and troubleshooting tips from both previous generations and today's USDA guidelines to share with others through the community farmer's markets and local libraries. To keep this going for generations to come, I have begun a recipe book for my girls with notes about each recipe pertaining to the family history on their dad's side and personal memories of my Granny. I enjoyed reflecting on the process after a busy day of canning. I will sell my jams and other canned goodness one day in the future, but we are currently having too much fun sharing these as special gifts and "surprises from the past" with family and friends.

I was able to can a small variety of fruit preserves and jams.



