

Jan Withers - September 2011



I was born Janice Margaret May in 1942 and as an infant I lived with my parents and grand parents as did many families in war time.

My love for gardens began during those times as my Grandmother's garden was a wonderful place and an inspiration to me. I remember clearly playing in it and watching what she planted and how she tended everything in her garden in her loving old fashioned way.

Old style flowers and vegetables were all growing in special plots with neat gravel paths. I remember the small half circle plot in the front lawn and each season she changed the flowers and the ones I always remember were the poppies. I marvelled when she picked the poppies then burning the base of the stem on the gas stove before arranging them in a vase.

I looked forward to summer time as we enjoyed the delicious stone fruits of nectarines, peaches and apricots, I can still taste them. There were large fig trees in the back yard with large ripe juicy figs and I loved sitting down under the tree eating figs or taking a handful of figs and hiding in a bamboo thicket which was like being in a secret jungle.

After the war we moved to Seaton with my new baby sister Helen. My father also had a 'gardening touch' with a healthy vegetable garden of traditional vegetables of the time. A huge Moore Park apricot tree stood majestically at the front of the garden. At the front of the house was a typical South Australian garden with a wide buffalo lawn surrounded by Lorraine Lee roses and on the side fence Black Beauty climbing roses.

When I left Findon High School I went to work at The News on North Terrace, Adelaide as a Junior Typist later becoming Secretary to the General Manager, Sir Kenneth May.

On Rupert Murdoch's many visits to Adelaide I acted as his Secretary. He was a generous and thoughtful man and was a pleasure to work with.

This was one of the most fulfilling and interesting times of my working life. After 13 years at The News my life changed. I was newly married and my husband was transferred to Canberra and later Sydney. While there my son Greg was born. We lived at Mosman and later at Beecroft. Our house even had fig trees as well as large mulberry and persimon trees which made me think of Adelaide.

Some five years later, Greg and I returned to Adelaide to start afresh due unfortunately to a marriage breakup.

I joined the Education Department becoming a School Services Officer a position I held for over 30 years.

During that time I met my husband Graham who coincidentally had come through a similar marriage situation. We had known each other 15 years previously as we were colleagues at The News. We married and have a combined family, three children Greg, Felicity and Chris and we have five grand children Tayla, Catherine, Caitlin, Alexander and a brand new one Lily who was born while I am writing this profile at the Gold Coast at the wedding of our son Greg. We lived in Rostrevor and later at a townhouse at Teringie. We established lovely gardens with a 'cottage garden element' at Rostrevor but only had a court yard at Teringie so I had dozens of pots. We have drawn on our parents gardening knowledge. Graham lived at Crafers in an 1860's house with a large botanic-like garden and his mother was a keen gardener with a wealth of experience.

Graham and I love visiting Open Gardens in the Adelaide Hills and Strathalbyn. We were amazed by the wonderful gardens at Strathalbyn. We are especially looking forward to visiting Tickle tank and seeing the mosaics and gardens next month.

We bought land at Goolwa Beach in 2000 and as owner builders built a beach house using new and recycled materials. Five years ago we retired and made the decision to make Goolwa Beach our permanent home and have a larger garden which I had missed at Teringie. We have been establishing our garden on a typical seaside block with a variety of plants, shrubs and trees and original seaside native plants with a cottage garden theme. I have grown to love succulents and have built a few rockeries to show them off, while in the shaded areas we have bromeliads, lillies, violets and ferns.

Our home has a touch of 'Shabby Sheik' - we call it coastal comfort and a quiet retreat that our family love. Our home is called 'The Hamptons' as our son Chris lived in New York for some time and visited The Hamptons regularly - recently his in-laws from New York visited our home and thought that our Goolwa Beach was very much like their Hamptons - we were chuffed.

My interests include being Secretary of the Port Elliot and Middleton Probus Club, member of the Fleurieu Historic Motor Vehicle Club and a member of a mosaic Group at Goolwa Beach. I have made a fabulous mosaic bird bath for our garden and lots of pots and rocks with mosaic pictures on them.

I'm in the middle of making a very large and colourful fish picture to hang on our deck, but our favourite club is the Strathalbyn Garden Club. We look forward to meetings and events, sharing and learning more about gardens and joining fellow gardening friends.