

## Helen Thredgold - June 2016



### Gardening and Garden Club Memories

The love of gardening is a legacy that can be passed down to future generations. Plants are not just pretty, edible objects in the garden, but can provide many loving memories of relatives and friends that have impacted your life over the years.

Although, as a child, I don't remember doing any gardening, I have memories of mum and dad keeping their garden at Seaton neat and productive.

I loved the spring time when mum's white spirea and pink rosea were in flower side by side along the drive way, as well as the pretty flowering peach (back yard) and hibiscus (front yard).

We never went without fresh home grown fruit and vegetables.

Our food scraps were always buried side by side in rows, to make ready for a new lot of vegetables to be planted.

Dad used to tend our front and back lawns (the back being a tough buffalo grass that was never comfortable to sit on). He mowed them with an electric mower. He was also proud of his Washington Navel orange tree that always looked healthy.

Dad diligently gave the tree an overnight soaking once a month and always kept his trench around the tree well dug.

The saltana grape vine on a trellis that shaded my bedroom window produced beautiful grapes in summer. Of course we had the apricot, peach and nectarine trees for eating fresh, and making jam and preserves.

This legacy was passed down to me after I married Harold. His parents also did the same as mine, so it seemed obvious that we would continue on with the practice.

My mum became known as the lady with 'green thumbs' and in her later years she liked to collect and propagate plants to sell on trading tables.

Even when she was in 'Falling Waters' nursing home she had some pot plants in her room and took

great interest in the newly developed garden there.

### First Gardening Experience

My first gardening experience was in the early years of marriage when I began collecting pot plants at our rented house in Woodville.

I was particularly proud of my pelargonium.

We bought land at Para Hills and had a house built on it. In preparation for the garden, and before we moved in, we began a compost heap on the block.

In the back yard of our rented house was a Rhus tree, a very beautiful but lethal plant that is now banned in Australia.

One of the branches had broken and Harold and I unknowingly decided to strip off the leaves for our new compost heap. We both developed a bad allergic reaction, and to this day I have to wear gloves when handling any plants.

When we moved into the new house we began our fruit and vegetable garden and developed a mixture of natives, plants that were given to us, and lawned areas.

Harold became an expert in identifying native plants by their botanical names. He still provides me with their names 40 years later.

### Moving to Papua New Guinea

Gardening was in the blood. After 12 years there, we moved to Papua New Guinea and this became the start of my involvement in a number of different garden clubs throughout the years.

In PNG we lived in a house with a beautiful garden which I tended and improved upon. I was interested in the tropical plants but didn't know any of their names.

One day I asked a PNG lady what the name of a particular plant was. She answered in Pidgin English, 'Diwai na blaua', which I later found out meant 'tree and flower', so I didn't learn the names of a lot of plants growing in my garden.

I joined a ladies garden club that opened my eyes to the beauty of tropical plants and I learnt lots there.

While living there for 10 years I collected cuttings from different coloured frangipani trees and planted them along the front of our house. They were large by the time we left.

I was also inspired by the different coloured pentases and began collecting cuttings. I also enjoyed our very sweet pineapples, planted along the back, but didn't have much luck with a red pawpaw plant.

By the time we left I was picking the most beautiful guavas.

One time we went on a trip to a coastal village. A PNG man took us on a raft along the bank of a river. Suddenly he jumped off the raft, ran into the jungle and came out with an orchid plant that I took home and put up in a frangipani in the back yard. It had very pretty orchid flowers.

### And then to Malaysia

After PNG we moved to a lot of different places. We lived in Malaysia for two years in two different places.

The first was in a Malay wooden house that you could look through the gaps in the wood to outside.

This was amongst oil palm and rubber plantations. There I bought some pots and went around

collecting cuttings to try to grow.

The second place was on the 11th floor of a condominium in Kajung city (35kms south of KL), so I took my pot plants there and tenderly cared for them.

### **Time in Tasmania**

We lived in Tasmania - a very different climate and plant variety. At first we lived at the base of the Great Western Tiers Mountain Range and of course I got stuck into the garden again.

We then bought a house at Smithton, on the north coast of Tasmania. It was on a steep hill with a beautiful view over the town and coastline.

The soil there was good and I became used to growing cold weather plants. The soil was acidic so I could grow camellias.

Again I did lots of propagating and used to sell a lot of plants at local markets, as well as from the house.

Harold and I joined the Circular Head Garden Club, the first of a number of Australian garden clubs.

I was thrilled when I won prizes in the flower and plant competitions which were held each month.

I still have a cherished black lily from a garden club member. I remember my involvement in the club when I look at the lily.

### **Mildura and Moonta**

After that was the Sunraysia Garden Club at Mildura. And again I was hard at work developing my new garden in a hot, dry area.

I was introduced to different plants here. We had quite a large block and I was able to obtain very cheap orange trees, so we planted quite a number of different types of citrus. Sadly we weren't there long enough to see the trees grow.

We moved on to Moonta Bay in a rented house, 500 metres from the sea, and of course we joined the Copper Coast Garden Club (quite a large club like Strathalbyn).

I also participated in the Moonta Cottage Garden group, a social group who met at a different homes.

We perused the garden, had morning tea and swapped plants. In our rental house we had a large apricot tree in the back yard which allowed us to make dried apricot leather, jam and preserves (although that type of apricot was not real good for preserving).

We loved growing sweetcorn there. During this time I continued to propagate plants ready for the future - we bought a hectare of land (pretty much a sand hill) at Moonta Mines so I began developing a garden there. Growing plants in sand was a very different experience.

### **Balaklava was next**

Next was in Balaklava where we bought a house with a good size block, so I was again in my element in the garden.

We joined the Balaklava Garden Club and really enjoyed the meetings and fellowship we had with them. I have a frangipani growing in that garden that was originally a cutting from mum's plant.

It is currently flowering and is a reminder of my mother. The garden was immaculate and many a passer-by would comment on the flowers.

We developed a couple of raised gardens in the back yard which were very productive for vegetable growing. We enjoyed a range of fruit and vegies

while living there.

I joined the SA African Violet Society and became entrenched in propagating and growing many different African violets.

During this time we also joined the Rare Fruit Society and found the meetings very interesting.

There I learnt to graft fruit trees so I managed to get a few different varieties of fruit on my already growing fruit trees in the back yard.

One of these was a grafted plum tree onto a prunus (flowering plum). I had fun grafting different apple trees onto fruit stock and gave a lot of them away.

### **Cambodia and garden withdrawals**

Cambodia was our next place to live, which had a very different climate. I had to get rid of all of my pot plants and African Violets before moving overseas, but was able to take a few African Violet leaves to see if I could grow them there.

But alas, I could not as the weather was way too hot and dry for them.

I had garden withdrawal symptoms there as I had no opportunity to get near plants or a garden.

We lived in an enclosed cement unit with lots of others around us. A few months after arriving we were taken to a village in the country where we had the opportunity to do a bit of rice harvesting.

I couldn't believe the relief I had to be able to get down and reap some of the rice. It wasn't until this time that I realised how much I had missed gardening.

That was the only time I was able to garden in the two years there.

### **Sitting on the East Coast**

I made up for the lack of gardening when we arrived back to find our rented Balaklava house garden was a disaster. We have spent a year getting that garden back into order and it now looks nice again.

After coming home from Cambodia and spending three months house sitting on the east coast of Australia, we moved to Strathalbyn.

We have been here for 1½ years now and have been members of the Strathalbyn Garden Club for about one year.

Last year we attended U3A garden group gatherings. Again, I am developing my garden in North Parade, where we have pulled down 5 large trees and planted lots of fruit trees.

Our vegie garden has been good and we are enjoying the produce we grow. We want to put our roots down in Strathalbyn.

I have family living here, and after so many years away from family it is lovely to have them living close by.

We are enjoying our membership in the garden club here and hope to be able to meet you as time passes.

### **The next generation of gardeners**

The legacy that my mum passed onto me is now being passed onto my two daughters, who are both married with children, and own their own homes with gardens.

Both have developed their own gardens, one on a very small block of land, but needing a lot of good garden design; the other daughter on a small farm with lots of room for fruit trees and vegies.

Both daughters propagate, grow, harvest, make jams, sauces, dry fruit and preserve. I'm thrilled that gardening is a part of all of our lives.