

Harold Thredgold - July 2016



Harold's story:

My father was a keen gardener, his garden gave him great joy and satisfaction, in contrast to his tedious job as a furnace operator at Pope's factory.

When I was born in 1945 in suburban Adelaide, he had turned the rear of the rental property at Seaton into a comprehensive garden.

Seven years later we moved into our own new house nearby (my father made most of the concrete bricks for his house) - there my father planted many fruit trees and seasonal vegetables, he loved growing sweet corn, beans, peas, cabbages, cauliflowers, silver beet, marrows, rock melons, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, carrots, turnips, swedes and rhubarb. His fruit trees included apricot, peach, orange, fig, pear, and almond trees in the fowl yard. We also had a grape vine.

Dad enjoyed giving his produce away to friends - my mother was content to grow a variety of flowers and care for them. I remember her love for roses, snapdragons, zinnias and poppies - she had a favourite white chrysanthemum.

My role in the garden was to (reluctantly) help with weeding and prepare apricots, peaches and pears for preserving.

I vowed that when I had my own house, there would be no garden - only green concrete, however, I particularly enjoyed eating the oranges and the dried apricots.

Every year my father grew broad beans - after he died, we picked the broad beans for my mother - she urged us to take them as she had never ever liked eating them.

I remember one day cutting one of mum's flower bulbs in half as I wanted to see what made a bulb work, unfortunately, mum did not share my

interest in science.

As a student at the University of Adelaide, I carried out research on a tropical tree suspected to contain chemical compounds effective in the treatment of cancer and for my three years of exciting discoveries and hard work I was awarded a PhD degree in Organic Chemistry.

Then I moved to the USA for a year for post-doctoral studies at Cornell University and enjoyed the autumn colours of New York State.

The family I stayed with had a number of maple trees and I remember seeing maple syrup dripping out of the trees and being collected - it was nice to have fresh maple syrup with the pancakes that she made.

Soon after my return, Helen and I were married in 1970 and we moved into our own house at Para Hills.

I must have been positively influenced by my father's love of gardening as Helen and I soon developed a fruit and vegetable garden.

I particularly liked to grow sweet corn and purple beans, we even purchased the adjoining block of land to extend our garden.

The surplus fruit was dried and preserved, and the prunings composted.

I am still using my father's mulcher - it must be over 30 years old.

Unfortunately we took the advice of certain people and planted lemon scented gum trees at the front and back of our block - the tree at the front is still there, looking magnificent (but probably the roots are still blocking drains).

However, with all of our subsequent moving around and lack of opportunity, my interest in growing vegetables lapsed, but it is now starting to return.

My first job was as a Senior Tutor Demonstrator in Chemistry at the University of SA.

I had never desired to be a teacher as I was quiet and very shy, however, I soon found the life of a teacher was satisfying.

I taught analytical chemistry, organic chemistry, engineering chemistry, microbiology, and food technology.

After five years I moved to Regency TAFE College to be their first Food Scientist.

One of the projects I was involved in was measuring the firmness of different varieties of tomatoes.

I also solved some problems butchers were having with the over-use of sulfur dioxide preservative in mincemeat and sausages.

I wrote a paper with the title, 'Do your sausages lose their preservative on the meat hook overnight'.

I stayed at Regency TAFE for eight years and learned a lot about food.

In 1983 Helen and I and our two young daughters moved to Papua New Guinea for a three year contract teaching chemistry at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology in Lae.

We enjoyed life there so much that we stayed for 10 years.

We were amazed by the brilliance of the foliage and flowers - the Lae Botanic Gardens were a delight to walk through, but it was too dangerous to walk alone.

I didn't need to do any gardening as a person mowed the lawns and another person raked up the cut grass.

I became interested in medicinal and aromatic plants hoping to find a cure for malaria, discover a new antibiotic or maybe come across some exciting essential oils - students used to bring me plants from their village that were effective against various ailments.

I appreciated help from the PNG National Herbarium at Lae and the University of New South Wales in my research.

At times I was asked to identify the bark from a certain tree (*Cryptocarya massoia*) before it was exported. For a while the essential oil from the bark of this tree was used in flavouring coconut ice cream - for my efforts I was paid in coffee beans. I also examined the chemical composition of two different varieties of basil and the level of active ingredient in varieties of betel nut.

I had several encounters with the police there. One day the police came to see me, they had a bottle of a colourless liquid that had caused the deaths of four people in Madang and I was asked to examine the contents of this bottle of supposed alcohol - after a short time I was able to conclude that this liquid contained a large amount of the deadly methanol.

Another time a witch doctor claimed that it was his power that had caused the deaths of several people in Lae. I was given some tablets found in the pocket of one of the victims and also a bone, claimed to be human, that the witch doctor used in his sorcery.

I identified the tablet as being a common anti-malarial that caused death if too many were consumed. Another time I needed some marijuana for a student experiment.

The senior magistrate, a friend of ours, lent me the sample of marijuana that was currently being presented as evidence in a case - I wrote a report on the findings of the students.

While we were in PNG students would be urged to protest by taking part in indefinite boycotts of classes. We remember at least three. Usually the boycotts would last about eight weeks and end when the riot police came onto the campus firing bullets and tear gas indiscriminately.

Apart from teaching at the university, we were appointed to be Tertiary Student Christian Fellowship (TSCF) staffworkers for the five Tertiary Student Christian Fellowship groups in Lae and trained the national TSCF executive - we became dad and mum to many of the students.

During our stay at Unitech, Helen wanted to buy a computer - as she didn't know anything about computers she decided to enrol in a computing class and she ended up studying all the computing subjects offered by the university.

They awarded her with a Diploma in Computing

and she became the computing lecturer to all the 170 first year computing students in the Accounting and Business Studies department as well as teaching computing subjects to Mining Engineering and Language students.

On returning to Australia, Helen completed a Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Education degree majoring in ESL, as a mature age student and also taught part time.

During this time I successfully completed a three year Bachelor of Theology degree. Helen also joined me at the Bible College and studied Diploma Theology subjects.

In 1996 Helen and I moved to Malaysia to teach Malays who were intending to come to an Australian university to complete their university degrees.

We both taught at this Muslim College of 600 students, but were given permission to start a Christian group on the campus.

I taught year 12 and first year university chemistry and some mathematics, while Helen taught English and Computing.

Again, I didn't have the opportunity for gardening, but enjoyed eating rambatans, longuns, mangosteins and durian purchased from the local markets.

I wanted to help the nearby palm oil factory overcome their pollution problems, but was advised by my head of department not to get involved in this political matter.

We left Malaysia when the government closed the program due to the devaluation of the local currency.

In the year 2000 we moved to Tasmania to start a year 11/12 college for youth at risk - the next year, at the age of 56, I started full time high school teaching - probably not a good move.

Helen and I taught in Smithton (Tasmania), Mildura, Kadina, and Balaklava.

When we first went to live in Mildura in 2003 we rented a house at Irymple and were privileged to be able to pick and eat export quality red table grapes from the adjoining vineyard - our dog got drunk from eating the rotten grapes.

In 2012, still young at heart, we went to Phnom Penh, Cambodia for two years to teach at a school for missionary children.

Harold had the privilege of teaching IB Chemistry while Helen taught English and SOSE.

We enjoyed shopping at the local markets for tropical foods and eating at local restaurants.

In this crowded city, where there is so much poverty, only the privileged people have room for a decent garden.

Now that we have settled at Strathalbyn I am getting back into gardening.

Every day is a day of rejoicing as we are very thankful for all that we have been given.

We are living at the old hospital (41 North Parade), please drop in, enjoy our hospitality and share any knowledge you may have of our house.

Harold Thredgold (husband of Helen).