

Margaret Croser

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I have lived in Strathalbyn for 20 years, but before that I was a bit of a nomad.

My Dad was a military man, in the R.A.F. and most of my early life we travelled the world, Dad would get posted to far away places and Mum and I would follow six months later by ship.

Our gardening experiences were many and varied, from west country England to date palms and camel thorn in Egypt, Singapore being my favourite, where coleus grew to half a metre in a fortnight and the Malays used to come to our garden every day to tap the rubber trees for latex.

We grew pineapples and paw paw - we always had a garden wherever we lived, Dad saw to that - he was from a nursery background in Somerset U.K., so when it was suggested to come to Australia in the 60s, it was just another 'tour of duty' to me - 'though I have to say from Southampton and the short stay at Glenelg Migrant Hostel were the worst six weeks of my life - not the way we had been used to travelling!

I was married by then and had two daughters, did the usual migrant thing and bought a nice house in Christies Beach, there the gardening really took off, raised rose garden, slate walls, patio, manicured lawns, the whole bit, then off we went to Blackwood - moss rocks, Captain Cook bottlebrushes, Tasmanian blue gums - remember the era?

Marriage collapsed, needed a life change, didn't want to go back into the banks, solicitors, accounts, in which I had been trained, so it was back to uni at night to do a horticulture course.

In the mean time I learned the Lasscock's catalogue from cover to cover and got a job at Lasscock's Garden Centre at Morphett Vale.

They were the leading nursery in South Australia at the time and in those days you started off mixing potting soil and they would send you on different courses and seminars - you were not allowed on the shop floor until you knew what you were talking about, so my horticultural degree meant very little.

Back to the Plains - picked up the pieces - renovated a couple of houses to make money, life was good, everyone was happy.

By that time my work had stepped up and I was made the first female manager of the company and was transferred to Marion Shopping Centre - a very good branch.

At that time I moved to Willunga and built a nice house of logs and brick with an internal courtyard - it was nicknamed the 'Green House' - you can imagine, it was dripping with everything I could get my hands on, an exotic jungle with old brick paths and Pittsburgh Ivy 'lawns'.

That era came to an end and I had an interest in the first retail nursery in McLaren Vale - McLaren Vale Garden Living Centre (now I think Plants Plus).

We converted an old weatherboard cottage into a very lovely rustic nursery, built pergolas for clients and sold outdoor furniture.

The moral to that story is, so the accountant told me, "Margaret never go into a partnership, rely on your own expertise!"

Sold my house in Willunga and built a log cabin in the Aldinga scrub, It was a glorious time of my life - spent my time working in various nurseries and knocking back all the high pressure offers and setting up my native garden - I became a native purist, (they're worse than reformed smokers!) we had beautiful grey acid sand in the scrub and could grow boronia, tetraetheca, dampiera etc. etc., everything that couldn't be grown in lime stone.

My favourite nursery was 'Tetraetheca' at Kanmantoo, such an adventure.

All good things must come to an end and when I eventually remarried, I had to sell my beautiful log cabin and move on to a very plain 70 acre racehorse property in Aldinga, which of course I set about once again, transforming.

Hundreds of trees and shrubs were planted - had it looking okay, then the Government issued us with an acquisition notice, they wanted the land for affordable housing - it's now the Aldinga Echo Village.

After much deliberation and searching, we bought 'Angas Bank', a couple of hundred acres on the outskirts of Strathalbyn, with a magnificent old house that was dropping to bits - huge reno job!

It was like moving onto the Prairies, apart from sugar gums which the previous owner had pollarded to the ground for the timber.

For the last 16 years we ran a 7 day week Racehorse Agistment Complex and in between, again I have planted hundreds of trees and set up shelter belts and a garden much too large for me, but I love it and now they tell us a ring road is going to run through our property for heavy vehicles to by-pass Strathalbyn.

We have enjoyed the last four years of semi retirement, I wonder what the next ten years will bring - I dread to think!

I was hoping to enjoy some peace, with me, my dog and my garden...