

## Beth Jones - August 2014



I was born in Shropshire, England a long, long time ago and the first garden that I remember was my Grandparents' garden.

Huge multicoloured dahlias in the front and masses of vegetables and fruit at the back of the house.

My Grandparents made wine and chutneys and jams out of every vegetable and fruit they grew - my earliest memory is having a 'little sip to keep out the cold' - even in summer!

With barrels of wine brewing in the cellar, the house always smelt wonderful.

In 1964 I married the boy next door and we moved to Buckinghamshire where we had a baby and a very small garden.

So we joined the local Flower and Vegetable Society which enabled us to have a community allotment.

We then organized a yearly Horticultural Show, specialising in vegetable and flower classes, later adding cakes, scones, wine and flower arrangements - we grew everything, potatoes, broad beans, carrots, onions, beet-root - we grew to freeze, pickle and enter our show - we grew and showed dahlias too.

Around that time I started working with people with mental health issues and became involved in Horticultural Therapy, utilizing the grounds and greenhouses of the big Victorian Hospital where I worked.

I took a course at the local Horticultural College and worked on the theory that fresh air, plants, nature and working with our hands was good for all of us - I didn't actually know much about Mental Health at that time!

Clients lived in and came to the garden for Day Care - gardening worked well and we did exercises too.

I subsequently worked with adults with learning disabilities and challenging behaviours, again using horticulture as a therapy - this became an integral part of our timetable.

We grew vegetables and fruit that we cooked and ate as well as selling our surplus to the public in a small cafe that we ran.

This programme was run in a small town where clients had grown up and we were known as the 'Options' people - we grew all sorts for the cafe in the greenhouse and on the allotment.

We took our 'Options' people out - most lived at home or in care homes - they did jobs - mowed grass and did gardening and got paid for their work and this helped support the cafe and programme.

Many clients had been in big centres and bringing them home was great, it was just so good for them, being in the community where people knew them.

A lot of our gardening skills, the clients and I learnt together, instruction book in one hand and spade in the other!

We also entered our produce in local shows and were very pleased and proud to win prizes - we had chatted up local experts and they gave us tips and cuttings - we entered our flowers and produce up against them at the shows and they were as pleased as us when we were more successful than them.

We had a pottery and worked here mostly when it was raining - we made whatever the people wanted, jugs, cups, mugs, flat vases and dragons - we made a huge six foot dragon for our garden, you burned the rubbish in the back of him and he breathed smoke.

The cafe worked well, parents, families and friends supported us well and everyone enjoyed sitting out in the garden - we sold produce - fruit, vegetables, cakes, scones and eggs.

I had a promotion to a large Day Centre in a big town, it was a backward step going big and was very non-productive, I hated it - our small Day Centre had worked ever so much better for clients, just run with three staff.

In this big centre I never got near a garden!

We moved to Devon and I started all over again in another small Day Centre, where clients got individual attention - it was wonderful, we had the best time.

Eventually my husband and I retired from work and in 2006 we followed our daughter and family to Australia, where we bought a ten acre hobby farm in Ashbourne.

I then realized that I knew nothing about gardening in Australia and had to start learning all over again - thanks Garden Club.

We are now settled on a half acre block in Mt Barker and I continue to learn about gardening Oz style!