

Jenny Hazelwood - October 2014



My first recollection of flowers and gardens comes from my grandmother's extensive garden on our farm at Bull Creek.

The farm had been in my father's family since my great-great grandfather first settled in Bull Creek in the early 1840s.

It is interesting to note that he gave some land to enable the building of the old Bull Creek Methodist Church, where he was later buried, and there is a heritage rose growing over his grave.

Gardening was my grandmother's chief pleasure. She was fortunate in having the assistance of both a part-time gardener, and my father Jeff, who did the heavy work.

Grandma's garden was about a hectare in size, and constructed in the style of the time, with numerous small gardens, held in place by large rocks around the edges.

I remember the large rockery in the centre of the main garden being a mass of phlox and other annuals, in a myriad of colours, and being allowed to pick some to put in a vase inside.

Grandma had an assortment of roses, with her favourite being Peace. Over the years this bush grew quite tall, and throughout the season it would be a mass of colour.

However, the rose I counted as favourite was the Cecile Brunner. It was planted next to a wooden stile, which gave access to the dahlia garden.

It did not matter what the season was, there were always a few flowers to be picked from this old climbing rose, and the delicate pale pink buds were so useful in posies and buttonholes.

Adjacent to the flower garden, stood about five acres of fruit trees. Many of these trees had been planted in the 1800s. The damson and green gage plums, together with numerous apples, pears, mulberry and medlar trees, stood beside apricots, peaches, lemons, oranges and the pomegranate.

There was even a stand of sour cherries (*Prunus cerasus*), which we children would eat, even though the taste would make us screw up our faces.

Two larger trees that held pride of place were a magnificent English Oak, which is still living today, and a tall old Norfolk Pine, which sadly has since died.

I well remember climbing the pine when I was about five years old, and reaching the top when my grandmother came around the side of the house and found me.

She must have had quite a nasty scare, but quietly tempted me down with promises of afternoon tea - always something to be looked forward to, as both she and her housekeeper were very good cooks.

As I grew older, we moved into a new home on the farm, and my mother set to work to establish her own new garden.

This was often a thankless task as she only had pure clay to work with. However, she was blessed with a 'green thumb', and eventually managed to establish a large cottage-style garden. Again, like grandma's garden, there was always a selection of flowers to be picked and we children were encouraged to plant both flowers and vegetables.

One of my grandmother's best friends was Mrs Lillian Yeend, who lived only a few miles

away. Mrs Yeend had been a Floral Art judge for many years, and kindly offered to teach me. She had a wonderful garden, including one whole garden bed of lily-of-the-valley.

I continued taking lessons from her for a number of years, and began to enter the flower sections of all the district shows.

It was very fortunate that I had such a ready supply of flowers and foliage to work with, especially during the Spring Shows.

The Strathalbyn Show was a favourite, with Mr Harold Stowe as Secretary, in the same little office that still serves as the Secretary and Treasurer's office today.

Once married, and living in Strathalbyn, my husband Barry and I set about establishing our own garden, with lots of cuttings from family and friends.

Our two oldest children were born here in the Strathalbyn hospital, where I had also been born. After about seven years we moved to Auburn, where once again we had to establish a new garden.

Within two years we had planted over seven hundred, trees, shrubs and fruit trees.

On the move again, we bought a farm in a small rural district in Western Victoria.

The farm was close to the township of Balmoral, and this time we were fortunate in having a very large front and back garden area, that already had a few existing trees. With Barry busy working on the farm and shearing for neighbours, it took a few years to extend the garden and establish an orchard and vegetable gardens.

A severe drought in the early 1980s meant that there was no market for older sheep, so farmers in our area were forced to shoot and burn many unsaleable older ewes and wethers. This was a heartbreaking time for so many. However, the one bright outcome was that after several months we were blessed with a plentiful supply of blood and bone. Our vegetable garden grew nearly thirty different vegetables and around twenty different herbs that year.

During more than twenty years on the farm I began a University degree as a distance student through Deakin University at Geelong. On my visits to the University, I was entranced by the acres of fresh new plantings at the Waurin Ponds Campus.

Composed of nearly all native species,

the banks would be awash with colour and birdlife, especially during Spring.

When we moved to Ballarat in 1999, so that our youngest daughter, Tamsin, could attend the University of Ballarat, we again had to establish a new garden.

During our seven years in Mt Helen, we were able to create a wonderful cool-climate garden, with lots of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and fuchsias, as well as a large vegetable garden and fruit orchard.

I enrolled at the University of Ballarat, eventually completing a PhD in History, during which time I was fortunate to be elected to the University Council. This gave me the opportunity to be involved in discussions on the University landscape, with the campus encompassing more than two hundred and fifty acres. It was decided to leave much of this land in its natural state, where it provided a habitat for emus, kangaroos, echidnas and koalas, as well as numerous species of birdlife and colourful native flora in Spring.

Barry and I left Mt Helen when I completed my doctorate, and travelled around Australia for eighteen months. We both particularly liked the tropical region of northern Queensland. Even though we were not familiar with the names of much of the vegetation, its variety was astounding.

We later settled back in Ballarat, and again had a new garden to establish.

Although very happy with our life in that beautiful city, all of our children lived interstate. Our son Graham lives in Toowoomba with his wife and two daughters, whilst both of our daughters have settled in Mount Barker. When our youngest daughter provided us with two grandsons, we decided to return to Strathalbyn, where we have built a nice new house to retire to.

Once again, Barry has been hard at work to establish our gardens, with a little direction from me. For those who have seen it, most have been impressed with all of his hard work, and are usually as happy to take away a few vegetables with them when they leave, as we are to provide them.

We are now looking forward to all of our new rose bushes providing us with a glorious supply of colour in the coming months, and for our young shrubs and trees to mature, and give us much needed shade during summer.