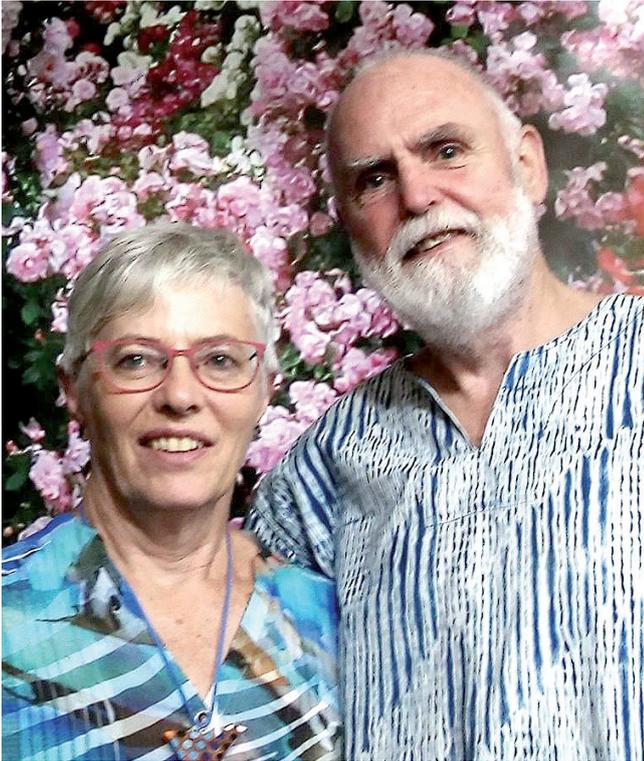


# Barb and Colin Colquhoun - June 2017



We married in 1973 and moved into a single fronted terrace house without any garden.

The only plant I remember having was a hoyo from a cutting taken from my mother's vine which grew on her front veranda in Geelong and fifty years later, I still have that same plant growing all around our front door on the home we built in Highland Valley.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

Colin and I have learnt about gardening mostly by trial and error with some things learnt from our mothers who were both keen gardeners.

Barb's mother planted natives in the sixties when the choices were limited compared to today and they were left to grow largely unpruned, as was the fashion then.

In spite of the good example set by his mother, Colin didn't really get involved in the garden early on, apart from the heavy lifting and digging bit - that part hasn't changed.

Life and primary interest centred around animals, not plants.

Starting work in zoos changed that as the relationship between animals and plants became obvious.

Introduction to our beautiful bushland through work was a life-changing experience.

One of my first jobs at Melbourne Zoo (my introduction to the zoo world) was a twice-weekly drive to collect gum for the koalas, of which we had quite a few as Melbourne Zoo was the main rescue centre for injured and displaced wildlife.

The main collecting site was an area of bush at Cranbourne, between Dandenong and

Frankston, which was being bulldozed for sand quarrying to support the housing boom, so we could harvest freely.

This area also happened to be one of the best native orchid areas in Victoria.

The destruction was soon stopped and the area is now Cranbourne Botanic Garden - thank heaven.

My companion and guide on these trips was a great self-taught naturalist and our excursions became a wonderful learning experience for me.

I necessarily learnt the various species of eucalypts needed for the koalas - not all are suitable and not at all seasons.

After cutting a truck-load of branches we would take time to look around this wonderland as Smiley introduced me to many varieties of tiny natives - mainly the many species of terrestrial orchids, but also Droseras and others.

It is an amazing experience to be walking through a patch of 'grass' and suddenly, as your eyes focus, to realise it is a field of Nodding Greenhoods.

Thus began a lifetime love of the bush.

It was also about this time that I met Barb, who had studied Botany and Ecology at Uni and also loved the bush and bush-walking, so I guess we were meant to get together!

44 years later we still share the passion.

Our first garden experience together happened when buying our first home after moving to South Australia a year into our marriage.

We purchased an ex-housing trust place in Gilles Plains and set about reducing the lawn area by planting the front with natives with a pond to attract frogs, birds etc.

The back had the usual lawn with central clothes line - a chook run was built with a vegetable garden across the back with the usual besser brick incinerator.

We learnt about black Bay of Biscay soils and hot, dry summers.

My teaching took a six year break as my two sons arrived on the scene two years apart.

We lived there for nine years except for a year's exchange with a Wellington, New Zealand zoo keeper.

In 1983 Colin became the zoo keeper at the new Monarto Agistment Area (as it was known then).

The bold plan envisaged by Don Dunstan of decentralising government by taking it out of Adelaide and moving to Monarto was dumped by the change of government.

However the area had been planted and the freeway was being built so instead of a small zoo, a very large area was available.

Adelaide Zoo was planning a major redevelopment so they relocated many of their large grassland species such as herds of Bison, Barbary sheep, Oryx, Zebra, Giraffe, Przewalski horses, etc.

We became shed dwellers for eighteen months on a friend's property until some houses were built on site at Monarto.

We joined Trees for Life and the Australian Plant Society (known then as the S.A. Society for Growing Australian Plants) and our knowledge and love of the bush grew.

Barb had become interested in Montessori education and was delighted to find an opening for a coordinator and teacher at the newly formed Hills Montessori School in Nairne.

She enjoyed enriching young minds in this caring environment.

She taught with the school for the next thirty two years (1983 – 2014).

The school is now located on a beautiful bush block in Aldgate and has grown to a full primary school, including an infant programme, i.e. education from birth to twelve.

There is a middle school in Stirling for students to year ten and Barb still organises weeding of the bush areas of the school grounds.

The first house we moved into at Monarto needed a garden so we planted natives on shallow sandy soils over limestone.

After two years we moved to another new house and so started again, bigger this time with a large chook run, vegetables (no dig) and some fruit trees - we even had mains water.

The view on one side was of large herds of zoo animals and on the other side there was pristine old growth mallee - Colin was fascinated by the number of orchids.

He counted ten different species of orchids over time in this thirteen inch (350mm) rainfall area.

There were amazing old mallee Eucalypts etc. in the hilltop areas too rocky for ploughing - we learnt so much about this vegetation from the rare Monarto Mint bush to the dagger leaf wattle.

Eventually, after eight years, we could move, as more staff were employed and could live on site - we left our Monarto Zoo home with its glory vine covered pergola leading out to a large green lawn (for fire safety) and its mature native garden.

We could now build a house on our ten hectare block in Wistow (now Highland Valley), bought ten years earlier.

At this time we joined the newly formed Rodwell Creek Landcare Group as the Rodwell Creek runs just below our land.

For many years Barb monitored salinity levels when the creek was actually running (about six months of the year).

Our rocky land has scattered enormous red

gum trees with a gully which runs down to the creek, but floods had caused some nasty gully erosion - we only needed to plant these areas and the bare roadside.

Red gum germination has been prolific in some years and in places grow like weeds.

As a consequence of Landcare being based in the Wistow hall we have become involved in that group as well and of course the first thing was to plant natives in front of the hall.

We built a cedar home in the wettest year for 100 years - the 1992 floods caused a domino effect of dam wall wash-outs and truck boggings - I had to quickly plant to stabilise the earth works around the house.

My friend and adopted mum, Jo, bought the block next door and as we both loved native flowers we decided to grow them and develop a flower selling business.

In came the tractor to rip deep lines for us to plant more easily, as every hole is a crowbar job otherwise.

Each Banksia, Thryptomene, Blue gum and lots more was protected with a cardboard milk/juice carton held in place by a rock on the base flap.

Rabbits were becoming a problem though cockatoos and kangaroos are nearly as destructive now.

We sold our flowers at the Wistow monthly markets until 2013 and then on a stall on the roadside at Wistow.

Colin retired seven years ago and Barb two years ago so in theory we have more time to garden - it is twenty-five years since we built and we still love this place, it is so beautiful and so full of bird and frog sounds.

Our compromise to the risk of fire, is to have three llamas to eat some of the grass.

In addition to this is the annual ritual of many hours of brush cutting and mowing.

We always have lots of burning piles because of all the pruning and dead stuff.

On the good side, we are self-sufficient in fire wood for heating and the wood oven.

We like the garden to be self-sufficient so that we can get away in our new camper.

We have two young grandchildren in Alice Springs and we love the outback.

Plants that need more care live in pots and wicking beds help with vegie growing.

We have volunteered with BlazeAid twice since retiring, at the Samson Flat and Pinery fires.

Bush weeding has been a passion both on local road sides and reserves and we have also had three trips to Althorpe Island with the Friends Group.

Discovering the Strathalbyn Garden Club through the knitted garden project is just another part of this wonderful gardening journey.