

# Margaret 'Maggie' Minchin - June 2021



## **An idyllic childhood growing up in New Zealand**

My childhood was idyllic. I grew up on a farm near the little village of Fairlie in the foothills of the Southern Alps in the South Island of New Zealand.

We lived on a beautiful property where my grandmother - whom I never knew - had employed professional landscapers to design the grounds.

I remember glorious rhododendrons and camellias, thousands of spring bulbs, an orchard of apple trees bordered by cherry plum trees, flowering cherry trees, sweeping lawns, and a lovely copse of every type of berry bush available.

## **Vegetables a-plenty**

A vegetable garden provided fresh seasonal food for the house, in spite of the severe frosts that we always endured during the winters.

The landscapers knew what they were doing, because every winter we had several falls of snow but in spring the garden

came to life again. The house and garden were protected from the cold wet southerly winds in winter and the hot nor' westers in summer by a plantation of pine trees and oak trees.

## **First commercial venture**

My first commercial venture failed dismally when at the age of about six I dug up several little blue flowering bulbs - muscari, or grape hyacinth - and took them to school to sell to my friends.

They grew everywhere in the garden so I felt that they could be spared. After I had collected quite a few three pences my friends' parents happened to mention to my father that there was a small illicit business going on under his nose, so that was that!

I have never forgotten it!!

## **Pets, pony and play**

My childhood was taken up with my pets, my pony, playing and occasionally helping in the garden, where my childhood school friends from Fairlie loved to come up to visit.

I was an avid reader, so I often visited the little town library to borrow books for the days when I could not go outside - which in the winter occurred frequently.

## **Boarding school, teachers college then Australia**

Boarding school and then Teachers' College and University put paid to any interest that I had in gardening for many years.

It wasn't until I came to Australia - to Broken Hill - where I married and had a home of my own that my love of gardening finally resurfaced.

## **The harsh climate was a huge culture shock**

The harsh climate and desolate red country of Broken Hill was a huge culture shock after the dramatic beauty of my N.Z. home, but once we moved into our own house I began to make the most of the very differ-

ent types of plants that would grow there.

Australian natives, mulching, and careful watering, all became part of a steep learning curve for me.

Our second home there was a beautiful old stone house with well-established eucalyptus trees on a large block.

### **An old bushy tale of pines**

At the front of the block were three huge pine trees that I was told had originated from seeds brought over from Gallipoli.

An old bushy friend told me that they had their roots in an underground creek - because of the way their needles were pointing!

I lived in that house for about 25 years and those pine trees are still there.

### **A rainforest at Broken Hill**

I managed to establish a rainforest of sorts under the eucalyptus trees, with many ferns and shade loving plants - quite an achievement for that climate.

My love of roses was born there, as Broken Hill is renowned for being an ideal climate for roses, and mine were stunning.

An old tennis court became a very successful vegetable garden after it had outlived its use as a paddock for my daughter's pony.

I grew to love the outback desert country with its endless skies and creek beds lined with beautiful old eucalyptus trees, where we enjoyed many happy barbeques with friends.

### **To Strathalbyn for retirement**

About 20 years ago my partner and I moved to a five acre block in Strathalbyn when we retired.

I started a new garden there from a blank canvas.

Many of my roses from Broken Hill came down with me, and then I met rose breeder George Thompson!

His knowledge and his roses were irresistible!

I think I eventually had over 60 roses! These, together with the other garden

beds that I was establishing kept me very busy, but I was in my element.

### **Joining the Club**

Joining the Strathalbyn Garden Club was such a bonus, as I met so many like-minded people.

Members of the Club in later years have been wonderfully generous with their time, assisting me with rose pruning in autumn. It was so rewarding to wander around the garden at the end of the pruning day - I was so grateful.

### **Open and Awarded**

My garden was accepted into the S.A. Open Garden Scheme in 2014 and in that year I also won Grand Champion Rural Garden in the Strathalbyn Show Spring Garden Competition.

### **Maggie's garden - a Mecca for birds**

The garden was a mecca for a surprising number of visiting birds, including noisy families of New Holland honey-eaters who constantly emptied my birdbaths with great glee; blue wrens, finches, and a variety of parrots, all of which loved the little waterfall into the fishpond.

Frogs shared the pond with the fish, buddleja shrubs and swan plants hosted monarch butterflies, and the occasional lizard appeared in the summer.

We enjoyed the produce from many citrus and stone fruits trees.

### **A move to the Hills**

Last year the time had come for me to reluctantly move to a much smaller garden in Littlehampton.

We now have a cooler climate garden which encourages me to plant camellias and more acid loving plants.

I hope my geraniums will survive the frosts here!

My learning curve from long ago is still growing!

The Strathalbyn Garden Club is still dear to me, and I will continue with my membership there for as long as I can.