

A Gardener's Album
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Hagan 1945-1956

*A memoir (from the French *mémoire* meaning memory) is a collection of memories that an individual writes about – moments or events, public or private – that take place in the person's life. In the simplest sense, memoirs are about the author remembering, reminiscing, and reflecting on experiences from their lives. "Memory is the seamstress that threads our lives together." – Virginia Woolf*



When we were about three years old, my friend David and I made mud pies and built houses where my mother had run the hose in the dirt for us. Dave made his with straw, and our parents smiled and said he was going to be an engineer. And, in fact, that is what he became. And I became a weekend gardener, having discovered early on the joy of playing in the dirt.

My mother had a small cut-flower garden, and around nine and ten years old I learned from her how to make furrows to plant seeds, thin the seedlings (wait – plant seeds and then pull them out?), weed and water, and then arrange a few zinnias, marigolds, snap dragons, phlox in a small bowl for the dining room table. Once I complained about the straight rows, envisioning English gardens pictured in magazines. Mother explained this was a different kind of garden, one which suited her purpose. Though our relationship in years to follow was vexed and difficult, I hold that image, seeing us working comfortably together there.

When I was first married, my then-husband was in the Foreign Service, and we lived for several years in Korea, in American-style housing, two stories, one apartment up, one down. I lived on the upper level, but each unit had a little swatch of garden by its front door, so I had a bit of dirt to cultivate. The women, and a few men, planned their tiny gardens in the cold winter, dug and planted in the spring, and enjoyed through the summer. That's when I first learned to grow the

valiant little portulaca. The couple who lived downstairs were avid gardeners, skillful and artistic, and I was in awe of them. They grew anemones!

In different houses I had more or less gardening space to work in. One year my son brought home a pine seedling in a Dixie cup, as he had brought me various injured birds and critters when he was little. Product of a conservation give-away program, the tree lived on the patio of our condominium until it had outgrown all available space. We donated it to a tree-planting organization, which placed it in a park far across the city. We felt as though we were saying goodbye to a friend who was moving away.

My daughter always claimed she couldn't grow anything. The few house plants she tried died, though mainly for lack of water, not something lacking in her DNA. She lived in half of a duplex way out in the country on five acres of Washington woods. One day, walking with her whippet, Ginger, she found an old whiskey half-barrel, its sides dry and fallen in. When I was visiting, we pulled it into a sunny spot, wet it down with the hose, then went to the garden shop to buy good soil and plants. After a few days of soaking, the staves gathered enough water to hold together, and we planted our treasures – Spanish lavender in the center, its butterfly tops brave and jaunty, and bright white bacopa trailing down the sides. Rain fell and the flowers grew. I was pleased to have given my daughter a step into the knowledge and love of gardening begun at my mother's side so long ago.



Living for many years in southern California, I was daunted by the hot dry summers. This transplanted easterner had a lot to learn. Bougainvillea became an unfailing comfort, growing whether it got attention or not. Mine was the standard red, but I'd have been happy with orange, too. Nearly as easy, the blue-violet plumbago worked its way up hillsides or towered amid trees watered in affluent parts of the city. Desert plants did very well in gardens, but I seem not to be attuned to succulents, so I tried dry-climate/low water use perennials.

Some succeeded, some gave up. All gardening is a work in progress, so far as I can tell, and this was essentially a learning experience.



Now, in my later years, I live half the year (the hot part) in Washington state, where rhodies flower as big as serving bowls. The house I have moved into is surrounded with beautiful gardens, for which I am thankful, though the shrubs and small trees are a bit too sculpted for me, what my friend in North Carolina calls “mushrooms.” So for a couple of years I’ll just sit back and watch them grow. Still, there are strawberries and blueberries to catch before the birds get their share, and, of course, there’s weeding to be done. As long as someone is nearby to help me get up, I happily play in the dirt.

