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# Gardens All Over the World

*The common thread of a long life.*

*By Sally Lynch*



Blindness has not stopped my 82-year-old mother, Helen Bush, from enjoying a planter box garden.

Legally blind since 2001, she cannot differentiate among pastel or dark colors. So every Memorial Day she chooses flowering plants of solid bright colors: a deep purple petunia, pure yellow snapdragons, and deep pink lobelias. She always in-

cludes some trailing plants. I set the annuals in a planter box which hooks over her waist-high porch railing. She waters it by touch.

She lives in an attractive, Adirondack-style apartment building. Flowers are a welcome, colorful touch. A neighbor has a scarlet ivy geranium cascading over a porch table. There is also a raised bed where residents grow vegetables, flowers, and herbs.

My mother has had gardens all over the world, many of them tropical.

I was born in Hirosaki, Japan, and pictures show a bald baby clutching a violet.

When I was six, we moved to Malang, Indonesia, and my mother planted the bare yard. Pink oleanders bloomed, a purple bougainvillea covered a tall gate, red and white poinsettias grew into tall shrubs. A Queen-of-the-night cactus perfumed the night

with white flowers.

We were blessed with Sukijo, our hardworking part-time gardener. Indonesia had been colonized by the Dutch, and formal, perfectly groomed gardens were the norm. My mother, though, persuaded Sukijo to leave plant litter unswept to enrich the soil. He grumbled that it was *jelek* (ugly), but the resulting growth was spectacular. A stinky pile of manure also helped fertilize the soil, depleted by the long rainy seasons.

Next we lived in a duplex in Saigon, Vietnam. A frangipani grew in our small shady yard, which was enclosed by tall concrete walls topped with barbed wire. I dug up gleaming brass bullet shells at its base. My mother planted coral vines, and their curling tendrils covered the walls with lacy pink flowers.

Fleeing terrorism, we moved to a house in Bangkok, Thailand. There, a tiled pool had an umbrella plant leaning over the goldfish.

Two years and a divorce later, we moved to Denver, Colorado. Semi-arid gardening was a challenge, as was our digging mongrel, Dingo. I remember him running around with a rose bush in his mouth: My mother had planted the thorny rose over one of his escape holes to try to keep Dingo behind his fence in the yard. I ended up shoveling his waste into the holes and covering it with soil. That would only work for a while, then I would shovel more. Shrubs turned out to be the answer. We had many, including a Japanese snowball and a high-bush cranberry that sheltered many birds. My mother planted a hawthorn tree, which flourished, probably because of its thorns. And she had a narrow, dog-free side garden where a pink hyacinth grew, as well as drought-resistant perennials like cosmos and yellow yarrow. In the fall, clouds of purple asters bloomed, creating a chaotic beauty.

My mother retired near Dunnellon, Florida. Cardinals raised families in her Chinese hibiscus every year.

She now lives near us in New York's North Country. Although her porch garden is small, it is lovely, and loved. ❖

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