

# Cultivating Precious Memories

Many a great gardener has been inspired by childhood experiences and beloved family members.

By Beverly Thevenin      Photography by Nancy Rosene

**D**o a little digging and you'll often find a heartfelt story behind someone's passion for gardening. Frequently the story evokes memories of time spent with loved ones from generations past. Whether it was grandpa carving a grandchild's name into a young pumpkin and the child's amazement as the personalized pumpkin continued to grow, or the neighbor who let you cut

flowers from her garden for your mom, connections have been created since the Garden of Eden.

For Peggy Buffington, a passion for gardening started at the knees of her grandparents, Myrtle and Orville Spradlin. Grandma grew vegetables out of necessity and flowers out of the need for beauty that is in all of us. They would sit on Grandma's front porch, and

**BELOW:** The foundation planting of boxwood, 'Little Princess' spirea, roses, 'Midnight Model' salvia and lillies provides year-round structure and color to the home of Peggy and Mark Buffington.

**RIGHT:** In the English garden with a view of the lake, 'Annabelle' hydrangeas, lillies, Whopper begonias and hostas thrive in the dappled shade.











Each year Peggy plans the color scheme and selects the flowers for the deck and back steps. Johnson's Farm Produce in Hobart collects the containers, plants them and returns them overflowing with *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea', Wave petunias and Whopper begonias.

Grandpa would teach seven-year-old Peggy to collect flower seeds and scatter them all around the house, filling the property with color and scent. "The first thing you saw when you pulled up to the house were the masses of flowers," Peggy says. "It was breathtaking."

Much later, when her grandfather was 97 years old and living in assisted living, the facility allowed Peggy and her father to create a garden outside Orville's



sliding door, where Orville grew watermelon, cucumbers and cantaloupes. “It brought him such peace,” she recalls.

When Peggy’s dad, Ronald Spradlin, saw his daughter’s interest in gardening, he encouraged it at home and went out to buy her a plug tray pre-seeded with marigolds. Roses and begonias soon followed, and success led to plowing up sod for vegetables and peach trees.

Now the garden of Peggy and her husband Mark blooms with a profusion of color from spring through fall. Boxwood, evergreens and ‘Annabelle’ hydrangea,

propagated from her dad’s garden, anchor the English-style garden to their stone house in northwest Indiana. Once the garden beds were filled, Peggy researched how to create stunning container gardens. Window boxes, urns and hanging baskets overflow with geraniums, *Calibrachoa* or Million Bells, euphorbia and creeping Jenny. “Every year they are a little different and unexpected,” Peggy says.

The generational gardening continues with a robust, friendly competition with Peggy’s dad Ronald over who has the largest hibiscus or the earliest blooms.

He has been known to sneak over when Peggy is at work and abscond with starts from her garden. However, he redeems himself by buying unique plants for her.

One day her dad joked that she had run out of garden space, but he still had five acres to transform. The gauntlet had been thrown down. She couldn’t do anything with the ravine behind her house, but there was still a grassy area on the side of the driveway. It was the end of the growing season, but Mark mowed a U-shaped outline for the new garden. Then they flew to the garden center,



Peggy and Mark devised this spectacular U-shaped space after a taunt from Peggy’s father prompted them to quickly cut out another garden alongside their house and rush out to the garden center to stock up on whatever was left on the shelves







filling their truck with whatever was available, and returned home to plant. Her dad was astonished. It became the sculpture garden and, just like Grandma's garden, the abundant blooms stop strangers passing by.

Peggy has found many ways to inspire others with their gardening endeavors. In 2016, her garden was featured on the Porter County Master Gardener's Walk. All day she enthusiastically greeted the guests, sharing her knowledge and passion. After the walk, she started thinking about a way to remember that special day.

When her beloved dog passed away, she needed something to lift her spirit. What better way to find comfort than to turn to her garden and her faith?

Writing a poem, "The Joyful Garden," and gathering photos taken during the walk, Peggy designed a very personal book, dedicated to her grandparents and father.

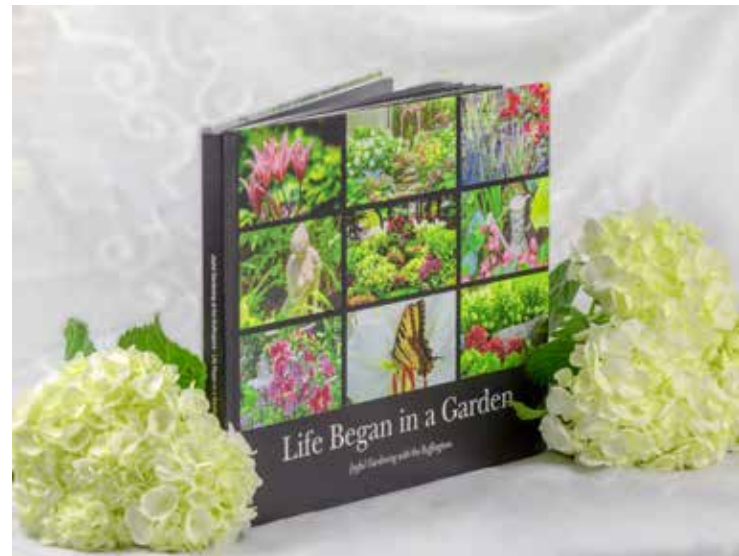
"While creating the book, *Life Began in a Garden*, and writing the poem, I found some peace and solace," Peggy said. She has given the book to several relatives and friends to share the meaning and joy her faith brings to the garden.

As Superintendent of the Hobart, Indiana public schools, Peggy has now inspired a younger generation of future gardeners. The 2017 senior class of the high school saw the book and asked her advice on landscaping the school courtyard and creating an outside

classroom as their legacy. The students raised the funds, and she helped them select appropriate plants at the garden center in the school colors of purple and gold, including hostas, 'Limelight' panicle hydrangea, purple coneflowers (*Echinacea*), and coral bells (*Heuchera*).

Whether its from students creating their own little Garden of Eden, fellow teachers sending photos with garden questions, interactions with friends, family or even strangers, Peggy Buffington has already acquired a lifetime of precious memories because of her garden. All worth cultivating and preserving. 🌿

Beverly Thevenin is a Master Gardener who is certified in Horticultural Therapy. If not in the garden, you'll find her cooking or quilting.



ABOVE: Peggy's Book

LEFT: Peggy and Mark Buffington

**FACING PAGE:** While monarda can become invasive, Peggy said this was the perfect place to let it have free reign. The bee balm, phlox and coneflowers are free to leap over the edge and down into the ravine.