

Survival

By Sheila Johnson

This is a true story.

Before moving to Windsor Gardens, I'd always maintained a flower garden, of sorts. None like you've ever seen before—as the flowers were a mixture of whatever I happened to find that looked happy. Not knowing how to raise flowers, especially in clay dirt, I thought it quite a gift from God that they all seemed to survive over such a long period of time.

My flower garden began with rose bushes of every color, as that's what my mother grew in her garden outside the house where I was raised. She taught me how to fertilize, trim, and even hybrid the bushes. So, for the first few years of that place known as "The Garden," I only grew roses. Over the years, I began to add other flowering plants. The red clay soil seemed friendly to the hydrangeas in my neighbors' yards so I added them to my garden. The roses co-existed with the hydrangeas nicely, so I kept them year after year.

Next came the California poppies. A dear friend was cleaning out her overgrown natural flower garden and invited me over to choose some plants. I arrived with my grandson, who, although he was non-verbal, made it very clear which flowers he wanted. He walked over to the poppies and gently reached for the flowers. Remembering that poppies can be poisonous, I moved his hand away, but asked my friend to add some of the plants to a small brown paper bag for me. Bright red orange with lilac pollination in the center accented with black "eyes," they were the epitome of what Georgia O'Keefe (my favorite artist) donned on canvas all over the world.

Then came my favorite—daisies. I absolutely love daisies—the white ones with the bright yellow centers circled by gentle lime colored stamens. Year after year, that daisy plant grew taller and taller. Oh how I loved that plant.

Next came the Ice Plant that bore purple daisy-like petals with white centers. Other gardeners would marvel that this succulent plant survived the red dry clay, and grew like a weed almost taking over the lower part of my garden.

And last, but not least, was the African violet plant that had grown in the same pot for over 40 years. My godmother gave it to me the year before her impending death. That violet held secrets of the centuries, joys of her marriage, travels of good friends, and tears of my then declining marriage. It became a part of my garden by sitting in the overlooking kitchen window.

These were my favorite flowers. These beauties each held stories of joy, sorrow, reconciliation, and love. In 2009 my Spirit urged me to take pictures of these five lovely ladies. I knew that it was my last chance to see them all together. It was a bittersweet occasion.

Every spring since 2015, my favorite ladies have lifted their beautiful white and yellow crowns peeking into my bedroom window here at Windsor Gardens.

Serendipity!