

## **My Life Since Brymore by Tony MacCulloch**

The path of life unfolds often in unanticipated or unexpected ways. So it was with the road that was to take me to Brymore.

### **Failure, good guidance and a timely scholarship**

My early primary school and secondary school life had been somewhat disrupted due to my parents having to move house many times in search of work during the post WW 2 period. I had failed my eleven plus exam at secondary school on the Isle of Wight and my mom arranged a meeting with the local agricultural advisor to explore work options for a boy like me with an interest in gardening. He was very clear if I wanted a career in horticulture or agriculture my best chance was to apply for a scholarship to Brymore Secondary Technical School of Agriculture in Cannington, Somerset. This scholarship would cover the enrolment fees that we were not in a position to manage ourselves. There was though a slight problem. To qualify for the scholarship, residence in Somerset for 6 months was required. So our family took the bold step of leaving the Isle of Wight and moved to Portishead, Somerset. I enrolled in the local Gordano Secondary School for the required six months and the scholarship was applied for and duly approved.

My interview with the selection panel at Brymore started ignominiously when on arrival at the gate of the long Brymore grounds drive we were asked to get out of the car and paddle through a mixture of straw and disinfectant to minimise the risk of spreading foot and mouth disease. At the time my youthful psyche just felt embarrassed and indignant. I recall the interview in a large room with the headmaster and a panel of teachers where I was asked about the kind of farm I imagined. I remember talking about pig farming. A week later we received a letter confirming I had been accepted and could start the next term. I was thrilled and excited. Next came the list of required uniform and various critical items of farm clothing and a suit for Sunday visits to church. Eventually when the term was about to start my luggage trunk was duly filled and I set off for my first spell as a boarder in the autumn of 1958 at thirteen years of age. I did not realize it at the time but those two years were to lay incredibly strong and thoroughly sound foundations that have served me well all of my life. Two years later, and sadly before I was able to sit any GCE exams, at age fifteen I left Brymore to get a job to support my then sick mother.

### **Beginning working life.**

My first job was as a general nursery-hand in a small mixed plant nursery in Newport on the Isle of Wight. There I gained hands-on experience growing Cucumbers, Tomatoes, Azaleas and Pelargoniums in glasshouses. We also sold a range of Roses and other easily transplantable shrubs. I was the chief stoker of the coke fired heating boilers at the end of each greenhouse. Keeping them going 24 hours a day was critical in the midst of icy winters. I learnt a lot about plant propagation, pest control and customer service in the shop on the premises. I also learnt how to make wedding bouquets and funeral wreaths using cut flowers. I soon became aware that to progress in horticulture I needed some qualifications, so enrolled at the local Polytechnic in a range of evening classes and gained UEI certificates in 'Grass & Greenkeeping', 'Flower Production', 'Glasshouse Cultivation', and 'Plant Propagation'. In 1964 I passed the Royal Horticultural Society General Examination in Horticulture.

A move to another part of the Isle of Wight launched me down another road of work and experience. I began working freelance as a private landscape gardener to a wide range of people with a diverse range of garden styles. These included tending the gardens and lawns of summer holiday mansions owned by London based gentry; maintaining gardens of elderly; widowed and retired residents and establishing a new garden for the Headmistress of an International girls boarding school. I met a retired bank manager who wanted to establish a small boutique nursery so this led to me taking a combined managing and nurseryman role that included developing the business into a position where we had a mobile double span, dutch-frame style greenhouse that could be moved on tracks over two different sites, thus making cultivation and multi-cropping very efficient.



*Mobile greenhouse planted with lettuce*

Several years later another opportunity presented me with a Manager role in a large glasshouse nursery near Newport on the Isle of Wight cropping Chrysanthemums and Tomatoes for the London Market. The job came with a provided cottage so our family had a new home.

### **New 'Cross-Roads' come into view**

It was however becoming increasingly clear that if I was to effectively continue my career in horticulture I needed a higher qualification, and so started to consider a move to the Botanical Gardens at Kew in London where I could enroll in a three year program and qualify with the Royal Horticultural Society.

However, there were features of my work that frequently left me hungering for a job more involved with people. Greenhouse work was rewarding, as was the art of growing plants that were healthy, beautiful and saleable. However, I did not warm to the commercial, economic side of things. A part of me found it troubling that sometimes decisions were made where it was more economic to plough a healthy crop into the ground than to sell it at a loss.

And so began a tentative foray into a new territory, down a different road into the world of nursing. I gained employment as a nurse aide in the geriatric ward of the local hospital and rapidly discovered I loved it. I recall my lunch-breaks in the staff room avidly reading textbooks about how the heart works and how to nurse people with all kinds of illnesses. I was hooked. Inevitably this led me to undertaking the three year training in St Marys Hospital, Portsmouth to become a State Registered Nurse.



SRN Graduation photo in 1969 (Tony front left)

I graduated in 1969 and a year later commenced an eighteen month training to become a Registered Mental Nurse....and I loved that too. After graduation I worked at Whitecroft, a local psychiatric hospital on the Isle of Wight nursing those with various mental illnesses. While working there the nursing tutor resigned and I was asked to stand in and teach Mental Health nursing to students in the Enrolled Nursing program. It was a small Nursing School and I discovered I really enjoyed teaching.



*Whitecroft Mental Hospital 1980*

One of the many other things I really enjoyed about teaching and nursing work was that it involved providing care according to what the person needed not according to whether it was profitable or not. Little was I to realize at that time that years later in the current world of Healthcare and Nursing Education, economics now plays a massive part in what care is available or affordable all across the world...but that's another story!

### **A new adventure begins**

In the mid 1970's life in the UK and Europe was very much mindful of the 'cold-war' between the West and the USSR. Events like the Cuba Missile crisis, the tragedy of the Berlin Wall, and talk of possible nuclear missile attacks left my wife and I with a strong sense of unease. We wanted to raise our family in a safe country far away from such things. A colleague at the Psychiatric Hospital where I worked had relatives in New Zealand and the picture she painted of this far away place was very seductive. It was clearly a beautiful, green country, and seemed to promise much opportunity for those with the will to succeed. We applied to emigrate, immediately found employment, sold our house and flew off half way around the planet. We had never flown in an airplane before and the flight to NZ took in excess of 30 hours. What an adventure to start a new life in a new country. I recall so well how green and lush the land was as we flew into Auckland, and then took another flight to Wellington.

On arrival, we were warmly welcomed by members of a local Baptist church. They provided us with temporary accommodation and generously supported us as we settled into a new country. I commenced work at the local psychiatric hospital in Porirua, at that time I think one of the largest such hospitals in the Southern Hemisphere.



*Very smart in my staff nurses uniform ready to go on duty and giving a newly acquired kitten a cuddle!*



My nursing and teaching experience on the Isle of Wight served me well and after several years I was appointed as a Tutor in the Porirua Hospital school of nursing. This later led to promotion to the role of Charge Tutor. While in this role I was appointed as the NZ Minister of Health's Psychiatric Representative to the Nursing Council of New Zealand where I served as the Chair of the Education committee and member of the Penal cases committee. Interest in advanced Psychiatric Nursing in turn took me to joining the School of Nursing at Auckland Institute of Technology in Auckland to teach a post-graduate course in 'Psychosocial Nursing'. Working for this educational institution has over the years brought many new opportunities and a continued role in the education of nurses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. My own education has continued with the successful completion of a Diploma in Counseling, a Masters Degree in 'Adult and Higher Education', and completion recently of a PhD. Lifelong education has clearly been well and truly incorporated since my time at Brymore. The 'diligentia et labore' inscription under the spur of the Brymore School badge has indeed inspired me to a life of sustained new learning that continues to this day. As a Contributor to International Mental Health journals and a reviewer of articles for publication I am privileged to be part of the research community and add modestly to the world of knowledge. As a Senior Lecturer in a university I have the real joy of supporting the learning of students from a range of health related disciplines and in some small part giving back something to professions and a career that has given me so much.



*In the lush grounds of the university where I now lecture in nursing*

I look back on my time at Brymore with much pride and appreciation for the quality of teaching and support I received there. I recall with much warmth the times when Reginald Adcock took me (as projectionist) to Womens' Institute evenings near to Cannington to show them the school film of a trip to Holland. When I was sick, the Matron (Reginald Adcocks wife) nursed me well and ensured a minor injury sustained while feeding the pigs was skillfully sutured at the local hospital. Perhaps these experiences of being cared for planted the seeds of my later move away from horticulture into a career in nursing. While New Zealand is now my home I will always have a place in my heart for England, my country of birth. Seeing how Brymore has gone from strength to strength is a real joy and I commend all those who continue to study and teach there.

My interest in things gardening continues to this day with a lush ornamental garden, neat lawns, productive vegetable beds and a greenhouse where tomatoes flourish. I have the pleasure of seeing my grown children succeed in their respective vocations and am proud of my growing grandchildren. My son and I are in the process of renovating a Hartley 16 'trailer-sailer' and look forward to exploring the many lakes and sheltered shores that New Zealand has in abundance. My wife Brenda, also a registered nurse has, along my life's journey been a constant source of encouragement and love. I am truly blessed in so many other ways and while always having a strong affection for England, feel equally enriched by the choice to emigrate to New Zealand, Aotearoa, the Land of the long white cloud. I would like to conclude with something in Maori that captures a value taught to me by my time at Brymore and by my work as a nurse and as a teacher.

**He aha te mea nui o te ao**

What is the most important thing in the world?

**He tangata, he tangata, he tangata**

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

May all who study, teach and continue to learn at Brymore be richly rewarded.