

Barry's Own Story

'In The Beginning'

At The Age Of Six

It all started when I was six years old. My father had many jobs in his early days but gardening was always his hobby and eventually he got a job as a gardener for a Mr Phillips in Brighton, where we lived. As always my Dad's enthusiasm was amazing and must have rubbed off on me. I would follow him around as he worked and planned the garden. I remember the butterfly bushes and my brothers and I trying to catch them, which wasn't a good idea! After working for Mr Phillips for some years Dad got a great job working at Ingwersen's in East Grinstead - a top Alpine nursery. My father had his own greenhouse and started growing alpines. But the long journey to work each day was too much and when Dad was told there was a job at Wisley gardens in Surrey we all went to have a look round. Dad got the job and it changed my world.

Move To Wisley

In 1971 when I was 8 years old Mum and Dad sold the house in Brighton and we moved to Wisley living in a cottage in the village, I absolutely loved it. We had the countryside and fields on our doorstep and a house with a large garden. I wasn't very good at school so loved the holidays when me and my brother would play all day in the fields and the village on our bikes and stay out until dark. Dad gave me a small area of the garden and I grew what I liked, I think this was to keep me out of his garden!

We all had chores to do at home and one of mine was to help Dad on the allotment which I didn't enjoy to start with. I'm not sure why I didn't like it, maybe because I was told to help but after spending time with my Dad, working together was good fun and I will always remember what he taught me about hoeing, digging, planting and general good husbandry. By this time, Dad had a new hobby - photography and took close ups of plants and butterflies. Again his enthusiasm was infectious and we would all go out to Ranmore Hill in Surrey hunting for butterflies for dad to photograph. This led me to buy many books to find out which caterpillars ate which plants and I started to breed butterflies and release them - a passion I still have today.

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Timelines

1980 to 1985

Trainee Gardener RHS Wisley

1985 to 1987

Private Design & Landscape work for various Manor Houses & Hotels

1987 to 1993

Coverwood Estate, Surrey: Single-Handed Gardener

1993 to 2001

Lye Grove Estate, Badminton Gloucestershire: Head Gardener

2001 to End of March 2013

Whatley Manor, Easton Grey: Head Gardener

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Working At Wisley

In the summer holidays I asked if I could work at Wisley as I knew I wanted a career in horticulture. So at the age of 13 I was working at the best gardening schools in the country! My first job was to dead head Rhododendrons for six weeks. It was a bit boring so I would learn the latin names of each plant - I still remember to this day Rhododendron 'Susan' and R. Yakushmanum. The following year I worked in the greenhouses and propagation which I loved and after that I was sent to the fruit department cutting around apple trees with a scythe (the old way before strimmers). I remember Mr Harry Baker (the superintendent of fruit) coming up to me at the end of six weeks and saying 'You've done well, its hard work with a scythe and you haven't complained once well done'.

I left school at the age of 16 in June 1980 and Wisley offered me not only a job but to train at Wisley for as long as I liked working from department to department and going to all the lectures and plant identification with one day a week at Merrist Wood College for three years.

I started on Battleston Hill back with the Rhododendrons! But this time not only dead heading but all work related with ericaceous plants. Next was propagation which I stayed on for about 18months. One day I was sowing seeds when I felt a presence from over my shoulders! On one side was Mr Chris Brickell (Director of Horticulture) and on the other side Mr Roy Lancaster writer and plant hunter and one of my heroes! Mr Lancaster said 'Be careful with the seeds, they're a new species. Three packets were sent to Kew, one to Edinburgh and the other one is in your hand!' My hands were shaking which is a good thing when sowing seeds.

After propagation I moved on to the trials fields where new and old plants are grown in the same conditions and in the straightest lines you ever did see. The plants were judged by the RHS committees. I then moved onto the construction of the new rock garden. We would move sand stone weighing up to two tons per stone. I enjoyed this even though it was some of the hardest work I've ever done, the rewards were wonderful to see. I then moved up to the alpine house where I was lucky enough to work with the amazing Ralph Haywood, the top man in alpines. Ralph and I hit it off straight away working with him was one of the best times of my life. I learnt so much and we spent most of our days laughing. One day he produced some cuttings from a bag - he had been to Ireland and saw this black voila which was growing in Molly Sanderson's garden. He only had six cuttings which he put into some sand and peat. They rooted and amazingly turned out to be a new variety which Ralph named Voila 'Molly Sanderson'. You can find this plant in most nurseries today and to think I saw the first cuttings to go in and Ralph's plants live on. By this time my Father was in charge of the floral department at Wisley and we both agreed it was not a good idea to work together so it was time to move on with my career in gardening and garden design...