

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

Memory Session at Otaki Library

5 April 2018

Betty Young grew up on **Rangiuru Road** where her family had market gardens. Her father **Dow Chung** had gardens in Ōtaki for about 60 years. Betty said her parents – like many other Chinese market gardeners – moved to Ōtaki when land in the Hutt was taken up by state housing developments.

In Ōtaki, Dow Chung grew mostly tomatoes but also other vegetables (cauliflower, leeks, spring onions etc...). He was one of the first New Zealand growers of broccoli - the seed companies approached him (in the 1980s) to do trial crops.

Dow Chung was one of the few market gardeners in Ōtaki who didn't have a roadside stall – instead almost all of his produce was sent to Wellington to auction. Betty remembered the auction system being very effective with less waste than there is now – with all grades of fruit and vegetables being bought and sold. With the growth of the supermarkets – and before the recent advent of local farmers markets – it was difficult to sell anything that wasn't 1st grade or “perfect”.

Betty worked in the family gardens most days after school while growing up. She also had uncles and cousins with market gardens in Ōtaki – and remembers that the Chinese community in Ōtaki was divided into 3 factions (depending on where in China they had originated from).

Dow Chung sold his **Rangiuru Road** land about 10 years ago – and it has now been subdivided.

Betty shared a story about going to Wellington to pick up a relation's wife who was newly arrived from China. She remembered her being absolutely beautiful and dressed in a long cheongsam.

Eight year old Betty was very worried that such a glamorous woman would be disappointed when she arrived in Ōtaki to find the gardens and a house that was little more than a shack.

Heather Watson talked about her family's home and garden in **Kirk Street**. It wasn't a commercial operation but her mother grew poppies for market – to “pay for her perm”. Her father grew “nerines for flagons”. Either **Edwards'** or **Cooksley's** transport trucks picked the boxes of flowers up from the front gate. Her brother **Don Watson** would pick mint to add to the boxes.

Heather also talked about the “bartering” culture of the time – with people swapping produce for other goods and services – her family often exchanged things over the fence with Nana and Poppa **Kendrick**. Nana Kendrick's hot cross buns were fantastic.

Heather thinks a lot of family's would not have “got by” were it not for **home gardens** and bartering – “we were all poor”. She said wooden apple boxes served as tables and chairs for many newly married couples.

Heather mentioned that the women at **Tainui Marae** were well-known for growing *violets*. And that Chinese gardeners – particularly **Jack Young** – were known to donate vegetables when there was a tangi.

Before **Atmore Ave** was developed the area was taken up by market gardens which were leased by the **Moy** family – who later moved to the **Main Highway**.

As a young man, Heather's brother **Don Watson** worked for **Jim McCormack** at **Cherry Gardens (now Watson's Gardens)** in **Bell Street**. Don married **Pat Enoka** in 1966 and took over the business in the late 1960s. He is currently compiling a book about his life – and also working on a list of growers that he supplied seed to.

Ian Carson grew up in **Te Manuao Road**. His parents (**Bill and Mae**) bought land there in 1952 - when there were only a handful of houses. Some of the Te Manuao Road families and growers he recalled from the 1950s-70s included: **Whetren, Morgan, Mudge, Chittick, Stewart**.

Ian emphasised how very involved the women were in operations – and how market gardening was very much a family affair. He remembers “*long hot summers...pruning, wiring, staking*”. He thinks he and his siblings didn't have to spend as much time in the gardens as their Chinese counterparts did – but it was still a lot of hard work. Saturday mornings were always spent in the gardens.

Ian's father worked their few acres on Te Manuao Road – but at times had different short-term leases in **Ōtaki and Te Horo**. Their main crop was tomatoes. In the 1970 the Carsons grew zucchinis - which were “a new thing”. Ian mentioned how weather-dependant crops were. The Carson's grew the majority of their vegetables under glass – but one particularly bad hailstorm left all the glasshouses and crops badly damaged.

Most of the Carson produce was sent to either **Palmerston North or Wellington** – following the best prices. Ōtaki growers always followed the prices closely – with auctioneers sending telegrams with the most up-to-date prices offered.

Growers would also congregate at the **Railway Station** to load their produce and compare prices before deciding where to send their goods. The **TAB** and **pubs** were further meeting points for the local growers - with a lot of time spent discussing prices.

During meetings at the **Ōtaki Maori Racecourse** there would be a steady “stream of traffic” down **Te Manuao and Freemans Road** – so the Carson's roadside stall was ideally situated.

At one stage, Ian's father had a garden on leased land on the corner of **Mill and Anzac Road** (where the **Rahui Rugby Club** noticeboard is now). He remembers that this piece of land had no fences so became something of “a community garden” with people often helping themselves.

Ian also mentioned the **water tower** at the **Railway Station**. It had a big canvas hose – and when the circus came to town the elephants would drink from it.

When Ian left home in 1971 he moved to **Wellington** and worked for **Turners and Growers**.

Meagan Roach remembers spending a lot of time with her mother at the **Bertlesen & Sons** gardens in Dunstan St from the time she was a toddler. Her uncle was a son-in-law of **Vic Bertlesen**. A

particularly strong memory is of big tomato fights. During the day workers would set aside rotten tomatoes to throw at each other when work finished.

Kaye Carkeek (nee Warwick) married at 18 and moved with her husband **Tana Carkeek** to a new house in **Freemans Road**. At that time there were no roads leading off Freemans Road – it was an unbroken stretch between **Te Manuao and Rahui Roads** with paddocks and market gardens all around.

Two Italian families the **Barones** and the **Speranza's** had gardens on Freemans Road – in the area which is now the **Ludlum Way** and **Speranza Ave** subdivisions. Kaye recalls that Ōtaki's Italian families would meet up on a Sunday to “play Italian bowls and drink grappa”.

Kaye worked for **Alec Morgan** packing tomatoes in his sheds **Te Manuao Road**. She also worked in his gardens at **Manakau**.

Nan Heginbotham stayed with her grandparents during holidays – and her Wellington friends would always ask her to bring some famous Ōtaki flowers home for them.

Nan's grandparent's villa (and “couple of acres”) was the first on the corner of **Lemon and Kirk Streets**. After World War Two they sold off some the surrounding land. A man named **Noel** grew violets there. And an Italian man named **Peter** grew pumpkins across the road. He had a secret recipe for turning pumpkins into whiskey.

Nan recalled that there were Chinese market gardens all along Kirk Street when she was younger. **Peter Kim** and his parent's had large gardens (in the area of the present-day **Patterson Court**).

Nan also remembered a **Mr Duncan** who had gardens and poultry at Ōtaki Beach.

Jan Harris recalled that when she was growing up in Wellington flower-sellers were common on the city streets. Their catch-cry was “*Lovely Ōtaki violets...Lovely Ōtaki pinks*”. **Ōtaki violets** were renowned for their size and beautiful perfume.

Christabelle lives in the old **Harvey** house on **Rangiuru Road** across from the **Telegraph Hotel**. She said the land is “22ft mud silt” and everything grows rampant – “*The feijoa is a hazard to aircraft*”. She is always finding horseshoes in the garden – a reminder from the old days when the **Ōtaki Automotive Services** garage across the road was the **Telegraph Hotel stables**.

Glennis Balloch recalled going with her mother to the **Palmerston North** markets in about 1955. Her mother bid fiercely against the Chinese buyers to take home boxes of vegetables to make her chutneys and sauces.

Joey Te Wiata spent years working in Ōtaki's market gardens – which taught him a lot about self-sufficiency. He said he was very grateful to the Chinese market gardeners who hired so many locals when times were tough.

Joey recalled that lots of kids worked for **Daisy Kwan** on **Mill Road** to earn some money for sweets or to go to the movies. She was very old but “*she'd kill those kids with work. They couldn't keep up...she was dynamite*”.

Joey attended the convent school (**St Peter Chanel**) until Form 2 - then went to work for **Jimmy Gow**.

Joey and his father also worked (with **Booboo Raika**) for **Vic Bertlesen**. Work included pruning, picking and loading the trucks. On occasion, he recalls them loading trucks for Wellington where the produce would be transferred to “flying boats” bound for the **Chatham Islands**.

At Bertlesen’s, Joey learnt the best way to remove the greenish powder you get over your hands and arms when you pick tomatoes. The trick is to squash a green tomato and use it to clean off the powder.

Other growers Joey and his whanau worked for included **Brian Meyer**, the **Ferretti** family, **Harry Branch** and the **Dal Din** family. A lot of this work was in and around **Bennetts Road**.

He also worked for the **Wang Young** in **Rangiuru Road**. And recalled a time when truckloads of workers from Ōtaki would head out to gardens around the district. Joey worked for **Wang Young** with **Hongi Edwards** (who was the “head man”), **Francie Nicholls** and **Sawa** (?). They’d travel by truck to work in his gardens at **Rangiuru**, **Ōhau** and even **Levin**.

Noel McBeth worked for **Coastal Freighters** for many years. During the 1970s, he’d pick up fruit and produce from growers 3-4 a week. He can remember gardens on “every street”. Some of those he recalled from **Rangiuru Road** area included **Les Young** (who had huge gardens), **You Yee Chung** and **Dow Chung**, Mr **Tilbury** who grew daffodils, the **Manz** family and **Bernie Housiaux** (who lived opposite **Hema Hakaraia**). He also named the **Duncan family** who grew radishes and tomatoes on **Ngaio Street** (now **Duncan Way**), Mr **Bellina** who lived and had packing sheds on **Bell Street** (but had gardens next to **Ōtaki College**), **Jim Gow** on **Convent Road**, **Tse Lun** and his wife who grew (the best) spring onions on the corner of **Dunstan Street** and **Waerenga Road**, the **Branch** gardens on **Waerenga Road** and the **Dal Dins** who had gardens alongside the **Morgans** on **Waerenga Road**.

While tomatoes were the mainstay of Ōtaki’s market gardens – flower growing was also big. In particular Noel mentioned **Chrysanthemums**.

Noel’s mother **Dorie McBeth** was a member of the Morgan family who were heavily involved in market gardening. A further “claim to fame” was that the Morgan men had helped to build **Rahui Road**.

The original Morgan family homestead (Noel’s grandparents) was the house on **Waerenga Road** which has lately been bought and used by **New World** as a car park for staff.

Noel remembered that some of the Chinese market gardeners would use “delay tactics” with him when he went to get their produce to take to the Wellington markets. This was because the last items on the truck were the first off, which meant they were auctioned first and so got the better prices. Noel recited the Ōtaki-famous adage: *Last on, First off, Best price*.

Linda Ludlow (nee Morgan) is the daughter of **Elsie and Lloyd Morgan** (and a cousin of Noel).

When Linda was born her parents were working for **Stanley Grant** at **Kaingaraki** – he grew tomatoes and flowers. **Elsie and Lloyd Morgan** later moved to a place above **Harold Taylor’s** shop on **Arthur**

Street. They had gardens nearby on the site of the present day “**Railway Shops**” (north end) around about where the **Bendon Shop** is now on the **Main Highway**.

The family later moved to **Te Roto Road** where they grew tomatoes on 3 acres. **Cork Roach** plowed their gardens in his tractor. Her mother also grew **chrysanthemums** on quite a large scale.

Linda said that most of their produce went by train to Wellington - but her mother was keen to send her flowers to Auckland where prices were higher. The north-bound train didn't stop at Otaki, so Elsie asked the railway porters **Reg Wylie** and **Jacko Giddens** if they could arrange for the train to slow down. They managed to get the flowers aboard and they went to the Auckland markets where they sold for £1 for twelve stems. Soon the trains were stopping and Elsie's business was booming.

Linda remembers that race days were “magic” - with lots of traffic. Linda's brother would be posted at the stall to sell produce to the race-goers who would travel along **Rahui** and **Te Roto Roads**.

Linda also shared a story about a man knocking on the family's door one night looking more than a little drunk. Her mother gave him a bed for the night and her father dropped him off somewhere the next morning. They later found out he was **Sir Harvey Turner** of **Turners and Growers**.

Apparently from that point on her mother's flowers were given priority at the markets (staff were told to look out for her name). And when they visited Auckland Sir Harvey would send a car to pick them up.

Linda's mother **Elsie Morgan** later inherited 3 ½ acres on **Waerenga Road**. She became famous in Ōtaki for beautiful home garden – and especially her teapot tree.

Linda also recalled a story about **Mr Young Fung**, who had gardens on **Rahui Road**. He apparently had his gold teeth removed to pay for a wife to be sent from China. She arrived in Ōtaki by train and according to local legend was weighed at the station to make sure he'd got his money's worth.

Elsie Morgan was friends with **Mrs Young Fun**. When Mr Young Fung died in 1965, Elsie was given four pennies wrapped in a white handkerchief. These have been gifted to Ōtaki Museum.

Linda recalled a **Mr Buxton** who her mother worked for as a young woman – he had previously been head gardener at the Christchurch Botanical Gardens. Elsie picked flowers for Mr Buxton alongside her relations **Maisie Branch** and **Dorrie Mcbeth**.

Some other points raised:

- **Commercial Growers** in Ōtaki marketed the well-known **Ōtaki Tomatoes** brand which had its own brand stickers and logo.

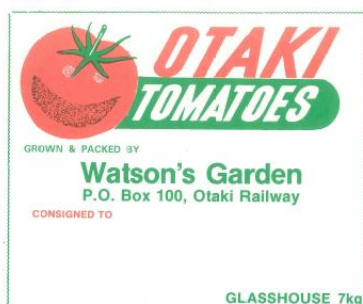


Image provided by Heather Watson.

- A couple asked about the history of their property at **129 Rangiuru Road** (just past Old Coach Road). Without being sure which property this was – people thought it probably belonged to the **Bartosh** family – who owned a lot of land in this area. Dow Chung later purchased some of their property.
- Several of the old market gardeners down **Bennetts Road** were returned soldiers who had been allotted land.
- **Mr Tilbury** grew daffodils on **Rangiuru Road**.
- **Kash's** stall on the Main Highway originally belonged to **Peter Young**.
- **Penray Gardens** takes its name from owners **Penny and Ray Bertlesen**.
- **Griffins** had gardens on **Ringwhaiti Road** – they grew gherkins (among other things) which were sent to Murdoch & Co in Wellington.
- **Jack Forsythe** (and his predecessor) had a popular **Fruit and Veg** Report show on National Radio.
- **Fred Thorpe** had gardens in **Waerenga Road**.
- A lot of people spoke about how fruit and veges are shared around Otaki. One woman (quite new to Ōtaki) said she lives on **Tasman Road** and has a quince tree that's been hit by lightning. In season she regularly has older ladies arrive with plastic bags to collect the fruit.
- To advertise this memory session a post was put on the Sunny Otaki Facebook page. It featured the image of Daisy Kwan below. Many people commented that they had worked for her as children, including **Wene Gilbert, Manu Carkeek, Craig Rikihana** and **Tom Rikihana**...



Please note this was a memory-sharing session – where people willingly shared their personal reminiscences and memories of old Ōtaki. However we have learnt that not everyone remembers the same thing the same way. Please do not think that the information provided here is definitive.