



FRUIT SALAD TREES™

Kerry's Story

Horticulture!! Me?? No Way!! Not this Sydney Northern Beaches girl!

At age 21 I returned to Australia from three years living and working in Europe and travelling the world. Was happy working in Sydney organising numerous Rock n' Roll tours around Australia for Elton, Rod Stewart, (Sir) Cliff Richard and Slim Dusty's "on the road" tours.

Then I meet James! Helped him for a few years to finish a seven-year project yacht building (both of us, in our spare time). We married and lived on board a couple of years and then decided to go 'bush' and I mean 'bush'.

No power, no running water (just what you run outside to get from an old tank with no lid), but lots of land, 2,500 acres to play with, on a dirt road out of a little town Emmaville, NW of Glen Innes in NSW on Northern Tablelands. It came with an ancient corrugated iron four-roomed tiny house, (some might call it a shack!) but it was our home, mice and all!



A week after taking over the farm, number one child was born, a girl Lucinda, then three boys quickly after, Scott, Dane, Mark, (God knew we needed grafters) resulting in four children under five years – not recommended in those conditions!



We played 'farm life' for couple of years and the funds got lower and lower. Finally we took someone's advice and put sheep on the farm, but didn't take their advice on what type of sheep, we thought females would be good so we could get babies for nothing, wrong!!!! Did we think to ask advice from anyone – NO, thought we could work it out!! The drought continued and the result was many orphan lambs and stock losses. The money finally ran out and James returned to Sydney and worked while I coped with the farm and four little children. I had one power point in the house and a generator for lights. I became very good at chopping wood and killing chickens and took the big trip to town (66kms away) around once every three to four weeks.

We had some financial relief with James' money but then he returned to the farm after six months, having taught himself panel beating and spray-painting in his spare time in Sydney. He returned in an old VW Beetle to restore and make some income. We obtained a Motor Dealer's Licence, the premises being the farm, and in those days, dealers had to supply a 'warranty' when a vehicle was priced over \$2,500 so of course we had to keep the final sale price under that figure. It took us at least two months to restore these cars, we always bought the cheaper ones, which needed a lot of work, renewing hood linings, plenty of welding and recarpeting and the list goes on! We both had to learn more new skills.

James completely reconditioned the engines and applied everything he learned from the VW manual. By the time we finished them, there was very little profit but we had to look at it as training! We got faster and better and great paintwork, two tone even! We progressed to putting on the Porsche look-a-like kits. Thank goodness the rules changed later and we could charge more to sell them without supplying a warranty.

We kept food on the table with help from James parents, living in Glen Innes and visiting the local supermarket huge waste bins regularly and collecting anything edible – for us! We paid the school bus driver \$2 each week to deliver the box/es. We called it the Lord's Bin and it was an exciting surprise every week to discover the contents.

The next project was fruit trees, but no money! My mum was working at Bond's Nursery in Sydney and gave James a grafting book.



5 year old 30 fruits

He studied it and as usual made some experiments. Twenty-nine of the thirty fruits he grafted to an old tree were successful! Wow!! He called me out to show me and alas I thought the flavours would all mix together and become one – Deerrr! I learned otherwise! We called it our Fruit Salad Tree and were so excited about what is supplied. Amazing! Why don't we make these to sell for others! We thought we had made a 'first' discovery. We set about to learn a lot about grafting, varieties, growth habits, rootstocks etc. etc. Some mistakes along the way, but this time we asked advice from people we met in the industry. After awhile we got out into the public arena at monthly markets within a day's drive and found people laughed at us but some people told us their stories of an old

grandfather or uncle having such a tree and others they told thought they were mad. By accident we were given an opportunity on local radio to talk about the trees, and then set out to inform the media of all types, about our trees. We grew them in pots to take to Gardening magazines' editors and TV producers etc. and so slowly exposure came our way.



We realised how important it was to educate people about how to recognise 'rootstock' growth and remove it, and of course the all important – keeping all the grafts growing at the same vigour, not allowing one to dominate and weaken other grafts. And now we continue to grow the business, educating people and increasing sales each year. We teach young overseas people the art of grafting during the summer months and other horticultural work during the year. I also teach them English lessons (5 days/week) to improve their command of the language. Our sons return to graft during the summer window when they can and our daughter attends to our website from a distance, as she is a mother of three little ones.

We couldn't have managed the nursery without the help of our four children. They worked every day after school and more during their home schooling years. They grafted for five of the six weeks of the Christmas holidays. There was very little television in their lives.

That discipline has developed good work ethics for them and that benefits everyone.

During all the years struggling to survive, both James and I became believing Christians, myself in 1984 and James, eight years later. This was a life-changing event and we continue today in our work for this cause, both in Australia and overseas. I teach scripture at the local school and help with the local Youth Group and Sunday School. It's important to show young people that endless DVD's, alcohol and drugs take you nowhere in the end. James is a Bible teacher.

We built a new house over a six-year period and had waited thirteen years for it. We continue to generate our own power and our own water supply. We will move soon and find a place with mains power, and again that will be 'progress'.

I continue to stop for just a half a minute sometimes to appreciate the house, the reliable, comfortable vehicle we now drive and to reflect on the journey so far, and be thankful. Necessity and poverty was the 'mother of invention' yet again!



*Kerry West (EWH Member)
Proprietor
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5th June 2009*