

Mary Lou, Mary Lou, how do your gardens grow?
By Trisha Harner

I can't believe my gardens are as they are today. Even as I look out on them now, winter gardens still give. I remember how it all began but the planning and work are all a blur.

I remember I cleared all the years of overgrown brush in my backyard, for months I'd cut and drag the wildness to the street to be picked up. I never had a concrete idea of what I was doing but I knew I needed to keep doing it. Finally before me was the blank canvas 10feet deep and wide as a city lot. I stared overwhelmed, what had I done? Now what?

Than Mary Lou came over thrilled to see such progress, than she saw my state of confusion and panic. She said no problem we'll plant some hostas around the lilac bush (the one thing I left unharmed) and put some black eyed Susan like so. In no time she was bending over and planting the tiniest of plants, just with one root. She said with a little of this and a little of that, it'll all grow in, no worries.

Another spot up front she took a hose and outlined an area where our gardens would join together and said don't worry you can always make it bigger. Bigger? At the time I could not believe it would ever be full. But with a little of her and a little of me it transformed into the perfect setting. One to admired from within the house through windows, or by walkers passing by, my husband even observed someone so inspired they were in our yard taking pictures one early morning.

In the evenings reading the paper and watching the kids play while we sit in our Adirondack chairs, with the lemon scent of the roses and the sight of Mary Lous climbing rose intertwine with my clematis feed the senses and cleanse the soul after a long day. Mary Lou introduced me to Lady's mantle my new love and shared my old love of Peony's and Hollyhocks. Her Hops plant she shared with me brings me so much joy as each year it climbs to

new heights. She gave me many gifts, like coming home to fresh scratched dirt and no weeds! Oh the joy I felt, and it was nothing to see her out in my garden sticking in baby plants that had been on sale.

My gardens are asleep now, they do deserve the rest, they work so hard starting in spring with crocus, tulips and daffodils galore, right on through to fall with roses still a bloom. They have transformed and morphed into something I know Mary Lou would adore.

This next spring like the last two, it will be just me out in the garden weeding, splitting and feeding. It was the last of the fall roses I took to her one afternoon when I went to say good-bye to her. Her anxious son left us alone only for a minute, in that moment all that could be said was, she was amazed to have arrived at death's door so quickly, I thanked her for all her gifts and whispered in her ear as I hugged her goodbye I Love you.

I did not know much of Mary Lou's life out of the garden, at her memorial service I learned much more. She was a woman of many accomplishments; people's lives she affected were overflowing the room. She gave life to others in other ways than flowers.

Gardening was what fed her soul though, so she was able to give so much more to all. I cried with no control, she was gone and I was disappointed to not have next spring with her. I had taken for granted there would be so much more time.

When the next spring came her last gift of plants on sale bloomed. They were to my delight the exact flower I had fallen for during my dream reads and research that had carried me through the winter months. Bellflowers, each year they spread and bloom, a gift that just keeps giving.

When I garden now I feel her presence, letting me know yes it's a weed pull it now. I prune, I trim, with her spirit guiding me all I have to do is listen. I do what I can to keep her garden going, it gives me such joy, to disappear in the gardens and be with them in their moment of glory. I observe, feel, see, and hear things in those gardens like no other place that I have been before; I truly

feel one with them. Newly growing, fully bloomed, fading, sleeping, never dying, each year a little different, but just as glorious. Just like Mary Lou. I've learned that even though she is gone, she is not; she is with me and everyone else she touched just when they need her most. Even though I know she'd be too humble to ever take any credit for being an inspiration to my creativeness I thank God for leading me to her and for bringing me and those around me the joy of the gardens.