



## AB's Rose Gardens



It was during the Summer of the year 2004.

Brenda, who had a serious disability, had, contrary to all expectations, reached the age of 32. Alice, her younger sister was now 27. She was intellectually disabled and also had several other disabilities. Her speech had never really developed well but she could always make herself understood.

So there were two children with serious disabilities in the one family.

One can imagine how most of the decisions that need to be made from day to day always take into account the needs of their special needs children.

A few years ago Harry and Amanda, Alice and Brenda's parents, had sold their property in Garden Street, Kingston, and had bought a larger property in one of the newly developed areas of Inverness Lakes. This decision was also made with the needs of their disabled children in mind.

The other three children in the family had already been married for a number of years.

Brenda's condition had deteriorated considerably.

When she was born everything seemed quite normal but after ten months or so her mother started to become concerned. Brenda used to be able to pick up little Lego blocks, sometimes three or four in one hand. But she started to lose many of her fine motor skills. And after some time she was not even able to do anything with her hands. Mealtime became a nightmare for her as she had great difficulty swallowing her food.

She could not even feed herself or do anything for herself. She needed help with everything.

Even now at the age of 32 she was still as helpless as a newborn baby.

All she did was put her hands in her mouth. Consequently her hands were constantly wet. This often caused infections between her fingers and at times she even had to be admitted to hospital because the infection turned into cellulites.

Even though she still managed to get around on tip toes like a ballet dancer she now needed more frequent rests either in bed or in her favourite bean bag. She also spent more time in her wheelchair.

One thing she was extremely good at and that was smiling. Her smile always made everyone around her happy. Her smile was warm and beautiful and everyone who met her tried to catch a glimpse of that radiant and smiling face. She spread love and warmth all around.

She was unable to say even one word but her smile said it all.



Alice had remained her usual self. She was quite tall and slim and had long blond and curly hair. Over the years she had developed a liking for gardening and with much help and encouragement from her parents, as well as from an Association assisting those with special needs, she had managed to create a very attractive flower garden. Roses were definitely her favourite flower and it was therefore not surprising that most of the garden was full of beautiful Rose bushes. This garden had over the years even become quite a tourist attraction. In fact it was decided after some time, in consultation with Alice's parents, to start charging an entrance fee. All year round many



people visited the garden. Even busloads of visitors started to arrive almost on a daily basis. Especially the Asian visitors were very excited about the garden with the colourful display of Roses which fragrance permeated the whole garden.

After some time, though, visitors started to ask for refreshments which was something Alice and her parents had not yet thought of. So with the help of some voluntary labour the workshop behind the house was transformed into a tearoom. But Alice was too busy caring for the flowers and had therefore no time to also take care of the various duties associated with such a new venture. Word got around and after a few days Marla, who was a member of one of the sister churches, was found most willing to take charge of the tearoom. Marla also had some disabilities. It soon became evident, though, that she enjoyed this new challenge and she even thrived on the various activities such as baking and serving the many customers. It gave her a feeling of self worth. But after several months it became quite obvious that it was far too busy for one person and Marla found two other ladies, also with several disabilities, very keen to help out. They very happily served the many visitors while Marla devoted herself mainly to the tasks in the kitchen which she was so good at.

Brenda was kept very busy in the garden.

John was another disabled person who lived in a Home for disabled people.

He was now three years away from his retirement and helped Alice with some weeding. John was slow in his movements, could not speak except very few words and was very clumsy. But with his bright and happy disposition he often helped Alice overcome her frustrations when things did not quite go the way she wanted them to go.

Brenda was the "silent" partner in this business venture. She was silent simply because she was unable to speak even one word. But with her warm and radiant smile she was a constant source of strength and encouragement to Alice. Now and then on a warm and beautiful day Brenda would come outside to 'inspect' the work. Together Brenda and Alice then walked from rosebush to rosebush. Alice would often bend over to smell the roses but Brenda, who was always walking on tip toes could not bend over far enough for fear of losing her balance. Then Alice would gently pick one of the most beautiful specimens and in her still somewhat un-coordinated and clumsy manner would shove it in Brenda's face and Brenda would just simply smile with great delight because of the sisterly 'tenderness' and the beautiful fragrance of the rose. Alice sometimes needed to support Brenda when they ventured too far from home to the back of the garden. At times she told Brenda to wait and then she went to get the wheel chair from the house and together they returned to the house where Mum would be waiting with a refreshing drink.

The garden continued to improve from year to year. Alice was very grateful for the help she received from the Mortimer Landscaping Company. They had supplied all of the paving and kerbing for the many paths through the garden. The owner of that business, who had retired many years ago, now also lived with his wife in Inverness Lakes close to Alice and Brenda's garden. He called in now and then and often gave Alice some very helpful and useful advice. In church on Sundays Alice often pointed out to her Mum and Dad where her friend was sitting with his wife. Her arm then shot out and pointed at the man. "Friend", she then said.



Over the years the garden became more and more famous and the workload continued to increase. So another disabled person, Sam, who had learned all about Roses, took full responsibility for the pruning. The teachers of the Christian School, that Alice and Brenda attended in their younger years, often organised regular excursions to the Rose Gardens with some of their classes. Also Mary, who by now had either become quite indispensable in the Special Ed section of the schools or just did not want to give up her beautiful task, visited the garden quite regularly with the special ed classes from the three local schools.

Even the Olga Special School frequently made visits to the beautiful Rose garden. Both Alice and Brenda had attended this school too.

Many of the visitors often expressed their amazement about the garden and tearoom run entirely by handicapped people. Of course, they received some help. And the financial side of the business, for instance, was done by an accountant of the church on a voluntary basis.

Then one evening, at the dinner table, Harry asked Alice why she had not given the garden a name. She had never thought of that, she said. She just enjoyed what she was doing and never bothered with such unimportant matters. Yet the thought did not leave her. And after a couple of weeks she arranged for a sign writer to make a sign and to erect it near the main entrance.

The name on the sign was:

AB's Rose Gardens

Everyone, including Harry and Amanda, thought it was quite an appropriate name.

After all the capital 'A' was obviously the first letter of Alice's name. And the capital 'B' was naturally the first letter of Brenda, the "silent" partner.

Nobody thought it strange or wrong that the 'A' of Alice came before the 'B' of Brenda even though Brenda was the oldest of the two sisters, the two business partners, with one doing most of the work and the other responsible for the smiling encouragement, the 'silent' partner.

Then it happened!

One morning a letter arrived in the mail from the Main Roads Department addressed to AB's Rose Gardens.

This is what the letter said:

*"With much regret we are forced to inform the owners of AB's Rose Gardens that as a result of increased traffic demands another access road will be needed to improve the flow of traffic to the nearby Freeway.*

*To facilitate this project it will be necessary for AB's Rose Gardens to give up some of the land for this worthy project. Naturally they will be richly rewarded for their willingness to cooperate with this project. Their community spirit will be very much appreciated."*



Alice did not understand all this flowery language and Brenda simply smiled about it. But Harry and Amanda understood very well what was going on. They wrote many letters of protest. They also made numerous phone calls some of which resulted in heated arguments. But all their efforts and all their arguments fell on deaf ears. After all, the response was, you can't hold up progress.

Many people wrote angry letters to The Editor of several newspapers. The Special Ed section of the School that Alice and Brenda used to attend wrote a letter to the Editor, as well as the Principal of the Olga Special School, but all to no avail.

Then one Sunday morning while the whole family was attending the Lomond church it happened. Disaster struck!

Rev. Gerson had just delivered a sermon about the text from the letter of Paul to the Romans chapter 12 verse 18:

*"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."*

They were busily discussing the implications of this text and sermon when they reached their home. As they drove up their driveway Alice pointed at some trucks which were just disappearing around the corner. They were just in time to see some trucks and other equipment disappear in the distance. And then they realised what had happened while they had been attending the church service.



Many workmen had been busy erecting a long fence which cut straight through the middle of AB's Rose Gardens as well as through the neighbouring properties. Harry and Amanda were furious.

Harry quickly picked up the phone and dialed the number of the Main Roads Department which by now he did not even need to consult the directory for.

Unfortunately he was confronted by an answering machine and now he could not even vent his anger. He so much wanted to let off some steam.

He was not impressed by this sneaky attack on their property.

Amanda in the meantime had walked up to the newly erected fence, the object of their irritation and anger, where she found Alice clinging to the fence wire.

She was totally unaware of Amanda's presence. She just stood there pinned to the ground staring with dumb silence at what had happened. She was thinking about all the flowers which were now out of reach. She silently observed all this with an expression of sheer disbelief.

In her mind's eye she saw all the dead flowers and withered Rose bushes which she had cared for with so much love and dedication.

With her very limited mental capabilities she understood one thing:

This meant disaster!

"All gone!", she said. "All gone!"

The big dividing fence stood there like the Berlin wall and she thought of all the years of hard labour. She could well imagine how all that part of the garden would soon look like a desert.

And suddenly it became too much for her.

Big tears rolled down her cheeks and she cried uncontrollably.



She did not even notice that it had started to rain. In a flash she suddenly grasped the meaning of all the many phone calls and numerous letters and Dad and Mum's sad discussions.

She cried, and cried, and cried bitterly.

Amanda just stood there and was unable to find words of comfort for her distressed daughter. How would she ever be able to explain such a cruel act to her intellectually and physically disabled daughter?

Alice would never be able to grasp this with her simple mind.

Her own heart was filled with bitterness for so much cruelty. The beauty and tranquility and the fragrance of the flowers was suddenly changed by a greedy business world and by a project that did not even make sense.

All in the name of progress.



Amanda noticed how Alice looked sideways at Brenda who was always nearby when she needed her. She looked at Brenda for support but Brenda just gave her a warm and encouraging smile. And that was exactly the support she needed.

It was as if Brenda was saying with her smiling eyes:

*"Come on, Alice, look at it positively. For now you only have half the garden to worry about."*

"Yes", Alice thought:

*"Brenda is right. OK, they have halved my garden. I might as well look at it positively for it means I can now double the amount of time available for the other half. With increased zeal and energy I'll use this stumbling block and try and make the rest of the garden even more beautiful."*

Amanda observed the change on Alice's face and how the two girls had such wonderful contact without any words and immediately Amanda's heart melted. The harsh expression vanished from her face and the usual softness returned.

Amanda thought:

*"The Lord has blessed our lives so much through these two special covenant children. How can I now have bitterness in my heart?"*

In a sudden impulse Amanda put her arms comfortingly around the two girls, the two partners, and quietly led them back to the house and gave them both a drink.

"Lollipop?", asked Alice suddenly.

Amanda looked at her in surprise. The lollipops were used many years ago for toilet training and for a reward each time Alice achieved something either at home or at school. But now after so many years, when the world was caving in around Alice and her dream was almost shattered, she seemed to urgently need the comfort of a lollipop which she still remembered.

Fortunately Amanda, understanding her need, still had some lollipops in the house for an occasion such as this. As old as Alice now was she unashamedly enjoyed the lollipop and it achieved the desired result just as it used to do many years ago.

At times the lollipops were used as a reward and at other times just to comfort her.



After about one whole year the wire fence was replaced by a most beautiful brick fence. The bricks and many other materials were donated by some of the builders around the district and with the help again of the Mortimer Landscaping Company the most beautiful wall was erected. It now even had some fountains and many other features. Many people felt sorry for the two partners, Alice and Brenda, and everyone wanted to do something to ease the hurt caused by the Main Roads Department. There was an extraordinary amount of outpouring of love and compassion. It really was overwhelming. All the people in the district pulled together and restored what had been damaged. The end result was even more beautiful than the original.

Some weeks later Amanda was looking for something in Alice's bedroom and there on Alice's desk she found a few attempts and ideas for a name for the Rose Gardens.

Everyone had always thought that AB meant the 'A' for Alice and the 'B' for Brenda but there on the desk was a note from Alice saying that the name of the garden was meant to honour her Mum. For wasn't her name Amanda Bernice? Her initials were therefore AB. Alice wanted to honour her Mum because she had so tirelessly and unselfishly cared for Alice and Brenda for so many years. She had quietly endured the difficult periods of Alice's life when she was often biting other children and pulling their hair and many other things. In fact both girls had been through some extremely difficult times. And Mum was always there to care for them.

It was Alice's way of saying thank you Mum, also on behalf of Brenda who is unable to say it herself. But you, as Mum, can read her mind. You know what is in her heart.

Therefore, from both of us, thank you with all our heart, Mum.

Amanda Bernice - AB.

From the partners of AB's Rose Gardens.

How was it possible that Alice with her limited abilities as well as her autism could think of such a beautiful way to express her love and thanks to her mother?

She, who had always had great difficulty in showing and expressing love.

Some tears fell on that beautiful paper as Amanda's heart overflowed with thankfulness to the Lord Who had given them such riches in entrusting to them these two special Covenant children.

They needed so much love, care and compassion.

They were always in so much need of patience and understanding.

But they also gave so much in return.

Both children were very much handicapped. Both of them had severe physical and intellectual disabilities.

But the Lord had given both of them as parents the strength needed to care for these children. But how could she have done it without Harry's support. He was always a pillar of strength.



SpindleWorks 



A short story by Leo Schoof, Kelmscott, Western Australia

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And it was God Who had always carried them. He had sustained their whole family even during difficult and stressful times.

To God be all honour and glory!

Leo Schoof - August 2005

(The names in this story are fictitious)

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