I woke up startled and somewhat irritated for having been disturbed from a beautiful dream about being away in far-off lands. The night air was a bit cool and I curled up under my favorite blanket, which was being tugged away by my grandmother along with the last vestiges of my precious dream. Only the calm soothing voice of Mama, as we called her, saying my name to wake me up, reassured me that everything was fine and I was back in my bedroom in our small bamboo and straw family home in Mambusao, Capiz.

I thought that she was waking me up for school like she always did but after rubbing the sleep out from my eyes, I realized that it was still dark outside. Noticing the bewilderment in my eyes, she put her fingers up to her lips and in a hushed voice asked me to follow her out into the garden. Sensing the excitement in her voice, I hurriedly put on my slippers and tried to keep close to the light emanating from the small gas-lit lamp that she was carrying.

We went down the bamboo steps, through gardenia shrubs, rose bushes, dama de noche, and jasmine vines of the pocket garden where she spent most of her free time until we came to a small clearing. She held up the lamp to reveal a cascading pristine white tubular flower with pink fringes exuding an exotic intoxicating heady scent that I have never seen before growing in a small corner of the garden. She told me that it was a rare flower that bloomed only one midnight in a year. I don't know how long we spent gazing and taking in the fragrance of that flower that night, just the two of us, crouching on our heels and just relishing a fleeting moment of nature's wonder. After thorough research I found out that it was called *Epiphyllum oxypetalum* or the Queen of the Night Cactus. This is a memory that has long stayed with me and has become a defining moment in my life.
Since that night I have gone back to living my dreams of travelling abroad, visiting exotic places and living in far-off lands. These experiences were all pleasurable and gave me the opportunity to visit the gardens of the world. But the lure of my grandmother’s pocket garden brought me back with a passion to create one of my own.

From that one night’s experience of long ago I had learned that all the hard work is worth it even if it is just to see one of God’s creations just for a moment in time. I learned to see beauty in the simplest of things. I learned the virtue and the rewards of patience from watching a seed blossom into a beautiful flower. Most of all, as Mama has passed on these lessons to me, I have learned the value of sharing this experience with others. Like Mama I hope to tug at the blankets of artificial comfort that people surround themselves with and hope to awaken them with the delight of discovering themselves in the beauties of a secret garden.

This essay is an excerpt from Sonya’s Secret Garden coffee table book.

Sonya S. Garcia’s grandmother “Mama” in an undated photo

Sonya S. Garcia is a passionate gardener, a LOCAVORE (someone who tries to eat homegrown or locally produced food), who immensely relishes living in the country.