

The Moroccan Garden
Dr Josh Newton



I have enjoyed Meanwhile Gardens for many years. I have often whiled away time simply enjoying the peace afforded by the ponds and the wildlife area. I skated the bowls when I was younger. Even rode the BMX track.

So as I walked through on a summer afternoon and saw people working, I stuck my head over the fence and asked: “Hello, what are you doing in here?” That’s how it started. Anyone from around here would understand that question. “What’re you doing with our gardens?”

“A Moroccan themed garden” Kacem said. I’d never been to Morocco – I don’t think I even knew any Moroccans- and I was not a gardener, but I offered to help. I thought digging a couple of holes and sticking in the odd plant was something I could do. I owed Meanwhile, so a little bit of blood, sweat and tears (actually, no tears...) was due, for the privilege of being able to put something back, to offer others what I have been fortunate enough to benefit from. A small price to pay- and one that many others before me have paid in full - I know, I’ve seen their scars. And it was a glorious summer to be out of doors... I had some spare time... the odd afternoon perhaps... A year ago!

What I discovered was the opportunity to work with some of the nicest people I have ever had the privilege to work with: the staff of Al-Hasaniya, for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration; the staff and volunteers of Meanwhile Gardens and MIND; the people who use the gardens. I have discovered the joy of putting a garden together, of working with the other gardeners: Mark, Joe, Sally, Eric, Phil, Peter, the Davids and Ulla, without whom this simply would not have worked and whose advice and cooperation have been invaluable. And Kacem, without whom, if he hadn’t taken my offer seriously and asked me to come back the next day and dig that first hole, plant that first palm... and then kept me coming back.

So I still owe Meanwhile Gardens. The people that carved it out originally and have fought to maintain this community space, the people who walk through every day and have offered support, advice and encouragement. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Al-Hasaniya and support the work that they do. To have met and felt the welcome of their clients, which in other circumstances may not have happened, and the regular and occasional visitors. To the blackbirds that have nested in our palms, the newts, frogs, mice, lavender, rosemary, mint and thyme and all that makes the whole thing such a pleasure. Now, you couldn’t keep me away: I love it. Thank you.

Stick YOUR head over the fence sometime.
Dr Josh Newton
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