

OF ROCK COLLECTING, TEACHING, AND GARDENING – Marilyn Nease - Texas

“So many rocks! What are we going to do with them? It doesn’t make sense to store them in our garage,” I said, stating the obvious.

“I already gave some to other science teachers who wanted them for geology lessons. I also thought I could use some for science workshops now that I’m retired,” my husband answered.

In 2008 my husband, Charles, retired after thirty-four years of teaching, most of it with fifth- and sixth-grade science students. On many summer vacations in those years, no matter where we traveled, we stopped along roadsides to gather rocks. Our car’s trunk and back-seat floor were often layered with rocks on our drive home.

Before each trip, Charles bought a copy of *Roadside Geology of (fill in the name of a state or area)* and studied it so that he would know the best areas for geology and could map our route to include rock collecting. On our trips, he packed a small shovel, small pickaxe, and heavy-duty bag for his finds.

In 1999 after our trip to Europe, he carried home rocks in his suitcase. At our U.S. Customs port of entry, he declared them as “agricultural products” and explained to the agents why he was traveling with rocks. They enjoyed hearing their first story of transporting rocks for teaching. Thus, we cleared customs.

Several years after his retirement, I was gardening and thought of Charles’ rock collection. I asked, “What do you think about my using some of your rocks to create a border around this flowerbed? That way we’d get to enjoy looking at your rocks and remembering what kind of rock each is and where and when you found it. Let’s use and enjoy your rocks.”

He liked the idea and hauled boxes of rocks out of storage into our backyard for rock-garden borders. Gardening in the years afterward, I’ve been pleased when I can remember the kinds of rocks (mica, shale, obsidian, composite, granite, rose, and so forth) and sometimes what trips we were on when he found them. I’ve also enjoyed the rocks’ beauty!

This past December, I decided it was time to redo that original rock border and expand it. As I lifted, sorted, cleaned, and rearranged rocks, I thought of working a jigsaw puzzle, except I didn’t have a picture to guide me. I worked from imagination as I scanned the rocks for colors, types, sizes, and shapes. I laughed as I asked myself, “What am I doing out here playing with rocks? Who knew rocks would be fun?”

After January’s cold halted my rock-border-redo project, on an 80-degree day in February, I went to Home Depot for soil. I wanted to raise the border’s height, which had settled under the weight of rocks and years passing. Now, I’m working: adding soil, placing rocks, making memories—traveling backward through summer trips and eras of rocks forming, and forward to the beauty of completed rock gardens framing spring flowers.