

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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Meeting

7:30 p.m. Monday, January 5, 2009

Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria, B.C.

**Speaker: Bill McMillan “Rhododendrons 101:
Basic Rhododendron Culture**

Bill McMillan is the former president of the VRS and curator of Glendale Gardens Rhododendron and Hosta Garden. He was a geologist by training, but has become a rhodophile since his retirement.

In This Issue

- **The Magic of Words** pg. 1
- **Dora Kreiss** pg. 3, pg. 5
- **Halfdan Lem, Hybridizer** pg. 6
- **Our Christmas Pot-Luck Dinner** pg.7
-

THE MAGIC OF WORDS

JANUARY REFRESHMENTS

Guy Gore-Langton, Dorothy Griffin, Tom Grogan, Marjorie Harkness, Ann and Stephen Harvard, Joe and Linda Harvey, and Sue Hawkins are asked to bring wrapped refreshments to January's meeting. Please phone Nadine Minckler at 250-474-1429 to confirm. Help for Joanna Massa and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

When are we rhododendron growers going to enter the 21st century? Just compare a couple of descriptions that aficionados of one particular indulgence adopt to that with which we rhododendron growers seem doomed to lumber along.

Read this:

*With its vivid core of ripe berry
shaded by dusty mocha and gamey licorice,*

Quatrain's texture is pure South Okanagan: rich and supple with some chalky tannins. Finishing with notable dimensions and depth, Quatrain is delicious —a plummy red with a hint of chocolate.

And,

The 2005 Oculus boasts multiple layers that unfold into decadent plum, blackberry and chocolate notes. Rich, loamy earthiness and fine tannins provide structure and mingle with the wine's lush fruit flavours. A wine to cellar.

But,

A broadly or upright rounded shrub or tree. The inflorescence is a compact racemose umbel of 15 to 30 flowers, which is lilac, mauve or purplish mauve with or without a deeper blotch at the base. The stamens are shorter than the corolla and the filaments are glabrous. J.D. Hooker discovered r. niveum in November 1849 in Sikkim.

Would you rush out and buy this plant?

Now how about this?

For a heart-stopping transformation into a state of sublime ecstasy, one must try a twenty-five year old (even older; it keeps improving with age) Rhododendron niveum sited in a semi-sunny sylvan setting where the plant is vernaly dusted by the miniscule granules of fresh pollen from a Saanich Peninsula Douglas fir. The profligacy of nature is manifested by the multitude of flower decadently compressed into one hemispheric outrage of smokey blueness subtly shaded with hints of lilac and mauve. The stature of this Dionysian luxuriance is such that the onlooker is serenely seduced into a consummate appreciation of eternity.

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Or,

With its eye-shattering display of deeply aureolin sunnyness, 'Nancy Evans', is pure horticultural perfection. Each flower emerges from a bud of fire-glowing rubification, which morphs majestically into the warmest of yellows with

hints of hidden infernos; furthermore each blossom is amplified by an annulation of flaring calyxial exuberance. Such floral splendour is accommodated on a plant of divine proportions densely clothed with the shiniest of foliage. A plant to worship.

Imagine, too, what could be done with the aroma of the 'Loderi' or that of the nutmeg fragrance from *edgeworthii*. Or what about the leaves of *singrande* or the new growth of *bureavii* or *yakushimanum*? Would not some of the oenophile's intoxicated prolixity increase Harold Greer's or Kenneth Cox's sales most handsomely if used in their catalogues? Why should wine imbibing evoke so many flights of linguistic fantasy and sadly, the beauty of nature's perfections, not aged by man in dark musky cellars, but honed by eons of evolutionary experimentation be described in the most commonplace of prosaic mediocrity?

Come on you rhododendron growers, get with it.

Norman Todd. November 2008.

DORA KREISS
30 August 1913 — 17 November
2008

Dora Kreiss was known widely throughout our Society. She was a regular attendee at our meetings and at conventions and conferences. For her many contributions, we awarded her the Bronze Medal. She was a participant in Nancy and Harold Greer's globe trotting tours and made many friends on her travels. She and her husband Bob were

founding members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society. Her now mature garden is on the richly forested northern shore of Juan de Fuca Strait near French Beach in British Columbia, Canada. The garden is locally very well known and has been visited by many from all over the world. Dora concentrated on species, many of which came from the Rhododendron Species Foundation of which she was a keen supporter.

Dora died in her own home at the age of 95. She had five children and six grandchildren who survive her.

Travel was a large part of Dora's life. Bob was a hydrologist and his expertise took him all over the world. Sometimes, Bob went to his new business location ahead of Dora and the children but Dora often preceded Bob when returning to the United States.

Dora was born near Cumberland, Iowa, to farming parents. The skills and confidence she acquired on the farm served her well throughout her entire life. She started and completed her undergraduate studies in sociology at the University of Iowa. Her studies were interrupted by having to work as a school teacher during the Great Depression. While working as a waitress, she met Bob who was doing graduate studies at the University of Iowa. They were married in 1938. Bob's work took him many places, including Galveston, Texas, the Panama Canal Zone (including some of the war years in the 1940's), Minneapolis, Omaha, Lincoln, Buenos Aires, Baghdad, and southwestern Iran.

When the family moved to Baghdad, Iraq, Bob went first. A year later, Dora, with five children, ages three to sixteen, followed her husband. En route, Dora and the children spent a month visiting seven European countries. While in Baghdad, Dora worked at the American School as a teacher. She and the three youngest children were among the last women and children to leave Iraq following the 1958 revolution overthrowing King Faisal. Bob stayed on for a few more months. Dora and Bob returned to the Middle East in 1959, this time to Iran.

In both Iraq and Iran, they explored the countries by car and Land Rover. In Iran, they also traveled into remote areas to meet the tribesmen who pursued nomadic lives herding their sheep and camels in seasonal travels between mountains and valleys. After leaving Iran, Dora decided to pursue graduate studies in library science at Eugene, Oregon. From Oregon they moved to Princeton NJ where Dora worked at the Woodrow Wilson Library of Princeton University and other libraries.

Retirement came in 1973. The following is how her daughter Kay describes that event:

“The retirement to British Columbia seemed to some of her children to be out of character. Mother and father had come to Vancouver Island on their honeymoon.... They returned to explore Vancouver Island. They inquired of Evelyn Packham at her Point No Point teahouse whether there was any property for sale in the vicinity. She told them about the Seaside

Drive property... They walked around the closed-up, curtained house, jotted down the realtor’s contact information and decided a week later to wire money to purchase the house, which they had never been in.”

The property that they bought had been logged off a few years before and had no landscaping. Through their landscaping decision, Dora’s and Bob’s passion for rhododendrons began. Over many years, they assiduously sought the finest forms of species. These thrived in the moist west coast seaside environment. Now some are twenty feet high. Dora loved to have visitors so she could show them her many plants and she would particularly emphasize the many big-leaf rhododendrons that she had – among them *R. praestans*, *R. hodgsonii*, *R. macabeanum*, *R. mallotum*, and *R. sinofalconeri*.

Their traveling days were not over by any means. Bob was not fully ‘retired’ and accepted assignments in Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and other exotic places and of course Dora went with him. In addition to those foreign travels, Dora rode a wooden dory through the Grand Canyon and trekked the arduous West Coast Trail on Vancouver Island; she traveled with the Greens and attended most rhododendron conventions. At the age of 85, she went on a tour to Antarctica; at 87, she took her grandson David to Saint Petersburg; and three years later went to the Galapagos with three of her children and three grandchildren. Right up to the age of 91, she visited her daughters in Seattle and in Sitka, Alaska. On one occasion, on her drive to the Victoria airport on the way to Sitka, she had an

accident in her car (the car was totaled) and was taken to hospital by ambulance. Assuring the emergency staff that her Alaskan daughter was a doctor she checked herself out of the hospital and caught her plane. When nearly 92, she broke both hips within six days and was advised she would always need a walker. As usual her spirit was stronger than the doctors' predictions and she walked with only a cane for several more years.

What a wonderful person Dora was. In manner she was quiet and unassuming, a great listener and a steadfast friend to the many, many people she came to know. All of these friends will miss her greatly but are thankful for having had their lives enriched by knowing Dora Kreiss.

Norm Todd, Kay Kreiss, Robert (Bob) Kreiss

DORA KREISS REMEMBERED

Dora's son, Bob, reports: His mother and father came to value species very much and their garden has a great many of them. Dora especially liked the big-leaved rhododendrons and enjoyed pointing them out to anyone who came by to visit her garden. *Macabeanum* was always a favorite of hers with its creamy blossoms and whitish indumentum. She also liked the indumentum on her *mallotum*. *Praestans* was another favorite. These past five years, her favorite plant was the *sinofalconeri* that friends and neighbors gave her for her 90th birthday. Norm Todd found it for her. It started as a 4' plant and has grown about 1' a year so it is

now a towering plant at about 9-10' high. It has wonderful, huge leaves and is thriving out here.

One story Dora liked to tell about going to rhododendron conferences is a story that Norm Todd probably tells even better. It seems that she had ridden with Norm and Jean to attend a conference in Portland (she rode with them, I understand, to a number of conferences). After the conference, Norm brought the car around to load up the luggage, then Dora climbed in and off they drove. Driving through the streets of Portland, one of them asked Jean a question. There was no answer. They looked in the back seat for Jean. No Jean. They had driven off and left her standing on the curb by the hotel!



R. macabeanum showing, tomentum, big leaves and bloom



Halfdan Lem, an Extraordinary Northwest Hybridizer

by Bill McMillan

In a 1988 ARS Journal, I found a note from Gwen Bell of Seattle reporting a conversation with Elliot Of, from Oregon about his friend Halfdan Lem. Lem was raised in Norway and introduced to birding by his uncle, who worked as a scientist for the Norwegian government. The bird and animal life drew Lem to Alaska in 1911. There he fished, trolling for salmon around Ketchikan for 20 years. The boat had 11 stockholders!

Lem moved south and started his rhododendron nursery in 1933; apparently the first to do so commercially in the area. Lem was very proud of his hybridizing and top grafting but was less successful with rooting cuttings. Lem described following a method suggested by a Canadian grower in which a 1 inch slice was made on one side of each cutting but most of the cuttings failed to root. I get the impression that they did not use rooting hormones at that time.

Lem did his top grafting in July or August, after the understock and cutting were past the very tender stage. A plastic bag over it kept the air around the graft humid and the plant was stored in a shade house away from direct sunlight.

Hybridizing was his forte. He stressed the importance of experience – and from growing some 50,000 rhododendrons from 2 to 3000 different crosses, Lem certainly had that in spades! He apparently favored ‘Anna’ for hybridizing, which was not easy for other propagators to imitate because timing was so tricky. Pollen had to be applied to ‘Anna’ as the flowers were fading and past their prime.

Among his many fine rhododendron hybrids are ‘Anna’, ‘Lem’s Cameo’, ‘Pink Walloper’ ‘Halfdan Lem’, ‘Alice Franklin’, ‘Riplet’,

‘Brilliant’ (‘Elizabeth’ x Labrador Tea!), ‘El Camino’, ‘Grandma’s Hat’, ‘Gretsel’, ‘Hansel’, ‘Holy Moses’, ‘Isabel Pierce’, ‘Jingle Bells’, ‘Lem’s 121’, ‘Lem’s Fortyniner’, ‘Moonwax’, ‘Point Defiance’ and ‘Red Walloper’. I found 47 of his hybrids listed on Homer Salley’s Rhododendron Hybrids 3rd Edition CD. After his death, another nursery renamed and widely marketed ‘Pink Walloper’ as ‘Lem’s Monarch’, which caused considerable confusion. Lem wrote that ‘Cameo’ was his most favored creation; you can see why! Although Lem died in 1969, his legacy of hybrids is ‘alive and well’.



*Lem’s Cameo (above) and
Pink Walloper (Lem’s Monarch)
(below)*



VRS Christmas Pot-Luck Dinner, Dec. 1

By Theresa McMillan

On Monday night, Dec. 1, we walked into Garth Homer Centre for our Christmas party. The hall had been beautifully decorated, The tablecloths were set out by Joanna Massa. A group including Keiko Alkire, Lois Blackmore, Jacqui Bradbury, Norma Buckley, and Karen Morrison had made table decorations using fresh foliage, winter flowers, cones and berries. They had also made the swaths of fresh foliage with tartan bows for the raffle table. The bows added to the theme of the Scottish Celebration.



Joyce Parker, Sandy and Alan Campbell and tartan bows on fresh foliage.

Dean Goard had provided his usual punch, which people drank as they checked out the raffle table. It was full because members had brought many plants, including Joyce Parker who had brought plants from Glendale Gardens. There were several books, and gift items, like home made jams, apples, a picture or figurines. The choices were so good that members had a hard time deciding where to place their raffle tickets. The dinner began to music provided by Jacqui Bradbury. Some of it was Scottish

bagpipe music, fitting our Scottish celebration. Ken Webb brought sliced turkey, and Karen Morrison brought the ham, paid for by the Society. Our pot-luck choices included a tasty assortment of appetizers, salads, casseroles, and, on another table, several decadent desserts (to use a description James Fuller would like). Joanna Massa had prepared tea and coffee to finish the dinner.

Arthur Ralfs showed pictures of beautiful gardens in Scotland taken by Madeline Webb, Ann Widdowson and Alan Campbell .

The party ended with the raffle. With Moe Massa's help it brought in \$269 that was donated to the Mustard Seed Food Bank. It will be very welcome in these hard times.

**VRS (YOUR)
ANNUAL SHOW and
PLANT SALE
25th Apr 2009
(Set-up April 24th)**

**SHOW CHAIR LOIS BLACKMORE WILL
CIRCULATE VOLUNTEERS SIGN -UP SHEETS
AT THE
FEBRUARY MEETING**

**Please volunteer and help
make the Show
A Winner**

**Entries from more
members would be welcomed.
Helpful hints on preparing
entries will be in a later
Newsletter**



Scenes from our Christmas Pot-Luck Dinner:

Moe and Joanna Massa and the raffle (above).

Keiko Alkire, Bill and Peggy McCarter and Jean Todd looking over the raffle choices. (to the left)

Liz Murray and some of her winnings from the raffle. (below)

