

# How I Learned To Love The Flower

By Ron L. Killingsworth\*

During my twenty-one years in the US Army, I spent considerable time in Okinawa, Thailand, Vietnam, Germany, and the Netherlands. I also visited England, Scotland and Wales. I was stationed in Florida, Georgia, California, Washington, DC, El Paso, Copperas Cove, TX, Arizona and Maryland. From the lush green of Florida to the desolate beauty of the barren desert in Arizona, I witnessed it all. From the dense jungle of Vietnam to the open farmlands of Germany, I loved each and every place for its unique beauty.

In Thailand and Vietnam I saw the trees upon which grew the fruit I had learned to love as a child. In Okinawa I saw my first pineapple plants and had to be convinced that such wonderful fruit could grow on that short palmetto looking plants. In El Paso and Arizona I watched the barren desert turn into a wonderland of blooms after a sudden rain. The home we purchased in Tallahassee, FL, was an older home with a yard full of azalea and camellia. Most homes in Arizona and El Paso had yards of colored rocks with a few cacti planted in the middle. Of course the British had their lovely “gardens” full of flowers and shrubs. The Germans loved their manicured forest and often rented small plots of land on which to raise small flower gardens. This world

of flowers held little interest to me at the time.

When we finally retired and settled in the small village of Belcher, Louisiana, we moved into a home on a one acre lot. I immediately went into town to purchase a 20 horsepower riding mower to handle all that grass. I could start at one end and mow back and forth in straight lines, “dressed right dressed” lines in fact. When the leaves from the pecan trees in the front yard fell, they were mowed down in the same manner as the grass. Nice straight swipes, back and forth.

Shortly thereafter my wife started making flower beds. The yard became a hodgepodge of flower beds and newly planted two foot trees. My mowing system was becoming more disrupted on a weekly basis. My nice straight rows of mowing were becoming obstacle courses. My speed was reduced to second gear instead of fourth. As time passed, there was less grass and more flowers and trees. Now my lawn mowing became circles. Round and round the flower beds and the trees. Mowing in first gear! Order had become disorder. A one hour job became a two hour job. All it took was a few “accidental” loses of control of the mower and the whacking of a few flowers and a few trees and my wife

took over the job of mowing the lawn.

Then my sister and brother-in-law bought 21 acres of land on Caddo Lake north of Shreveport, La. But, they were absentee land owners! Being a good brother I volunteered to get the place in good military order. Everything dressed right and shinning. If it couldn't be picked up, I painted it green. Now I had over ten acres of grass to mow and a nice big tractor and flail mower to drive. Nice straight rows. Back in forth. In fourth gear again. Order and precision had returned at last!

One day my sister called from Worcester, Mass., and told me she had decided to raise Louisiana irises. She asked me to prepare beds for about 6,000 iris plants. Glad that she had decided to plant the irises around the ponds, I started making the beds. My mowing method was not disturbed as I already had to go around the ponds in circles when mowing.

Then word came from Worcester that we were going to near Dallas, Texas, at the end of August, in a heat wave and drought, and dig and move some 6,000 iris plants. I tried to explain to her that August in Texas was a little different from August in Massachusetts.

So, with the help of some good “labor ready” workers we moved those

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Louisiana irises back to Louisiana where they belonged. All those beds were filled with Louisiana irises ready to be watered and tended.

Then word again came from Worcester. We were going back to Texas, to Little Elm, and help Marie Caillet thin out the irises from her famous pond. Fortunately this time it would be in the fall and a lot cooler. So, several thousand more irises made it back to Louisiana and were "temporarily" planted in my vegetable garden.

Now irrigation systems had to be prepared so that all those irises could be watered from the lake. Trenches were dug all across the lawn. Piles of dirt were everywhere. Mowing was again an obstacle course with piles of dirt and mounds of irises to be avoided. Back in second gear again!

Word came from Worcester again. Now she wanted to also raise tall bearded irises and daylilies and would I prepare beds, in the middle of the lawn area, and install irrigation, for 100 varieties of tall bearded and 100 varieties of daylilies. Of course, the beds had to be prepared differently because the tall bearded did not like water, the daylilies liked a little water, and the LA irises wanted to be standing in water! Now I had all those rows of bearded irises and daylilies in the middle of "my" lawn. Dodge this bed, watch out for that bed. Watch out for that pile of dirt! I had nightmares of driving on the wrong side of the road in Thailand, but the road had become the Autobahn in Germany and all the other drivers were British!

Order had again become disorder. Neat straight mowing paths were cluttered with flowers. Flowers here, flowers there, flowers everywhere. All of them green and plain!

Then April arrived and the flowers started to bloom. First to bloom were the Louisiana irises and then the tall bearded. Soon the daylilies started too. We had every color the eye could imagine. What had been dull greenery became a wall of colors. Every bloom was different. Every color was different. I could not believe that such color could come from those plain looking green blades.

And so in April and May I transitioned from hating flowers, considering them a hazard to good lawn mowing and despising their intrusion into my harmony to being a flower nut! Hours were spent reading about cartwheels, diploids, stands and falls, signals and style-arms. I started ordering more irises. After all, we only had about 350 varieties of LA irises and there are over 1900 varieties to be had and cherished! And, how many varieties of tall bearded and daylilies?

So, just as Doctor Strangelove learned to love the bomb, I learned to love the flower.



## Memorial

SLI member Walter Moores of Mississippi has given a gift to the Society in memory of the late Shirley Welch, sister of Marie Caillet of Texas.

## NOTICE

Just before press time, the editor learned of the recent death of long-time SLI member Helene Booth Reid Mertzweiller of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is the widow of the late Joe Mertzweiller of tetraploid Louisiana iris breeding fame. Marie Caillet is preparing a full obituary for the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

## Letter to the Editor

Robert Treadway's account of the American Iris Society vote resulting in 'Cajun Sunset' winning the 2003 DeBaillon Medal is most interesting and distressing. You [the editor] are right in your editorial when you say, "This is not a happy story, but Robert writes it in such a way that we at least learn a lesson or two from this unfortunate imbroglio."

As an AIS Master Judge I am as much to blame as the other 49 judges who voted for it. In my mind's eye I was clearly voting for 'Cajun Sunrise (Mertzweiller 92) and not remembering that this gorgeous red with a yellow halo had already won the DeBaillon in 2000 and thus was ineligible to win again. I have never seen 'Cajun Sunset.' It is embarrassing to admit this error in judgment, but I do so freely in hopes that we all will learn from this situation. It brings to mind the confusion that can occur when confronted with 'Colour Bright' versus 'Color Brite.' The former is a standard dwarf bearded while the latter is a border bearded. You all knew that, right? R-i-g-h-t.

Several members in the St. Louis area grow representative gardens of Louisiana irises and I visit them all. I travel extensively and have seen Louisianas grown from coast to coast in various conditions. When I judge iris shows (and I have judged scores of shows around the U.S.), I always make sure that any iris not known to the judging panel is looked up in the AIS Registration and Introduction checklists. This ensures that only properly named and introduced irises win show awards. Maybe we need to follow the same procedure when it comes to recording our votes for AIS Garden Awards. Think about it. I believe that 'Cajun Sunset' gave many judges a wake up call.

Jim Morris  
Missouri

Minutes  
Autumn Board Meeting  
Jackson, Mississippi  
September 27, 2003

Present: President Kevin Vaughn, Vice President Paul Gossett, Treasurer Richard Sloan, Secretary Tom W. Dillard; and Board Members Joe Musacchia, Earline Sudduth, Jeff Weeks, and Ron Betzer. Others present were Dorman Haymon and Sandy Duhon.

The Society for Louisiana Irises autumn board meeting convened at 1:00 p.m., Saturday, September 27, 2003, at the home of board member Earline Sudduth in Jackson, Mississippi.

The minutes of the last board meeting were approved.

The Treasurer's report showed a balance of \$1,563.37 in the checking account and \$28,194.62 in money market accounts. The report was accepted.

The board expressed deep appreciation to Joe Musacchia for updating and otherwise improving the SLI mailing list.

The board also expressed appreciation to Earline Sudduth for hosting the meeting and, especially, for preparing and serving an outstanding lunch to the board.

After a discussion of the need recruit more members and bolster SLI dues receipts, Dick Sloan volunteered to prepare a statement that addresses Life Membership dues as well as well as memorial gifts. (Related to the issue of dues, SLI leaders realize that our current dues are inadequate to meet the needs of the Society. This issue will be on the agenda for discussion at the 2004 convention in Dallas.) The board voted to discard the stock of old membership

brochures, which are out of date.

The board then thoroughly discussed questions and concerns about the 2003 balloting for the DeBaillon Medal. President Vaughn explained that the voting, which resulted in awarding the Medal to 'Cajun Sunset' (Granger 90), was a mistake since the iris never received distribution. The board then voted not to award the DeBaillon Medal for 2003. (Note: AIS conducts the balloting and names the winner, but SLI actually awards the Medal.)

SLI Newsletter editor Tom Dillard reported on the journal and its needs. The board adopted a motion to pay up to \$250 per issue for design and layout assistance. Also, the editor reported that he is continuing to investigate the possibility of printing the newsletter in color.

The board discussed at length board member Harry Wolford's efforts to develop a CD version of the SLI Cultivar Check List. The board expressed appreciation to Harry for his efforts, and then voted to issue the CD edition at the cost of \$5 for SLI members, and \$10 for non-members.

President Vaughn noted that he is proceeding with efforts to cast a new supply of the DeBaillon Medal, which the Board approved.

Tom Dillard reported that an SLI member in New Zealand, Darlene Cook, had located the 1965 DeBaillon Award winner 'Frances Elizabeth' (Rix 57), and had arranged for its importation to the United States. A motion was adopted to reintroduce 'Frances Elizabeth' to commerce through Iris City Gardens in Nashville, Tennessee, with one-half of the receipts accruing to the Society.

Vice President Paul Gossett volunteered to work to reinvigorate the SLI regional representatives program.

On the issue of Special Publications, the board heard from President Vaughn. He reported that a book-length manuscript on the history of Louisiana iris hybridizing is about ready.

**Committee Reports:**

1.) Acadiana Chapter Commit-

tee: Joe Musacchia said that plans are already underway for the 2006 convention—which will be in Lafayette.

2.) Archives Committee: Tom Dillard informed the board that he and Marie Caillet have been sending various SLI publications and records to the University Archives at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

3.) Awards Committee: Dorman Haymon presented nominations for the two main SLI awards, which were accepted by the board. (The winners will be announced at the SLI convention in Dallas in April.) The board also authorized Dorman to purchase up to five more Distinguished Merit Awards for future use.

4.) International Committee: An emailed report from Chairman Heather Pryor of Australia was read to the group and accepted.

5.) Scientific Committee: Kevin Vaughn reported that his Committee has continued to work with biologists at the University of Georgia on native irises. His committee is also cooperating with the United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service (Miami office) on the status of Louisiana irises in Florida.

6.) Publicity Committee: Joe Musacchia said he had recently given a talk on Louisiana irises at the Jean Laffite National Park in Louisiana.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tom W. Dillard  
Secretary



## Report of the International Committee

As I write this Report our garden here in Australia is on the brink of our bloom season commencement. While I dearly would wish to be present to give this report in person, I'm also sure that many of you would wish to be here in Sydney to enjoy our forthcoming Louisiana iris season with us.

On an international level, I'm happy to report that the increase in popularity of Louisiana irises as the "iris cultivar of choice" continues in an ever-widening variation of garden locations and countries.

Since my last report I am happy to advise that I have learned via correspondences with other iris fanciers around the world that Louisiana irises are now growing successfully in several locations in Europe – including several sites in Germany; in central Poland; in several locations in France and even in Sweden!

In Asia Louisiana irises continue to out-perform their bearded counterparts in many Japanese cities, in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

In the Pacific region of Australasia you may be interested to learn that Louisiana irises are growing very well in the harsh "red centre" of Australia - in the famous town of Alice Springs, as well in the humid rainforests of far north Queensland in the Daintree rainforest areas. Not to be outdone, gardeners in southern Tasmania are also reporting great success with these wonderfully adaptable cultivars. Louisiana iris cultivars are now listed in mainstream, nation-wide bulb and perennial mail or-

der catalogues in Australia – and the demand is almost out-stripping the supply!

In a recent visit to New Zealand last July (mid winter) Bernard and I also espied Louisiana irises thriving in the "winterless north" of the North Island of that wonderful country. Cultivars are also growing very well in several locations in the Republic of South Africa and even in Zambia.

In late October, 2003 the Iris Society of Australia is holding an international convention in Perth, Western Australia. At this convention I'm happy to advise that the majority of serious hybridisers of Louisiana irises in Australia have sent guest plants for the convention attendees to enjoy. The convention has attracted many international guests from the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA. All of this does indeed auger well for the continued showcasing of Louisiana irises to an international audience – which must, in turn, be a wonderful thing for the SLI.

The Pacific Flora 2004 event continues to gain international momentum and interest, with tour groups from Australia already being arranged to visit the garden site in Hamamatsu, Japan in May, 2004 as well as the international garden site in Rochester, NY. No doubt other countries are doing the same thing. I believe that the SLI stands on the brink of receiving some much-welcome wonderful international exposure due to this project.

Respectfully submitted,  
Heather Pryor, Chair  
September 27, 2003

## Letter in Memory of Marvin Granger

As I read the article in the recent Newsletter by Robert Treadway titled "Oh Iris, Where Art Thou," when I read where he said he had never gotten to know the man Marvin Granger, my thought was, "Oh, what a loss!" To never get to indulge in a cup of his dripped coffee and a piece of his peanut butter pie, to never have gotten to know this kind, gentle, funny witty person! There are thousands of people who cross our paths in a year, having the open garden and being involved in plant societies, pottery, etc., that we are involved with. But, over the course of a lifetime, there are that small handful of people that you say "Thank you, Lord, for letting our paths meet and allowing us to get to know this person." So it was with Marvin.

As our daughter recently left with a vase from the load of pottery Donald had just unloaded from the kiln, he picked her an 'Angel Face' rosebud for it, and I pulled her some penstemon to surround it. A week or so later she wanted to know what the other plant was, because it was still pretty, and I told her, and that the original plant of it came from Marvin. She was delighted, and spread the seeds around her place hoping they will come up in the spring.

Nita Copenhaver  
Louisiana

