

What Irises Have Done To Me

By Vincent Christopherson - Arlington, TX

Warning - contact with irises can be addictive! Laws should be passed that require warning signs at the entrance to all iris gardens. Little do unsuspecting people know, at first contact, what an encounter with irises may do to them. Let me say that you too may be drawn down the primrose path. Step by step you may even turn into a pollen dauber. Let me show you graphic pictorial evidence. Let me tell you how it happened to me, how one thing led to another.

It all started when I was about ten years old and read a book about Luther Burbank. I was impressed by the fact that he developed Cobbler and Kenebeck potatoes from seed grown plants. The book said that the seedling variation was unlimited but the cuttings from the potatoes would produce plants the same as the originals. Sure in my mind that this would also work with tulips, I went home and asked mom if I could use her little 10' by 10' garden. She told me that I could, but I had to keep it weeded and also said, "Vincent you better not change the color of my tulips". She was particularly concerned about Black Beauty, her favorite. I set seed pods and planted the tulip seeds but they

did not germinate. It was at this time I collected my first irises growing in wild clumps in the ditches close to home. I later learned that these original collected plants would have been classified as variegatas.

My next encounter with irises was when I moved to Texas in 1980. I rented a room from a family until I could afford my own apartment. The lady of the house gave me her iris collection when the family decided to move back to Joplin, Missouri. She told me that I had to take good care of them because they had been given to her by her mom, who was a member of the Joplin



ANGEL'S DESIRE

ALL ABOARD

Iris Society. Her mom had paid as much as twenty-five dollars each because they were new introductions bought through mail order catalogs. Her charge to me was that I must take care of them or her mom would not forgive her.

Over the next five years I probably moved as many times. Each time I carried the precious irises with me. This of course kept most of them from blooming. When I met the love of my life, Louise, I married, settled down, and planted the irises out by the mail box. Then they started to bloom and I was impressed with their beauty. I later identified two varieties from this group as CELESTIAL SNOW and VIETNAM. I had never seen such a big ruffled white or a plicata before and was awestruck by the stitched edges on VIETNAM. By chance it was at the same time that I

received a Spring Hill flower catalog. The iris collection they were offering had NIGHT OWL and VANITY in it. I had never seen a black or a pink iris. Even though I did not want to spend the money, I bought the collection. The thought then came back to me of the seed pods that I had set on mom's tulips.

I started hybridizing on old flags to see what new colors or patterns might come. I was attending college at The University Of Texas At Arlington working toward my bachelor's degree in botany. My botany professor found out I was hybridizing irises and asked me if I would give a presentation to the botany laboratory. Of course I accepted, but in the back of my mind I was thinking I did not know enough about irises to stand up in front of the class. With the help of directory assistance, I found the number for the Fort Worth Iris Society and went to their next meeting. My presentation to the botany laboratory was a success, but I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams what this would lead to.

As providence would have it, the FWIS was hosting the American Iris Society convention. The gardens were blooming with first year clumps. When Patsy Rosen, a club member and AIS certified judge, found out I was hybridizing on old flags, she offered to let me set some seed on the modern cultivars in her garden. She introduced me to Tom Burseen, a local

hybridizer, who also let me make some crosses in his garden. Abandoning my old flag breeding program, I started over. Patsy also told me she was taking care of the guest iris beds in Duncanville, TX and suggested, "Vincent you should come and pull weeds because it would familiarize you with the newer irises". I think she is related to my mom. Patsy then gave me a box full of past AIS bulletins and I read them all. Articles on a wide spectrum of iris knowledge were laid before me. With my appetite for iris knowledge whetted, the quest began.



RODEO ARENA

The World Of Irises was my first book purchase and I read it from cover to cover at least twice. The section on color pigments in iris really fascinated me. My botany professor had told me that lycopene was the pigment that makes tomatoes red. It was look out red iris, here I come! I purchased all of the registration and introduction checklists that were available, reading them as though they were novels. My wife thought I had gone off the deep end. I procured iris catalogs and cut out the photos, arranging them according to color pattern. Purchasing all the breeding stock to supply my own garden took a while but I was on my way to producing modern hybrids. The color patterns of most interest to me were recessive traits that are not often stumbled onto, but required a selective breeding program. As I look back, it is apparent that all the homework saved a lot of extra footwork.



WORLD OF COLOR

My first seedling garden was devoted specifically to reverse bitones and bicolors. Having been inspired by IN REVERSE and HULA DANCER I had several seedlings ready to guest when the Dallas Iris Society hosted the AIS convention in 2000. There were seedlings guested at the Arboretum in Dallas, at the Clark Garden, and at the Rodeo Arena of Jean and Joan Stanley. Three seedlings from the reverse and bitone work which were there drew many comments from convention go-ers, ANGEL'S DESIRE, ALL ABOARD, and WORLD OF COLOR. In the past I had guested seedlings in Sacramento, California and in Boulder, Colorado but the Rodeo Arena planting at the Dallas convention brought the most feedback from garden viewers.

It was Joan Stanley who approached me and asked if I would guest some of my seedlings in the arena. When she knew that I was intending to ride on one of the tour buses she said, "Vincent, if you ride on the bus you will only meet the people on that bus, but if you hang out here at the arena, I will introduce you to all the iris people as they arrive." As fate would have it, a good rain occurred and Jean became concerned that all of Joan's work would be for naught. He went out and purchased grass type carpet and had it installed around the entire arena so the garden would be accessible to all the viewers. This was a true love story! Because of all this the arena garden was pristine and raised quite a stir among convention go-ers. Of course



MAKE A WISH

this special set of circumstances became a highlight in my iris experience. There was one cultivar from my guest irises in the arena that did not bloom till the day after the convention, and that has now become RODEO ARENA. Special thanks to Jean and Joan, and introduced in 2004 in their honor is RODEO ARENA sdlg# P4-170 (Rock Star X Brandy Sipper).

Luminatas became the focus of two gardens made available to me by close neighbors. It was on my weeding excursions to the Duncanville garden that I originally fell in love with SPIRIT WORLD, MIND READER and the pure luminata pattern. A stroke of luck won me SPIRIT WORLD from the FWIS guest iris program in 1994. The purple in the plant parts was intriguing. From crosses made with plant color in mind came FANCY FRIENDS (Gypsy Skirts X Spirit World), introduced in 2001 and TALL DARK STRANGER (Mind Reader X Chiffon Ruffles) introduced in 2002. SPIRIT WORLD's crests at the ends of the beards were a definite enticement to cross it with some horned varieties. Efforts along these avenues are carried into my current lines with cultivars such as INVITATION ONLY sdlg #L9-5A (Mind Reader X Chiffon Ruffles) an amoena luminata in white and blue with beard crests and purple stalks, MAKE A WISH sdlg# LP8-10AH (Invitation Only X Rodeo Arena) a horned variegata luminata in yellow and red-brown, and L1-49BH Invitation Only X L8-13AH (L5-124; Romantic



INVITATION ONLY

Mood x Spirit World) x (L5-115; Spirit World x Amelia's Orchid) a horned variegata luminata in peach and light purple. In the luminata lines that carry plicata, come one type of expression which are often called fancies, fancy plicatas, or luminata plicatas. These express luminata washes but do not have a flower core free of dark pigments as the pure luminatas do. Thus as a by-product of breeding for luminatas came the introductions LET'S BE FRIENDS in 2002 and PREPOSITION, a border bearded in 2004.

Glaciatas became the focus of a third seedling garden with growing space made available by another friend.

As time has passed and new seedlings bloomed, new developments have occurred. The most exciting has probably been the emergence of the first glaciata cultivars. From a cross of PII (Gigolo x unknown) X Rock Star came G3-236BH an orange glaciata with



G6-61YH

If you have read this article until here, you too have been drawn, unaware, into the twilight zone of the iris world. By now, well passed the point of no return, I am hopelessly immersed to everything iris, but know that I am not alone. At every turn there have been friends along the way. Each new seedling crop brings new insights. Each new success leads to renewed effort. Anticipation keeps me waiting for the future. What new iris wonders will it bring? What new people will I meet?



L1-49BH

horns. This is nice but not a strong grower. G3-236BH crossed with BURNING BRIGHT gave better growing plants and a range of color variation. Among these were G6-61YH a horned yellow glaciata, AG6-61HH a horned orange glaciata, and G6-61A a white and yellow amoena glaciata. From another line came AG5-2E (Mind Reader X Scorch), an amoena glaciata with white standards and light yellow falls blended with peach. These two lines both lead back to GIGOLO, which I consider to be the probable source of their amoena ground color.



G6-61A

**AG6-61HH**

Our new garden location is on twenty acres south of Arlington, Texas where my family lives. I now grow iris stock and hybridize there. Accent Iris Garden presented by Vincent Christopherson is now open and inquiries are welcome. My temporary web site is being built at toolsbydesign.com/vciris/ and will be up so everyone can look in on the progress. Our email address is vincent1@integrity.com.



**Have you checked
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**AG5-2E**