

# The Alphabet and the Iris Breeder

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Sanford L. Babson

When our good editor asked me to write about the Howard Hughes of the iris world, I knew immediately of whom he was speaking. Who else? Sanford Babson. If Sanford seems to be a bit of a reluctant spectre at times, perhaps it is because he is busy in his sixty-acre orange grove, playing golf, or touring the Sierras looking at wild flowers, or busy with the half acre of irises, mostly seedlings, that he grows beside the orange trees.

Sanford and his wife, Annabell, have finished raising their son and two daughters and are now enjoying the effortless role of grandparents.

Occasionally there is a little extra time, but many interesting activities help to fill one's life, and iris growing is one of them. Sanford once told me, it is more fun to get a golf trophy than an iris award because the trophy is won in contest with local friends whose congratulations are more personal, thus giving a more immediate sense of satisfaction.

Reticent though he may act, an undertone of gratification can always be detected in chuckle when you mention some new award he has won for one of his irises, and it is obvious that he gleans a great deal of pleasure from his iris breeding or he would not have been dabbling pollen for twenty-five years.

Sanford first became interested in iris breeding when Tom Craig rented some land from him on which to grow iris. The subject of irises arose, and Tom enthusiastically and expressively told him all about it. Sanford was hooked.

When Sanford numbered his first seedlings, he used the letter "A" to designate the year. I do not know if he decided then, but several years ago he stated that when he reached the letter "Z", he was going to quit. Next year, 1975, is the "Z" year. I believe him; he is going to quit. And so will end the active part of an exciting twenty-seven years of iris breeding; years that harvested seven Awards of Merit, a number of Honorable Mentions, and the Franklin Cook Memorial Cup for SHIPSHAPE in 1973.

Sanford has always claimed that he has no forethought in his crosses. Reading some of his parentages, you might think he means it. Crossing EPIC with PACIFIC PANORAMA seems a bit far fetched, but it equalled

SHIPSHAPE. How many breeders would cross a black and a brown? That is how CREDO was created. Sanford has never cared much for plicatas and never grew any until we insisted that he grow STEPPING OUT. He used it in breeding and came up with ODYSSEY—but with no plicatas to cross with STEPPING OUT? In his fifth seedling patch he numbered three seedlings with the basic number E61, but the parentage was lost, so naturally these three seedlings played the biggest role in his future breeding, giving his iris that subtle coloring that no other iris had had before. All of the varieties from these E61 seedlings have shown “the effect” down to the present and are still contributing: FAIR IMAGE, EPIC, CONFECTION, COMMENTARY, CAMBODIA, GOODNESS, APROPOS, etc. There was one cross about that time that I have always personally thought could have been “it.” (SNOW FLURRY x BALI BELLE) mostly because it was far out enough to have given Sanford what he usually got from such crosses.

Sanford may say it is pure luck, but we have always suspected that a great deal more is behind the crosses that he makes than he admits.

Sanford has not always been inaccessible to the iris world. He once went to a convention; the one before the last in Oregon. He had a fine time, but he never went again except for a veritable forced appearance for a short time at the 1968 convention here in his own region, Central California.

We even have a picture to show you. The region BULLETIN once requested such a picture, but it was easier to request than to receive it. Sanford's very charming and resourceful wife had a bag of tricks. She hired a photographer to come out to the ranch, told Sanford that guests were coming and to put on a clean shirt and jacket. When he came out from changing clothes, there was the photographer, snapping away. So we have the picture, and it is a good one.

Again in 1975 the national convention of the American Iris Society will be held in California (Southern, this time), and we hope that we will be able to convince Sanford that he should attend. If all other methods fail, well, kidnapping seems to have become a popular pastime these days.

Sanford Babson's greatest contribution will always be his irises. A partial list of his most popular ones follows. You have probably grown most of them in your own garden:

AD ASTRA AM'70, APROPOS AM'69, CAMBODIA AM'71, CHAPEAU, COMMENTARY AM'67, COPPEROPOLIS HM'61, CREDO three times runner up for AM'69, '70, and '71, EPIC AM'69, GOODNESS AM'67, NOBLEMAN HM'72, ODYSSEY HM'72, JC'73, PANTOMIME HM'73, SHIPSHAPE AM'72, Franklin Cook Memorial Cup '73, TAMBOURINE HM'70, WESTERN HOST HM'69. And there are more to come!

## CORRECTIONS AIS JUDGES FOR 1974

Region 2—Mrs. LaVerne A. Dillenbeck is an Apprentice Judge  
Region 3—Mr. Maxwell W. Hunter, Sr., is an Honorary Judge  
Region 9—Mr. Nathan H. Rudolph is a Senior Judge  
Region 17—Add Garden Judge, Mrs. John Welch, El Paso