

Dr. D. C. Nearpass

1914 - 1997

by Clarence Mahan

DON CHARLES NEARPASS, MORE WIDELY KNOWN IN THE world of irises as Dr. D. C. Nearpass, or to his many friends as "Charlie," died on June 30, 1997. Born in Newbury, Ohio, Dr. Nearpass served during World War II in India and North Africa in a medical unit of the U. S. Army. Although he never spoke of such matters, his military decorations included the Bronze Star. Dr. Nearpass received his bachelor of science degree from the University of Florida, and his masters and doctorate in agronomy from Cornell University. Before retiring, he worked for many years as a soils scientist with the Department of Agriculture's Plant Industry Station in Beltsville, Maryland. His work included many significant research projects relating to plant uptakes, zinc and sulphur availability, submerged soils and environmental effects of pesticides and herbicides

An avid genealogist, Dr. Nearpass volunteered his time and knowledge at the Family History Center of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kensington, Maryland. He was a member of the Mayflower Society, Sons of the American Revolution, Sons and Daughters of the Pilgrims, Dutch Settlers of Albany, Descendants of the Founders of New Jersey, and Flagon and Trencher.

His daughter Katie Nearpass Ogden wrote: "It has been said that although his career was in soils, his heart was in flowers." In the 1950's, Dr. Nearpass and his wife Bonita's interest in African violets prompted him to study plant photography, and he developed considerable expertise in this field. About the same time, a neighbor gave Dr. Nearpass some modern tall bearded irises. And so began his great love of irises. About 1960, he began his first iris breeding experiments. He was particularly impressed with the work of Paul Cook and Cook's great breakthroughs

represented by WHOLE CLOTH and EMMA COOK, and he modeled his hybridizing efforts on Cook's emphasis on carefully thought out objectives.

Over the years, Dr. Nearpass permitted only 16 of his seedlings to be introduced. He sought perfection, and his standards of excellence were legendary. One of his most popular TBs is PURPLE PEPPER (HM'88). It is generally conceded, however, that his two best TBs are DOVER BEACH and SPINNING WHEEL, surely one of the great irises of our time. He won Awards of Merit for the latter two irises. For more than a decade, Dr. Nearpass worked on a breeding program to obtain tetraploid miniature tall bearded irises with improved substance, form and color. He incorporated *Iris aphylla* into his miniature tall bearded iris breeding, and obtained some excellent seedlings—some of which dependably rebloom. He also hybridized daylilies, a number of which were registered and introduced. Last year Dr. Nearpass registered two tall bearded irises. SWEET SOLITUDE and ROMAN CARNIVAL, both of which were introduced this year by Friendship Gardens.

From 1975 to 1984, Dr. Nearpass served as the Slides Chairman for AIS, as well as for Region 4 for many years. He put together many outstanding slide sets, a good portion of which were the result of his own photography. For as long as anyone can remember, he was the auctioneer for the Chesapeake and Potomac Iris Society. In 1996, the American Iris Society formally recognized Dr. Nearpass's distinguished work by awarding him its coveted Hybridizer's Medal. Region 4 instituted the Nearpass Award, which is bestowed annually on the best in-region iris. Charlie was compassionate and generous, dedicated and wise. He taught a whole generation of mid-Atlantic iris growers about irises. For his standards, his accomplishments, his knowledge and his wisdom, Dr. Nearpass was much respected. For his heart, Charlie was much loved. ❧