

A Convention Overview

by *Debbie Babuscio, California*

THIS WAS MY SECOND NATIONAL, AND I WAS BETTER PREPARED for the event that would take place. I so looked forward to seeing the gardens and the blooms, and meeting the people who cared for them for the last few years.

The first garden for the bus I had boarded was the Loving Garden. And it was just that, a very lovely yard. Not only were there Iris, but also the hostas, columbines and peonies were just as lovely. Here in Southern California, we cannot grow hostas or peonies, and I love them both. The iris in Jack and Rosalie Loving's garden were what I would consider in full bloom. There were several seedlings I would like to own upon introduction, especially "EC2" by Nearpass. I also liked seedling "P3-211B" by Christopherson, and RANKS OF BLUE by Griffin Crump (reg. '01). Among introduced varieties, Ghio's STARRING caught my eye, and the last one I must have for my yard is Don Spoon's RAINBOW CANDY.

From there we went to the Lois Rose Garden, highlighted by a pond that was tucked into the woods but still visible. There were lots of irises to see here. PASSING CLOUDS (Ben Hager) was open for all to see and admire. MY GINNY, another one of Don Spoon's, was so beautiful that I took several pictures of it, just in case one of them didn't turn out. Rick Tasco's SOLAR FIRE ('03) will soon be in my yard; his intros always grow so well for me, and I'm sure this one will too.

After boarding the bus and traveling through beautiful country, we arrived at the garden of Jim and Gina Schroetter. Their log home was nestled among the trees, and it looked like it was made from the trees that once stood where the house now sits. The front drive had many irises in bloom, and the guest beds were located in the back. After wandering around to the back, the first iris that caught my eye was HEARTBEAT AWAY (Christopherson), and I don't even think it was a guest iris. There was a nice TB seedling that also deserved attention, "96-1-A" by Larry Hughes. It was at the Schroetter's that I fell in love with MASLON, an '02 MTB by Don Spoon. One could venture to say that Dr. Spoon has quite a few irises that are more than worth their purchase price!

Back into the bus we went and on to the next garden. At this point I was

halfway to heaven, after smelling almost every iris, and the effects of fragrance mixed with all the colors! I always meet new people at Iris functions, and the National was no different. After much good conversation on the bus with seatmate Claire, we arrived at the home of Kurt and Sonia Kuppert. Their corner lot was well planned, and the bloom was out where all could see, not just us trekkers. It was here that GOLDEN PANTHER was proudly blooming along with an outstanding seedling of Chun Fan's.

Friday morning was a gloomy one. The weather forecast was rain for the better part of the day. My bus partner decided not to trek, so off I went with the other brave ones; after all, I came to see gardens, and gardens was what I was going to see! At the Lord Fairfax Community College Garden the rain was not falling when we arrived so I ventured out to the iris beds. On the way I wandered into a child's garden where I enjoyed the statues. After viewing the iris I realized how many of their hybridizers were present. By chance there were now two buses at the College, and I thought how memorable it would be to get them all into a group photo, so, with some assistance, a very nice photo was taken. I was glad the rain held off until we were all done shooting our pictures.

More rain met us at Winterberry Gardens, and I found myself reluctant to leave the bus. I think the bus driver could tell I wanted to go out and see the flowers but didn't want to get wet, so he kindly loaned me his umbrella, and off I went thanking him all the way. The blooms were still lovely despite the rain and cold. Some of the flowers actually looked as if they enjoyed being out in the rain. We all appreciated the hot tea and coffee that Ginny Spoon so thoughtfully provided, along with lots of goodies!

I woke up Saturday morning and was sad to see it was still raining. Even so, my partner accompanied me onto the bus and off we all went. We arrived at the State Arboretum of Virginia, which is part of the Blandy Experimental Farm. Again I was offered and used an umbrella loaned to me by our bus driver. Off I strolled down the paths and around the grounds. I found a beautiful dogwood path and an herb garden in addition to the iris beds. After a nice hot lunch we boarded the bus and headed on to the Winterberry Gardens for a second visit. I noticed a lot more iris and yard art on this trip, and a few that I thought looked outstanding were MELTED BUTTER (Chun Fan), PAUL BLACK (Tom Johnson), MOMENTOUS OCCASION (George Sutton), and the little MTB WISTERIA MIST (Opal Wulf).

Well, the day was coming to an end and that meant the trek was ending too. On the bus ride back I thought about all the beautiful iris I saw and all the people I met. It was a trip I will remember for many years to come. 