

2009 Eunice Fisher Distinguished Hybridizer Merit Award

William and Eleanor Lachman



Eunice Fisher Distinguished Merit Hosta

H. 'Robert Frost'



Good evening ladies and gentlemen, friends of Bill and Eleanor Lachman and appreciators of the hostas they bred. My name is Elizabeth Lachman, and I am very proud and honored to be here tonight to accept the Eunice Fisher Award on my parents' behalf. When Chuck Zdeb wrote to inform me that my parents had been chosen to receive the Eunice Fisher Award this year, he asked me to write an acceptance speech, to pick a hosta that my parents might have considered their favorite, to look for photos of my parents to show to you now, and to choose someone to read my speech to you tonight.



First of all, I felt and still feel very touched that you on the awards' committee chose to honor my parents and their accomplishment in hybridizing exceptional hostas. Preparing and now presenting this speech has been a way for me to share in honoring their work. On this occasion I thought that you in the audience might like to meet one of my parents' first hybrids and so I came to speak to you tonight. I thank the American Hosta Society and especially those of you who made this presentation possible and helped me to be involved in it.

My parents' delight in growing flowers and in hybridizing plants and flowers goes back further in time than most any of us can remember. During his teens my father began growing dahlias in Pennsylvania. My grandfather grew gladioli for cut flowers, and together father and son visited the Pennypack gardens, where Mr. Pennypack encouraged my father in this interest. Both of my parents studied horticulture - my

father at Pennsylvania State College and my mother at Massachusetts State College, which in 1947 became The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. My mother received her Bachelor of Science in the Physical and Biological Sciences in 1937. Both Eleanor and Bill received their Masters of Science in Olericulture. My parents met in the fall of 1936 at Massachusetts State College in Amherst. My mother was just beginning her senior year and was taking courses in the department of olericulture. My father began his teaching and research in the same department in September 1936. In addition to her studies Eleanor was helping out in the department and began taking field records on sweet corn and tomatoes for Bill. He liked to call her the "Statistician". Bill and Eleanor dated from 1937 until June of 1941, when they eloped to Brattleboro, VT. Several months after their return to Amherst, Bill rented the first floor at 90 Spring St. in the center of Amherst.

In what follows, you will hear some of the names my parents later chose for the flowers they bred, both daylilies and hostas. In 1907 the house at 90 Spring St. had been moved from its original location across the street and just a few steps further away. At its original site the house was called "The Dell" and had been built by Mabel and David Todd in the 1880's for their own use. David was a noted astronomer teaching at Amherst College. Mabel was somewhat of a socialite who wanted to go places, but Amherst was a small town. She met Austin Dickinson much her elder, and their subsequent affair made the headlines. Austin was the sister of poet Emily Dickinson; he was married and the father of 3 children.

Robert Frost was poet in residence at Amherst College during at least some of the years our family lived at 90 Spring St. We watched him walk down "our" street. Was he turning in at number 97, which to us was a mansion and had become the Garis' family residence in 1948. It was now called "The Dell" marking the spot where our house once stood. Mr. Frost was a friend of the family especially of Howard Garis, who sometimes visited his son, Roger Garis and family there. Howard Garis was well-known to all children and their parents as the author of "Uncle Wiggily" and many other children's books. At that time we knew just a few of Robert Frost's poems; in the late 40's he was more well known to us, particularly to my sister, for helping her find her lost roller skate key.

In June of 1950 Bill and Eleanor with their two daughters moved into the brick house on the hill at 419 Pine St. in the Cushman section of Amherst. They had wanted a house of their own and additionally the opportunity of starting a garden. That is when the real work began. The area was the end of a glacial moraine; that meant rocks, not just little stones but boulders too! We "picked" rocks for years; they seemed to multiply in winter and come up in spring. But somehow with 4 sets of hands and 2 strong backs, most of the rocks were either removed or later used to build small walls around flower beds. Next came the mulching, autumn leaves, our own plus neighbors' contributions and also pine needles; those who owned horses not far away were relieved of their stores of manure now moved to our garden by wheelbarrow or carted in the trunk of Bill's car. We knew early on what biological waste and organic gardening were about, but Bill used fertilizers and pesticides too. He knew what dosage was called for. Bill called the earth soil, he didn't like the word 'dirt', and he developed his special mix. Together, Bill and Eleanor seemed able to make most anything grow. Our neighbors were in awe of our first harvests of fruit, mainly strawberries, and especially of vegetables. The first

gardens were filled with Bill's hybrids from work, both sweet corn and tomatoes, plus almost every other vegetable imaginable. This was our summer diet and was also canned and frozen by Eleanor for the wintertime.

When the garden seemed well established, Bill and Eleanor started hybridizing dahlias, next came iris, then daylilies and finally hostas. With the dahlias, size, color, whether spidery or full were the looked for qualities. Would it be possible to breed a truly red iris? Eleanor took a fashion to daylilies and again they tried for full reds and pinks. Bill started working with colchicine turning diploids and triploids into tetraploids. Our kitchen table looked like Bill's laboratory, microscope and all. The cellar, earlier storage for dahlia tubers and Bill's photo lab, now became the packing space for plants sent maybe to you, and a self-made plant room was installed too. They rose early and were out in the gardens before breakfast for a first look at seedling blooms before the sun changed their color. Bill waited till the dew was gone before capturing them on film. Eleanor sometimes took breaks from the garden and met with a local group of hikers who climbed Mount Tom and hiked at other well-known sites in Hampshire County.

Bill was a professional and a perfectionist, who wanted to come in first. He liked winning prizes; one of his most important was the Silver Medal awarded him for his sweet corn hybrid, Golden Beauty, in the early 1950's. Together Eleanor and Bill were awarded many ribbons and prizes for their flowers. Bill worked methodically and took exact records. Eleanor was a scientist too, and a naturalist; she knew what was good but also used her intuition in selecting the crosses she made. Bill and Eleanor worked well together, exchanging ideas, choosing the best seedlings and searching for names. They worked side by side for hours sometimes almost in silence. Over the years, or better decades, they had learned to communicate using few words, and their teamwork was fruitful.

Their work with hostas began in the 1970's, before Bill retired from the University of Massachusetts in 1976 as professor emeritus. If we look at the long list of hostas Bill and Eleanor hybridized, we see that most were introduced in the 1980's and '90's. They worked for size, both big and small, and for the margins, ivory-rimmed green and green-rimmed ivory, shiny, dull, rippled, smooth, streaking, veining, mottling, time of bloom, etc. Some of their ideas for new cultivars came from their earlier work with sweet corn; they selfed hostas too and got good results with some inbreds.

Bill and Eleanor didn't want to slow down, but of necessity they had to. As Eleanor once said to me in her last years, "Just let nature take its course." And it did. Bill passed away in June of 1998. Eleanor tried to keep the gardens going for a while with help, and a few more of their hostas were registered in the later 1990's and early 2000's. After Bill's death, Eleanor made a large floral gift primarily of daylilies to the University of Massachusetts, and many friends and neighbors were given hostas and daylilies for their gardens before Eleanor moved away from her home at 419 Pine St. She and I planted many of the Lachman hostas and daylilies at the Arbors on University Drive in Amherst, where she lived from July 1999 to mid June 2001. After Eleanor passed away at the end of Oct. 2004, you remembered her work, their work, in your Hosta Library, First Look commemoration. My parents certainly had many favorite hostas in their collection of hybrids, and choosing just one is no easy task. The short piece by Glen Williams "Visit"

printed in that First Look commemoration led me to choose *H. 'Robert Frost'* as the one to receive the award tonight.

I thank you again for honoring my parents with the Eunice Fisher Award, and I wish each of you the very best in breeding interesting and beautiful hostas. Thank you.