

Meet The Speaker by Leslie Ann Keller

H.P. Norton



H.P. Norton is an artist. Not the sort of artist that knocks out one painting after another with very little variation in style. Rather, H. P. is a creative sort, one who is always trying to come up with something new—a bit like Picasso. In fact, H. P. has gone through several periods, including, like Picasso, a blue period! But first there was a yellow fascination and then later still, a long extended red phase. The artistry of breeding phalaenopsis, this is what H.P. Norton is known for worldwide. Because he is so keen on coming up with something a little better, a bloom richer in color or bigger in size, H.P. rolls the dice of evolution time and again. He is a gambler with the genetic code. Like all breeders, he mixes and matches species and hybrids of note. And here is where his keen eye (or instinct) has led him to great success. Along with his wife Katherine and daughter Carol Campbell, he has traveled the world in search of the best possible stock. The artist, after all, must start with the finest of materials. But let us step back, how did this thriving family business, Orchidview, in Monck's Corner, S.C., ever come to be? What brought H.P. to what is surely his life's calling, breeder of some of the most unique phalaenopsis in the world?

H.P. Norton is a WWII veteran. He was born in 1925 in Macon County, N.C., and at the age of seventeen enlisted in the Navy. During his tour of duty H.P. patrolled for German submarines. After the war he worked in a naval shipyard, work that led him years later to open his own boat and accessories shop, The Outboard Shop, in North Charleston. In 1976, at the age of 51, H.P. was thrown a curve ball, a major heart attack. The damage was significant enough to require him to retire from the boat business. One of those stories we hear again and again, a major twist, unforeseen and certainly not desired, can so often lead to a stunning fruition, a remaking of one's life. H.P. refashioned himself in a big way.

It just happened that about this time Katherine Norton decided she needed some orchids. As with many of our own members, Katherine was lured into a local orchid society show and life forever *changed*. Katherine signed up with the American Orchid Society and came home with an armful of plants. H.P. took note, especially when a week later a seedpod appeared. H.P. was intrigued. Yes, the blooms were fantastic, but the possibilities of what could be attained by doing a little finagling, this is what attracted him—the future. Creativity is fueled by a question mark. What if? What if I mix this with that? What if I breed this little gem with that stoutly beast, this exquisite color with that impeccable shape? Any good question leads to a million others. In a recent article in the American Orchid Society's monthly magazine (May, 2010), writer Linda White quotes H.P., "That's the beauty of hybridizing—you never come to the end."

But back to the beginning, it was a friend, mentor and president of the local orchid society, Mike Osborn, who set H.P. on his way. He encouraged H.P. to experiment with breeding yellow phalaenopsis for longer lasting color and larger size. All these years later H.P. is known for his sumptuously colored and well awarded yellow phals. But of course, the inquisitive H.P. didn't stop there. Red! Yes, we need deeper, darker reds, true reds. Yet before delving into red, what about business? In 1993 Orchidview was established with greenhouses adjacent to the Norton family home on the Cooper River, in Monck's Corner. The Nortons were in business, and this is, in fact, a family affair. Katherine Norton and Carol Campbell are H.P.'s stalwart partners. Running several greenhouses and a lab is a phenomenal amount of work, as all of WNCOS small greenhouse owners can imagine.



Red, back to red. H.P. has received numerous awards from the American Orchid Society for his red phalaenopsis. Deep, dark and gorgeous. He also has created some exquisite oranges. But of course, an artist would never stop with just yellow and red... what about blue? Blue phalaenopsis, now that's a feat. Like all great discoveries in both art and science, there is often a fair amount of serendipity involved and the Orchidview story of blue is certainly laced with *right time, and right place*. Back in the early 1980's H.P.'s friend Mike Osborn was hosting a tour of orchid greenhouses in the southeast for his Malaysian friend and orchid expert Michael Ooi. Osborn asked H.P. to join them. Little did H.P. know what repercussions would occur. At the end of the tour, H.P. sent Ooi home with a flask of his latest yellow crosses. Later, Ooi reciprocated by sending H.P. coconut shells beautifully planted with *Phal. bellina* and *Phal. violacea*. These species plants had been collected from trees marked for clearance (later to be replaced by rubber trees). From this precious gift was born the quest for blue. Again, with a mix of luck and cleverness, and persistence, always persistence, an award winning blue was finally birthed in 2001—*Phal. violacea* 'Gulfstream Blue'.

Yellows, reds and blues? Yes, you can imagine H.P. wondering what's next. Once again, a chance event would bring another breeding challenge H.P.'s way. In 1996 the Nortons attended an International Phalaenopsis Alliance symposium in Chicago. (H.P. is a founding member of the IPA). While there, a friend of the Nortons purchased a large collection of phragmipediums and asked the couple to drive it back to South Carolina. This collection rode back with the Nortons and took up residence in their greenhouse for nearly 6 months. H.P., of course, was taking notes. Reds again. H.P. saw the opportunity for crossing the stunningly colored *Phragmipedium besseae* with other Phrags. More awards from the AOS followed. Today one of H.P.'s popular crosses is *Phrag. besseae* with *Phrag. kovachii*, a subject he will be speaking on in our upcoming meeting.

H.P. is tireless in his search for new and better. Novelty is what speaks to him. As orchid lovers we have a great deal of appreciation for his efforts. What attracts so many of us to orchids is their illimitable variety, their history, their plenitude. H.P. is broadening this story with his fantastic new orchid creations. There is both luck and insight involved in this endeavor, and not an insignificant amount of hard work. Katherine and H.P. Norton, along with their daughter Carol, have given us a whole lot more to ooh and awe over. Such beauty—we at WNCOS are grateful for their hard work and their generosity, for their sharing with us their world and gracing us with their presence for so many of our annual events and more.