

Lohmann: She grew prize-winning daffodils and made friends for life



Margaret Galloway Ford (left) looks over photographs from past Virginia Daffodil Society shows with Jack Lohmann at the April 2017 VDS Show at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Ford sparked Lohmann's interest in daffodils in a chance meeting in 2002 when Lohmann was 5 years old and Ford was being interviewed by Lohmann's father, Times-Dispatch columnist Bill Lohmann. Ford died 2/8/19 at the age of 86.

I've often maintained the best thing about this sort of work – besides the lack of a requirement for heavy lifting – is the opportunity to meet people I otherwise would have no business getting to know, and the lasting connections that develop.

Margaret Galloway Ford was one of those people.

I met Margaret in April 2002, having been sent her way by an editor wanting a story about Margaret and her granddaughter, Kristi Sadler, then 15, who had cleaned up at the Virginia Daffodil Society's annual show at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden the previous weekend, winning all kinds of ribbons and awards for their daffodils.

We made arrangements to meet at Margaret's home on a weekday afternoon. Now, you probably don't want to take your child to cover a planning commission meeting, but since this interview involved a grandmother and a granddaughter talking about growing flowers – and I was a running a little short on child-care that afternoon – I figured, why not? So my 5-year-old son, Jack, accompanied me. Turned out to be, if not a life-changing moment, then surely a life-enhancing one.

As I recall, we sat at the dining room table and listened as Margaret and Kristi told us about daffodils and good soil, but mostly about their relationship and how raising flowers had brought them closer and was so much fun.

Margaret laughed as she recalled growing up in Lakeside, across from the former Hermitage Country Club (now Belmont Golf Course) where her father, Tommy Galloway, was the golf pro, and how her mother used to make her weed the garden.

"It was the most boring thing in the world," Margaret told us. "I said I would never have a garden."

Decades later? "I hope my mother knows how much I enjoy it now," she said. Through it all, Jack sat there quietly enthralled, which was quite a good thing since he usually didn't mind offering his opinion on a wide variety of topics at preschool, where he was once asked to refrain from bringing his beloved

stuffed cat, Kitty, to class because Kitty had been disruptive by “talking too much.” Kitty, you might have deduced, sounded a lot like Jack.

After the interview, Margaret and Kristi gave us a tour of the yard, showing us different varieties of daffodils. Their enthusiasm was contagious. Jack took it all in, asked questions, was exceedingly polite and seemed like a gardener-to-be, which he really was since he always enjoyed visiting his grandmother in Norfolk who had a genuine green thumb and had a backyard that was pretty much a pick-your-own farm in miniature.

This was also during his phase of being infatuated with tractors and farm machinery in general. At the end of many days, his pockets were filled with what he called “nature”: pine straw, pine cones, hickory nuts, long blades of grass and peculiar weeds that looked like beautiful flowers to a little boy. He also had started saving coins in his piggybank so he could, as he put it, “buy land.”

In the ensuing 17 years, Jack has developed many other interests, and he has moved on from toy tractors, but not daffodils. That’s because of Margaret Ford. We didn’t realize this at the beginning, but Margaret possessed an unmatched enthusiasm in her effort to excite younger generations about growing daffodils. She wanted them to love it as much as she did. She enjoyed working with school groups and Girl Scouts, introducing them to a passion she didn’t know she had until a decade before we met.

Her story went like this: she was helping her garden club provide coffee for the area’s first big daffodil show and, on a whim, she plucked a pretty daffodil out of her yard and entered it in the contest. She left the flower show and thought nothing more of it – until she got a call later in the afternoon informing her she had won “best in show.”

“Isn’t that a miracle?” she said.

Some weeks after our visit with Margaret and Kristi in 2002, a letter arrived in the mail for Jack: Margaret had given him a membership in the Virginia Daffodil Society.

That fall, we planted a few new daffodil bulbs – some of which I’m pretty sure came from Margaret -- and combined with those we already had from his

Norfolk grandmother, Jack was off and running. The next spring, he entered flowers in the show at the botanical garden, and won a red ribbon. Second place. He was overjoyed.

Jack became a regular at the show, where we'd see Margaret and her husband, Skip, who also was a daffodil man. Over the years, Margaret and Skip would share bulbs and books about daffodils with Jack and always encourage him to keep growing. In one of the books, she included a sticky note pointing out a photograph of the variety that earned them their first "best in show:" a Redhill, an ivory-white flower with a red-orange cup. The book with its sticky note is still on Jack's book shelf.

So, Margaret was thrilled, more than a dozen years after they first met, when Jack informed her that he had written one of the essays for his college application about growing daffodils and what it meant to him. Even when he went off to college in the Northeast, he would hop a train home so he could be here for the weekend of the daffodil show. He enjoyed winning ribbons, but he liked seeing Margaret more.

Margaret Ford died last week. She was 86. She lived a full life with the love of family and friends. She had interests beyond growing daffodils, but pretty much everything she did seemed to involve making other people's lives as happy and as full as hers.

This year's early daffodils are just beginning to poke their green leaves through the cold soil. No doubt whenever the trumpet-like flowers bloom in all of their glory this spring -- and every spring to come -- we will think of Margaret. Skip called the other day to pass along a message from Margaret: She wanted us to know how proud she was of Jack and how grateful she was for having known him.

That feeling goes both ways.