

MURRAY EVANS

1912-1988

Murray Evans, daffodil hybridizer and grower, died at his home in Corbett, Oregon, on November 8, 1988. He succumbed after a five year bout with cancer, which wracked his body but never conquered his spirit. He will truly be missed by those who knew him including many in the daffodil world.

Murray was born on Christmas Day, 1912, in Corbett, Oregon. He spent his entire life in Corbett except for four years in World War II when he served in the Army as a machinist in Oklahoma. His future wife, Estella Davis, also grew up in Corbett and he married her in 1934 in the middle of the Depression. One of his first jobs was working in the family daffodil bulb business for his grandfather and uncles. Stella and Murray dug volunteer bulbs in preparation for starting their own business, and by the time Murray went into the Army they had three acres of their own bulbs.

Following the war, the Evans bought their farm and began to build their new house. However, times were difficult financially for the bulb and cut flower markets. The bulb market was depressed because the embargo on Dutch bulbs was lifted after the War and Dutch bulbs cost much less. The Evans then sold timber from the part of their property not under cultivation.

At this time Murray had an offer to attend, under a VA program, a nurseryman's school at night. This school changed the direction of the rest of his life. As part of the school program, a trip was made to Grant

Mitsch's bulb farm in Canby. Murray became interested in hybridizing and was encouraged in this by Grant Mitsch who generously gave advice.

From Grant Mitsch he also obtained some bulbs and unbloomed seedlings. From these and commercial bulbs Murray started his own hybridizing, and soon joined the newly formed American Daffodil Society. Through the society, he met Bill Pannill and Harry Tuggle, who began to send their seeds to Murray to grow in the favorable Oregon climate. With time the relationship grew and both men were frequent visitors to the farm on Mannthey Road. As Murray's own hybrids bloomed and their merit became apparent, Bill and Harry both encouraged Murray to offer his bulbs for sale to the daffodil community at large.



Murray Evans with his daffodils.

Though the Evans were creating beautiful daffodils for the future, these years were lean financially and Stella had to work for a while at the local supermarket to augment the family income. Conditions began to slowly improve as Murray's seedlings received increased world-wide attention, and soon Murray concentrated on selling only his own and Bill Pannill's hybrids.

By 1975, Murray retired (at least from his other jobs) at age 62 and concentrated on his daffodil hybridizing which, by then, was thriving. One of his first successes was Celilo, a 1 W-W, named after a falls on the Columbia River now submerged behind a dam. Many of the well-known Evans' hybrids are named after Oregon localities, such as Wahkeena and Oneonta which are two falls in the Columbia Gorge just a few miles from the Evans' home.

Cancer struck Murray in 1983. He had several operations, but a year and a half ago it returned and spread through his body quickly. Though often tired he remained cheerful and outgoing until he died.

The American Daffodil Society and many of its members brought warmth and praise to Murray and Stella Evans' lives over the last fifteen years. At the 1984 ADS Convention in Portland, Murray and Grant Mitsch were honored for their outstanding work in creating daffodil hybrids. At that convention, Murray and Stella were presented with a framed painting by Gene Bauer of some of the best of Murray's hybrids

and the spaces between filled with the names of others. Since then, the painting has been proudly displayed in the Evans' living room.

Every spring has brought a procession of visitors from near and far to Corbett. Father Athanasius Buchholz from nearby Mount Angel Abbey was a very good friend. Bill Pannill and his wife Kit have visited regularly. Visitors have also come from Australia, Tasmania, England, Ireland, and Holland as well as all over the USA.

Murray is survived by his wife, Estella, a sister, Katherine Rix of Portland, and a brother, Everett Evans of Portland. A nephew, Ronald Evans, with his wife Sandra, and a niece, Diane Tribe, and her husband Bill, are carrying on the daffodil business. All live near the Evans' farm in Corbett.

On a personal note, I had only known Murray for four years, but had really enjoyed walking through his fields and talking to him about daffodils, how he named them, and other subjects that came to mind. He was always cheerful, even when he talked about his health. His view of life, I think, is most clearly reflected in the following excerpt from his journal, which included commentary on business, weather, and, of course, daffodils. The excerpt is from 1959.

"While I never really relished growing older, the prospects of viewing our new seedlings, plus a number of normal varieties to date, almost makes one feel he is being re-born rather than growing a year older. How wonderful it would be if everyone had as much to look forward to with each passing year."