

Heroes

By Kenneth Durio, Jr.

All kids have heroes — someone to look up to, someone to emulate, someone to be like! It may be Superman or General Patton or John Wayne or Ronald Reagan. As we grow older some of us still have heroes. So it was for me!

When we first joined the American Magnolia Society we were not so young in years but were really “youngsters” as far as accumulated magnolia knowledge was concerned. Magnolia journals didn’t come too often in those days, but they were read and re-read from cover to cover. We read of magnolias that we had never heard of. We especially enjoyed articles by Joe McDaniel, Phil Savage, Todd Gresham and Jack Fogg. These were men who knew what they were talking about. We never imagined that we would some day meet and become friends with most of these men but they became our heroes.

One fall day we got a call from a fellow named Joe McDaniel who was visiting Gloster Arboretum in Gloster, Mississippi, and wanted to take the train to Opelousas to visit us. We were naturally thrilled but we were certainly unaware of the impact that this kind, knowledgeable and outgoing man would make on our lives.

Joe immediately went around the garden and identified various magnolias for us. He had his grafting equipment and some scion wood and was soon climbing trees to make grafts. He walked around and correctly identified mislabeled and misspelled plants in the nursery. All of you who knew Joe well know how much he enjoyed correcting letters, books, papers, catalogs or anything else that needed correcting. After being exposed to Joe for a couple of days, Belle, our children and I all became magnolia nuts for life.

We finally got to go to a national

A.M.S. Meeting in St. Louis in 1979. Here we met Jack Fogg and Phil Savage for the first time. The marvelous sense of humor and great knowledge that was evident in Phil’s articles was even more obvious in person. Jack Fogg proved to be the elder statesman of the Magnolia Society that we had expected.

We never did get to meet Todd Gresham and we regret this because we know that we would have benefited by doing so. The A.M.S. is indeed lucky to have had such men to visualize, create and guide our society.

Three of our heroes are gone now! Thank goodness we still have Phil to share his extensive magnolia knowledge with us. His hybridizing achievements are many and these will make a tremendous impact as the trees mature and become better known.

We found other heroes as we became better acquainted with the A.M.S. membership. Frank and Sara Gladney, Carl Amason, John Giordano and Joe Hickman have all encouraged us and increased our love and knowledge of magnolias and other plants. Ed and Jerry Hetzer and the wonderful Gossler family have surely helped everyone in the A.M.S. Karl Flinck, Sir Peter Smithers and Carl Ferris Miller do more than their part to help our group even though they are “foreign” members. People like Ginnie Melnick, Perry Narten, Dean McCoy, Bon Hartline, Tom Dodd, Bill Dodd and Phil Seitner have all been mainstays in the society.

Our society is extremely lucky to have several outstanding young men who are becoming progressively active in the society. Our new associate editor and vice president, Dick Figlar, certainly qualifies here. Our seed counter chairman, Dennis Ledvina, our slide custodian, Larry Langford, our registrar, Peter Del Tredici, and our secretary, Chuck Tubesing, all do terrific jobs for the A.M.S. And we certainly cannot overlook our wonderful women members such as Lola Koerting and Mary Nell