

Min Pyong-Gal (Carl Ferris Miller)

December 24 1921—April 8 2002

Although I had heard a lot about Carl Miller, as he was called then, from Harold and Barbara Hillier, who had him to stay at Jermyns House and who had also stayed with him in Korea after their tour in Japan, it was not until 1968 that I first met him. I was attending a tour of the Devon and Cornish gardens organized by Lady Anne Berry for the International Dendrology Society (IDS). It was his first tour too and we very quickly struck up a friendship, which was to last until his death earlier this year.

The next IDS tour, the following year, was to be in Japan and I was very excited at the prospect, as I dearly wanted to see *Camellia japonica* growing in the wild. Ferris told me that I was quite wrong, as the biggest camellias grew in Korea! I took this with a pinch of salt, but he stuck to his guns and invited me to come to Korea after the Japanese tour to prove his point. The Japanese tour was superb and I really felt an anticlimax on the airplane before arriving at Kimpo airport in Seoul. I need not have worried as I was immediately captivated by the country, the people, and, of course, the Camellias, which really were as huge as he had said! Ferris, as I now knew him, was the perfect host and I stayed with him at his house in Seoul and at Chollipo. His son, Yonsu, had just finished at University and showed me around Seoul while Ferris was at work at the bank. Later in the week, we drove down to Chollipo, arriving in the dark, to a wonderful dinner cooked by Ferris' ajumoni, who kept house for him until he died. The next morning we toured the arboretum in its beautiful setting on the Yellow Sea.

Ferris had a capacity of spotting very bright young Koreans to work in the Arboretum and it was very refreshing to be among these cheerful and very polite young Koreans with a thirst for knowledge that knows no bounds. Korea has changed dramatically since those days, but I was hooked and I have returned many



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Chollipo Arboretum, 1995. From left to right: Song Kihun, Min Pyong-Gal (Ferris Miller), John Gallagher, Sunsuk, and the Chollipo ajamoni.



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Wisley Gardens, Surrey England, 2001. From left to right: Kim Chyngun, Min Pyong-Gal, John Gallaher, Yi Kyu-Hyon.

times since then and have tried to encourage many of the students at the arboretum to gain further experience both in the States and here in England, which I hope has been very beneficial to Chollipo and has also given me some wonderful friends.

Ferris, Yi Kyu-Hyon, who was his secretary, and I traveled together quite extensively over the years and we visited his late mother many times and his aunt and, of course, his sister and brother and their families.

He was born on the 24TH of December 1921 in West Pittston where he graduated from high school in 1939. He then graduated at Wilkes University in 1941 and was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Bucknell University, Lewisburg in 1943. After Japanese language classes at the University of Colorado, the US Navy commissioned him to interrogate prisoners of war in Okinawa, Japan during World War II. At the end of the war, he was sent to Korea and participated in the surrender of the Japanese Army. His Naval service ended in 1946 and he returned to Korea in 1947, making it his permanent home and later even becoming a Korean citizen, which was none too popular with the American authorities! Before retiring he was employed by the Bank of Korea for thirty years, serving as assistant to the United Nations advisor. He was also employed as a consultant director by several investment companies.

In the course of taking his holidays at Mollipo, a seaside resort on the Yellow Sea, a fellow bridge player suggested he buy some land



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Birr Castle, Tour of Irish Gardens, April 2001. From Left to right, Earl of Rosse, Dennis Jones, Min Pyong-Gal.

that was for sale further up the coast at Chollipo. This purchase led to what is now known as the Chollipo Arboretum Foundation, a privately funded arboretum of 180 acres and an island of 12 acres, known world wide for its 9,000 plus varieties of plants. Extremely energetic and enthusiastic, he collected native plants and imported vast numbers of plants from abroad. He published an Index Seminum for many years, which in turn resulted in masses of seed being sent to him from all over the world. Many arboreta and gardens owe their specimens of Korean plants to his generosity.

At first, his main love was hollies and he built up a huge collection of species and cultivars, which grow very well at Chollipo. On the southwest coast of Korea, Ferris spotted a potted plant which had been dug up from the wild in the village of Wando. This turned out to be a naturally occurring putative hybrid of *Ilex cornuta* \times *Ilex integra*. The hybrids are variable and he visited Wando and Chindo Islands collecting seed and cuttings, which are well represented in the holly collection at Chollipo. As a board member of the American Holly Society, he organized for members several visits to Korea and Chollipo.

I don't know when he really got keen on magnolias, but certainly his interest was really stimulated after a gift of Gresham hybrids from the late John Allen Smith, another great plantsman from Mobile, Alabama. After that, every magnolia was sought after and, to date, Chollipo has one of the finest collections in Asia. The climate is so suitable, as after March there is never a frost. Until then, the plants are completely dormant during the winter. Many seedlings have been grown and to date four have been named:

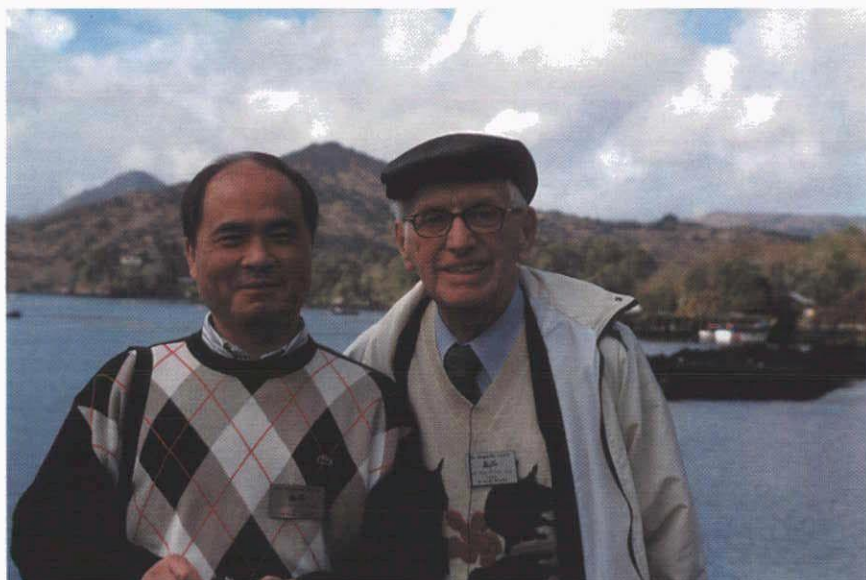
- *M. sieboldii* 'Ferris Miller,' is a wild-collected seedling of *M. sieboldii* with pink tips to the tepals.
- *M.* 'Raspberry Fun,' a seedling of *M.* \times *loebeneri* 'Leonard Messel,' with extra tepals and a darker color.
- *M.* 'Yellow Sea,' a *M. acuminata* \times *M. denudata* cross, which actually overlooks the Yellow Sea!

- *M. denudata* × *M. sprengeri* 'Diva,' a very beautiful seedling given to Ferris by Karl Flinck. This plant has grown into a very handsome tree and was named *M.* 'Strawberries and Cream' just before he died.

For many years, Ferris was a very active member of the Board of Directors for the Magnolia Society. He was very interested that the Society should be international in the true sense of the word. He arranged a very successful tour of Korea, which was very well supported by young members of the Society, which is quite unusual these days. He attended practically all of the Magnolia Society meetings and supported the first foreign tour of Devon and Cornwall and the joint IDS and Magnolia Society Conference at Windsor in April 1996. His final tour, when he was very ill, was in Southern Ireland, organized by Jim Gardiner April 2001. He stayed with me before we set off and I must admit that when we arrived at Dublin airport, I wondered however we would cope. Typically, his strength of will took over and he did the whole tour and enjoyed every minute of it, never complaining about his illness.

Weekends at Chollipo were always an event. With his business and horticultural contacts, you were never sure who would be there! After spending the day in the arboretum, as dusk fell drinks were served on the verandah of one of the beautiful old Korean houses he had rescued from Seoul and rebuilt at the Arboretum. Watching the sun go down, dark orange over the Yellow Sea, was unforgettable. There followed dinner served in the Meeting House and a wealth of conversation of truly international flavor before we all wandered off into the dark to our beds.

One particular evening stands out in my memory. A very eminent American professor who was a world authority on Asian affairs, was seated beside Ferris armed with sheaves of paper and a clipboard. She was determined to interview Ferris for the story of his life and we were quite sure that nothing was further from Ferris' mind. Unfortunately she forgot the Korean custom of drinking soju, (Korean gin) from small cups, with each cup being refilled as soon as it was emptied from a "teapot," being passed round the table. For some reason the



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Magnolia Tour of Irish Gardens, 2001. Min Pyong-Gal with Yi Kyu-Hyon, who cared for Min Pyong-Gal until his death.

teapot, started to circulate at a very fast rate. Impatiently, she gulped down her cup so that she could continue her interviewing, only to find it almost immediately refilled again. After a little while, we noticed her notes were well and truly off the page and she became remarkably silent for the rest of the evening! Ferris was completely oblivious to all this and was very surprised when she left very early next morning after thrusting two copies of her latest books into his hands and bidding him a very firm "good bye!"

There are many other memories that come to mind. Ferris was a very good pianist and had a piano at Chollipo. He was an expert on the popular songs of the 20s and 30s and when only a few of us were there, we would sing songs well into the night. One thing is certain, the world will be a little duller without those fun times, his keen sense of humor and interest in life. I will never forget his encouragement and the friendship we shared. He most certainly walked with kings, but never lost the common touch.

John T. Gallagher
15 August 2002