

**Gold has become a hot commodity on today's financial markets.** Investors have placed the yellow metal in their portfolios as a hedge against inflation and economic instability. Increased demand has led to skyrocketing prices over the past decade, so miners of all stripes are scouring the countryside searching for their ticket to fame and fortune. The bonanza has spawned two cable reality shows following enthusiastic upstarts chasing their dreams on land and sea in the treacherous Alaska wilderness. Gold exploration, however, is a high stakes game and failure, not success, is the usual outcome.

Reblooming iris breeding operates under a similar premise. Fall flowering is recessive; the trait can take generations to consistently show up in seedlings. Intention, instinct, courage and lots of patience are crucial qualities needed for long-term success. My mentor and friend, the late Dr. Lloyd "Doc" Zurbrigg had these gifts

plus a little luck. The gene pool however is still a limited one after 50 years of development by Zurbrigg and other major rebloom players. Has the genetic prowess of older releases been totally exhausted? Due to poor promotion and distribution, the answer in most cases is probably "no."

Lloyd Zurbrigg had the great fortune to meet and work with his mentor, the late Dr. Raymond Smith during his doctorate studies at Indiana University. Smith recognized the value of 'Gibson Girl' (J. Gibson, 1946) and he used the mulberry colored plicata as the foundation for his rebloom breeding program. 'Gibson Girl' offspring, 'Purple Duet' (R. Smith, 1965) and 'Replicata' (R. Smith, 1964) are behind Lloyd's 'I Do' (Zurbrigg, 1973). Likewise, 'Re-Treat' (R. Smith, 1976) with a similar lineage shows up in the background of 'Northward Ho' (Zurbrigg, 1991). Smith reblooming plicata genetics in subsequent Zurbrigg breeding lines would prove to be both a blessing and a curse. The remedies to cure shortcomings in future seedlings would take decades to discover.

'Gibson Girl' gave reliable fall flowering to its descendants. The downside was atrocious flower form, stalk height and branching. Non-remontant bearded iris breeding on the other hand already enjoyed decades of intense development to address these floral faults before the initial tall bearded reblooming introductions hit the iris marketplace. The comparison made rebloomers look second rate. The challenge for Zurbrigg and other remontant pollen daubers was to find parents with

improved flower form without sacrificing fall reliability in Eastern microclimates—easier said than done.

Progress was slow at first. As the gene pool expanded, advances started showing up in Doc's seedling rows. 'I Do' (Zurbrigg, 1974) was a major breakthrough; a white self with hints of green and violet on the standards, its flowers represented improvement in form. Rebloom credentials were solid, but bloomstalks averaged 32" or shorter. 'Brother Carl' (Zurbrigg, 1983), 'Immortality' (Zurbrigg, 1983) and 'Northward Ho' (Zurbrigg, 1991) have 'I Do' genes. Their availability set the stage for Lloyd's best breeding achievement and the next chapter in rebloom development.

## Rebloom's *Past* is Its *Future*

By Mike Lockatell, Virginia

Photo: M. Lockatell



'Northward Ho' (Zurbrigg, 1991)

The trick for Zurbrigg and his fellow remontant breeders was identifying a warm-season parent from the West Coast with modern flower form and rebloom tendencies to cross into their Eastern originations. 'Victoria Falls' (R. Schreiner, 1977) was a turning point. The eventual Dykes Medalist had the right stuff. Clarence Mahan, former AIS president, used the medium blue tall bearded as a pollen





parent with 'Violet Miracle' (Zurbrigg, 1979) to create 'Suky' (Mahan, 1991). Doc also incorporated the Schreiner iris into his own blue lines. 'Bethany Claire' (Zurbrigg, 1985) and 'Sugar Blues' (Zurbrigg, 1985) sprang from his initial 'Victoria Falls' cross pollinations, and recent investigation strongly indicates the latter played a vital role in the origination of 'Clarence' (Zurbrigg, 1991).

Zurbrigg registered and released 'Clarence' after considerable positive feedback from AIS Region 4 judges. The Wister Medalist features white standards tinted violet, while falls are light blue with a white center. Its unknown parentage has sparked considerable speculation. After his death in 2005, I acquired Lloyd's stud book to research his yearly cross pollinations. After observing Clarence offspring in my Central Virginia garden, I wrote a follow-up story to Dr. Donald Spoon's article entitled "The Great Clarence Mystery" (AIS *Bulletin*, April 1999) to report my findings and encourage its further breeding use.

Dr. Spoon, a fellow AIS Region 4 breeder from Winchester, VA, suggested 'I Do' as a major player in the pedigree of 'Clarence'. Stud book records indicate 'Brother Carl' (Sister Helen X I Do) was used heavily in Zurbrigg blue lines to retain rebloom reliability. In "The Great Clarence Mystery Revisited" published in the AIS *Bulletin*, April 2011, I found evidence that descendants of 'Victoria Falls' had a direct impact on Lloyd's signature iris. 'Sugar Blues' would contribute flower form plus consistent fall flowering to match 'Brother Carl'. Of Doc's 1986 crosses fitting the above scenario, HH 57 or ((Brother Carl X (Victoria Falls X (Grand Dame x Summer Holidays)) X ((Sugar Blues X (Summer Holidays x Sister Helen))) or the reverse cross HH 81 or 82 are sound possibilities. If offspring such as 'Daughter of Stars' (D. Spoon, 2001), 'Gate of Heaven' (Zurbrigg, 2004) and 'Just Call Me' (Wilkerson, 2008) are any indication, luminata-plicatas, blue selfs, and blue amoenas or neglectas are possible with wise parental selection.

'Matrix' (E. Hall by Zurbrigg, 1991) is another valuable 'Brother Carl' child. Used as pollen parent with 'Violet Miracle', the cream plicata has an excellent rebloom record. 'Matrix' proved to be an ideal parent to be combined with Mahan's 'Suky'. Some hybridizers may be turned off by its drab coloring, but its lineage offers some intriguing avenues to explore. Zurbrigg made a similar point in a memorial to Hall in the AIS *Bulletin*, January 2002 lauding "'Matrix', a pale cream plicata serves well as a foil to brighter colors; it has superb form and is an important parent."

Lloyd looked for other avenues to produce high-quality blue rebloomers. The (Matrix X Suky) pairing allowed my mentor to use a double dose of 'Violet Miracle' with 'Victoria Falls' and 'Brother Carl' to create 'Renown' (Zurbrigg, 1992). Like its pod parent 'Matrix', 'Renown' and its attractive flower form was overshadowed by its coloring. Oyster white flowers did not resonate with pollen daubers. Its true worth remains largely untapped. A seedling from a cross of 'Renown' and 'Mesmerizer' (Byers, 1991) or OO33 was a key ingredient in Doc's later quest for reliable space-age or blue-bearded white rebloomers. Due to health issues and limited growing space, neither goal was realized prior to his passing.

Sterling Innerst, a Dykes Medal-winning breeder from Pennsylvania found success using 'Renown' with 'Anxious' (Hager, 1992). The best from east and west resulted in 'Again and Again' (Innerst, 1999). The medium yellow tall bearded remontant was a top performer for me in 2012; two clumps planted at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (JSRCC) in Goochland, VA gave continuous rebloom under ideal conditions from late May until early November. Breeding potential for 'Again and Again' remains unknown.

Sterling tried reversed the cross that yielded 'Renown' to come up with 'Over and Over' (Innerst, 2001). A white with lavender plicata markings, the Eastern rebloomer hit





**Photos, left to right:**

'Lunar Whitewash' (Innerst, 2003)

'Over and Over' (Innerst, 2001)

'Renown' (Zurbrigg, 1992)

Locketell seedling 20526-358

Locketell seedling 20526-829

All photos: M. Locketell

the iris marketplace with little fanfare. Luckily, Innerst sent it as a guest for the 2003 AIS National Convention in Northern Virginia. The tour gardens for the event were evenly divided between Chesapeake & Potomac and Fredericksburg Area Iris Society members. Rosalie and Jack Loving from the FAIS group had a clump in bloom years later during an October visit to their King George, VA garden.

After acquiring 'Over and Over' from the Lovings, the unassuming tall bearded plicata was planted in my rebloom bed at Cosby Farm in Powhatan, VA. Summer and fall flowering have been outstanding with minimal care. Like 'Again and Again', two clumps were planted at JSRCC. They also bloomed nonstop from late May until early November. Summer rebloom was also recorded at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden in James City County, VA without supplemental watering. Considering the possible breeding value, its meager distribution shocks me.

Sterling's last successful tall bearded rebloom introduction was 'Lunar Whitewash' (Innerst, 2003). A pure white self with impeccable flower form, it resulted from a sibling cross involving 'Bonus Mama' (Hager, 1990) and 'Twice Delightful' (Innerst, 1989) seedlings. Warm-season rebloomer breeding paired with a double dose of 'I Do' genes produced a solid early-fall performer. Like 'Again and Again' and 'Over and Over', 'Lunar Whitewash' was a great find from the 2003 AIS National Convention. Hybridizers would be wise to investigate its worth.

'Northward Ho' has been a solid tall bearded rebloomer for 10 years at multiple Central Virginia garden locations. The pink-brown plicata sports a parentage of (English Cottage x unknown) X Re-Treat, but I believe the unknown to be 'I Do'.

During a spring 2000 visit to Lloyd's seedling garden in Durham, NC, I noticed a red-brown plicata. Fall petals were narrow, so its destiny was the compost pile. Lloyd allowed me to dig and plant the seedling for trial cross pollinations in my original Powhatan, VA garden. TT57

is (Tennison Ridge x Matrix) X ((Chuckles X (Northward Ho x Rock Star)). Used as a pollen parent with TT57, my goal was to find fall-flowering plicatas using 'Double Vision' (Ghio, 1999), which would try to unsuccessfully rebloom each winter. The combination produced BB 'Double Dare' (Locketell, 2009). My rich burgundy red fancy plicata rebloomer sadly flowered prior to Zurbrigg's last visit to my garden in October 2004.

'Double Vision', used as a pollen parent with 'Northward Ho', gave me many dazzling fancy plicata rebloomers including 20526-358 and 20526-829. Flower form was much improved, but bloomstalk height and branching were abysmal. A disappointment for sure, but 'Northward Ho' still remains an exciting option for improved plicata remontants.

A major silver lining from witnessing continuous rebloom under ideal conditions at JSRCC was data collection. The regular occurrence of night temperature triggers below 60 °F in May and June plus abundant moisture helped identify the absolute best tall bearded rebloomers currently available. The lesson to be learned from 2012 results was warm and cool season remontants must be carefully positioned on both sides of future cross pollinations for maximum results. Color range, flower form, bloomstalk quality and rebloom reliability will continue to improve for breeders using this philosophy.

'Clarence', 'Matrix', 'Northward Ho', 'Renown' and 'Suky' are now 20 years old. Their ultimate worth is still unrealized. Sterling Innerst rebloom introductions with similar genetics suffer a similar fate. Mining for gold requires an immense leap of faith to hit pay dirt. Are the old time favorites mentioned in this article still "diamonds in the rough" for enterprising hybridizers or a bunch of dead ends? Pollen daubers are best advised to explore rebloom's past to achieve its future. ❀

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