

President's Letter

John Brown — Cleveland, South Carolina



"I noticed a shortage of drooling towels." That simple declarative sentence, uttered during the national membership meeting, could well have broken up the show. Note, as you re-read her words, that they could have been taken in any number of ways. Ribald humor, direct criticism, or veiled compliments; the list goes on.

I visualized the late Harvey Herschel Korman offering his stack of starched, ironed linens saying: "Drooling towel, Sir? A towel for your chin, Madam?" But, I digress. As it was, a number of things combined to let it become one of the most profound, yet un-remarked statements of the convention.

My poor hearing, and the fact that money cannot buy hearing aids capable of overcoming crowd noise, resulted in the fact that I heard only a mumble from an important area, so I was spared the need to directly reply to the statement. I think I muttered something about "my tender age" and "not going there," which avoided any direct (and undoubtedly insufficient) reply. Fortunately, it got a laugh, and we passed on to other topics.

The speaker's family—husband, daughter, and son-in-law—were all sitting close enough to hear the remark. Most of the 140 some odd attendees were astounded that the reticent, retiring, kindly, giving, wonderful person would speak in front of the entire ASA membership represented at the meeting. Much less, that she would give us such a compelling remark. They all sat, mouths agape, as she repeated her statement, trying to get her point across.

It was the next morning, at breakfast, that I found out what she actually said. Fortune protects the innocent, because I was not given the opportunity during the meeting to mess up such a remarkable remark.

Frances Louer does not do things by accident, without thought, or on the fly. We were the beneficiaries. While parsing sentences is not one of my strong points, this one needs attention. In seven words, she declared the gardens were superb (although a tad early by all accounts), and the convention atmosphere was such that she was comfortable making such a risky statement in front of a large crowd.

Coming from Frances, that is praise enough. Those seven words expressed her feelings so well that some 140 odd people (a record attendance) became, for a few minutes, a small, close-knit group of friends, sharing a common experience. Thank you, Frances, for being there and sharing your thoughts with us.

Please understand that those precious moments do not proclaim a perfect convention by any means. We had room for improvement and will be working on the issues; many caused by the writer, personally. We will share our experiences with the hosts of the upcoming conventions in the surety that we will have even better gatherings in future years. It is this attitude that makes our Society such a strong entity with the knowledge and experience to weather the shortfall, and to plan for a better future.

I am looking forward to seeing even more of you at our next conventions.

The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (*Ericaceae*).

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Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of \$25; life-membership for one or two persons at the same address is \$500. Members receive *The Azalean* and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society including those of the chapter with which the member affiliates. For information and a membership application, write to Carol Flowers, Secretary, 700 New Hampshire NW, Apt. 1011, Washington, DC 20037 or visit www.azaleas.org.