

In Remembrance—Rosalie Nachman

By Richard Bauer with significant contributions by William Bedwell and Dr. Sandra McDonald

The azalea and rhododendron communities lost a major contributor on 4 October 2015, when Rosalie Nachman passed away in Richmond, Virginia.

Rosalie was a significant force in the field of rhododendrons and azaleas. I first met her when we both spoke at the 2009 ASA Convention in Herndon. Rosalie had been invited to speak due to her vast knowledge and background in azaleas. I had a very limited background in azaleas and had been “invited” due to a scheduled speaker bowing out at the last minute because of health problems. As part of my talk, I apologized for butchering the names of several Japanese varieties of azaleas. At the end of my presentation, Rosalie came up to me and assured me I pronounced them perfectly. I’m sure she was just being gracious, but that memory stuck with me.

I later remember visiting her home and garden in Richmond during a Richmond Garden Tour sponsored by the Northern Virginia Chapter, ASA. She took us through a tour of her home, showing us beautiful artwork which she had collected during her extensive travels. I was impressed by her large kitchen which was designed with an area set up solely for creating her flower arrangements; Ikebana was a major passion of hers that combined all of her interests.

Rosalie first became interested in azaleas when seeing a white one with red stripes, while visiting Japan with her father. Rosalie had a Fine Arts degree that enhanced her keen appreciation of colors and design. Eventually she created her own magnificent garden of azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, and many other plants, incorporating some elements of Japanese design and authentic Japanese garden lanterns that she bought in Japan. She developed amazing skill in pruning to keep so many different plants in scale over the years with no evidence of pruning. No gumdrop, or meatball, azaleas for her. She said there was no such thing as color clashes in nature and she proved it. For example, she liked mixing red and purple azaleas, which while an unusual combination for many, worked when composed by Rosalie. Bill Bedwell remembers her garden as “everything looking natural and in harmony.” Sandra McDonald recalls it “looking almost like a painting.”



▲ David Sauer and Rosalie Nachman in April 2007.

Bill told me of an evening when he, along with ASA members Debby and David Sauer, were invited to dinner by Rosalie and Larry Nachman. David and Rosalie started telling stories of growing up in Richmond and Rosalie later treated them to an entertaining and informative slide show talk on a trip she and Larry had made to India. It was an evening to remember.

Rosalie was a very giving person, freely sharing cuttings, plants and slips from her garden. One time Bill was visiting her garden during one of the meeting tours and admired one of her plants. Out of nowhere, Rosalie produced a trowel and plastic bag, dug it up, and gave it to him. When he protested she stated that the neighboring plants were sighing in relief because they now had room to spread out!

Both a founding member of the Richmond Chapter of the ASA (and later an at-large member) and a longtime member of the Middle Atlantic Chapter (MAC) of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), Rosalie contributed much to both organizations. Bill Bedwell, also an early member of the Richmond Chapter and longtime MAC member has vivid memories of meeting with Rosalie, Nancy Sewell, and a group of ASA officials in the fall of 1981 on what would become the first joint convention of the ASA and ARS in Richmond in the spring of 1982.

Rosalie was also a contributor to *The Azalean* (articles in 1984, 1991 and 1994) and the *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society* (JARS). She was proud that one of her color photos had appeared on the cover of JARS. Don Hager named an azalea ‘Rosalie Nachman’. She served on the Boards of Directors for both MAC and the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. For her contributions, she was honored with the ARS Bronze Medal.

Rick Bauer is co-chairman, with Don Hyatt, of the ASA/ARS national convention in Williamsburg, Virginia, and environs April 20-24, 2016.

