

Oscie Whatley Retrospective

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(This is an edited version, updated and illustrated a day later, of a post to the AHS e-mail Robin on December 31, 2006)

When I moved to St Louis in 1995 I made a point of looking up Oscie Whatley, who I knew only by name and reputation, and we became good friends. He made sure I had a starter collection of his things, even though my garden at the time was a narrow strip next to the fence in the back yard of the house I shared with a retired railroad caterer. My wife joined me a year later and we created a proper, though small, city garden.

Oscie often said that he didn't pay much attention to branching or bud count. If he had lived decades longer, who knows? He was primarily interested in plant vitality, color, size, and genetic breakthroughs that came from converting the best diploids. I know he wanted to jump on the gold edge bandwagon, but in the 90s, when he understood himself to be near the top of the waiting list for a breakthrough edged daylily, he was shocked when he found a miniscule plant in the shipping box. He told me he understood instantly that this failure to send him a blooming-size plant guaranteed a two-year setback in his ability to work with gold edges. It would be ten years or so before he would rekindle his interest in gold-edged whites, using a bud someone sent him from J.T. DAVIS.

He loathed the greedy attitude that drove some other hybridizers to "screw the customer." Greed was not a part of his makeup. He had been raised a generous man by a generous mother. He told me a story of one garden visit in which he indicated which plant he wanted to buy. The hybridizer dug the plant, said "excuse me," and returned from the work shed with a paper bag. Oscie looked inside and saw not the plant he had seen dug, but the smallest side shoot from that plant. He handed the bag back and said, "no sale."

Oscie considered Orville Fay and Robert Griesbach his guides, but locally there was William Dill, a nurseryman who himself won a Stout Medal, and who handled the introductions of Doc Branch in the 1960s, and Earl Rexroad, who made annual trips to the Gilbert Wild seedling fields in Sarcoxie, Missouri, plucking buds to bring back and share with Oscie. One of those buds was from a big symmetrical yellow Wild seedling that Oscie combined with SOLO, a Branch daylily that he'd obtained from Will Dill. This cross yielded JAKARTA, Oscie's second registration and his express ticket to fame. Eight years later he brought out YUMA, still useful in hybridizing for its fringe. He didn't introduce fringe, though. It was already there. He brought it out in a very useful tetraploid form.

In the ten years we were friends, I saw and grew a lot of his creations, and we had many opportunities to discuss them. Despite this long exposure, I don't regard myself as an authority on his work. He had a lot more friendships of longer duration, with a lot of people who are better evaluators of plant performance than I am.

I decided to write down my experience according to the color of the flowers. All the photographs are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Red



MOHICAN CHIEF is the one he tried for years to surpass. He thought it the best red for our Midwestern summers. Totally sunfast and mocking of rain. Fertile either way. In breeding he found it nigh impossible to get offspring that looked anything other than the spitting image of the parent. I saw one such offspring in his garden last summer, and mistook it for MOHICAN CHIEF until I realized that it had better branching and the buds opened differently. I don't know if the unlabeled plant I noticed was Oscie's FRED BIRD because he never sent me a picture of it and I never saw it in a garden, so it is labeled a "Mohican Chief seedling" in the Whatley garden at present. (Pictured below)





TOP OF THE MORNING was his favorite recent red, top-budded, but with no floral collision. I saw it last summer in his garden. It's a very clear, bright red with big size, EMO, and it gladdened his heart during the worst of times. This one is out of Tet. DENA MARIE. There are other numbered seedlings out of that parent.



BEAR CLAWS will draw a lot of raves for the gold teeth and large size. Since I didn't go for gold teeth on red daylilies I passed up his offer of BEAR CLAWS, twice.

BRAVE ONE is a pony sized sunfast red that increases well. It's a delightful garden plant and an easy breeder.

RED CANDY is a pony out of Tet. SILOAM APPLE BLOSSOM. It's cuter than a bug's ear, in my opinion. Bright, clear, round, ruffled, front-of-border material.



He brought out a lot of reds. CRITICAL MASS is a child of BEAR CLAWS with fewer gold do-dads on the edge and a rather strange shade of red, but with good branching. My picture is in Eureka 2007. I grow it and MOHICAN CHIEF.

His earlier reds out of Tet. CHRISTMAS IS, such as SLIGO and THREE DIAMONDS are also quality reds worth growing.



There are also some tomato reds such as MEXICAN SUNRISE (above) and MEXICAN ART. I photographed MEXICAN SUNRISE for Eureka 2007. It's very showy.



There's a numbered seedling out of STARTLE in the Whatley garden that I think will have to come to market some day.

Melon



FEMME OSAGE is a big, bright melon with a showy array of citrus colors in the throat.

ALVIN LEBEGUE MEMORIAL is a very ruffled, smooth-textured melon that he was quite proud of. I recall it as front-of-border material.

ITALIA sold out, he thought, on name alone. (No picture)



FUSION was Oscie's workhorse lately. It's a reliable cold weather opener, sort of a melon pink blend, out of Tet. CHUBBY LAD with pollen from one of his huge rose pinks, ROSA GRANDE. Humidity enhances the melon tones, as in the portrait above. Otherwise, it can appear more creamy, as in the portrait below.



In my opinion, FUSION tends to suppress ruffling, though in some cases a ruffled mate wins the day. In 2004, Oscie gave me some numbered seedlings which showed little or no ruffling, from FUSION X "Cindy Grace," with advice to sib cross them. I believe "Cindy Grace" was released by Frank Smith as MOMENT IN THE SUN. Somehow, Oscie obtained pollen from that. He considered that one of his triumphs of stealth bargaining on the phone.

Oscie also gave me two seedlings from FUSION X TET. MARY JANE CARPENTER, pictured below.



TARTA is a unique silvery melon pink with very rounded petals and a habit of not opening completely flat. It is a good grower and is easily pod fertile. When taken to more disciplined flowers such as AMERICA'S MOST WANTED, the result is an updated and improved Tarta with some of the ruffling of the other mate. Although registered with FUSION as the pollen parent, Oscie's notebook shows he reconsidered that and believed AGE OF INNOCENCE is the pollen parent, which makes a lot more sense when considering the way TARTA opens normally. Here is TARTA:



Here are some of my TARTA kids:



Best Kept Secret x Tarta



Tarta x Betty Warren Woods



Tarta x America's Most Wanted



Scarlet Orbit x Tarta

Orange



PERSIMMON PUNCH is a child of FEMME OSAGE and has the same citrus throat. It's a very hefty plant and flower, bright and showy, with easy fertility. My Nikon Coolpix 995 goosed the color in the picture, but I've desaturated it by 10 points to get close to reality.



DELIBERATE PACE was one of his favorite recent ones. He advised me to take it to all colors. It's a real dazzle, large size, vibrant color. Pictures can't do justice to its garden impact.



CALL OF UNIQUENESS is one of his last registrations and may only be available from Marietta Gardens, which received most of the stock of his 2003 registrations for propagation and initial marketing. My photo of it is in Eureka 2007. It's a knockout flower in the

garden. Large size, unique color, rather low bud count, but clearly something crying out for registration. I wish I grew it.



MAPLE HUES is an ornery opener with such distinctively vibrant color that registering it was a no brainer. Color gets nuclear here in the heat and humidity. Wonderful landscape daylily for the carrying power. Crossing it with “behaved” openers can result in very fine seedlings. Here is a bridge plant from MAPLE HUES X WYOMING WILDFIRE:





FIRE BURST is totally dazzling, golden yellow with flashes of red.



AT SUNSET was a big hit at the 2004 national convention. It's a wonderful specimen, one of the first he showed me with I met him in 1995.

PERFIDIA (no picture) is a large, tangy orange with a citrus blend in the throat from PERSIMMON PUNCH. I love this one and still grow it.



LITTLE BRASS BAND is a 4.5" bright orange one from his 1990s work, released in 2003.

Pink



PINK FANFARE is a large, very clear rose pink with maybe 18 buds but with color that gets better as the heat of the day mounts. Difficult pod parent but quite a breeder of whites.



JULIETTE WHATLEY MEMORIAL is a huge child of PINK FANFARE that had good multi-region performance. Impeccable foliage on this one and on its kids, but modest bud count. Because of the PINK FANFARE legacy, JWM will throw a lot of whites, too. The pink in my photo is unrealistic due to an imbalance in the Nikon Coolpix 995. Actual color is much like my PINK FANFARE image above, taken with a Nikon D 50.

ADJURE is a big rose daylily, stately, wonderful. (No picture) Oscie said it did not breed “keepers,” but there are other opinions on that.



ROSE IMPACT is probably my favorite Whatley pink. There's nothing else like it and everyone should try it. It is fertile either way and usually imparts nice rounding to the flower segments. Although only a 4 1/2” flower, it will yield large offspring. Oscie disliked veining in daylily flowers and was not sure this should be registered. I urged him to do so; I'd fallen in love at first sight.

FRENCH LICK (home town of the basketball player, Larry Bird) was a unique shade of lavender pink. He kept a lot of stock of it at his home, though I have never grown it. It's not the only joking name he used, but as far as I know, it's the only name that could be innocent and not innocent at the same time.

POLAR ICE, which he thought he'd registered as PINK POLAR ICE, is a branched ice rose, ruffled beauty out of Tet. NEAL BERREY. (No picture)



TIPPECANOE is his clearest pink. It's an unassuming daylily with rapid increase. I think it probably does best with a bit of shade. One Saturday morning on a whim, as I was eating breakfast, I began to jot down possible floral names to show Oscie when I saw him later that morning. When he saw my list he was astonished. "What's this???" I said, "It's a present for you; couldn't help myself." He looked down the list and laughed. I'd included a few absolute shockers. "Well, I don't think I'd get away with a name like this!" "I don't either, but it's good to know such a thing can come to mind, isn't it?" My list included "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," "Deliberate Speed," "Perfidia," "Say Good Morning," and many others. It meant a lot to me when he used some of those names. He thought the choice of a name was nothing to take lightly, but he'd sure done that with FRENCH LICK.



TYLER TOO came out with TIPPECANOE. It will occasionally set pods.



REVELLING is a later addition to this list and it was his pride and joy in the last years of his life. It's a linebacker of a daylily, making a big impression.



GREAT EXPRESSION was one of his 1990s glories, and I just bought my first plant of it last year from Van Sellers.



VOLVER is an exceptionally good plant and flower. It is an orange-shaded shell pink with a faint purple eye inherited from Tet. WILL RETURN. Totally consistent in all ways, and fairly easily pod fertile. It makes a stately impression in the garden and turns heads.



PINK ABERRATION is a distinctive, eye-catching surprise from breeding with Tet. RED STEP AHEAD. Oscie registered it in 2003. I haven't grown it, but took this picture in the Whatley garden in 2006.

Lavender and blue



SOARING is a wonderful, huge strawberry lavender with a darker eye. I recommend it highly.



BEVERLY'S BABY, a child of Spalding's NIECE BEVERLY, found unlabeled in the Whatley garden in 2006. Note the excellent throat color.



HORIZON LIGHT is an ultra-pale lavender, just like the name.



Photo by Oscie Whatley in his garden.

THRESHOLD TO BLUE was his secret weapon in the final years. It was out of his conversion of COME SEE. It is variable in the way it looks, but one day last summer I saw a flower on a plant he had personally marked as THRESHOLD TO BLUE in the summer he died, and it was the bluest lavender I've ever seen. Other days there's violet in the lavender. Possibly he misidentified that plant that I saw. This is one that was "lost" in the garden in 2004 and it was his top priority to mark it in the few days he was strong enough to be in the garden in 2005. My photo is below.



White

Oscie's best whites are still numbered seedlings, I believe. However, there are some fine registrations.



CANDOR is a large, triangular near-white with good branching. The hybridizer, Dan Trimmer, updated CANDOR in the 1990s with an excellent and beautiful late white that shows its CANDOR inheritance, AUGUST FROST.



GREEK EFFECT is a wonderful large “near cream” with strong rose color on the tips. Magnificent, sometimes sets pods, sometimes reblooms here.



GREEN GAGE is a dome-shaped wide-petaled flower that some mornings is pale pastel yellow and other mornings is pearly. Other times it's melon pink! It's another product of Tet. CHUBBY LAD, with much green in the throat. It's a reluctant pod setter in my experience, but a grand garden specimen.



LABADIE is an appealing cultivar that came from CUSTARD CANDY X MINI CRAZE. The strong green throat and bold eye gave the flower special beauty, but Oscie thought it couldn't compete in the marketplace because of its strong similarity to CUSTARD CANDY.



OUT OF MY WAY is a big, vigorous white with green infusion. It was a very difficult pod parent for me.



MORNING SPELL can be extremely seductive on its good days, or it can up and die. Oscie had a special liking for this one because of a silky sheen it could take on, and he grew it in the bed closest to his house.



SAY GOOD MORNING is a vigorous near white that I believe clarifies anything you take it to.



FROST AVENUE was his workhorse white breeder, a “dream maker in the garden.”



ELAN is an elegant near-white of covetous beauty. I was moved by the beauty of it.



DOROTHY WHATLEY, registered in 2004, is a daylily dedicated to his wife of 60+ years. It is her prized keepsake and enjoys the status of a family treasure. Since it is a very, very slow increaser, I don't imagine it will enter the commercial market. If you want to try to duplicate the cross, take J.T. DAVIS to FROST AVENUE and hope the seeds germinate and hope there are a lot of them. Oscie germinated 32 seeds, which amounts to fabulous luck for this cross, and saw only one seedling worth keeping. This is palest pastel greenish yellow which on some days is a frosty near-white with a lavish edge of green gold. As a flower, this was a dream come true. It is fitting that he gave it to Dorothy a year before he passed on. It would surprise me if she or the family ever part with it.

Oatmeal



Photo by Oscie Whatley

SASSY SALLY was the cover girl of the 2004 convention handbook. Oscie took this picture in 2001. Before his surgery in March of 2003 he gave me a fan. He registered it in the spring of 2004. It's a bold, sassy breakfast blend of oatmeal and cantaloupe, and it can look either color, but not both, depending on the heat and humidity. Rapid increase, reluctant to set pods, but in my experience a marvelous breeder when combined with marvelous mates. See my 2006 seedlings pictures at www.daylilylay.com for a look at the first of my selections from SASSY SALLY. It's out of Tet. ULTIMATE PERFECTION and carries luxurious ruffles because of that. FUSION was the pod parent.

To show how variable its color can be, here are two of my own photos in different seasons.



Yellow

This was Oscie's signature color to much of the daylily world. His LAHAINA became the foundation plant for a whole generation of fine yellow tetraploids by Oscie and nearly every other hybridizer. I didn't know Oscie's yellows until the 1990s, when I saw a picture of YARDMASTER in R. W. Munson's book on daylilies. In that same book was KEWANEE.



KEWANEE is a diploid from his phenomenal ZENAR. Like so many of his registrations, he took this name from the map of Missouri. Others had done that, too. Oscie's mentor, Will Dill, named Doc Branch's SOLO for a Missouri town. Oscie found names like OZORA, KIMMSWICK, FEMME OSAGE on the map. He found ETZKORN and FROST AVENUE on street signs in St. Louis, and SLIGO on the roof of an industrial building. Oscie gave KEWANEE "permanent resident" status in his primary daylily bed.



He converted ZENAR to tetraploid and never looked back. He marketed ZENAR until the end, and there's a plant still there in the Whatley garden. Pollen has to be collected before the bud opens. ZENAR won't set seed pods.



Oscie experimented with tight edges on yellows in the 90s, releasing CRUMPLE and JUMBLE EDGE (above). He tried combining purple and yellow, resulting in GALERIA, a bright golden yellow daylily with a rose stile. It's out of Tet. SUPER PURPLE.



He experimented with spiders, releasing the award-winning STRUNG OUT (above) from Tet. SPIDER MIRACLE.



He got into edges again with PERMA FRINGE (above) and CROCODILE JAWS, named for the appearance of buds the day before they open.

His big break came from the conversion of SILOAM MEDALLION. The tet version had a stronger scape than the diploid, and he told me the crosses with that conversion gave him more registrations than anything else.



Darrel Apps told me once that he thought ISOSCELES (above) a superior yellow tet. That was one of the Tet. SILOAM MEDALLION kids.



SOLAR MUSIC is a stunning offspring of that conversion.



GLIBBER MANNER is another beauty from that line, but I have a hunch that if Oscie had gotten to know it better he would have destroyed all the stock of it. In my experience, fall division of GLIBBER MANNER will result in the death of the division. This happened

twice in a few years in my garden. I suspect this reflects a form of tenderness related to heat stress. I wouldn't breed with it.



SOLAR MUSIC produced the incredible BUTTER CREAM (Solar Music x Tet. John Allen), and its brother, PASTOR JAMES, which is almost a dead ringer for BC. Oscie registered BUTTER CREAM with a bud count of 15, and this is a mistake. I got a plant of BUTTER CREAM with a great root system, and the first year in my garden it had 24 buds. I think he took data from a plant with immature roots. BC is a scene-stealer in the garden. The huge 7" flowers are consistent in early opening, form, and size. They command attention. The plant is average in pod-setting, but I don't use it much as a pod parent because in my experience the results are better when it donates pollen. It's worth every penny of the steep price it commands nine years after registration.



Pastor James in the Whatley garden, 2006.



PARABOLA is a product of BUTTER CREAM X PASTOR JAMES. It's is a huge dome-shaped butter yellow on a somewhat short scape. A clump is a commanding sight. The blossom is not consistent in form, but on good days it would win a photo contest.



The same is true of RAM. It's stunning garden subject, more vibrant south of St. Louis than here, but quite lovely here. Oscie said that Van Sellers joked that at Iron Gate Gardens they used RAM to provide shade for the Hostas.



Eager And Early, photo by Oscie Whatley

EAGER AND EARLY is Oscie's best product of Tet. SILOAM RALPH HENRY. It imparts excellent ruffling to its offspring as well as some inconsistency of blossom formation that I have seen in my own seedlings from TSRH. Several of my best seedlings came from taking pollen from EAGER AND EARLY to SHERRY LANE CARR. I haven't grown EAGER AND EARLY yet, but the pollen I collected in 2000 is still setting pods six years later.

I haven't mentioned the 1980s daylilies such as KHORASSAN or SEDALIA because I haven't grown them. I jumped in during the 90s and tried to keep abreast of opportunities to extend his line without making the same crosses he was trying. It was probably the best

male friendship of my life, all ten years of it. As I told someone yesterday, every friend of Oscie's felt like a best friend, and they were. He had no "second best" friends.

Seedlings Gracing a Summer Day

I saw these at the Whatley garden during ten days of plant identification in July of 2006. Some were numbered, some not yet selected from the tiny crop he never saw. Some are such beautiful creations, even though there are not many flowers on the scape. They represent a future that remains a question. The Whatley family granted rights of final selection and registration of Oscie's last seedlings to MaryAnn Pruden, a former Region 11 gardener who now operates Lilyhouseonline.com in Hummelstown, PA.





