

## HAROLD HOBBS

### Hybridizer of the Dean Series of African Violets

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Marjorie Bullard asked me to write an article about Harold. I want to start this article by telling you that my brother was a perfectionist. He excelled in anything he did and could not turn his back on a challenge. He was a tail gunner on a B-24 and served with the 8th Air Force in WW II, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. He was an aircraft mechanic by profession but liked to stay busy when he was not on the job.

Harold did wood working, oil painting, ceramics, and could do beautiful pieces on needlepoint and peti point. O yes, he could tat pretty lace too! He learned bee keeping and had several hives producing good honey that was sold in grocery stores. He also learned all he could about wine making and I'll not forget that era the family went through, going to Poteet to get strawberries and crushing them in a big tub. Never a dull moment around Harold Dean! He read and would seek advice from experts on any project that he undertook. That is why he did so well in the short time he had in the African violet world.

Harold entered into hybridizing after a medical retirement from Kelly Air Force Base. His wife June had been growing beautiful African violets for many years and he enjoyed them with her. After the retirement in the early 1980s, he was limited as to what he could do physically due to heart problems. Through his friendship with Hortense Pittman, he became more interested in how to develop new varieties of the Saintpaulia. He gained a lot of information from Hortense on her method of hybridizing. He read as much material as he could find on the subject and had long telephone conversations with the late Bill Johnson of Ohio. I am sure you remember him as the hybridizer of the Haven series of plants, such as Snow Kist Haven, Fantasy Haven, and Aloha Haven. Through the years they became good telephone friends.

Harold first wanted to develop a small standard because they would not take up the room that a large standard did. His first one was a dark purple velvet textured blossom with plain green foliage. He decided to use the name "Dean" for his plants as it was his father's middle name as well as his and his son's and his grandson's. He named this first plant Dean's Velvet One. Other pretty small standards were Dean's Texas Orchid, Dean's Blue Skies and Dean's Beauty. They are all lost now but Dean's Blue Skies, which I still have.

After a while he decided that people were not that interested in small standards but preferred the large African violet. He gave all his attention to hybridizing miniatures and semiminiatures. Some of the more popular ones are: Dean's Ivory Lace, Dean's Artic Frost, Dean's Cupid, Dean's Trinket, Dean's Bunny Blue, Dean's Aquarius, and Dean's Plum Peacock. Dean's Plum Peacock has mosaic foliage and is hard for me to keep on the shelf due to demand. Dean's Legacy was named after his death. I don't think he had a favorite; he liked them all.



**Dean's  
Cupid**

Because Harold was color blind, blossom color with deep textures did take his eye. Harold liked variegated foliage and especially liked to use Snuggles by Lyons, and Pittman's Precious Pink as the mother plants for most of his hybrids. His wife June helped him with the naming of the plants and also sorting out the colors when his color blindness got in the way of picking good blossoms to cross.

He took up photography in his later years and photographed his plants and would sit for hours with his telescopic lens to get a picture of a mother bird feeding her young or a hummingbird feeding.

Harold passed away in May of 1991 and did not get to carry on the hybridizing to the extent he would have liked. He made close to 200 crosses and came out with 76 varieties, but did not register all of them. His daughter, Kay Gregg, did some crosses after his death. Some of her crosses produced really good plants – such as Dean's Lady Bug, Dean's Lucienne, Dean's Rosalie, and Dean's Bashful.

I hope this will give you a closer look at someone that could have produced many more beautiful plants if God had not called him home.



**Dean's Lady Bug**

I introduced his plants in my catalog and at the conventions and it did not take long for them to gain in popularity. Many of them are still being entered in shows and winning awards.



**Dean's Plum Peacock**