

WRANGLER'S RIDE AGAIN!

By
Marge Savage

Wrangler's Dixie Celebration



“Finally, I had a greenhouse full of variegated African Violets!”

So said Winston Smith, the seventy-eight-year-old father of multitudes of Wrangler's Series and Maverick's Series African violets, who retired after forty years teaching Shorthand, Typing, Accounting and other business courses at high schools in Barber's Hill, San Angelo, Hardin and Mont Belvieu. The very Winston Smith who drove the school bus, directed high school plays, survived cancer and who is known as a friend of his students.

Quite near those high school towns is Liberty in hot and humid East Texas, where Winston has made his home during the past thirty-eight years. We spoke on the telephone, recently:

“My Mother ordered some African Violets from the Better Homes and Gardens magazine. She was a novice grower. There was a local African Violet Show in Beaumont. We went and I met Mrs. George Vallin (Wrangler's Margaret Vallin). She invited me over. We were life-long friends. Mrs. Vallin helped form the national association and taught me everything. She gave me an interest in hybridizing and taught me all about hybridizing.”

Winston actively hybridized plants from 1979 ?? to 1989, the year of his retirement:

“I love variegation. I wanted variegated African Violets. I had a deep, red Rhapsodie, which I loved. But, I lost it and raised Optimara Colorado, instead. I crossed Optimara Colorado to Sunlit Sugar Plum. I loved that Sunlit Sugar Plum. I got it from Maneeta Lanigan—she hybridized a long time ago. Maneeta Lanigan hybridized it—not R. E. Scott. It had only one seedpod. This produced Wrangler's Canyon Echoes.

At the same time, I crossed Optimara Colorado onto Persian Tapestry and had both seedlings growing out at the same time. Dixie African Violet Society was to have their convention in Beaumont. And so, I named this seedling for that DAVS event: Wrangler's Dixie Celebration (6-29-81). That's the best one!”

We think so, too! I agreed. But, how did Winston come up with his series names: Wrangler's and Maverick's?

“I went to Mrs. Vallin to seek her advice on what to name all these hybrids. She felt that they were worthy hybrids and needed a series name. I wanted a name that.... On TV, in the 80's, there was a commercial featuring a young girl wearing blue jeans. She turned around. And across her back pocket, it said, “Wrangler.” That was it!”

The Maverick's were just that. “They were too contrary to variegate.” They were Mavericks because they didn't fit in Winston's Grand Plan: they wouldn't variegate.

When I asked Winston about the Savage series of Wrangler's, some truths about growing African violets in hot, dry West Texas jumped out at me: “Those were hybridized during the

hottest summer, 1981 to 1982.” I related that I have noticed an increase in commercial growers offering more and more of his hybrids in their inventories: Libbie Glembocki in South Carolina, where it is hot and humid; Travis’ Violets in Georgia, where it is hot and humid, Alannah’s Greenhouses, Washington/Canada, go figure. Winston seemed elated as I named the eight hybrids exhibited at the 2004 AVSA Convention and Show in Tucson, Arizona—where it is hot and dry: Wrangler’s Dixie Celebration (2), Pink Patches, Snowfields, Jealous Jewels, Savage Beauty; and Maverick’s Faded Jeans (2).

Winston did venture into commercial advertising. “One Fall, I did put one ad in the African Violet Magazine. I got into business because of two women from Texas A&M. These two women and Ray Scott were at my home one night. They dropped in after seeing Wrangler’s Jealous Heart at the Beaumont show. I had fully-grown plants. I was depending on A&M to clone what I needed for sales from that ad. They didn’t come through and I didn’t have any plants to sell. Out of 100 orders, only one person wanted their money back. Can you imagine that? I didn’t have to advertise. They came to see me!”

Winston had a few choice comments on people who had ordered plants and hadn’t paid him, on people who infested his greenhouse with soil mealy bugs and on a greenhouse bout with thrips. He recommended placing little plastic cups of Cedar-Cide (Wal-Mart) among the plants for the thrips.

When I asked Winston if there was anything special he wanted to tell me, he said: “Mollie Ritchie (Wrangler’s Mollie Ritchie) and Susan Myers (Wrangler’s Susan Myers) had been judging a show in Beaumont. While looking around the greenhouse, Susan Myers said, ‘Oh, my God, a YELLOW African violet! You come over here and look at this!’ The yellow blossom was on one of Mrs. Vallin’s plants, Silver Honey, a pink-blossomed violet. This plant had mutated into sort of a vine-y plant that I named Wrangler’s White Silver Sands. And, it put up this yellow blossom. We lifted up the leaves and it was hanging down over the pot—a yellow blossom with a little streak of pink. I never took a picture of it, or had it photographed. Can you imagine that? I put leaves down and put leaves down. That was a hard winter that year. I had heaters going full blast. But, the temperature dropped down to 9 degrees. And all the leaves froze.” Winston exhaled as he thought about the elusive Eldorado of the African Violet World.

“Kent Stork called me, one year and asked if he could show one of my hybrids on his commercial table at the AVSA Convention and Show. It was Wrangler’s Jealous Heart. I was glad to do this, because I don’t care to get into it that much. Ray Scott ?? called me from the Convention and said, ‘Your plant has just won Best New Introduction!’” About conventions, Winston did attend the 1999 AVSA Convention and Show in Houston. (But, we missed him.

We were holding down the Hospitality Room upstairs.) “The national show’ll be back in Houston some day,” he said, “and, when it does, I’ll try to go.”

Maverick’s Faded Jeans



By the time you read this, Winston may have moved into a new two-story home he and his family have built in nearby Kenefick [sp.?]. “I have a new greenhouse built in my new location, too,” he offered. There are also four acres, a catfish pond and folks who say, “I love you, Pop.”

Give Winston a call. He gets the news at 10:00 p.m. After he gets the news he’s free to talk.

Wrangler's El Diablo



Wrangler's Bryan's Song



Wrangler's Empty Saddles



Wrangler's Petticoat Chaser

Wrangler's Pink Patches



Wrangler's Savage Beauty

