

## **The Educational Value of the Rose Show**

Excerpted from the March/April Issue of *American Rose Magazine*

By Robert B. Martin Jr.

In 1986, as a new member of the Pasadena Rose Society, I heard a talk about showing roses. Even though I had previously attended two rose shows, I had never before considered what might be involved in exhibiting. Fascinated, I said to myself, "you can do that!" And, I became determined to try.

The night before the show, I drove all over Pasadena visiting stores like Pier One Imports, looking for suitable vases in which to display the roses I planned to take to the show. I didn't know that the vases were provided. And, on arrival, I discovered there were a lot of other things I didn't know. I saw people in the parking lot with tall roses in containers with Q-tips sticking out of them like Martian antennas. I didn't know why. I watched a couple bring in coolers full of perfect miniature roses. I didn't know how they did that. In the preparation room, I found myself surrounded by beautiful roses and busy people hurrying to and fro doing things I knew nothing about.

After entries had been made, the show chairman asked if I would like to help out as a clerk. I had no idea what a clerk did but said, "yes" anyway. It involved helping the judges, and as I tagged along after them, I watched and learned as they evaluated entries. I learned a little of what distinguished a very good rose from one not so good. I even learned how to thread the string on a ribbon through the hole in the entry tag. I learned a lot at that rose show.

I made nine entries that day, mostly in the novice section, and won four blue ribbons, which I proudly displayed at my law office the next Monday. I was hooked. Now, 23 years later, I have participated in about 250 rose shows – as an exhibitor, a judge in both horticultural and arrangements, a show chairman, and a clerk - and I am reasonably certain that I have learned something new at every show.

Over the course of years, I've read many articles and comments on the educational value of a rose show. Some have been skeptical that a rose show has much educational value at all. But the skeptics, I have noticed, generally focus on the educational benefit to the spectator – to the visitor to the show. This focus, I have come to believe, is wrong. The primary educational value of a rose show lies in the education of its participants. And, as an educational organization, the rose show is the most single important educational activity that a rose society can undertake.

Those who participate as exhibitors learn how to grow better roses. As stated by Don Ballin, writing in the February 1983 *American Rose*: "Exhibiting FORCES the grower to develop exemplary cultural practices. It is only with the correct feeding, spraying, pruning and general garden maintenance that an exhibitor becomes a frequent winner."

Much of this learning requires experimentation. So the exhibitor is usually the first to learn about new roses and new products, as well as skills involved in transportation, presentation and display of roses. And, in showing roses exhibitors learn and reaffirm good personal values including the principles that friends play fair and growing good roses requires discipline and hard work.

Judges learn about the proper attitude to perform judging duties. They learn to set aside personal prejudices toward a type of rose or specific varieties and to judge objectively. They learn to practice courtesy in interacting with other judges and improve their skills at evaluating roses. And, they learn about roses, new varieties and older varieties with which they have not been familiar.

The clerks learn about the judging process. They learn to be careful and to listen. And, they also learn about roses, their display and new varieties. The show chair and members of the show committee also learn about roses as well as organizational skills. And everyone learns the value of pulling together in a common enterprise, the purpose of which is to show the most beautiful flower in God's creation at its most perfect phase of possible beauty.

This is not to say that there is no educational value to the spectator. Most visitors to a rose show will learn – or at least learn that they need to learn. And the experience may ignite a spark of interest that will later lead toward participation.

It is important to note that the educational process of a rose show is not complete unless the roses are judged. By this process, exhibitors, as well as other participants, can assess the value of the things they have learned. How can you know which rose has been grown the best unless it be judged? Judging is necessary and an integral component of the educational value of a rose show. So-called "rose displays" in which examples of badly grown roses are presented will not and cannot bring out exhibitors determined to display the best a rose can be. Nor will they inform the other participants of what a rose can be and what must be done to make it so.

Dr. Kent Campbell, a retired college professor of music at Western Kentucky University, once observed :

"A rose show, much as a concert or a poetry reading, is an aesthetic event. There is a straight line between a Monet exhibition at an art museum and the tables at a rose show. They both primarily exist to evoke feeling in the viewer. The more one knows about French Impressionism, the more heightened the response to Monet. The same is true of roses. The more one understands varieties, growing, grooming techniques, and staging, the more feelingful the response to the rose show."

Continuing, Dr. Campbell said:

“Even though an aesthetic feeling is a private phenomenon, we, as with artists of all types, want to share this special and unique experience with others. Poems are created to be read; paintings and sculptures are created to be viewed; music is created to be heard; and *roses are grown to be seen.*”

And so it is. A rose society without a rose show is like a musical instrument society that forms no orchestra or band. It is like a society of painters that has no exhibition of their works. It is a society of sculpture artists that keep their works in their garages. It is an educational institution that holds no classes and gives no tests.

So what was the difference between the first two rose shows I attended, where I learned very little, and the third, where I learned so much? The difference is that at the first two shows, I was a mere spectator. At the third, I was a participant. At that show I was a participant as an exhibitor. I was a participant as a clerk. And, I was a participant as a member of the society that sponsored the show. It was my participation that made all the difference. Rose shows have taught me much of what I know and given me enormous pleasure. I encourage all those serious about roses and desirous of learning more to participate in a rose show. There is undoubtedly one in your neighborhood when the roses are next in bloom.