

This Week in the Garden #6: “Remembering Good Friends” - April 25, 2020

by Don Hyatt - Potomac Valley Chapter ARS

Looking at the calendar, I realize that I should be on my way to the ARS 75th Anniversary Convention this weekend. Alas, I am home instead. The meeting has been rescheduled for 2022 and I do plan to go.

Two weeks ago, I introduced our youngest member, Dr. Ralf Bauer. In this issue, I want you to meet one of senior members, Dr. John M. Keshishian. I don't know if he is our oldest member right now since most of us don't share our ages. John will be turning 97 years young this summer.

John and his wife, Nancy Lee, sold their home in McLean this year and he said it was hard to leave it behind. They moved to a condominium in McLean but they also have a place at Ocean Pines on Eastern Shore, MD. They will spend their time between those two locations, and visiting family members.

John was able to salvage a few plants which he has in containers but he had to leave behind one of his favorites, 'Taurus'. His granddaughter, Maggie, was a toddler when he planted it. She is now 18 and 'Taurus' is over 12 feet tall. Maggie always helped John when he entered trusses in our flower shows.

I have known John for well over 40 years and to say he is brilliant and has led an amazing life is an understatement. One thing I learned teaching the geniuses at the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology for half my career is that truly gifted students see no need to tell others how smart they are. So it is with John. In his self-deprecating manner, John might say he has “the IQ of an oak tree” as he did in an article titled “A Recollection of John Creech and Glenn Dale”, *Azalean* Summer 2010. Every year I learn of other things John has done. I am in a constant state of awe.



John Keshishian in his Former Garden Hyatt

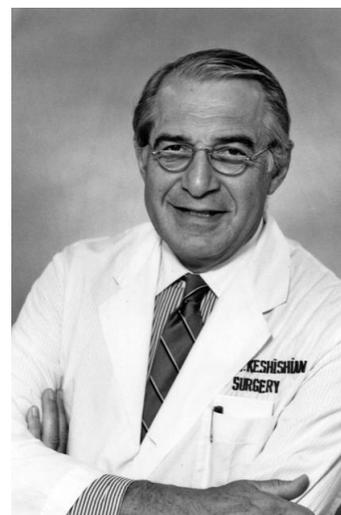


John's Granddaughter Maggie and 'Taurus' Keshishian



The Former Keshishian Home in McLean Hyatt

John Keshishian had a very distinguished career in cardiothoracic and vascular surgery at the Washington Hospital Center. He was a professor, a researcher, and division chief. He served as a White House consultant in the Nixon and Reagan administrations. He was part of the team who attended President Reagan after his 1980 assassination attempt. Remember, these are just a few details I know so far.



Dr. John M. Keshishian



Corfu

Hyatt

Born on the scenic Greek island of Corfu, John's family eventually emigrated to the US. Prior to getting his medical degree, John spent time in the Navy during WWII and then started traveling the world. He became a photographer for National Geographic where he documented archaeological treasures in Egypt, Abu Simbel, Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and Russia. He wrote about and photographed the turmoil in Vietnam. He wrote for World Book Science News, was a radio announcer, and a lecturer at times, too.

John served as a consultant for NASA and the State Department. He became involved in cold war espionage as well. He related a story to me recently about being kidnapped in Moscow by Israelis who ushered him out of Russia because they learned the Communists were planning to frame and arrest him. Then John would say as he often does, "But that's another story."

I told John, "You really need to write down your memoirs!" Once again, I missed the mark. John politely replied that he essentially had done that. I was unaware that he has authored several novels. The one published in 2012 titled *Dr. John on Assignment* is a "fictionalized autobiography" of his life story. Most of the incidents are true except for a few literary enhancements like a fictional affair with Gigi. I just ordered my copy from Amazon so it should be on its way.



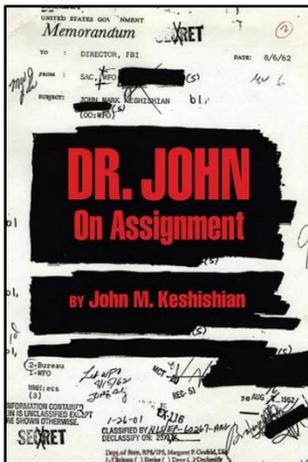
Deciduous Azaleas in John's Garden

Keshishian

John began his interest with azaleas while he was working at the Glenn Dale Tuberculosis Sanatorium in the mid 1950's. I was struck by the similarity of doctors and nurses dealing with our coronavirus pandemic as to what he was doing with the tuberculosis scourge back then.

As a way to deal with the stress in the sanatorium, John strolled over to the nearby Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale where he met Dr. John Creech. That began a life-long friendship and a mutual interest in azaleas. John registered 'Henry Allanson', an open pollinated Mollis hybrid he raised from seed collected at Glenn Dale.

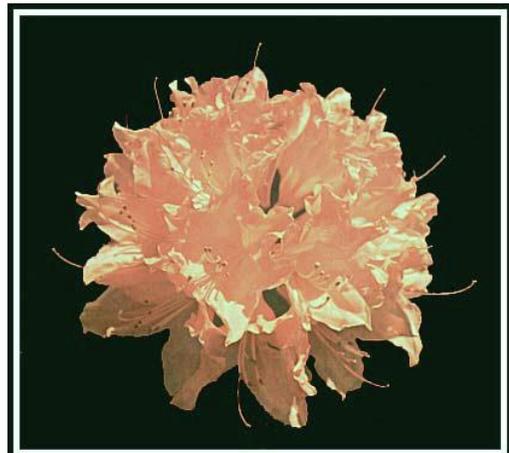
John has camped on mountaintops in the Southern Appalachians with forestry leaders. He has written many entertaining articles for the *ARS Journal*. Check out his article on how to resuscitate sick plants (Vol 62 No. 4) and his story about a begonia he found in the jungles of South America, "The Saga of Herman." (Vol 66 No. 1) In 2012, John gave me a piece of Herman, another remembrance of an amazing man I feel privileged to know.



John's Book



A Piece of "Herman" Hyatt



1973 ARS Cover: 'Henry Allanson' Keshishian

London Town Gardens

How nice it would be to go to London Town Gardens to see the plants we installed at the Gray Carter Memorial Bench last fall. We want to thank Meenal Harankhedkar, the Horticulture Director at Historic London Town and Public Gardens. She kindly sent some pictures of the garden as well as Gray's bench that we can at least enjoy for now.



Evergreen Azaleas Londontown



Magnolia Shading the Bench Londontown



Unknown Dexter Rhododendron Londontown



Azalea Glade Vista



Gray's Bench



R. makinoi Londontown

Jane Newman & Quakeress

I have often said that I like to grow plants that remind me of my friends. The late Jane Newman who passed away in 2017 was one of those good friends I had known for nearly 50 years.

Jane was one of the most knowledgeable experts on azaleas in our Northern Virginia region. We would always go to her for assistance on variety identification. She had particular interest in the Glenn Dale azaleas and studied them closely. She photographed flowers and plants but also buds, leaves, and even the backs of flowers so she could see the shape of the calyx. She studied her photos the rest of the year. I was convinced Jane could tell every one of the 454 Glenn Dales apart from a distance of 20 ft away.

I asked Jane what her favorite Glenn Dale was and she told me 'Quakeress'. It was the plant that got her started growing azaleas. The flowers are delightfully ruffled, typically white and boldly striped with purple but extremely variable. On some branches, it can have solid colored blooms of white or purple, and there will occasionally be blooms with pink undertones or red blotches, too.



'Quakeress'

Hyatt



Jane Newman

Jane had an enormous 'Quakeress' planted in the center of a driveway loop at the front of her house. It was spectacular. It must have been 12 ft tall and just captivating. Looking at all the flowers variations, they seemed like snowflakes where no two are alike. I planted three 'Quakeress' azaleas at my street edge as a tribute Jane. They have now become a mass about 10 ft wide and 4 to 5 ft tall. We miss you, Jane!



'Quakeress' Flower Variations

Hyatt



'Quakeress' in the Hyatt Garden

Hyatt

Garden Share - ARS District 9
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