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# A Eulogy to Richard T. (Dick) West

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**Barbara L. Bullock**

*Curator of Azaleas, U.S. National Arboretum*

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Dick West passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on October 1, 1996. All who knew him are very sad, and the loss of his energetic and creative work in many areas will affect many more. At the Arboretum, for example, we are raising thousands of Glenn Dale azaleas due to Dick's efforts. Inspired by his enthusiasm, we azalea lovers were always traveling down the path of discovery. One moment it was finding a direct link between the breeding of the Glenn Dale azaleas at Glenn Dale, Maryland, and the thousands of azaleas planted up on Mt. Hamilton in the National Arboretum; the next, it was "I've found 'Luna'!" 'Luna' is a Glenn Dale cultivar previously thought to have been lost. Another time, it was making contact with a London garden as a possible source of lost Glenn Dale cultivars. Each spring was packed with the anticipation of how he would organize himself to observe, record and write as much as he possibly could—noting the correct descriptions and the locations of the plants he so dearly loved. These plants weren't merely azaleas, they were the Glenn Dale azaleas, complete with a rich legacy, steeped in scattered horticultural facts, just waiting to be pieced back together by someone like Dick.

Dick West was a historian in his own right. Yes, he loved the flowers, but he was intrigued by the amount of research and time that went into producing the Glenn Dale azalea group. Benjamin Yoe Morrison, who became the first director of the National Arboretum, selected and named 454 azaleas after observing thousands of seedlings through decades of study, hybridization and tests. Over the past half century, many of these disappeared from collections. With Dick's work, we had brought back about 250 azaleas to the Arboretum.

As the Curator of Azaleas at the National Arboretum, my first exposure to the history of the mighty collection of azaleas on the southern flank of Mt. Hamilton was through contact with Dick West. Dick made available to me a wealth of information that he and his friend and colleague, Bill Miller, had gathered on the Glenn Dale azaleas. Dick provided the catalyst for so many of my programs at the Arboretum. We initiated two separate flower-color studies in order to verify our Glenn Dale azalea holdings, and we began a volunteer program to restore the Glenn Dale Hillside that has endured to this day, spurred on by information that we were regularly getting from Dick. When we found long-lost labels, Dick knew what they meant. We participated in the Ten Oaks/Glenn Dale Distribution Project, initiated and organized by Dick. His interest in, and subsequent knowledge of, the Glenn Dale azalea program at Glenn Dale, Maryland, provides the backbone of a large part of my work at the Arboretum.

When I began my job, there was a threat of losing the entire Hillside—which was heavily infested with weeds and vines—due to the lack of knowledge concerning the identity of the azaleas and why they were planted there. Ben Morrison's contemporaries and colleagues were just about all gone (either deceased or unreachable). There were only a few people left in the world who might be able to tell what we needed to know about Morrison's azalea breeding program and documentation is difficult to interpret once found. Dick's analytical mind and perseverance pieced so much of it back together. He was as thorough with his research as anyone could possibly be. He also supported other programs in the azalea collection by frequently writing letters to the arboretum administration supporting and confirming the direction of our progress in the azalea collection. Without Dick West and the extensive data

that he and Bill Miller analyzed, the Azalea Hillside might have been lost and would not have had the administrative support that it has today.

Dick also left a legacy in the form of documentation and publication of his findings. He checked and rechecked before he would get enough information together to write an article. His many articles on the Glenn Dales can be found in **THE AZALEAN** and in *The Journal of the American Rhododendron Society*. If he didn't have enough information to write up a formal paper, he still provided people like Bill Miller and me with his drafts, copies of original documents, old articles, etc. He left a trail of writings and documents any researcher would be proud of. And thanks to Dick's work, many of us are now growing many rare varieties of Glenn Dale azaleas again.

Without Dick, we are left with a lot of loose ends. We had so many more directions to go, so many leads, and we were kept energized by his boundless energy and enthusiasm. He will be sorely missed. The contributions he made to the body of knowledge of the Glenn Dale azaleas blazed a trail that will long be followed. Dick was so thorough in disseminating his information and hypotheses that we know what to do now because of him. Many of us have benefited through the Ten Oaks/Glenn Dale Distribution Project. Dick made all of us promise to uphold our agreements when he shipped us those cuttings. They aren't simply pretty flowers—they are the reminder of another legacy, that of B. Y. Morrison, a man respected by many. Much of Morrison's work might have been lost were it not for Dick West. We must not let Dick West's work be lost. We will miss you Dick; your mannerisms, your phrases, your humor, your leather tobacco pouch, but mostly, your friendship.

*Barbara Bullock has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Horticulture and a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Maryland. She is currently the Curator of Azalea Collections at the U. S. National Arboretum. She is a member of the Brookside Gardens Chapter. □*