

GARDENING

## Dad knows his way around dirt

Phyllis Stephens celebrates her father's 100th birthday.

Phyllis Stephens - The Spokesman-Review



My dad, Phil Caruso, will celebrate his 100th birthday on Saturday. When he was born, there were no cars, planes, TVs, radios, electric refrigerators, fast-food restaurants, computers, rockets to the moon or Milky Way candy bars.

Dad's endless, delightful stories encompassing the past century are witness to incredible changes, inventions and historic events. Though life was simpler then, it was still very hard.

Dad and his family came to Spokane from Italy. At age 7 he took a job selling . On the street corners downtown, he heralded such events as the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake, the sinking of the Titanic and the beginning of World War I.

He also worked with my Grandpa, who sold fresh produce to local residents and merchants. This was not only an introduction to the world of gardening for Dad, but growing and distributing produce was a way of life for many people at the turn of the century. The rich soil in and around the Spokane area produced excellent fruits and vegetables. At one time, the warm, rocky riverbeds in the Spokane Valley produced some of the best Hearts of Gold cantaloupe.

Each week Dad and Grandpa traveled by horse and wagon to these local growers, picking up vegetables, then went to Five Mile Prairie for apples and other fruits. Keeping the

produce from spoiling was difficult since there was no refrigeration. For that reason, they worked long days getting the food to market.

About 1910, a forest fire ravaged large areas of North Idaho and western Montana. At age 17, Dad, along with hundreds of other men, volunteered to help the Forest Service replant the charred areas. It's because of their efforts that a pristine forest is again ours to enjoy.

Doing what he knew best Ñ I still don't know if Dad truly enjoyed the backbreaking work of gardening or if it was simply a means of employment Ñ Dad plunged back into greenhouse work and then truck farming for John Aragone. In his late teens, he worked at the Hoyt Greenhouses in Garden Springs. Today only the smokestack, north of Interstate 90 at the airport exit, remains as a reminder of this old establishment.

John Aragone was a successful truck farmer, growing and delivering his sought-after produce to the finest restaurants in Spokane \_ the Sullivan, the Davenport Hotel and the Ridpath. According to Dad, not only did Aragone grow a wide assortment of handsome vegetables, he also grew the finest endive.

How did they weed the acres and acres of garden? With a hoe and stooped back. And how did they water the acres and acres? By digging irrigation ditches or merely through dry-land farming methods.

After these outdoor adventures, Dad moved inside for work. Tilting his sword at a few enterprises, he settled on establishing The Linoleum Shop in 1933.

Today he still loves to grow his vegetables. Radishes have to be planted by the first of April, potatoes on Good Friday and corn should be ``knee-high on the Fourth of July," he says. Though he dislikes the taste of tomatoes, he loves sharing them, along with cucumbers, onions and zucchini, with family

and friends.

I can always tell when Dad has been in the garden. The peonies are tied en masse to the fence, the one-branched peach tree is tied to the oak tree with a thick rope, climbing roses are propped up with wood boards and brambles are tied together with wire. As Mom says, "In the early days, you learned to make do with what you had."

This is a lesson not easily forgotten, nor should it be. For these are the little things Dad, that make you and your garden so unique. Happy 100th birthday, Dad.

### **Mark your calendar**

Sunday, we can learn about identifying the birds in our area and how to attract them to our gardens at a workshop sponsored by the Friends of Manito. The workshop runs 2 to 4 p.m. at the Manito Park Meeting Room east of the conservatory. The session is \$5, free for Friends of Manito members. Please call 456-8038 for more information.

The Spokane Master Composters will hold a spring composting fair as part of the Earth Day Celebration at Riverfront Park on April 22. Spokane County residents who complete this event can take home a new, plastic compost bin (limit one per household). The fair runs 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Call the recycling hotline, 747-0242, for more information.

A seminar titled Naturalizing Your Landscape, will run 6:30-9 p.m. on April 26, May 3, 6 and May 10. This series is designed for people with acreage that they want to preserve in a natural state, and for those with yards that they want to restore to a more natural environment. The fee for the series is \$40, which includes handouts and study materials. Classes will be held at the County Extension Office, 222 N. Havana. Pre-registration is required. Please call the Extension office, 477-2048, for more information.

The Inland Empire Gladiolus Society will host its annual gladiolus sale April 22 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Northwest Seed and Pet, 2422 E. Sprague.

*Phyllis Stephens is a professional horticulturist and landscape designer.*

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