

Common Threads

By Donna Russett

Florists have a slogan, "Say it with flowers!" People are urged to congratulate, commiserate and sentimentalize with flowers. Everyone seems to like flowers, but they especially delight women; note the proficient African violet grower, the woman who keeps her kitchen cheery with a blaze of geraniums, and the many who grow ferns, vines and other windowsill brighteners.

Let us consider garden flowers and how they relate to our members. Have you ever thought of comparing flower characteristics with human ones? Flowers, like people, come in varied shapes, sizes and colours. Also, like humans, some flowers are hardy, some are fragile and delicate, and some bruise easily. Others flourish anywhere and are not readily discouraged.

Just as the many nationalities which live in Ontario have adapted and adjusted, so have flowers. Ontario gardens brighten the landscape as petunias, morning glories and nasturtiums from South America grow side-by-side with zinnias and marigolds from Mexico and snapdragons from Europe. Gladioli from Africa grow beside chrysanthemums from Asia and strawflowers from Australia. And those heralds of spring - tulips - emerge from bulbs from Holland.

What can we learn from flowers?

The rose in its queenly beauty seems drawn from above; it is so fair. Yet we know a seed has died before there was growth, budding and flowering. There has been a fight too, against drought, chill and insects, and in spite of the struggle, beauty has prevailed. True beauty radiates from within. Let us emulate the queenly beauty of the rose.

A small brown bulb, drab, dry, without promise of beauty, is left to the elements - the wind, the sun and the rain - yet yellow sunshine blooms in early springtime. The daffodil radiates cheer. We too can blossom forth and radiate cheer, especially when there seems no apparent reason to believe cheer can come from situations. The daffodil has a mighty lesson to teach - be of good cheer!

Violet blossoms lie against the cold, damp breast of spring. They grace the vase on the kitchen table and dress up May baskets. They never tower on tall stems, but their simple, little bloom nestles deep in springtime's grassy beds. There are people like that who go their modest, unassuming way, humbly doing their best, and never towering high so others become conscious of their greatness.

Tulips: from the death of their brown bulbs comes life and a splash of colour and beauty

in the blooming season. While snow still spreads a thin blanket on the ground, shoots, valiantly, peep through the chilly earth. In a few weeks the bell-shaped blossoms open, reminding us that the seeming death of winter always blooms into new life when springtime comes. There are those people who have a spirit of perennial springtime, always ready and eager to testify of new hopes.

The daisy in its white dress, with heart-of-gold, is the simple flower of the countryside, giving of itself in friendly fashion without guile, artifice or pretense. The daisy reminds us of heart-of-gold individuals, who in simple, honest, dependable ways labour without thought of reward. We need many daisies in life's garden plot.

The appealing little pansy with its velvety face is another lovely flower. The pansy reminds us of those who have an abundance of inner richness because they have sown seeds of goodness, kindness and truth in the heart's garden. These people have no room for gossip or malice, but are ever kind and forbearing.

"Plant these for colour through heat and drought," urge the nurseries. "A small packet of seed produces a blaze of colour." Our late summer gardens are "saved" by the zinnia. Don't you admire zinnia people? They are unruffled by heated, hasty words. They remain resistant to tears of self-pity. They stand aloof from pettiness. They are real towers of brightness and sturdy faith.

Charming sprays of sky-blue forget-me-nots bring to mind a story of a Scottish shepherd who saw a scientist studying a bluebell. "What are you doing?" the boy asked "Stoop down and look," the scientist invited, as he handed the boy the magnifying glass. The boy was amazed at the beauty revealed. "And to think," he said, "I have been trampling them under my feet!" Forget-me-not people bestow charm. A close scrutiny of their lives reveals they remember the lonely, the sick and the sorrowing, in addition to their circle of friends.



Snapdragons! From the early days of summer until frost, they splash their clustered, coloured stalks in flower borders with continuous bloom. They bring a riot of cheer into a sick room or grace a bowl for a festive touch to a dinner table. Snapdragons give and give and give; their bright petals are like grateful people giving thanks. May we be ready to give graciously of our time and our talents that our lives too may bloom in graciousness and constancy.

Yes, the message of flowers can grace our daily lives. Flowers lend brightness in sun or shower. Flowers turn for the sun's caress and warmth. Flowers create harmony and beauty. Each variety blooms happily according to its own nature. So may we!

Donna Russett is the President of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

Another Tulip Tribute



Members of the Parham Branch in the Frontenac District participated in a "Tulip Tribute." Along with the Grade 6 and 7 students, they planted bulbs at Hinchinbrooke Public School in honour of past WI members who worked on the home front during World War II. For every tulip planted in community gardens, a similar number was planted in memorial beds in Ottawa, bringing the number of blooms to over three million for the Canadian Tulip Festival in May. The Canadian Embassy and the Royal Netherlands Embassy sponsored the Tribute. Pictured above from left to right are three Grade 7 students - Sheri Bevans, Erin McConnell and Melissa Tyson - and Doreen Howes, President of the Parham Branch.

Submitted by Mrs. M. Howes, member of the Parham Women's Institute and Public Relations Officer for the Frontenac District.