

What is the Dahlia Legacy Project? By Anne Maria Jacobson

“What is the Dahlia Legacy Project?” I get this question a lot. And truth be told, I’m struggling to fine tune a description or my “elevator pitch” to something snappy, exciting and under two minutes.

In short, it’s an effort to establish an archival rich database of our Pacific Northwest Dahlia history. Sort of snappy.

Did you know, we have the highest concentration of dahlia hybridizers and dahlia legends in the world? That is exciting!

We need to capture their remarkable history and vast knowledge and bring it all onto a friendly online platform for all to benefit from. In doing so we protect our history for the future generations of dahlia addicts.

This idea planted itself like a wee little seed in my head during 2020 and took firm root by that fall. Three events transpired that germinated that seed and began sending out roots.

Event One: To my naïve delight I discovered the most adorable pink pom sport from Stoneleigh Joyce in my garden and desperately wanted to keep it. Being a newbie to the hybridizing world of dahlias I had NO IDEA how to bring my little sport forward. I started asking my favorite dahlia hybridizers “what do I do to keep my sweet little sport going?” One of the benefits of this happening in 2020 was people were home and picking up their phones and answering their emails. Interestingly the four mentors who responded all had a common response that centered around leaf cuttings and Gordie LeRoux. I didn’t know what either of these terms meant (remember I’m new to all this). Thus, more inquiries were made. Mentor One encouraged me to read Gordie’s Dahlias of Today article on leaf cuttings. “Great idea! Which DOT is that in? How do I find past DOT editions? How do you spell Gordy La Roo?” So many questions.... And Google wasn’t answering any of them well. Round three inquires ensued – this time, Mentor Two did some digging through their bookshelves, found the edition in question, and dropped off a photocopy of the article for me!!! I immediately read the detailed instructions and diligently went out to my garden and began taking leaf cuttings of my sweet little sport...

But I digress – I’m supposed to be explaining how the DLP came to be.

Event Two: Due to COVID-19 the National Show in Wenatchee was postponed. At the time I was leading on the pre-show garden tours and reaching out to each wonderful dahlia gardener who was preparing to host a tour and let them know we were on hold till 2024. One of these conversations impacted me profoundly and nurtured that seed of an idea along. The comment was “it’s a real shame this show has to be cancelled because there are several great dahlia growers who probably won’t be here or able to attend the show in four years”. This thought was shocking and frightening to me. I had never really considered the mortality of the Dahlia Giants I look up to until that moment.

Event Three: Two phenomenal Dahlia Legends passed away in the summer of 2020 within weeks of each other. Like so many in the dahlia community, I too was devastated.

I didn’t get the chance to know one of them, but I was certainly aware of their impact on the dahlia world. The other I had only recently struck up a friendship with. I felt cheated and upset that I hadn’t

known either better. I tried to find articles on them to learn more, but it was challenging to track them down and most were only available in hard copy from someone else.

Something had to be done. There must be a way to honor these amazing pioneers and champions in the PNW Dahlia world as well as those who came before them and those still with us.

That little seed's roots dug deep and became a vision to create an online archival rich database of our PNW Dahlia history in a wiki page format. It would be a depository filled with photos, articles, and stories about our dahlia legends. All Federation clubs could utilize the project to increase member engagement and we could structure many of the projects to qualify as judging projects for those working on progressing through the judging program! Clubs could share their history and focus on creating profiles of their members who had reached "legend" status over the years. Newer dahlia enthusiasts could interview living legends either about themselves or those who had been their mentors so we could create history profiles on them too before we get to a point where there isn't someone who remembers the earlier innovators and their dahlia history and contributions are lost.

The online database would be available to anyone who wanted to learn more about dahlias and the people who grew them. Instead of reinventing best practices of dahlia growing, like how to save a sport for example – you would just search the data base for information and multiple articles on proven methods by our own dahlia experts would come up and you would be on your way. We could then build on these methods and advance the process to the next level quicker!

A group of us came together and formalized the concept and pitched it to the Federation board. They approved the project, agreed to allocate the resources needed to get it started and the Dahlia Legacy Project was born!

The DLP is very much in its infancy state, but we have high hopes for what it can become.

We are slowly building out this collection of resources about the leaders in the dahlia hybridizing and show world, sharing their stories and best practices and articles they have written and or have been written about them. Photos are being collected and hybridization lists are being confirmed. This effort is volunteer based and thus taking longer to actualize than originally hoped but we will get there. Volunteers from several of Federation clubs have begun creating profiles from interviews on living legends. Most clubs have contributed a history on their organization. The Puget Sound Dahlia Association funded the effort to electronically scan all the past issues of Dahlias of Today, and as soon as we figure out how to set up the search engine, we will make these editions (sans the most current publications) available for free to access on the DLP wiki page.

I'm excited for the opportunity this project offers the dahlia world. It is an effort that will provide member engagement and learning opportunities for years to come.

Many of the Federations clubs are actively involved and there are nearly 60 people enthusiastically interested in finding ways to help and participating in quarterly planning sessions. Of course, it will take many more contributors and a sustained campaign to fully realize this project. Those who have jumped in have truly enjoyed the time they've donated to their chosen project and benefitted from the engagement and knowledge it provided them.

There are as many ways to support the DLP as there are varieties of dahlias! If you like meeting and talking with people, there is a long list of living legends needing to be interviewed and their profiles written, this can be a great team project too. Prefer to work more behind the scenes or on your own? We have research projects, cataloging, electronic scanning and indexing to be done. It's sort of like weeding – the opportunities are seemingly endless!

The project wouldn't be this far along without the foundational help, inspiration, and positive energies of the following individuals: Alli Richards, Colin Walker, Betty Girard, Linda Holmes-Cook, Paul Kusche, Doug Symonds, Roger Walker, and Pete Haywood. Thank you, Thank you!

To check out the Dahlia Legacy Project plug in <http://dahlia.wikidot.com/> and let me know what you think. If you would like to find out more or how you can become involved, please contact me– we need you!

Postscript: With help from Mentor One my sport survived! The genetics have not settled yet – we shall see what happens.

Mentor Three gifted me a nearly complete collection of Dahlias of Today!

And if you want to search leaf cuttings or Kenora dahlia varieties, be sure to spell the name correctly - it's Gordie Leroux!