

Geoffrey B. Charlesworth
September 29th 1920 – May 14th 2008



Raised in a Yorkshire, England mining village, Geoffrey Charlesworth won a scholarship to Cambridge University from where he was recruited by Alan Turing to join the war time code breakers at Bletchley Park. There he met Norman Singer and formed a partnership that lasted almost sixty years until Norman's death in 2001.

After a short time teaching in Egypt, Geoffrey immigrated to the USA where he made a thirty year career in teaching mathematics (receiving an Excellence in Teaching award in 1960) and in administration at Hofstra University.

On Long Island, Geoffrey developed an interest in rock gardening that was to become a life-time love, shared with Norman. After buying a summer home in Sandisfield, MA in 1968, they joined the Connecticut chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS). As Chairman of the chapter, Geoffrey was obliged to write a column for the monthly newsletter. Those columns became the basis for *The Opinionated Gardener* which won the Garden Writers of America's Quill and Trowel Award in 1987. Eventually, Norman and Geoffrey co-founded the Berkshire chapter based at the Berkshire Botanical Garden in Stockbridge, MA. Many people joined just for the articles in the newsletter, amongst which were Geoffrey's ever informative and often wry musings on plants, the joys and perils of gardening and life in general. From these came *A Gardener Obsessed* in 1994 including a verse response to, "Why did my plant die?", the suggested "first one hundred alpine plants" and much advice given with self-deprecating humor.

The 5-acre Sandisfield garden, including an arboretum, perennials and most especially many beds of rock garden plants, attracted visitors from all over the world. Sowing more than one thousand seeds a year and studying a succession of species in depth, Geoffrey became an expert plantsman and sought-after speaker and was invited to make presentations across the USA and in Europe. In 1987 he received from NARGS their *Award of Merit* and in 1990 the *Carleton Worth Award* for "distinguished writing on rock gardening and rock garden plants." In a section of the special centennial edition of "*Horticulture Magazine*", April 2004, they listed their "top 100" books" and #3 reads:

Geoffrey Charlesworth, *The Opinionated Gardener* ‘Take equal measures of dry, acerbic wit, sharp intelligence, consummate plantsmanship, and philosophical speculation and you get the uniquely satisfying blend contained in “The Opinionated Gardener”, written by one of America’s most respected rock gardeners. Although there’s much here about alpine plants, there’s also much that is universal: “Being happy is dirt under your fingernails, wearing old clothes, having a good idea get better the longer you work at it, starting a new bed, giving plants away, and listening to rain.” ‘

Geoffrey’s other interests included composing music, playing the piano, folk dancing, painting and writing poetry, all of which he studied and performed to a high standard. The final chapter of his life was spent in the retirement community of Kimball Farms where his interest in both music and art was re-invigorated and he made many new friends.

He will be sadly missed by a legion of friends including those in the international rock gardening community and at Kimball Farms and by his family. He is survived by his sisters Margaret and Olive residing in England and Phyllis in Canada and was pre-deceased by his brothers Norman and Stanley and sister Mabel, all of England. He will also be missed by his nephews and nieces and their children, many of whom visited him in Sandisfield. A celebration of his life will be planned within a few months. Donations in Geoffrey’s memory may be made to the Berkshire Botanical Garden, PO Box 826, Stockbridge, MA 01262

Obituary prepared by Pamela Johnson, friend and executrix
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