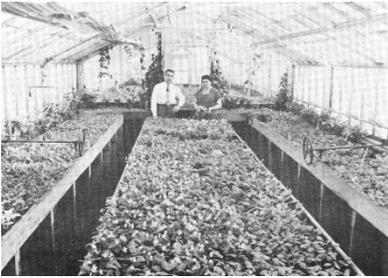


**Anne Palmer Tinari  
1917-2008**

**Our Business Venture**

Are we still selling African violets? Yes, but my son Frank has taken over the business and it's been expanded. The show room area was renovated and the greenhouses are still being maintained with African violets. The business is different in that many other kinds of plants are grown. There is also a mulch business. My husband and I grew only African violets.



We sold African violets exclusively. When we started, it was just the right time I guess because nobody knew anything about African violets. We were able to educate the public. The National African Violet Society of America, Inc. was started about the same time that we were building the business, and that was a big help. The Society had a membership of 18,000 members in the early sixties.

[Photo: Frank and Anne in their first greenhouse]

My husband Frank and I lived a very interesting life with our decision to grow and ship them. We attended fifty African violet conventions in many states. The first was held in Georgia. We've met such interesting people, and I correspond with many growers from all over the USA and foreign countries. Some are in Russia, Japan, Germany, Africa, and Australia to name a few. Most attend the conventions wherever they are held in the USA. It's been a great opportunity to share our life's work with other growers and collectors.

**Beginnings of our African Violet Business**

We were married in 1933, the height of the Depression. My husband had gone to mechanic's school and found employment as an auto mechanic. He enjoyed the work, but like most others at the time, he was laid off. Then he was hired as a gardener by the Jarrett family. The Jarretts lived in the big house on top of the hill above the Pennypack on Terwood Drive. They owned the stone quarry and all this land around the quarry. Mrs. Jarrett's family, the Saunders, lived in a house on top of the quarry on Terwood Road (the house is no longer there). She was Lillian Saunders and married Franklin Jarrett. She established a business of rock garden plants and perennials of all kinds. Frank was employed by her under the name "Jarrett Gardens", a successful enterprise. Frank absorbed and experienced great knowledge of plants from her which opened up a whole new way of earning a living.

Mrs. Lillian Jarrett had a group of African violet plants that were always in full flower and Frank fell in love with these plants. He studied their history and found that people were starting to grow them but knew little about them. All the prominent greenhouses on the Main Line were growing them.

They were named African violets because they came from Africa and looked like a violet. Actually that is not the real name. The original species was discovered in 1892 by Baron Walter Von Saint Paul, a German scientist in Tanzania and Kenya area in the foothills of Africa near the Usambara Mountains. They were first shown at a botanical show in Germany and given the name "Saintpaulia Ionantha".

We recall numerous greenhouses which grew African violets that had purple or lavender blossoms. We purchased plants wherever they were available. Frank found them so interesting that he began a hybridizing program in an effort to develop new colors and improved foliage types. Over fifty years in this fascinating business, we succeeded in developing and registering of 500 varieties or cultivars as they are referred to in the plant world. We corresponded with individuals and plant growers who were anxious to grow and included them as a new crop in their greenhouses.

Like fashions, many early types are no longer available as so much improvement in color, leaf structure, and knowledge of their culture in growing has been established. Our business thrived and all our greenhouses became state and federal certified with constant inspections, allowing us to ship plants and leaf cuttings to all areas. As new varieties were developed, they were advertised and shipped to customers. We developed our own method of safely shipping live plants by mail to arrive in good condition and printed an annual catalog with plant descriptions and featured our new introductions in color.

African violets were particularly popular in the south where the National African Violet Society of America Inc. was established. The first annual meeting was held on October 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> at the Ansley Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia in 1947. Mrs. Jarrett and I attended. Frank was busy building greenhouses at home.

We first traded under the name “Tinari Floral Gardens” but later registered our trade name as “Tinari Greenhouses”. We became acquainted with Mrs. William DuPont in Delaware. She was an avid orchid collector and had imported live orchids and many unusual types of plants. She was so interested in African violets. Mrs. Jarrett introduced us and we received an invitation to visit her greenhouses. She had a little conservatory where her exotic orchids grew on racks throughout. When working with her African violets, discarded leaves often fell through the slats into mulch-like dirt under the benches and many rooted and developed into flowering plants.

[Photo: First home on Terwood Road by the train tracks]



The best variety she had was named “Christina” for the Queen of Sweden on the occasion of her visit to Delaware. We encouraged her to register the beautiful plant with the violet society, but she was too busy to bother. However, in later years she sold us her complete stock of “Christina”. It became very popular and was listed in our annual catalog.

## Early Life

When we married in 1933 we were living with Frank's mother. Ten months after this, Frank's mother and her three year old son, Tony, met with a tragic accident in December of that year. She was killed instantly and her son sustained injuries that he survived. He grew up to be a fine man. After such a tragic happening, we decided to look for a home of our own as we were expecting. The only place we could find was a little white house with the red roof on Terwood Drive next to the train tracks. Frank and I lived happily for five years in this little house we called our "honeymoon house". We installed electricity and made improvements and were so happy to have our own place. Our first child, Clementine, was born in 1934 and we felt so rich even though we didn't have much. Frank's stepfather, the husband of Frank's mother who had died, was left with a little boy and girl, and we took them in for six months in the house with the red roof. We were happy to have them.

That house was what was termed a "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" house. The first floor was all one room, the second floor was two small bedrooms, and a little bedroom was on the third floor. No bathroom. There was an outdoor facility in the back near the woods. But let me tell you, it was depression time for sure! Almost every morning a tramp of some sort would walk the track in front of the house. Frank was always friendly with people, and he would invite a person in to have breakfast with us. A funny thing happened. One day a tramp came along and I handed him a sandwich because when Frank wasn't home, I would not let anyone in. I thought he had gone on his way. Now that little house had a small porch at the back. I was going to take the youngster up to the facility in the woods. I went to go out the door from my bedroom, and here was the tramp sitting on the porch enjoying his sandwich!

When our next house on 2325 Valley was built, there were no other houses being built. As it was being built, I would come to measure for making dotted Swiss curtains, but it was difficult to get in because all the townspeople were here watching the house being built. Houses just weren't being built during the Depression.



Before the violets, Frank was very interested in honeybees so when we moved here we had about 350 hives. We had imported a honey extractor from Minnesota that had about 20 frames. We put bee hives together. He would rent out the hives to places that had fruit trees for pollination and would tend them until they were full of honey. He used to extract honey in our basement. We would sell the honey in all sizes. This was during the depression and sugar was scarce, so that kept us for a while. Then in 1945 we decided to build a greenhouse. The bees stayed around for quite a while but then African violets took over.

[Photo: Frank's honey business]

My family, the Palmers, numbered ten children. The first born son was Luigi who sadly died three days after his birth. Then eight girls names Mary, Adeline, Ernestine, Florence, Lucy, Josephine, Anna and Margaret. I was the seventh girl and I considered myself the lucky one as I was born the seventh month, the 27<sup>th</sup> day and on the celebration of St. Anne's Day. The tenth child in our family was a son, Philip. He was a graduate of Lower Moreland and attended West Chester State College, earning his teaching degree and taught in the music department at Lower Moreland High School. He later entered the seminary and became a Methodist minister.

His first church assignment was in Yardley, PA. He was a highly respected and popular minister. Our family was Catholic and we attended St. Cecilia's in Fox Chase and enjoyed many activities with our family and friends.

When I was five years old, we lived in the big white house on the corner of Valley Road and Welsh Road. In 1920 we moved into the twin home below the church on Red Lion Road, and I lived there until I was married. My sister Florence died during the flu epidemic in 1918. It was a very sad time. So many people perished.

The Mignatti Company purchased the quarry from the Jarretts. My father was engineer at the quarry for 45 years. When my father went to get his citizen papers, the people said my father's real last name was "Palermo". In those days, Italians weren't thought of very highly. Things have changed since then thankfully. In any case, he was told to forget "Palermo" and insisted he use "Palmer". That's what was officially put on his citizenship document. One day in school, we had a composition to write. I wrote my Italian name "Anna Palermo". The teacher saw that name and got so angry that she sent me out of the room saying, "You should never use that name! Your name is Palmer." My given name is Anna but when I write I use "Anne" because it is a more familiar name. Anna seems cold to me. No one calls me Anna. My father's name was Felipe changed to Philip. My mother was Lucia, changed to Lucy. My mother came to American when she was two years old. My father was a teenager when he came. His mother sold her gold earrings to get him passage to come to America.

Frank came over to this country when he was twelve years old with his mother. His father had come over before and worked in the steel industry but died when he was 27 before he was able to bring his wife and son Frank to America.

### **School Life**

Frank attended Lower Moreland and placed in first grade. He was a quick learner and soon was promoted to third grade. His teacher was Miss Gamble. One day she asked the class a question: "Who wrote the Star Spangled Banner"? No one seemed to know. She looked at Frank turning her hand in a motion symbolic of turning a key. Immediately he shouted "Francis Scott Key". He never forgot her kindness and guidance. During our years at the Philadelphia Flower Show, she always made it a point to attend in her wheelchair and smile and wish Frank well.

My senior class was held in the little attic room in the Lower Moreland School opposite the firehouse (Red Lion School). One day there was a rumor that there was an Italian boy coming to our class named Francisco. Some of my classmates were itching to go to this boy's classroom to make fun. I led the way, there were about six of us. We went down the steps and to the door of the classroom and as we entered, I took one look at him with that curly black hair and great big smile. I backed up! The others retreated too! Fate sure plays a part in every life. Little did I know Frank would one day become my beloved husband.

I graduated from Lower Moreland in 1930. Nineteen people were in my graduating class, including Philip Saint, Tom Redmile, Donald Ivins, and Hattie Campoli. I went to Red Lion School when Mr. Swartley was principal. I remember in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we had class in the second floor in an attic area. Ours was the first class to go to the high school on Murray Avenue. I was a senior then and it was quite a change from the little attic room to go to a brand new school. I remember how the boys rang the bell in the tower at Red Lion School for the last time. Our teacher was Miss Nielsen.

## **The Start of our Life Together**

Frank and I were married in Southampton in Our Lady of Good Counsel. It was in February and there was lots of snow. In the back of the church there was one old man who came up and hugged us. No one else came because it was such a terrible day. My brother Philip and sister Margaret were our witnesses. Margaret made my wedding dress. I was 20 and Frank was 21. After the ceremony, Frank's mother had a big dinner for us. We took the train and went into Philadelphia to Strawbridge & Clothier to have our picture taken.

Frank was earning \$17.50 a week. In those Depression days, that was considered a good wage. We managed. I always wanted to go into hairdressing. My father was from the old school. "If you are going to get married, I am not going to spend money on an education." In those days, you were not encouraged to go on to college or training. I worked for different people. I remember the time I graduated from high school. Frank came to the house with a big bouquet of flowers for me. I thought his interest was for another sister who had curly hair and blue eyes. I felt kind of plain looking. But they were for me. He came another time with flowers and a lovely Cameo and friendship ring. I thought it was for my sister, but I was wrong. In those days you didn't date. If you did, your mother and father came with you. We had a player piano and would play "Tiptoe through the Tulips" and other popular songs. We would sit on the piano bench and enjoy being with each other and our family. Frank was a very generous person who blended in with the family. He would come with a big box of candy or ice cream for all the children. My parents liked him very much. After three years we decided to take the plunge. All the girls I went to school with were in the same boat with the financial climate. It was not at all like today. Presently teachers encourage students to achieve their best grades in preparation for college. It was not even talked about in 1930!

## **Life in Bethayres**

People were very friendly. The only grocery store was "Doerings" and part of it was the Bethayres Post Office. The postmaster was Henry Doering. Later we shipped hundreds of plant orders from this post office and were once told they received a first class rating due to the amount of packages we were sending. Entertainment was primarily radio programs such as "Amos and Andy", comedy shows, and of course, news programs. The great tenor at that time was Mario Lanza, a talented Italian singer and actor. We went to all of his movies. Kate Smith was quite popular at that time as well.

The Pennypack Creek used to freeze over in winter. We went skating there. Terwood Drive would be full of cars and people. In the summer months, the water there was so beautiful. I couldn't swim and neither could our friend, Lillian Jarrett. She had a little rowboat and she would call early in the morning to go for a boat ride. We would paddle up to Bryn Athyn and back.

## **African Violet Business**

I have written a book about African Violets, "Our African Violet Heritage", published in 1975 and sold out! I was also instrumental in getting a postage stamp dedicated honoring the plant. This happened when I was promotion chairman of the African Violet Society of America, Inc. We tried to have it for the celebration of the 199<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of the African violet. When the 100<sup>th</sup> year came up, I was just crazy trying to get the stamp. I happened to get a call one day from a woman I had come to know quite well. She asked if I knew who the Postmaster General was. We had written everywhere we could think of. Well, she said, "He's Marvin Runyon, and he's my brother." I thought she was kidding me. She thought that he might be able to

help. Time went by and we had just about given up, and on a Thanksgiving morning as Frank and I were preparing to go to Clem's house for dinner, a man from Washington, D.C. came to the house and handed me a letter saying, "This is acknowledging the proposed African Violet stamp. Would you please approve it and send it back." I was all shivers and shakes so I didn't open the letter until I came home from dinner. There were a couple minor mistakes which they corrected. It was a picture of a gorgeous pink African violet.

In April, 1993, our convention was held in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where the stamp was first unveiled. Postmaster General Marvin Runyon was unable to attend, so he sent a representative. But in October we went to Beaumont, Texas for the first day issue of the stamp for sale, October 8, 1993. A large celebration was held, the mayor of Beaumont and the state senator was in attendance and many society members. Marvin Runyon spoke, I spoke, and the president of the African Violet Society spoke. I received a large painting of the stamp. I wanted to share it with everyone. A member at the convention who lived very near our society's office took the painting for me to place in the main office of the African Violet Society of America, Inc. headquarters in Beaumont, Texas.



[Photo: Anne's official U.S. stamp]

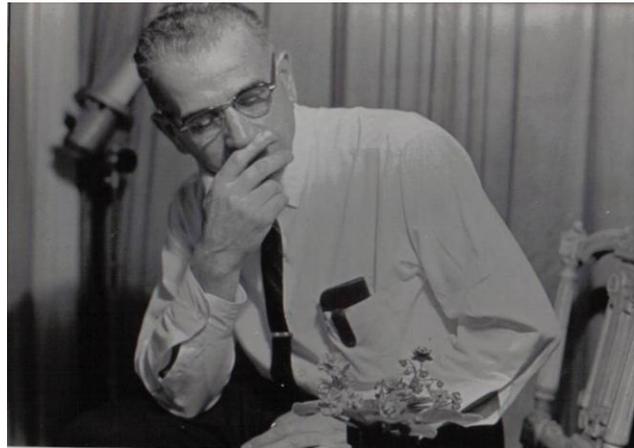
We were strictly African violet growers. We had special boxes for shipping and a method we developed that I wrote in our society magazines about how to do it successfully. In the beginning people thought we were a little crazy, but we had a lot of help from our children coming along who were interested and helpful. Clementine became our secretary until her first child came along at which time Lilianne took over until Frank passed away. Our son, Anthony, is an attorney and Frank Jr. inherited the greenhouse business.

I have kept all the publications of the society since it began in 1947. I am planning to send them about 275 issues to the headquarters in Beaumont, Texas. They will auction them for funds to benefit the society. Hurricane Katrina caused problems in that area with flooding. Mold and mildew have wrought destruction with some parts of their offices. I am glad to be able to send the magazine collection there to help. I was the "question box" editor of the publication for over 20 years. When I thought I was done writing for that column, they asked me to write a column called "Seasonal Suggestions". I wrote that for seven years. Then I was elected President. Being President of the society for two years was a big challenge. You always have people who don't agree with you. I had a secret weapon. My girls! They would do all the typing for me. I never had to ask twice. I have been very active.

My husband was research chairman for the society for many years and he was instrumental in getting Penn State University to devote a greenhouse to African Violets. We became familiar with Dr. Craig who ran that program. We visited to see what they were doing but finally they gave it up. Dr. Craig said to Frank, "I don't know how you do it. All the new varieties you have. Our students haven't been able to produce anything very different." We were able to get research from it for one year and we learned a lot more about insecticides and greenhouse management.

We were involved in many activities. Frank and I took turns accepting invitations to lecture and demonstrate how to propagate and grow African Violets at many garden and violet clubs. We often showed slides and took live plants and cuttings to demonstrate growing practices. Frank was a guest on the Captain Noah show, and we were both guests on the popular weekly “Roy Kersey Garden Show” several times a year. I still have an hour tape recording done on radio with Ernesta Ballard, who headed the Philadelphia Flower Show for many years, featuring African violets.

Our first African violet exhibit was entered in New York City at the Coliseum in 1949. It was a great success attracting many visitors. We received a citation for new and unusual plant material and an Award of Merit. This was a great incentive in pursuing our dream. The first exhibit in the Philadelphia Flower Show was in 1950. Since it was so successful we rented a booth and for thirty years sold African Violets and accessories. Customers patronized us year after year to purchase and to look for new varieties that we introduced.



[Photo: Frank and his famous violet]

The fifth annual convention of the society was held in Dayton, Ohio in 1951. It was a real milestone for members. An African Violet Judges Manual had been published. Thus the first judging school was held. After a three hour lecture, students were privileged to take a judges’ test and were certified to judge national shows. I was one of 25 students who took and passed the first test. I studied further, attending each judges’ school and received a lifetime judges’ status, and five years later became an African violet judge teacher.

I enjoyed invitations from around the country to teach the class and to serve on their judging team at the national shows. I taught judging classes in Atlanta, New York, New Jersey, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and even went to Bermuda. My greatest thrill and experience was when I taught the school in Colorado with 75 students. Most students took the lengthy test, passed and received their certificate enabling them to judge in our national shows.

I feel very blessed to have ten grandchildren and ten great grandchildren. I am privileged to have family, home and to have been a big part of a thriving business. Frank worked until two days before he passed in 2002 at the age of 90. His biggest disappointment in his life’s work was that he couldn’t produce a plant that had fragrance. We hope someday intense hybridizing will make it possible.

I’ve never felt deprived. God was good to us and the years we spent together. I have albums and albums of things we did together. No regrets, it’s been a wonderful life.