

The Story of 'Ellie's Girl' and My Camellia Hybridizing

by Craig Carroll, NSW Camellia Research Society

In 1995 when I had my camellia and azalea maintenance business, I also did general gardening for some clients. One day, a client from Pymble told me I could have a seedling, which was about 18" high, from under her *C.r.* 'Ellie Rubensohn'. I dug it up and planted it in an 8"(200 mm) pot. The following year it had one bud on it which flowered formal double, so I grafted it in the same year. It flowered again two to three years later. I observed its performance for the next five years and showed it at the NSWCR Society meeting. Charlie Cowell, of Cowell's Nursery at Theresa Park, was very impressed with it and I gave scions to Camellia Grove Nursery at St. Ives, who later gave scions to Bill Hooper of Camellia Vale Nursery at Bexley. When Bill retired, he sold his camellias to Charlie Cowell. I originally named this camellia 'Opening Presence' but later changed the name to 'Ellie's Girl', since the seedling originated from 'Ellie Rubensohn'.

'Ellie's Girl' is now growing everywhere and people are asking who named it. I did write a small article about it in *Camellia News* some time ago and so did Charlie Cowell. Now when I look up the camellia reference books, I find that my camellia 'Ellie's Girl' was bred and named by the client who gave me the seedling. I am the one who named it and tried to register it formally but did not provide a photo with the flowers on the bush. I do a lot of hybridizing with other plants, azaleas, irises, and daylilies and have registered azaleas and irises. 'Ellie's Girl' is the first cultivar for which I have not obtained recognition for propagation and naming. I have a number of plants of 'Ellie's Girl' in our garden at Mount Tomah and it makes a very showy garden camellia, much admired by all who have grown it.

In the past twenty years I have done a number of camellia crosses, mainly using *C.reticulata*. I have done combinations such as *C.reticulata* x *C.reticulata*, *C.reticulata* x *C.japonica*, *C.reticulata* x *C.saluenensis*, and *C.reticulata* x *C.fraterna*. My experience has taught me that the best species to use are *C.reticulata* x *C.japonica* which produces hardy seedlings. One of my best seed parents has been *C.r.* 'Buddha', a *C.reticulata* x *C.pitardii* variety Yunnanica. In the past I have also used *C.r.* 'Lasca Beauty', which is a good seed parent but now I do not sow many chance seedlings as I can achieve better results, when hybridising, by choosing desirable characteristics that may result in better progeny. I have also tried using *C.amplexicaulis* which has not worked but have crossed *C.reticulata* onto a triploid which has resulted in three seedlings. With *C.r.* 'Buddha' as the seed parent I have crossed the following *C.japonica* and other species as the pollen parents; *C.J.* 'Drama Girl', *C.J.* 'Kramer's Supreme', *C.hyb.* 'Anne's Memorial', *C.J.* 'Easter Morn', *C.r.* 'Dr Clifford Parks', *C.r.* 'Lasca Beauty', *C.r.* 'Hody Wilson', *C.J.* 'Takanini', *C.hyb.* 'Spring Daze', *C.J.* 'Cathy Becher', *C.r.* 'Alaskan Queen', *C.J.* 'Mark Alan Variegated', *C.frate ma*, *C.hyb.* 'Black Opal', (which resulted in seven small seeds that have all germinated), *C.J.* 'Swan Lake' and *C.r.* 'William Hertrich'.

This year I have seeds from *C.r.* 'Buddha' crossed with *C.J.*

'Margaret Davis', *C.J.* 'Moonlight Bay', *C.hyb.* 'Pale Opal', *C.J.* 'Chin Tsubaki', *C.J.* 'Midnight Magic', and a (*C.r.* 'Lasca Beauty' x *C.nitidissima*) seedling. Most of these seedlings have a compact form inherited from the *C.japonica* parent. I have some outstanding foliage resulting from the *C.r.* 'Dr Clifford Parks' cross. I always make reciprocal crosses and do as many of the same crosses as I can to increase the odds of realizing what I am trying to achieve.

A lot of people I have spoken to ask me why I use 'Buddha' which is regarded as a weak plant. I have learnt over the years that it is important to choose a pollen parent that is strong and has a compact growth habit inherited from *C.japonica*. When I worked at Camellia Grove Nursery we changed to *C.reticulata* x *C.japonica* crosses as they were stronger plants and had less chance of getting dieback caused by the fungus *Glomerella cingulata*, which occurs when environmental conditions favour disease development. This is the reason why I have used strong japonicas as pollen parents to minimize the potential problems of dieback.

Why hybridize? Many people ask what is left to do. Quite simply the possibilities are endless. There are now so many species available in Australia for crossing to produce new hybrids with new characteristics and qualities. Watching your own creations grow and the anticipation of seeing what their flowers will ultimately look like will have you rushing out every morning to see if your camellia seedling has flowered.

I would like to see more camellias bred here in Australia. It is not a difficult task to do and I get lots of enjoyment out of hybridising my camellias.