

## The Rose of Tralee

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This is the story of a distant ancestor of mine, actually an uncle several times removed, named Gustov McDermott.

When Gustov was an infant, his family immigrated to Ireland and settled near Tralee Bay, in Southwest Ireland. I doubt that the family name was actually McDermott. Gustov's father was named Hans. His mother was named Helga. His sisters were named Heidi and Gretchen. Anyway, when they settled on the outskirts of Tralee, they took the name McDermott. Nobody knows what their name really was, or where they actually came from, or why they arrived in Tralee sweating and with only what they could carry at a dead run. That's just the kind of people that they were.

Gustov grew up in Tralee, but he had little interest in the local seaport and manufacturing activities. His passion was flowers. He became an avid gardener at an early age and, by the time he was 20, he was heavily involved in plant genetics and heredity. His goal was to develop a flower that would make him and his family famous. I suppose that he'd grown up amid a certain amount of thinly veiled gossip about the family tree. Anyway, he worked hard and after several years of careful cross-breeding, he produced a rather flamboyant Azalea. He called it the Azalea of Tralee. Sadly, it was frail and easily damaged. It never fulfilled his hopes of fame.

After his failure with Azaleas, Gustov worked with Chrysanthemums. He spent most of his active career as a horticulturist working with Chrysanthemums. He created several new strains and eventually produced a lovely miniature Chrysanthemum of a startling purple hue. He dubbed it the Chrysanthemum of Tralee. It, however, proved susceptible to the Coastal Rusty Blight and within a year it was extinct.

Gustov spent the following decade developing an extravagant daisy, which was capable of producing blossoms with a diameter of up to 24 inches. It was an impressive and spectacular flower but incapable of standing erect on its own stem, which he was unable to develop to a degree to match the size of the flower. That effort eventually flopped.

In his declining years, Gustov began to work with roses. They proved ideal. They were hardy and easily bred in many varieties. Midway into his project, a process server arrived from a small European principality, searching for the Wilhelm family. All of the McDermott's vanished overnight, somewhat like the proverbial covey of quail. Indeed, one of them ended up in the colonies where he took the name Quayle. His family has been here ever since, mostly living in welcome obscurity, with the occasional rare exception.

Gustov also came to the colonies, leaving his son John behind, but bringing his precious roses with him. He settled in New York, and continued his research. His final achievement was a multicolored rose of stunning complexity. Sadly, it had needle-sharp thorns over 6 inches long and the blossoms were extremely transient, lasting scant hours before they withered and fell to the ground. Without much hope, he called it the Rose of Ithaca. The plant proved extremely hardy and spread to surrounding

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lawns where it was viewed as a weed. It was a local nuisance for many years, proving impossible to eradicate, until it was eventually exterminated after the invention of herbicide for which it is believed the Rose of Ithaca was the primary incentive.

Gustov McDermott died shortly after developing the Rose of Ithaca, impoverished, disillusioned, and unknown, and never realizing what an ugly hand he had been dealt by fate.