

An Exciting Life in Horticulture[®]

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We don't have much influence on where and to whom we are born, but we do have a lot of influence on what we do with our lives, even from a relatively early age. I was born in the country of Denmark, to a horticulturist father and a mother who came from farming.

This was in 1941 during the Nazi occupation of Denmark in World War II. Shortly after the war, my parents started a small nursery that never grew beyond the original two acres.

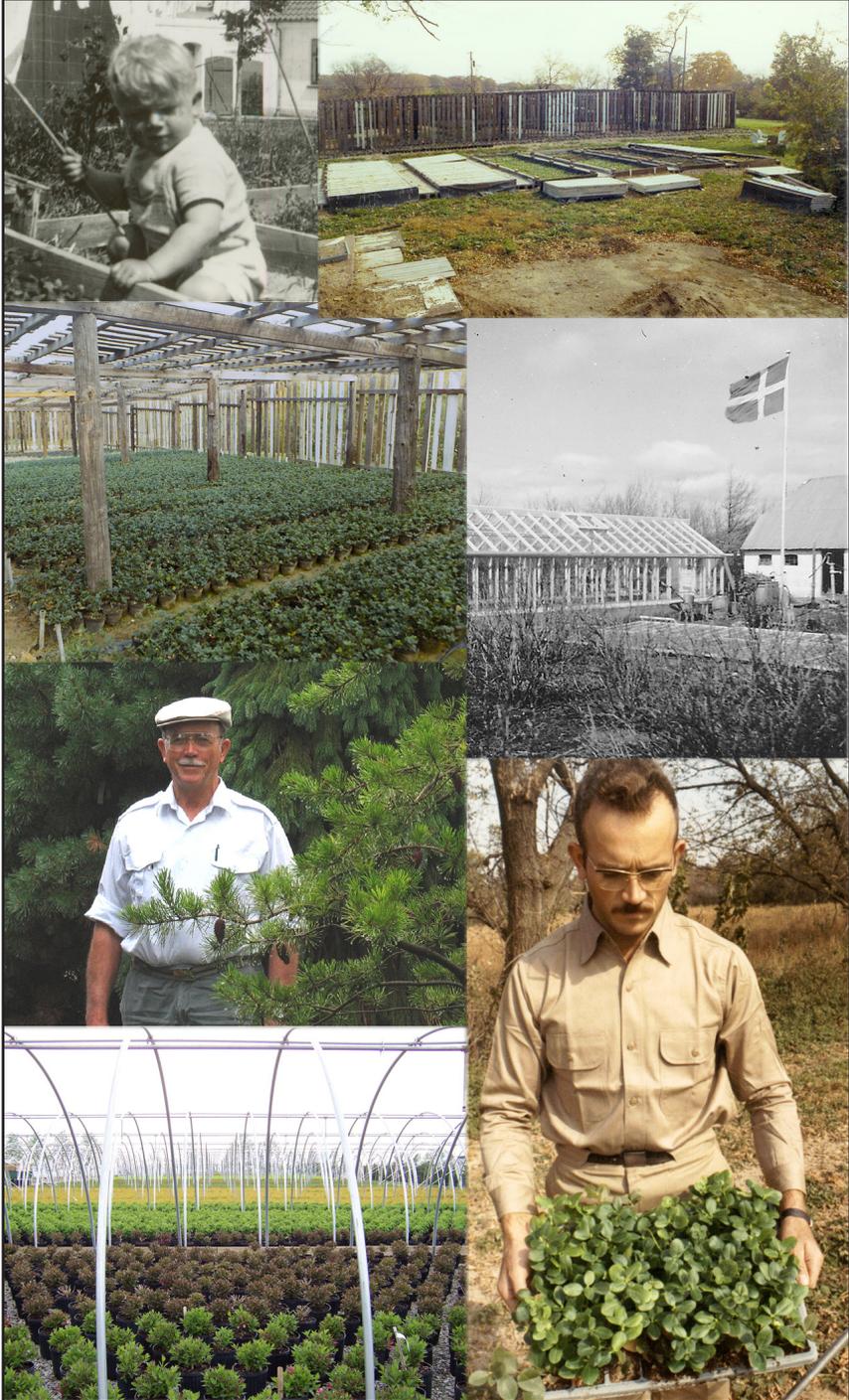
This is where I grew up, in a life with plants that had to provide our livelihood. Often that was very meager. There was a lot of love and a lot of teaching, and somehow we all liked those plants. Unfortunately, my father often liked too many that never produced for the livelihood. Since our family could not afford to send me to high school (you paid for that in those days) I was apprenticed out to a nursery in a neighboring town. Here I learned to grow many plants that I never knew about from my father's place. The boss was good; he even grew some plants just so I could learn how to do it!

Later I came to a larger nursery and finished my apprenticeship. This was capped with a year in horticulture school and diploma from there. Being short on education, but with a great desire to learn and some brains, this was like being in heaven for me. This year was one of the best and most formative of my life, even though I had to have a part-time job and borrow money from my aunt to be there.

In those days, young men had a simple choice when they were about 20 and finished with their apprenticeship: They could either enlist in the Army or they were drafted! I enlisted in the Royal Danish Army Corps of Engineers and ended up as an engineer-officer. That became a very valuable experience for me in my later life as a leader and businessman.

In 1965 I came to the U.S.A., to see the world and to learn more about my trade of horticulture. I was fortunate to come to work for Jack Hill at the D. Hill Nursery in Dundee, Illinois. He was an I.P.P.S. member and took me to my first meeting, in Cleveland, Ohio. I was to become his propagator. Here, I also met plantsman and propagator, John Wilde, who was to really become my mentor in plant propagation. John had been a plant explorer in the Amazon jungle during World War II and later became an I.P.P.S. fellow.

The real unique thing about the I.P.P.S. was that here a young man (ladies had not come about at that time) was considered to be something and somebody, even if he did not know a lot or have a lot of experience. That was a good feeling! You could actually talk with people like Jim Wells, Bill Flemer, Case Hoogendorn, Pete Vermeulen, and many professors who easily shared their knowledge. If the horticulture school was my first heaven — this certainly was my second! There have been very few years since 1965, when I have not attended an I.P.P.S. conference and later on in many foreign places. On the International Board and last as President, I came to work with growers and plantsmen from around the World. That was a great experience.



When my wife and I later decided to start our own nursery, we made use of endless things I had learned in I.P.P.S. The Farm Credit system became our source of money for many years. I had learned about that in a bar in Norfolk at an I.P.P.S. meeting, having a drink with no other than Jim Wells!

Charlie Hess, professor from Rutgers and later Under-Secretary of Agriculture, encouraged me to write an article about a propagation setup I had made and later gave a talk about it. That became the beginning to becoming involved in I.P.P.S. affairs, helping to organize conferences, working on the Board, becoming Eastern President, and later on the I.P.P.S. International Board — last as International President in 2000.

For many years I spent more time on organizing and business-things than propagating and growing plants. Younger people in our nurseries have been doing that, and are of course I.P.P.S. members. As I had to start thinking of retiring, or maybe rather getting out of the way for our younger people, I started another nursery with a friend. It is not a large operation, so we can be out in the field and growing plants again. And last year, I built a small greenhouse and rooted my first crop of cuttings in I don't know how many years. That felt good.

We come to many crossroads in life and we must choose which roads to take. We are fortunate if good parents, teachers, and mentors lend us a helping hand in making our own decisions. Without I.P.P.S. I would not be who I am and we would not be where we are.