

The Way We Were

Susan and Anthony Liberta's rose adventures began in the early 1960s when they decided to plant six rose bushes at their newly acquired home in Normal. Those original six bushes became the genesis for planting approximately 200 championship caliber bushes of all types of roses. Anthony's motivation to "play in the dirt" centered around his enjoyment of entering his rose blooms in competition with those of other Midwestern growers.

The sight of so many blooms in her yard awakened Susan's artistic talents, and she began designing and constructing floral arrangements that featured their home-grown roses. She decided to join her husband in the world of floral competition, entering her creations in the arrangements division while Anthony exhibited his blooms in the non-arrangements division. As the years marched onward, their venues of competition included such sites as Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Minneapolis, Mobile, San Diego, Seattle, and St. Louis.

As Susan's reputation as a rose specialist in design grew, she began to receive invitations to participate in national-level workshops devoted to floral arranging as well as to speak at seminars and to write articles for various publications, including the *American Rose* magazine. She was also invited to contribute a chapter and photographs to the book *Ultimate rose* which was assembled by the *American Rose Society* and published by Dorling Kindersley. Meanwhile, Anthony's activities included becoming an accredited judge of competitive roses, lecturing, writing articles, and serving six years on the *American Rose Society's* Board of Directors.

Susan and Anthony competed as a team using their own garden-grown roses for approximately 30 years. The number of roses grown at the residence in Normal has since been scaled back, but the beauty of those that remain continues to be enjoyed.

Susan Elizabeth (Fitch) Liberta, 85, of Normal, passed away on July 13, 2023 at her home. Susan was born May 5, 1938, in Elmhurst, Illinois to Horatio and Dorothy (Schenk) Fitch. She married Anthony Liberta on February 1, 1960, in Champaign. Preceding her in death were her parents, and sons, Andrew Ross Liberta and Marc Robert Liberta. Susan is survived by her husband, her daughter, Valerie S. Liberta, Pawnee; and one nephew, Brian Fitch, El Dorado Hills, California. Susan graduated from Champaign Central High School and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Illinois, Urbana. Her hobbies included floral arranging that featured roses from the family garden. When her arrangements were entered at national competitions sponsored by the *American Rose Society*, they consistently won national awards. She also wrote articles on the art of constructing floral arrangements for such publications as the *American Rose*, and was a contributing author for the book *Ultimate rose*. She was a longtime member of the former McLean County Rose Society, was a Consulting Rosarian for the *American Rose Society*, and presented programs and workshops at various venues throughout the country about the use of roses in floral arrangements.

In addition to Sue's love of roses, her husband, Dr. Anthony Liberta, professor emeritus at Illinois State University dedicated his career to the University but was also a Rose Enthusiast: Dr. Liberta was also an avid rose grower. He was a member of the former McLean County Rose Society (IL) and served in various roles, including Editor, Treasurer, Vice-President, and President.

Dr. Anthony Liberta's legacy extends from scientific research to a passion for roses, leaving a lasting impact on both education and horticulture. Liberta joined the Department of Biological Sciences at Illinois State Normal University in the role of assistant professor of mycology in 1961. While at ISU, Liberta's research included findings that led to the discovery of numerous species and one new genus. In recognition of his work, Liberta was named Distinguished Professor in 1990.

In 2003, Dr. Anthony Liberta was asked to be on Rose Chat Radio
Dr. Tony Liberta - Old Garden Roses | Rose Chat Podcast (podbean.com)

Join us as Rose Chat Radio Welcomes Dr. Tony Liberta. We'll be chatting Old Garden Roses! As a member of the *American Rose Society* he served on its Board of Directors for six years as the Director of the Illinois-Indiana District as well as serving a three-year term as a trustee of the ARS Maintenance Endowment Trust. He has served on several committees of the *American Rose Society*, and chaired its Rose Classification Committee for thirteen years. He frequently lectures and writes articles on various aspects of rose culture and was a contributing author, along with his wife, to the books *Ultimate rose* and *The Rose*. He also helped revise the section on the genus *Rosa* for the American Horticulture Society's 2004 edition of its A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants. He is an accredited rose judge and was designated a Master Rosarian by the *American Rose Society* in 2005. He also served as chairperson of rose judges in the Illinois-Indiana district for more than a decade. In 1989, he was selected as the *American Rose Society's* Outstanding Judge in the Illinois-Indiana District. He received the *American Rose Society* President's Citation for his role in modernizing the society's system of classifying roses. Other *American Rose Society* awards included the Bronze Honor Medal (shared with his wife) for dedicated service to the McLean County Rose Society, the *American Rose Society* Silver Honor Medal for service to the Illinois-Indiana District (1988), and the Outstanding Consulting Rosarian Award in 2001.

