

# Pauleen Sullivan

## May 27, 1921 – August 8, 2012



### Remembrances from Leland Lai, John Dransfield and Ralph Velez.

**Leland Lai:** *Chamaedorea elegans* was my first palm, given to me by a very elegant woman, Pauleen Sullivan. Her love for palms took her far beyond physical limitations faced by most polio victims to the jungles of Ecuador, Venezuela, Tonga, Australia, Indonesia, down rivers in Thailand and the Amazon basin, yes,

all using a wheel chair. In a way, you could say she was driven by her passion for palms and along the way, gave a lot of others a ride to “can do.” What better way to remember this Queen of Palms than a tribute of her involvement and commitment to the International Palm Society.

**John Dransfield:** Pauleen Sullivan had true grit and determination. My first contact with her was in 1975. Newly returned from four years in Indonesia, I had been appointed a palm taxonomist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. Pauleen wrote to me to ask about the possibility of seeing interesting palms in Northern Sumatra, as she and her husband Joe were planning a trip to Indonesia. I enthused about interesting localities where I had seen unusual palms, little knowing that Pauleen was a polio victim and using a wheel chair. It was, in fact, not until much later that I learned that she had serious mobility problems. Notwithstanding this, Pauleen and Joe did indeed visit Sumatra. They found the going tough, but they did see some of the palms I had mentioned. They went on from Sumatra to Jakarta, in Java, where they were met by our old friend Eric Taylor, at the time an IPS member. Joe had a fatal heart attack in Jakarta, and Eric helped Pauleen with the traumatic business of repatriating Joe's body.

1. Pauleen Sullivan palm hunting on Mount Lewis, assisted by Tony Irvine and Randy Moore, while Maria Boggs, Natalie Uhl, Teddie Buhler and John Dransfield look on. Photo S. Dransfield.



The spirit and determination that had taken her to the jungles of Sumatra were often in evidence at IPS Biennials. One of the most memorable occasions was during the 1988 Queensland Biennial on a day's outing to the wet forests of Mount Lewis. Although the forest was visible from the road and exquisitely beautiful, several of the undergrowth palms were only visible if one penetrated the forest edge. Nothing daunted, Pauleen persuaded two or three stalwarts to carry her in her chair through the roadside scrub (Fig. 1) so she could see the as yet undescribed *Linospadix apetiolata* that is such a feature of the forest on Mount Lewis.

Natalie Uhl, my wife Jatmi and I stayed with Pauleen in 1983 when we were in California for an interim meeting of the IPS Board of Directors, at which we started the major drive to raise funds for the publication of the first edition of *Genera Palmarum*. Pauleen was the IPS Bookstore. She ran this with total commitment. The prospect of the IPS publishing GP enthused her, and she spearheaded the fund raising and pre-publication sale that was, eventually, to provide sufficient funds for the Society to co-publish the book.

In Ventura Pauleen lived in a single-story house, superbly set up for wheel chair access and including a pool for hydro-therapy. The house was decorated in jungle style. Surrounding the pool was a collection of palms that in the 1980s would have been considered great rarities. I particularly remember a wonderful plant of *Licuala peltata* var. *sumawongii*, with its entire fronds overhanging the pool. Outside in the narrow strip in front of her house was a sensational *Trithrinax campestris* and other treasures.

Pauleen's contribution to the IPS in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s was immense. Her commitment to singlehandedly running the Bookstore was complete, and the role she played in fund-raising for the publication of *Genera Palmarum* and Don Hodel's *Chamaedorea Palms* has a lasting legacy in the form of the Revolving Publications Fund. She was a most remarkable lady.

**Ralph Velez:** Pauleen was the "Palm Queen" (Fig. 2). I must have met her back in the late 1960s or early 1970s. At that time, it was primarily Joe, her husband, who had been fixated with palms. Earlier on, Joe and Pauleen operated a nursery in Ventura. They sold the nursery and purchased various apartment



2. Pauleen, the "Amazon Queen," in 1973.

complexes. Naturally, they landscaped all of them with palms. It was at one of these complexes that I helped Pauleen plant a *Jubaeopsis caffra*.

In her pool room she had a number of palms planted around the perimeter of the pool. That was the first and only time I saw *Pelagodoxa henryana*, native to the Marquesas. It is an incredible palm, and until that time I had never seen anything like it in California. She did a number of "firsts" like this, introducing many of us to palms unknown or rarely seen within the commercial nursery world.

Pauleen also had a great sense of humor. In 1996, a Palm Society of Southern California local chapter meeting was held at Leland Lai's Jardin Topagonia. There was always an auction at the end of the day. Pauleen was always full of surprises and brought a very special palm (as we all thought) from Madagascar. It had a bright orange crownshaft and everyone thought it would fetch a high bid for the Society. This plant was in a two gallon pot

and, perhaps two feet high. As the bidding approached \$200, Pauleen finally stopped the bidding and revealed that she had pulled a joke on everyone and that the specimen was actually a *Chamaedorea klotzschiana* of which she had painted the crownshaft an alluring orange.

**Leland Lai:** When she could no longer travel to far destinations, she embarked on her last commitment with the help of many friends, but mostly with her son Terry and Don Tollefson. She purchased 11 acres in Kapoho and planted over 3000 palms of more than 400 species on rock hard lava. Most of these were "surface" planted where the area around the plant was mounded with volcanic cinder. These grew so well that by the 2004 IPS Biennial in Hawaii, she had full grown specimens. She died 8 August 2012 at the age of 91 after a near lifetime devoted to the interest she loved. If there is a Palm heaven, know that Pauleen is the Queen, and we shall all miss her.