



BromeliAdvisory

December 2010
BSSF Officers 2010

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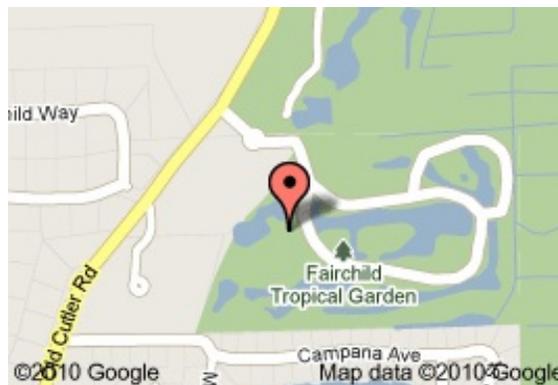
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DECEMBER 7, 2010, 7:00 PM CAN SHOW AT 6:30
HOLIDAY PARTY
FOOD TABLE: Enormous – this is show time.
NEW SITE: **the Visitor Center**

NOTE THE LOCATION IS NOT CORBIN A
Where is the Visitors' Center? Look at map below



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Bromeliads and Squirrels

by Alan Herndon

With their wide brown eyes, fuzzy faces and long furry tails, squirrels seem the embodiment of all that is cute and good. What could be more delightful than watching squirrels run merrily through the tree branches, or attack a ‘squirrel proof’ bird feeder from all possible angles until they breach its defenses and, as their reward, feast upon its contents. And how can you resist the belief that squirrels enjoy human company when you hear them begin to chatter as soon as you enter their realm and note how carefully they watch you (especially when you are refilling the bird feeders) as if expressing interest in your every move.

Of course, it is pleasant to believe they are engaging in social conversation and idle chit-chat (Good looking clothes are you headed out? How about this weather?) as befits their angelic appearance. But, for all you really know, this ‘chatter’ may be an extremely graphic description of how they plan to kill you and hang your mutilated body in the trees as a warning to any other human who does not replenish the food supplies and vacate the premises quickly enough.



When it comes to the relationship between squirrels and bromeliads, however, there is every reason to question the saintly image of the squirrel.

That dreaded enemy of Florida bromeliads, the Evil Weevil, has never taken hold in the Miami area. You will sometimes see larger native species of *Tillandsia* that appear to have been attacked by weevils (leaves strewn about on the ground beneath the mangled ‘parent’) but on closer inspection, it is evident that these leaves were torn out by something much larger than weevils. Squirrels are a prime suspect.

Such damage is most evident during the dry winter and spring seasons in our area, so it is

possible that the squirrels are ‘mining’ for water stored in the bromeliad tanks. Since I have never seen a squirrel dig into a bromeliad in this manner, the case is speculative – but, read on.

Some years ago, I ‘planted’ several clones of the *Aechmea orlandiana* complex in trees near the nursery. These, as expected, did very well until the local squirrel population began to increase. Once squirrels began to nest nearby, I would see what appeared to be damage caused by active teeth. One clone, *Aechmea orlandiana belloii*, was completely destroyed over a two year period. Again, this evidence is circumstantial because I never actually saw squirrels eating the plants.

One of the more popular plants we grow for landscape use is *Neoregelia* ‘Sheba’, an albomarginate Skotak hybrid with rapid growth rate. Four years ago, as we were began growing plants in the then new sales area, at least one squirrel developed a taste for *Neoregelia* ‘Sheba’ pups (and this time we did catch the squirrel in the act). This squirrel was not interested in just any pups, mind you, but young pups with leaves perhaps 10-12 inches long – in other words, pups that were just reaching the size that they began to appeal to buyers.

Of course, the squirrel was not interested in the whole pup, but just chewed out the succulent base. We would frequently find more than twenty pups chewed off over the course of a day. Pups from a few other types of plants were attacked in the same manner, but *Neoregelia* ‘Sheba’ was the preferred target. We tried hanging pie tins above the benches to scare the perpetrator(s), but this worked about as well as ‘squirrel-proof’ bird-feeders. We tried moving the plants to a different location in the shadehouse. Eventually, we were forced to surrender and move all *Neoregelia* ‘Sheba’ production to the stock area.

Another _ completely independent _ case where a squirrel was ‘caught in the act’ was reported to our Editor, Robert Meyer, by Robin Burr in April. Robin ‘caught a squirrel with the fire bromeliad [*Neoregelia* ‘Fireball’?] in his mouth’. Furthermore, when confronted by the plant grower, this squirrel ‘carried it off to continue eating it’.

Any fair-minded reader will surely agree that we have a very strong case for distrusting the designs squirrels have on our bromeliads. The problem is we don’t have any feasible defense. Squirrels have already defeated every attempt to separate them from bird seed, and now we are supposed to construct a defensive barrier around a much larger target (our gardens) with many more points of entry. A pack of rat terriers might, indeed, keep squirrels at bay, but the terriers would have to be allowed access to the garden to do their job. In their headlong pursuits, the terriers would undoubtedly cause more damage than the squirrels ever could.

Given the situation, we might as well adopt a philosophical attitude. We aren’t going to have any control over squirrel activities or change squirrel attitudes, so we might as well grin and bear it. If we lose a few plants along the way – well that is the cost of being a good neighbor.

Editor’s Note: Once I had a plant on ledge located in a screened-in porch. Days later, screen was cut open. Culprit: Squirrel who was in my porch and very shocked when I caught him red mouthed.

In Case You Missed It

by Robert Meyer

On the day you receive this article, the weather changes will be significant enough that you will want to read the rest as Jay Thurrot brought to the organization a talk about protecting plants in the winter.

Four enemies of the plants arise in the winter weather changes: drought; rain; wind and cold.

Thurrot carved these concepts into distinct issues, and then cross referenced many as the admonition of one may be the blessing of another.

Thurrot’s depiction of a hardiness map in 2006 depicted a color-coded the first day of “no more frost” across the continental American map. The result of frost was very evident with his personal photographs of *Pitcairnia*, *Ananas* and *Quesnelia* suffering from wintertime cold slumber, deprived of more than just warmth in his yard. In folly or scientific curiosity, he had several plants near or next to one another differently treated to evidence what can or will happen to plants which are protected or not protected.

Hints from the horticultural elder abounded. First, Jay Thurrott asked that each person walk about their yard and better identify the microclimates of his or her yard. Some thermometers can deliver a high and low temperature at a particular area. Contrast these figures against a common source on internet or television, and determine whether the spot is warmer or cooler than the meteorological “norm” described on the news of the web or tube.

Secondly, Thurrott asks that the plants be identified by the owner. Keep the tenderest in the warmest areas. And, he suggests to keep them together. Why? Because when the threat of cold or other inclement weather is predicted, you can wisp the plants quickly into the protective confines of your home’s interior or to other areas which will provide protection(s) from the cold, wind or other threat.

Thirdly, after knowing the susceptible plants, as well as their location, and your microclimates in the yard, he suggests close attention be made of the weather. Watch it on a relatively easy-to-find facility – the 11:00 PM news may be too late for many of us to be called to action and gather plants in, turn on the water spouts, and let the winter know whose boss on our acre of eden.

Fourthly, if learning about plants, use the club memberships to your advantage. Walk up to people like Nat DeLeon, Karl Green, Alan Herndon and their equivalents for advice about how *Tillandsia* may better or worse defeat the cold as opposed to the mysterious *Cryptanthus* or delightful *Billbergia*.

Fifthly, either move the plants when the fronts come, or learn the art of insulation.

Commonly, insulators are the same thing – freeze blanket, frost cloth, frost blanket – and each can be purchased from local nurseries. Buy them if frost is a regular winter visitor, and cover the area surrounding the most susceptible plants. Thurrot says each layer represents a 3 degree to 5 degree difference in temperature.

Sixthly, learn the art of plastic shelving, art of lightbulb tepees and other irregular methodologies of conducting heat in the outdoors beneath false canopies created with the frost blankets or other forms of tarpaulin.

Jay Thurrot further identified the answer as to why watering can help in cold. First, only do it if you are a commercial grower as the volume needed is too great for the home grower. But, if one waters the ground prior to the entry of the colder weather, the in-ground plant will do better than its dry counterpart. Dry plants are damaged more easily than wet plants.

Wind, which dries plants and makes them more susceptible to damage, can also be curtailed by watering. And, as wind usually accompanies cold, the dryness created by the wind will make the cold more pronounced.

Wind also has the ability to damage the protected plants beneath the frost blanket. How? Wind may get below the poorly staked or improperly weighted blanket, which when flying over the far ends of the neighbor's yard, will provide no protection to your own yard's plants.

The photo gallery by Jay Thurrott of brown plants in his yard after winter's bullying reminded many of us of the luxury of living in zone 10.5; and, how we should feel more appreciative of the 12-month health our plants usually enjoy in our own yards.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A recent e-mail from TopTropicals also approached this issue with the following words of advise.

TEMPERATURE

Bring plants inside in stages. First, set them up in a garage or basement that is a little warmer than the outdoors, but not as warm as inside the house. If the plants are moved immediately from 50F to 75F, some may become stressed and suffer. Plants should be acclimated slowly by a gradual increase in temperature. After a few days,

bring them into the warm house. Most tropical plants grow best in daytime temperatures between 65-85F. To further protect them, keep houseplants away from cold, drafty windows or hot radiators, stoves or air vents. Also keep foliage from touching cold windows which can burn the leaves.

LIGHT

It is always much darker indoors than it was outside in the yard, and lack of light most likely will cause some leaf drop. Try to place your container plants in the most well-lit spot of your home as close to the window as possible.

AIR HUMIDITY

Humidity is important. Most tropical plants prefer air humidity level at minimum 40-50%. The humidity in most homes is closer to only 15-20% – a level much too low for the plants. Raise humidity levels by using a humidifier or grouping plants together. Placing houseplants on saucers or trays filled with gravel or pebbles and water will also increase humidity. The bottoms of the pots should always be above the water level.

WATER

In general, all houseplants don't require as much water during the winter months. Most tropical and subtropical plants should be watered when the soil is almost dry to the touch. When watering, apply a thorough amount. Water the plant until water drains out of the bottom of the pot. Never allow plants to sit in excess water.

NO FERTILIZER

Eliminate fertilizer during the winter months since most plants grow very little. Fertilize again in Spring as growing conditions improve and the plants begin to flush out. Cleaning

It's important to keep houseplants clean while they rest through the winter indoors. Grease and dust can accumulate on leaves and slow down the normal transpiration. Leaves can be cleaned with a soft sponge, cloth or paper towel dipped in a mild solution of dishwashing soap and lukewarm water.

Fertilizer Basics: Nutrition for People and Plants, Excluding The Homeland Security Agency

Craig Morell
Pinecrest Gardens

After three (3) decades of growing plants, I've learned a few things. One is that there is a lot more I need to know. But, amid my lack of knowledge, I have discovered that I oddly better retain information about fertilizer than most sensible people I know. I've always been intrigued with fertilizer components and how they affect a plant; and, how the grower can control plant growth with the certain types of fertilizer. In this article I'll go over some of the basics, to get everyone familiarized with the fertilizer components and add some ideas of how to grow better plants.

Basics of fertilizing start with the triple play: nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. (Micronutrients will append these basics and be covered in the next article.) We'll look at how the components work for specific purposes.

As with human food, there are vast differences in plant foods. Similarly, there are vast differences in quality. There really isn't a "perfect" plant food and no "perfect" diet. Both plants and people need nutrition which is specific to their needs and abilities. The diets for plants and humans have one unfortunate and remarkable similarity: there is junk food. On a similar vein, there is also overdoing a good thing. As we know there are ways to overdo or overdose on vitamins, and there is an analogous claim for "advanced growth" concepts attributable to plants. How does one sort it all out?

For people and plants, regular nutrition and accurate dosing are key points to good growth. Consistency of nutrition, coupled with a good choice for nutrition targeted specifically to the issues of the plant are stalwart concepts; yet, for

people and plants alike we always want to cheat a little. Junk food and high-nitrogen fertilizers are roughly the same idea: fast response, soft growth, and they're readily available. In some cases where nitrogen is needed to produce the part you want (bananas on banana plants, flowers in canna lilies, blooms in Heliconias, etc.) a high-nitrogen fertilizer is good, not so much with bromeliads, especially is their adjoin one another in your landscape.

Years ago I used to have a huge bed of *Neoregelia macwilliamsii* in my front yard in West Palm Beach, which I fertilized with Peters 30-10-10 every week to get them to grow well. They grew well, all right, over 4 feet across! They didn't bloom very well, and had 2 foot long floppy leaves, but they sure consumed garden space. I learned one moral: lots of nitrogen yielded huge plants with soft growth.



Cluster of *Neoregelia macwilliamsii*

In my current abode, the same plants measure a compact 18 inches across, have a far greater leaf count in a far more compact rosette, and flower well. The difference is that here I use a low-nitrogen, high-potassium fertilizer, but with a distant connection to the Homeland Security Agency. More on that later....

In some basic experiments, I used a low-nitrogen, high-phosphorous fertilizer (10-30-20) on my *Neo. macwilliamsii* plants, and found that I got great roots, but not much leaf growth, and reduced stolon growth. The plants grew more slowly, and for those plants I wanted to keep in a small area, this seemed like a good fertilizer to use. In hanging baskets where I mixed bromeliads and orchids, I noticed better flowers and stronger roots on the orchids, with a better color on the bromeliad flowers and foliage. Less growth, more color, better roots: is this a better idea?

In one of my mad-scientist moods, I used a low-nitrogen, low-phosphorous, high-

potassium fertilizer, (13-0-44). This experiment was derived from a college lesson – high-potassium fertilizers often gave better foliage growth, better color, and better flowers to plants in several ways. I sprayed my bromeliad guinea pigs with potassium nitrate and *voila!* The plants grew with better color, flowers, and leaf thickness than ever before. I repeated the experiment, trying the tactic on lots of other plants, including palms, ferns, orchids, water plants, cacti, even grass.

At the Boca Raton Resort, I had the luxury of having dozens of fertilizers and components available to me. I learned that potassium nitrate was really useful stuff. Unfortunately, so does the explosives industry, and consequently, the Department of Homeland Security paid me a visit. Many people know potassium nitrate by its older name of saltpeter, an ingredient in gunpowder and some industrial explosives. Therefore, should you trot off to your favorite fertilizer vendor and ask for several bags of PN, be prepared to fill out some lengthy paperwork, and answer some probing questions.

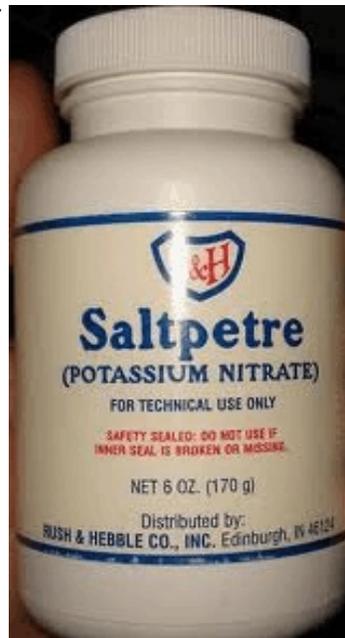
Armed with this new data, I wondered if I could use PN for everything in my garden, and the answer is a qualified “yes.” The lower-nitrogen fertilizers slowed down growth and yielded significantly better flowers and leaves, without a lot of excess growth. Does this work for all plants, including grass, bamboo, trees, vegetables, and so on? No. But PN works great on bromeliads in moderation. One great example of moderation was the technique of Moyna and Ed Prince whose plants were always famously gorgeous and brightly colored. The results were, usually a derivative of a very low-fertility diet. Bright light and low fertility made for some great bromeliads, but they knew which plants needed which conditions.

Knowing the plant’s needs, and its needs for water and fertilizer make you a more-educated grower, and thereupon someone with better plants. Still, many people don’t know what fertilizers do, and some think that fertilizer just makes plants grow fast, leading to higher

maintenance costs. In that venue, let me make some suggestions.

I espouse feeding plants and gardens routinely – say, THREE times per year – with a balanced fertilizer such as Harrell’s 12-4-12 or Atlantic Fertilizer’s Palm special. Your plants will be healthy and won’t grow beyond their normal growth speed. You can use these products on grass with good success, where you will likely see the grass grows a little slower.

I further suggest fertilizing the entire property, not plant-by-plant. The old adage is “feed the soil, not the plant.” Stop making rings of fertilizer around your palms and trees, and the roots will grow more evenly and strongly. Stop using the 29-3-3 stuff from the big box store on the grass, and use a balanced fertilizer for every square foot of your property. Everything grows better with routine attention plus some gentle routine fertilizing.



For bromeliads and many other high-value plants, I suggest TWO applications of Dynamite or Nutricote 13-13-13 per year is a great diet. Delivering fertilizer at every watering consistently and slowly without inducing any sudden growth is ideal. Back to my food for people metaphor: several small meals every day is better than one big meal a day. I

suggest reducing inputs of nitrogen and phosphorous into the soil to reduce pollution in our groundwater.

I also strongly suggest terminating the Miami-Dade vice of overwatering our gardens and start paying attention to the plants’ actual water needs.

On a more technical note, I add more suggestions. Fertilizers are written in a 3-number series, always in the same order: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), and Potassium (K). Loosely described, N is for foliage growth, P is for root and stem growth, K is involved with flower production, leaf and stem tissue cell growth, and plant color. With this in mind, I ask would you still use a 30-10-

10 fertilizer on your compact Neoregelias? Would you still use a 29-3-3 “green it up overnight” fertilizer on your palm trees? Would you consider using a 13-0-44 on your Aechmeas, and expect a better looking plant than last year? The answer is in the number and the associated growth concept described above.

As a final note, plants will grow better with fertilizer than without it. They, like us, need some level of nutrition. You can choose what you feed your plants, and can now adjust your expectations and abilities to meet the plant’s needs. Some plants need very little fertilizer, some need feeding every week. Slow-release fertilizers are a great way to save time and labor while reducing pollution.

Should you wish to buy potassium nitrate, small bags of it can be bought at OFE International near the Kendall Airport, look them up at www.OFE-Intl.com.

In the next article I’ll look at refining our knowledge of how micronutrients can make a macro-difference in plants.

President’s Message

By Robert Meyer

This is a final presidential message by me to you. After two years of service, I will happily pass the baton to Master Gardener Carl Bauer who has been involved in the society for a period of time greater than my own.

In a retrospective analysis of events during my tenure, I look upon some events as wonderful and others as unfortunately still in the idea stage.

I believe that my tenure saw more inaugurations and declarations of life members than witnessed by previous administrations. As a great believer of delivery and recognition to the living and avoiding posthumous acclamation, I was happy to make the announcements before the membership on numerous occasions with the recipient as witness – something to evidence the society’s deeply believed endorsement and validation of the honor. See more on the most recent below.

We also became involved in a few gardens – one at the VA and another at Sunset High School with very different purposes, but very similar concepts. Each remains alive in the respective venue, and each will hopefully continue to catch the eye and admiration of the crowded facilities

and voluminous pedestrian traffic.

In further attempts to accomplish more of the By-Law’s declaration of improving education, we have attempted, but not yet finalized, a scholarship fund associated with bromeliads for college level students in the area. That matter remains on the burner, but hopefully moved from the back to the front.

We had a few road trips, and there will be more in the future. These events, like the planting events of the weekends at Sunset or VA, are the weekend events which bind friendships within the society, which I hope can continue to grow in the future.

Thanks for being your servant for the past two years, and expect more good things with the future administration.

KOUCHALAKOS TEAM NOW LIFERS

Unanimous approval by the board and membership determined that Peter Kouchalacos and Clara Kouchalacos be named as life members.



Peter and Clara at the Ramble 2010

The most recently named parties, first since Sandy Roth was named last December, their years as service with the

organization included directorship, treasurer, president and other functions in addition to be highly involved in the auctions and annual show over the past few decades.

Still young in age and heart, the Kouchalacos couple are deservedly named BSSF life members.

What’s in Bloom - Nov 2010

by Alan Herndon

After nearly two years of listing plants in bloom, I am ready for a change. Starting with this month, I will be putting forth a more general description of how bromeliads in our collection are doing. Many blooming plants will be mentioned, of course, but other interesting plants will also be included whether they are in bloom or not. Another side benefit (for me) is that it will no longer be

as apparent when my bloom surveys are less thorough than could be expected.

A lower, less intense sun and cooler temperatures have slowed bromeliad growth noticeably. One consequence has been the intensification of leaf colors (especially the red tones) seen on some species and many hybrids. Gone are the dominant greens and muted reds of summer; bright reds have taken center stage. We can expect the reds to become even more vibrant as we get deeper into what passes for winter in southern Florida.

Aechmea chantinii is following the same pattern as in years past. We are nearing the end of the fall peak in blooms for this species although we can expect some chantiniis to be coming into bloom throughout the winter. Fall/winter blooming species (primarily the *Aechmea fulgens*/*Aechmea miniata* complex, the multitudinous forms of *Aechmea nudicaulis*, and *Aechmea* subgenus *Ortgiesia*) are picking up the slack. One notable species in bloom is *Aechmea fraudulosa*, a member of the *Gravisia* complex. It is important to note that *Aechmea angustifolia* is in bloom again. This species has had one or more flowering rosettes throughout most of the year. Since the flowers on any given rosette do not appear to last more than two months, we can assume this means the species does not have any particular blooming period. Rosettes bloom whenever they reach sufficient size and external conditions are favorable.

Billbergia species and hybrids are poking their blooms out sporadically. Most of these blooms last only a few days, so they are easy to miss. At least, I use that argument to justify my inability to get a good record of blooming plants.

Guzmania sanguinea is still blooming although the period any single rosette has open flowers is less than a month. I have a few different clones, and they are all blooming at slightly different times this year. It is also important to remember that the leaves color up weeks before flowers open, so you are realistically able to enjoy a solitary plant for about six weeks.

Both species of *Hohenbergia* reported last month (*Hohenbergia lanata* and *Hohenbergia pennae*) are still producing flowers. These have been joined by a single plant of *Hohenbergia edmundoi* that is probably blooming out of season. There are actually several more species of *Hohenbergia* in bloom now, but they are

plants few collectors would care to grow, so I have not bothered listing them.

Neoregelia species are generally quiet during this part of the year. We have had blooms on *Neoregelia ampullacea*, *Neoregelia liliputiana* and a scattering of *Neoregelia* Fireball. Otherwise, the only blooms are on hybrids (*Neoregelia* Sheba, *Neoregalia Ultima*) that bloom year round.

Many species of the *Orthophytum disjunctum* complex (including *Orthophytum disjunctum*, *Orthophytum grossiorum*, *Orthophytum harleyi*, *Orthophytum lymaniana*, *Orthophytum maracasense* and *Orthophytum rubiginosum*) are blooming. Many of the older plants have finished blooming or are just finishing, but the pups produced at the base of these plants are often producing inflorescences as soon as they have 3 or 4 short leaves. This ensures a overlapping of flower production between the parent plants and successive generations of offsets.

It is time for the *Portea* species to reenter their annual cycle of blooming, but, currently, the only *Portea* species I have with open flowers is the one we call *Portea petropolitana* (not *petropolitana extensa*). You may have noted that *Portea alatisepala* was frequently encountered in bloom during the year, but most species have bloom within a 2 month period, once a year. Several pots of *Portea alatisepala* seem to have bloomed more than once during the last year, and it will be interesting to see whether the same pattern holds this coming year.

Tillandsia species are blooming massively in collections where they are given sufficient water and fertilizer. In my collection, characterized by the stingy application of water during dry periods and a complete lack of supplemental fertilizer, only a few hardy species are blooming now. *Tillandsia ionantha*, a reliable bloomer around this time of year, is putting on a show with its bright red leaves. All of the large plants in a clump tend to bloom at the same time, so the larger the clump, the more spectacular the display. *Tillandsia cyanea* is still in bloom from last month, but *Tillandsia vernicosa* is just coming into bloom now. There are quite a few more species in bud (most of these are already blooming in better cared-for collections).

There are several *Vriesea* species with promising buds, but the only plants I have found with open flowers recently have been *Vriesea carinata*.

Hummingbirds, as usual this time of year, are common throughout our stock area. Mostly they are seen taking nectar from the flowers of the large plants in the *Gravisia* group of *Aechmea*. Earlier in the month, I was also able to watch a hummingbird attending to the flowers of *Aechmea chantinii* we have growing on an avocado tree near the house.

At that time, there were four blooming rosettes of *Aechmea chantinii* arrayed in a more-or-less vertical line along the main trunk of the avocado tree. The hummingbird hovered around these plants over a period of several minutes, visiting flowers on one rosette, moving to another rosette then moving on to yet another rosette (sometimes returning to a previously visited rosette). If the hummingbird was moving between rosettes with different genetic makeup, cross-pollination would be achieved with the subsequent production of viable seeds. In this case, alas, I believe all of the blooming rosettes were descendants from a single plant, and no seeds can be expected.

Holiday Party

The time of year for a little gaiety is among us. This season, we celebrate with our *Holiday Party* at a different venue – we are at the Garden House.

We have a new leader, Mike Michalski, who will gladly take your calls to offer food or refreshment. No desserts.

And, pursuant to tradition, if you bring a plant, you get a plant. The plan swap rules are simple: wrap it so that the naked eye cannot uncover the plant. Make the gift a true gift without revelation. This tradition is always greatly appreciated. And the fun is that your plant, which you have years and accumulated many of, may be traded for something you have never had – good deal.

Murder in Corbin A

Chapters 12 and 13 © by Robert Meyer

If you have missed the previous chapters, go to: <http://bssf-miami.org/newsbulletins.htm>

12.

The next day, Boss drove to Mary Silverman's home for a standard follow up. He had only seen her at the bed, and her apparent freakish despair over her

friend's demise compounded with her first apparent discussion with a dwarf – especially from a hospital bed he figured – made the last conversation less than candid and extremely awkward.

After knocking on the door, Mary opened the same and looked forward not realizing that Boss stood alone about a foot below her horizon line. Quickly, she repositioned her sights and looked down at Boss, thrust a warm and embracing smile in his direction, opened her hand to visually invite him into her home and uttered, “Do please come in officer.”

Boss walked to her living room, obeyed her request to sit on the sofa, sat with protruding legs and feet more than a foot from the ground, and accepted her invitation for an iced tea. Upon her return to the room with glasses in tow, he asked her if she felt better than she had the first time.

“I am physically okay. But, somewhere sometime, some long time ago, I read a book where an author cleverly stated, ‘remorse is short-lived, death lasts forever.’”

“Richard Ford, *The Sportswriter*, a great novel about remorse over the death of a young child which acts as wedge in a marriage which thereafter fails and encounters melancholy thereafter about the topic of relationships between men, women, parents, children. . .” Boss looked at his host, and noticed that she was a bit agog with mouth opened and rounded eyes. “Oh, I am sorry, your statement was so correct and I need not say more than those words.” Boss concluded.

At this juncture, Mary did not know what to say. First a little cop walked into her home. Then they had a one sentence discussion about a quotation she grabbed from the deepest memories of her reading experiences, and this little policeman knows the book, the author and the book's topic as though he read it yesterday. “Cops read books?” she wondered. “Probably only the little ones.” she concluded.

“That was very impressive Lt. . . Oh I apologize that I have forgotten your name.” She uttered in awe to his statement.

“Vazquez ma'am.” he responded. “And, no need to apologize. I would be most surprised if you could remember anything of the time that we met as you were hospitalized, had fainted and lost a very close friend within moments of seeing me. My name would have been the very least of your priorities, and I would not be insulted if you forgot it upon my toes stepping out into my vehicle outside.”

At this time, Mary's mind wandered to a most

interesting thought. “What kind of car does he drive? A little go cart like the kid down the block uses on weekends when the streets are clear? Or a special car where everything is handled by hands as his feet obviously could not reach the floor? Or do they put stilts on the pedals for people like him?” Thinking this through, she smiled.

“I am glad that you smile about my comment ma’am. You seem in better spirits. I came to ask a few questions, and then I will be off. First, do you know of anyone, for any reason whatsoever, who would hold a grudge against your friend?”

She knew many. Too many. The deceased was friendly on the exterior, but her thin veneer of civility was circumvented by more than occasional outbursts of less-than-southernly charming statements. Upon contemplation completing, she stated “No one that I can think of.”

Boss knew eyes. He rarely could see them at level, but when he could, he read them as easily as any book he read. Her pupils dilated, she blinked more than usual, and upon completion of this statement, looked to her left and then to her right. And, he was right. There are people out there, and this person knows who they are. But, without her answer, he did not know who. And, more importantly, he did not how many.

“Then that leads me to my second and last question which will need a simple answer before I leave: how many are there and what are their names?” At this point, the tiny man leaned back into the large cushions, took off his blazer and looked back to his host, and impishly smiled.

13.

When he returned, Boss knew that just the prior day his ignorance had been bliss. What he thought was or would be a closed case had become a more complicated matter. The increase in facts and knowledge came concomitant with the case’s complexity.

Boss had already often demurred when the plant people spoke about plants as concepts, as metaphors, and even as descriptive components to personality(ies) or character(s).

“Hey Boss, learn anything new from the old lady?” asked Rodriguez.

“Let me tell you something – dad was right.”

“What do you mean, man? I am losing you?”

“It’s all like baseball. Not the game you watch, but the game itself. As a young boy, it is old men – men your father’s age – hitting balls farther than you can imagine. Then you attend high school, and it is young adults hitting a ball harder than most anyone

your age ever does. Then you attend college or be college age, and it is peers hitting the ball for a living. Then you grow older, and the players are young men who can still run and throw and have biceps like you had years before. Pretty soon, it is a game of people of an age that you do not remember well. Suddenly it is a game of men your child’s age, then people younger than your child. . . and before you know it, you attend games with scorecards, and keep the score in meticulous fashion. You are getting to the age where you do pitch counts, and can remember who was up in what inning when the starter threw his 100th pitch. It is not a game of fun, it is a statistics operation, based upon probabilities, a study akin to statistics in a DNA lab, and you are an insider with decades of experience who can hypothesize with some expertise. But, at 50 or at 10, you had about the same chance of guessing where the pitch was going, what kind of pitch it would be and how it would be delivered. The child is right by hunch, the adult is right by educated guess. Each is right about the same amount of time, but for very different reasons. Like baseball, as I get deeper and deeper into this case, I fear I will be inputting numbers and plant names and other data into a computer and receive no more valuable information than I had with my first hunch. Spinning wheels for days, weeks, months, maybe years – to do what? Learn more about plants, and nothing more about the culprit. Yuck.”

“Wow, Boss, that was some heavy thoughts you just threw my direction. I never knew.”

“Never knew what Rodriguez?” Boss gruffly responded.

“Never knew you liked baseball so much. Heck, we never saw a Marlins game together, and I never heard you talk about them” Rodriguez said with a smirk on his face to reveal his sarcasm.

“Awe, shove it.”

“Hey, Boss – I got an idea. If you resigned to the fact that there will be no avoiding the educational curve about those bromeliads. . . , then delegate. Have the lessons be the burden of someone who will enjoy the classroom experience. Give it to Marlene.”

Boss smiled. Turning around the room and trying to see past the workers who flitted about the room at his eyeshot, he finally caught a glimpse of Marlene. Pointing in her direction, he turned again toward Rodriguez and said, “I think there is a home game tonight against the Mets. Want to join me while Marlene goes out with the tree huggers?”

“Absolutamente, hombre!”

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