



Welcome to the ABS Newsletter for January 2017. We wish you a wonderful 2017, filled with joy, happiness, and healthy bonsai.

As always, we've got our hands out for newsletter content. A grateful thanks to those who have submitted articles and feedback! Please keep the ideas and feedback coming to me at: dave.paris@w3works.com We're dedicated to bringing a fresh perspective and exceptional content to everyone, so your input is invaluable.

Happy New Year .. and now, on with the newsletter!

The Procrastinating Pruner **By Leon R. Olenick**

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. I really don't know why?

Sometimes I get so frustrated, I could just cry!

I'm thinking of cutting that branch, It has lost all its green.

A caterpillar liked its leaves and ate them all clean.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch, it has an awful wound.

The wind and a neighbor have created a contentious mood.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch, it's taken off like crazy.

And it's making all its neighbors look kind of lazy.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It's hanging so low.

But then, where would the climbing child's foot go?

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It's reaching for the sky.

The impression that it gives, does nothing in my eye.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It looks like it is dead.

But then again, perhaps... I should jin it instead.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It is broken at least twice.

But, I'm afraid if I do, the tree won't look so nice. I'm thinking of cutting that branch. The scars on it are just awful.

But if I do, the tree will just not be nearly as full. I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It's bearing zero fruit.

But perhaps I should water and fertilize to stimulate its root.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch. It seems so out of place.

But then I saw a robin sitting in its space.

I'm thinking of cutting that branch...

A Day With Danny Coffee **by Gary Warton**

Just got back from the Pacific Bonsai Museum in Federal Way where on Friday as a volunteer, I detailed wired an old upright spruce. The spruces structural wire had previously been applied by someone else. My job was to wire the secondary and tertiary branching so we could establish clean lines on the foliage pads. The day was spent applying short lengths of #18 and #20 gauge wire.

The following Saturday I spent at a museum hosted workshop with four other individuals that was presented by Danny Coffee. Danny is a young Bonsai professional that spent a two year apprenticeship in Japan. Prior to studying in Japan he volunteered at the National in DC and penned a blog called Tree the People. I have been following Danny Blog for several years though the post have been few and far between of late. Danny was invited to spend some time at the museum by Aaron Packard to work on a few trees. I must admit I am impressed with Danny's grasp of bonsai technique and aesthetic and very glad I was able to spend some quality time with him.



At the workshop we did the initial styling and set the structure on a limber pine that I collected in Idaho several years ago. The first step was to clean the trees by removing old needles and dead twigs. After the tree was cleaned we decided on a design that fit the inherent wild character of the tree. Several options were considered with lots of attention paid to the large sweeping branch on the lower right. We decided on an upright tree with strong movement to the right. We left the sweeping branch to give the tree a unique identity keeping in mind that the branch could always be removed in the future if needed. The tree was completely wired with copper ranging in gauge from #4 to #14. We used several guy wires to position larger branches where the #4 was inadequate to maintain the desired branch placement. At present the branching is a little messy because we left as much foliage as practical to maintain the health of the tree. However, the cluttered branching will be resolved as the tree regains vigor and is further developed over the next several years.

I am pleased.

A Tree as Hard as an Oak By Andrew Smith

Misery is as justifiable a part of life as happiness is and I need to get my fair share of both every day or I feel like I'm missing out on something.

There are lots of causes of happiness; a bright blue sky over your head, stars glittering like a bucket of diamonds thrown into the night, a smile from my wife, a wag from my dog, pure white snow, pancake syrup, coffee, wine. The list is endless. I get to choose from it every day.

The causes of misery are equally numerous and frequently just as trivial. I won't attempt to list them, but the one that's been getting to me lately is oak trees; very stunted oak trees. Burr oak, *Quercus macrocarpa*, to be specific. I think the species was misnamed. It should be *Quercus horribilus*.

We're marking a timber sale in the Bearlodge Mountains, in northeast Wyoming. The soil there is sandy and fertile and the pines are magnificent, for the Black Hills anyway -20 to 30 inches in diameter, 80 or 90 feet tall, straight as an arrow, and often not even 100 years old. We mark the best of these to retain as seed trees. In much of the forest a vigorous Ponderosa pine of that age would average only 50 feet tall and maybe 10 or 12 inches in diameter, so these are exceptional.

What is not so exceptional is the oak trees that grow in a tangled mat beneath the pines. Although some of them are probably of about the same age as the pines (that's a guess, I've never taken a sample core from one), these oaks average just 8 to 10 feet tall and are as knotted and contorted as an old man's fingers. They grow so thickly together, and more often horizontally than upright, that you have to thrash and fight and break your way through them while they tear your clothes and pull off your hat and I've already used

up a several years supply of cuss words in just the past couple weeks. So I've had to borrow a lot on my Visa cussit card, and I've just about maxed it out. But I can get another one, I'm sure.

The snow is calf deep and walking is slow and it's been very cold for the last month. We carry corn brooms with us to sweep the snow away from the butts of the trees we are going to mark. The forest is dark and seems medieval somehow. I keep expecting to hear sleigh bells, or wolves howling, or peasants out wassailing; but there are none.

So that's where I've been getting my daily dose of misery: I'd just like to be able to walk ten feet in a straight line without a machete or having an oak reach into my pocket and pull something out. Pretty light on the scale of miseries, but it's enough for me.

Northeast Wyoming is sort of the outer limits for burr oak habitat, which is why they take a shrubby, rather than a tree-like, form there. I remember a huge burr oak a forester friend showed me in an Ohio farm lot years ago. The trunk was nearly 6 feet in diameter, straight, with 45 feet of clear wood to the first branch. That was an oak growing in its proper habitat.

The farmer wanted to keep the tree in the family, but was also mindful of its economic value. Inspection of other nearby oaks showed several of them infected with spider heart, a type of rot which spreads through the root systems, so my friend advised him to sell the tree, if that was his eventual goal, while it was still salable. That single tree sold to a furniture manufacturer for \$25,000 and paid for someone's college, I believe. Back when \$25,000 would pay for college.

But back to the oaks on the Bearlodge. I've often wondered, if it's such marginal habitat for them, then why are there so many of them? I could understand it if there were one or two stunted

oaks here and there. I'd say, well, it's marginal habitat, the edge of the range for oaks, and they barely grow here.

Yet there are countless millions of them, 8 or 10 thousand dwarf oak trees per acre in many areas. You can't see through them, let alone walk through them. This is obviously oak Heaven. Except they don't grow well here at all, assuming that forming trees is better than forming tangled knots of shrubbery. But perhaps that's just a human prejudice. Maybe they prefer being a bush.

Of course, poor growing sites often make for excellent bonsai material. And I've seen places where these oaks grow in clumps of 4 or 5 old trees, maybe 30 inches tall, with rough old bark, small leaves, lots of branching and trunks as big around as your wrist. You don't even have to know anything about bonsai to know that these would make great bonsai! They look just like a group of old oak trees, but in miniature – which is what they are.

The first time I saw one of these miniature oak clumps I thought, "Hallelujah! I'm in bonsai Heaven!" and I grabbed my shovel. I had no idea what I was in for. Oaks tend to have very big root systems. I remember when we planted trees that you had to make a hole twice as big for an oak seedling as for anything else. But with these dwarf oaks the root system is all out of proportion to the tree above, and in fact, most of the tree is actually underground.

What I found when I dug around one of these miniature oak clumps was that four or five trunks as big as your wrist above ground would mean six or seven roots as big as your calf, or thigh even, below the surface. And, unfortunately, that's no exaggeration at all.

Yikes! You'd need a swimming pool, not a pot, to plant one of these things in. Even so, they also

had fine hair roots coming out of the enormous main roots, and most deciduous trees don't need a complete root system to transplant and I was undaunted. I dug and sawed and chopped until I was exhausted and brought home some great old oaks for bonsai.

Those all died is short order. I decided my timing might have been off so next time I tried earlier in the year, then later in the year, then with smaller oaks, then with more sand in the soil, then less sand, then no sand, then all sand, then with various magical growth-promoting hormones, and then with oaks from different locations, and with misters, and without misters, and... In 20 years I haven't gotten a single one to transplant successfully. Not one.

And so far, everyone else I've talked to who has tried it has had the same luck.

I'm not sure why. You can buy them in pots. And I've bought bare-root burr oak seedlings and transplanted them with a high success rate. But the wild ones just seem to want to stay out in the woods and annoy me by reaching into my shirt pocket when I walk by.

I haven't given up yet though. I'm almost undaunted. Thrashing through the oaks on a cold winters day has got me thinking about them again. Man would they look great in a pot! And there has to be a way!

I'll let you know when I find it.

Till then, I'll just wish you a joyful New Year.

Upcoming Events

April 7-9 2017 – MidAtlantic Bonsai Societies Annual Spring Festival
<http://midatlanticbonsai.org/>

May 25-29 2017 – ABS / BSF Convention
Moving American Bonsai Forward – ABS 50th Anniversary.
http://bonsai-bsf.com/?page_id=3103

Join your fellow ABS members
To Celebrate 50 years
of
Moving American Bonsai Forward
with the Bonsai Societies of Florida
May 26-28, 2017
at the Florida Hotel & Conference Center
Orlando, Florida, USA



REGISTRATION FORMS AT
[http://www.absbonsai.org/
PDF/2017-reg.pdf](http://www.absbonsai.org/PDF/2017-reg.pdf)

Reserve the dates now and call in your
hotel reservation to
1-800-588-4656
Rooms are \$106 + tax
use code ABS/BSF 2017

A FULL WEEKEND OF BONSAI LEARNING
IN OUR CLASSROOM FORMAT

- 41 CLASSES (4 INCLUDED IN YOUR REGISTRATION)
- OVER 10 OUTSTANDING TEACHERS
- SPECIAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION
- DEMONSTRATIONS
- VENDORS
- CONTESTS
- SPECIAL EXHIBITION (BOOK AVAILABLE) AND SPECIAL EVENTS TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS



Newsletter Submissions:

Please send submissions, upcoming events, article ideas, raves, rants, and so forth to dave.paris@w3works.com

ABS Newsletter Staff:

Chair: Dave Paris
Asst. Editor: Andrew Robson
Asst. Editor: Cullen Mariacher