



# YAMA KI NEWSLETTER

Learning from each other ..... Sharing with the community”

July

2004

## ANNUAL MEETING & SEMI-ANNUAL AUCTION AT LUCILLE MILLER’S HOME - JULY 10, 2004, 1:00 PM

**Are you ready?** Did you weed your book and magazine stocks? Did you thin out your bonsai – ones you want to pass on for someone else’s challenge, ones you’ve tired of, ones for which you no longer have room, or which you specifically potted for YAMA KI’s benefit? Did you trim your pot collection? Did you filter all holdings of bonsai accessories? Have you put them in a logical place so you will remember to bring them to the auction on July 10? Do you need help transporting some of your contributions to *Lucille Miller’s*? Are you dusting off your cash-stash to purchase some special and/or necessary items?

At the auction you will probably be able to find some of the unusual items you’ve been seeking; some of *Marion Gyllenswan’s* pots will be on the block as will a couple of artist-designed trees which were not raffled at meetings. Our auctioneers are sharpening their verbal skills so that they can entice you to raise your bids, or at the very least to provide a dynamic afternoon. The auction will follow the annual meeting.

The lively event will take place the second Saturday of July (the 10<sup>th</sup>), at *Lucille Miller’s* home at 1:00 p.m. (For directions see back of cover). The afternoon’s activities will start with the annual meeting: financial report, programming plans, elections, etc. The elections are a major part of the annual meeting and membership participation (even as at civic elections) is vital. Please bring a chair for yourself to the July 10<sup>th</sup> home/garden annual meeting/auction.

### NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

This year our Nominating Committee had to find members to fill the posts of officers—each for one year, one director to fill the unexpired term (one year) of *Len Douglas* who is moving, and two directors for three years. Accordingly, *Anne Gastrich*, *Lucille Miller*, and *Rhoda Kleiman* (as chair) present the following slate for your approval at the Annual Meeting on July 10:

- President ..... *Gail Therrien*
- Vice President/Program Chair ..... *Jim Glatthaar*<sup>1</sup>
- Corresponding Secretary/Web Master ..... *Mike Pollock*<sup>1</sup>
- Recording Secretary ..... *Steve Peach*
- Treasurer ..... *Irv Kleiman*<sup>1</sup>
- Director - 1 year ..... *Joann Spence*
- Director - 3 years ..... *John Cotaggio*
- Director - 3 years ..... *Craig Cowing*

Also serving, but not for election, but for your information:

- Immediate Past-President ..... *Adam Hume*
- Director - year ..... *Arlene Quigley*
- Director - 2 years ..... *Kevin Goveia*
- Director - 2 years ..... *Norman Geisinger*

<sup>1</sup>Incumbent candidate

As always, nominations from the floor will be most welcome, or you may call *Rhoda* at 212.724.7840 to add names. In either case you must have the consent of the nominee.

## AMERICAN BONSAI SOCIETY'S JOSHUA ROTH COMPETITION

*Mike Pollock*

It all began at this year's Mid-Atlantic convention. My friend *Todd Hansen* encouraged me to enter the Joshua Roth Competition\*. *Todd* is the President of the Bonsai Society of Greater Hartford as well as a participant in the local session of *Colin Lewis'* Ho Yoku bonsai school.

We were selected to participate, and arrived at the St. Louis ABS / BCI convention ready to compete on Thursday, June 17th. We started at 8 a.m. Thursday morning and had to stop at 5 p.m. Working in one of the hotel ballrooms, most of us used almost all of the nine hours to work on our trees. The material was nice Shimpaku in plastic nursery pots. After drawing tree numbers in the order in which we applied for the competition (basically making tree selection a matter of chance), we started.

I don't know about *Todd*, but I was nervous. There were lots of people milling about talking to us or each other in the background. It was pretty quiet in there for awhile. Once most of us had made some design decisions on our trees, the conversations between us all increased.

I was so appreciative of *Colin's* coaching at the Ho Yoku sessions; most of his advice was spot on. ABS supplied aluminum wire on a single rack in the center of the room; boy was I glad I brought my own copper. Aside from wire and an outlet (yes, one outlet for the room), we had to use our own supplies.

We both followed *Colin's* advice and spent the first part of the day cleaning bark and unnecessary foliage. I made my first cut at 9:05. Somewhere around then, *Todd* made his major design decision – to cut off the top of the tree which had a long straight section and some reverse taper.

I ended up selecting an informal upright style for my tree. Working from the bottom up, I thinned the foliage and wired the branches. Although I made quite a few wiring mistakes, our Ho Yoku work paid off and I was able to do what I needed to do in shaping the tree. By the time I broke for lunch, I had wired much of my tree.



Tree at the start

By five, most of us were done. I used two of *Todd's* wooden wedges to present my tree. The next morning we used vet wrap to attach them to the pot so the tree sat correctly whenever it was moved.



We started up again at about 1 p.m. By 2 p.m., I was seriously despairing. The day seemed to be flying by and I was second-guessing both my design decisions and the quality of my work. The tree seemed to be too heavy with wire and too sparse. But I kept going remembering *Colin's* advice to just keep working and finish the tree.

The trees were displayed at different places throughout the convention. Every headline artist got a vote, and the attendees got to vote for the People's Choice award. I listened to a lot of people discuss the trees. Like many people, I thought *Todd's* shohin (mame?) tree was the best.

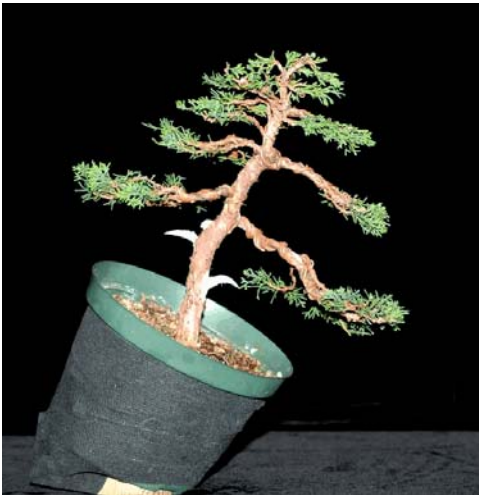
The results were announced at the banquet. They kept us in suspense until after dinner. Then they announced the results.

People's Choice Award: Tree number 6, *Todd Hansen*

Second place (and a set of Joshua Roth professional tools): Tree Number 6, *Todd Hansen*

First Place (and a round trip ticket to Japan): Tree Number 7. . . *Michael Pollock*

I was blown away. I didn't seriously consider my tree would win. Now comes the hard part. Whose trip should I choose? Stay tuned for my decision.



At the end of the day



Accepting the Award



Todd's tree

\* Amer  
The  
ican

Bonsai Society created the New Talent Competition three years ago to recognize emerging bonsai talent in the U.S. The Joshua Roth Company, importer of bonsai tools, sponsors the competition. In addition to subsidizing the contestants' registration, Joshua Roth provides the prizes. The top of the line carbon steel tool set for second place and a round trip ticket to Japan for the winner. The headline artists are the judges. In addition, ABS allows attendees to pick a Peoples' Choice Award.

See the ABS website ([www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org)) for information on entering next year's contest.

## JOHN YOSHIO NAKA (Aug. 16, 1914 - May 19, 2004)

"It has been estimated that in all the international world of bonsai, John Y. Naka was easily considered among the top five contemporary greatest masters, the grand masters of the art."

A Google search of John Naka reveals numerous testimonials and over 25,000 references. A comprehensive biography entitled **"IN CELEBRATION OF A GRAND MASTER'S LIFE"** can be found at

<http://www.phoenixbonsai.com/JYN.html>

*"What I like about bonsai is that it has a beginning but no end. A bud today becomes a branch tomorrow. It is like searching for the rainbow's end; the farther it is pursued, the farther away it is. There are no borders in bonsai. The dove of peace flies to palace as to humble house, to young as to old, to rich and poor. So does the spirit of bonsai."*

John Naka, 1992, upon receiving a National Heritage Fellowship Award from The National Endowment for the Arts.

## BACK TO BASICS WITH BERNI

*Berni Gastrich*

### ENERGY DISTRIBUTION

The roots of trees take in the food, i.e., the N.P.K (Nitrogen/Phosphorus/Potassium etc.) and water. These liquids are now transported up to the leaves where in the presence of chlorophyll, air and sunlight they are converted to starches. These are then redistributed to all parts of the tree to produce health and growth.

The analogy is: our mouths eat, our viscera convert the raw foods to glucose, which is then distributed to the entire body for growth and health and fitness.

Trees have either vertical dominance, i.e., more energy goes to the top of the tree and it grows tall, or lateral dominance, i.e., energy and growth are primarily in a horizontal direction. Pines and maples are vertically dominant. Azaleas and most junipers are horizontally dominant.

So What?? You ask. You can make the energy go anywhere you want by a little horticultural manipulation. Have you ever had a tree with a weak branch that needed strengthening? Next months' Basics will tell you how to strengthen that branch and slow down growth in the rest of the tree.

### ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS\*

*A Non Emus*

Are you an active member, the kind that would be missed,  
Or are you just contented that your name is on the list?

Do you work on our committees to see there is no trick,  
Or leave the work to just a few and talk about the clique?

Do you attend our meetings, and mingle with the flock,  
Or do you meet in private and criticize and knock?

So come to meetings often, and help with hand and heart,  
Don't just be a member but take an active part.

Do you take an active part to help the work along,

Think this over, members, you know what's right from  
wrong,

Or are you satisfied to be the kind who "just belongs"?

Are you an active member, or do you "just belong"?

\* PBA Clippings, June 2004, (Newsletter of the Potomac Bonsai Assoc.)

### REMINDER - ANNUAL DUES NOTICE

If you still haven't sent in your dues for our new fiscal year which started May 1<sup>st</sup>, you are in arrears! As a reminder, we have placed a "\$" sign on your mailing label. If you joined YAMA KI after January 1<sup>st</sup>, the dues you paid cover your membership until April 30, 2005.

Dues are now \$25 for individual members and \$35 for family membership. Please mail your dues check payable to the YAMA KI BONSAI SOCIETY to the return address on the back page. Please include any change of address and if you have an internet connection, please include your email address.

Your dues and the auctions primarily provide the funds to pay for our monthly programs, which include lectures and demonstrations by the major bonsai artists of the world, as well as the cost of printing and postage of our newsletter..

## ROOT ROT AND ITS CONTROL\*

by Zachary Smith

Of all the scourges the bonsai literature warns about, root rot is perhaps the worst. It is fearsome because it occurs underground, out of sight, and invariably does its damage slyly. One day your bonsai is either simply dead, or its leaves have yellowed or wilted over a moist soil, this causing an inexplicable, rather hollow feeling in the gut.

There are references in the literature to the use of Benomyl® systemic fungicide as a means to eliminate or prevent root rot, specifically *Paul Lesniewicz's* book *BONSAI: The Complete Guide to Art and Technique* and at least one bonsai sales catalog. But how many of us have actual experience that it works? When Benomyl® is used periodically as a preventative measure (soil drench), the absence of root rot does not necessarily mean the fungicide has done the trick. Few of us would brave conducting the only valid test, that being to take a sufficiently large population of bonsai and treat half of them with Benomyl® while mistreating them all.

Following a good bit of reading and discussion with knowledgeable people, I have what I feel is a reasonably good understanding of just what root rot is and how the control measures work.

### **The fungus among us**

There are many types of rot, most of them caused by fungi or bacteria. The ones we bonsaiists are most concerned with are caused by fungi of the family Pythiaceae, especially the genera *Pythium* and *Phytophthora*.

Since these pathogens are fungi, they produce spores, and in astounding numbers. We literally live in a sea of spores. Carried by water, air and other agents, widespread distribution is assured. So it's not exaggeration to say that root rot fungus spores are a component of soil in nature. Thus, the potential for root rot is always with us.

### **How it occurs**

Root rot fungus spores require two things for proper germination: very high moisture levels and sufficient warmth. If moisture levels are not high enough, the fungus cannot grow or at least not well enough to complete its life cycle.

Once the root rot spores have germinated, they produce threadlike, food gathering structures called hyphae (the network of hyphae is known as mycelium). Since fungi cannot produce their own food, the hyphae attack a tree's feeder roots out of simple necessity. What better place to find the rich source of carbohydrates the fungus needs than structures which gather and store food for an organism the size of a tree? Feeder root tissue is digested (rotted) by enzymes for use by the fungus. When the root rot mycelium is sufficiently large and enough moisture is present, reproductive bodies are produced (sporulation) and the cycle repeats. (Mushrooms are the reproductive bodies for certain fungi, but not root rot.)

It is interesting to note that the mechanism by which root rot kills trees is exactly the same as that by which mycorrhiza benefits them. The difference is that mycorrhiza acts in a symbiotic fashion, providing certain nutrients (especially phosphorus), while it takes the carbohydrates it needs without causing excessive destruction of tissues.

### **Stopping the rot**

The key to our first line of defense against root rot is to prevent germination of the spores. *When we prepare our bonsai soil mixes, the first consideration is always, always excellent drainage.* Without this we know our bonsai will, at the very least, grow poorly. They may choose not to grow at all, or they may die. Since trees do not require the excessive moisture that fungi do, a fast draining soil is ideal to prevent the germination of spores. (Preventing germination of spores this way does not kill them. The most well adapted of all reproductive bodies known, some spores can survive for literally thousands of years.)

How about sterilizing your soil? This will certainly kill any spores present, but there is nothing to prevent new spores from "reinfesting" the soil once your bonsai have been potted. Over the span of three to five years, the potential for root rot will surely have returned. Sterilization of a poorly draining soil is, therefore, ineffectual. In addition, sterilization not only kills the root rot pathogens but also soil pathogens which attack root rot fungi. (Yes, they have their own enemies.)

Chemical fumigation of soil (with agents such as methyl bromide), besides being a hazardous practice not recommended for the home gardener, is of little use for the same reason as sterilization.

### **The use of fungicides**

As noted, there are bonsai literature references recommending Benomyl® fungicide, a product of the DuPont company, to combat root rot. I contacted a plant pathologist at DuPont to ask about this usage for their product.

Benomyl® fungicide (sold under the trade name, Benlate™) is primarily useful in controlling fungi on the

exposed parts of a plant, particularly the leaves. In fact, the primary intended application for Benlate™ is the control of black spot on roses and other ornamentals. (Zelkova is one bonsai species susceptible to black spot.) Other applications include use to control brown spot on various types of fruit. Although it is called a systemic fungicide, Benomyl® is more correctly thought of as a localized systemic. When applied to a plant's foliage, for example, it will absorb into the leaves' conducting tissues and provide internal protection there (and kill fungus which has invaded the leaves).

Benlate™ product labels do **not** indicate any effectiveness for Benomyl® in root rot control, nor does DuPont recommend such use. There are other fungicides on the general gardening market, such as Captan®, but none are recommended for use against root rot.

I spoke with Vaughn Banting about controlling root rot with fungicide. He indicated that there are products which can be used as soil drenches to kill root rot fungi, but they are not commonly available to the home gardener. Such brands as Banrot®, Trueban®, and Subdue® are specifically targeted to kill fungi of the Pythium genus. These may be obtained by contacting a horticulturist or a nurseryman, but should not be thought of as products for casual use in root rot prevention. If used against root rot fungi, these products will also kill any mycorrhiza present. They are your last defense. (Their high cost alone precludes frequent use.)

### Summary

In bonsai there are always pests and diseases with which to contend. Many can be avoided while others must simply be fought as best we can. Root rot is a particularly destructive disease, but is also one of the most easily prevented. As Vaughn pointed out, root rot is most likely to occur when a plant is under stress. Poor soil drainage and the resulting wet conditions cause feeder roots to die and allow root rot spores to germinate and grow on the dead tissues. Or the bonsai gets too dry and feeder roots die, then you water and again the spores germinate and grow.

Particular attention should be paid to soil composition, as this is the best way to regulate moisture levels. Experience has shown that *proper bonsai soils should be 50% solid, 25% liquid, and 25% gas*. When this ratio is maintained, root rot is extremely unlikely to occur.

As part of a practical approach to root rot prevention, don't be afraid to adjust your repotting schedule, if your bonsai are not draining properly after watering. Be careful to avoid over-watering.

*In the end, the best way to control root rot is to keep it from occurring.*

\*Reprinted from The Lake Charles Bonsai Society's **BONSAI NEWS**, May 2004, which was reprinted from **BONSAI: Journal of the American Bonsai Society**, Vol 24, No. 3, Fall 1990, pp. 8-9.

### DOLIE SMITH

Sadly, on June 12, 2004, *Eudolia Smith (Dolie as we knew her)* passed away. She was one of *Yuji Yoshimura's* longtime students. She started bonsai with him in about 1958. She was also one of the founding members of the Greater New York Bonsai Society and served as Secretary early on. She was a member of Yama Ki since its founding. Her bonsai have been exhibited at the New York Botanical Garden and in Washington at the National Arboretum, as well as almost every Yama Ki exhibit. She was 97 years old!

Due to time constraints, a review of the June 26<sup>th</sup> lecture/demonstration and workshop with *Colin Lewis* will be included in the August issue



Boxwood at 10:00 AM



Boxwood at 12:30 PM



**OFFICERS**

**DIRECTORS**

Adam Hume ..... President  
 Jim Glatthaar ..... Vice-President  
 Irv Kleiman ..... Treasurer  
 Mike Pollock ..... Corresponding Secretary  
 Gail Therrien ..... Recording Secretary  
 Nicki Wallhofer ..... Librarian

Cecelia Grieshaber ..... Steve Peach  
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 Jerry Meyer ..... Life-Time Director

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**COMING EVENTS**

July	10	Annual Meeting & Auction—at <i>Lucille Miller's</i> Home
August	14	Home Visit with <i>Gail Therrien</i> & Member Critiques
September	11	Member Teams Styling Competition

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