



Welcome to the ABS Newsletter for June 2017. Some of us are in frenetic mode, getting ready for the First US Shohin National Exhibition, while others are getting trees prepared for other shows, or just a great growing season – filled with plans and preparation of great trees in 2, 5, 10, 20, or more years down the road.

A major thanks to those who contribute articles. We missed having a May newsletter due to not just a lack of submissions, but a lack of article ideas. I'm not above begging when it comes to content. We're sitting on empty when it comes down to even ideas for articles. As I wrote in April, if you can contribute or if you have an idea for an article you think would be of interest, please email me at: [dave.paris@w3works.com](mailto:dave.paris@w3works.com) We desperately need a cache of articles to chose from so we can make the newsletter interesting! We can handle the writing if we know what the membership would find interesting.

## SCARS

By Andrew Smith – South Dakota

Scars, I guess, are the marks of living. Perhaps you could say they are sometimes the marks of careless living, and perhaps you could say that when it comes to scars charity demands that it's better to give than receive; but going through life unscarred is not really going through life at all, though we wisely avoid them when we can.

I remember my grandfather's burly arms, which had thin, white lines crossing them, as did his cheeks. He came here from Germany and the thin, white lines were scars from sword duels. As a youth he'd been a member of some sort of brotherhood whose main purpose seemed to be: 1) Finding something to argue about, 2) Getting offended that someone would dare to take the

opposite side of your argument, though if they didn't you'd have to keep looking for someone who would, and then, 3) Settling things in a rational way with bloodshed and a sword. But I don't think the goal was really to kill anyone. I'd guess, more likely, it was just to get some good scars on your arms that you could flash around the burg to catch some pretty fraulein's eye.

My Dad used to tell me that when he was a boy they always ate Sunday dinner at my great grandma's farmhouse, and there were usually at least 30 people there and once in a while as many as 60. He would sit at a huge long table with six or eight of his uncles sitting across from him and he said every one of them would have knuckle marks across their foreheads from the night before. They were Irish and this was before there were smart phones, or even TV sets, to entertain themselves with, so they did the best they could to have fun with the limited means they had. And they got scars.

In many instances we wear our scars somewhat proudly, as evidence of challenges we have survived and stories we have the right to tell. The few scars I bear are more evidence of plans that weren't thought all the way through before they were put into action, but I only admit that here. To most people I present them as manifest proofs of hard challenges I have lived through. Or at least as lessons; learned, or not.

I sometimes wonder if the current tattoo craze has come about because real scars are somewhat risky, difficult and usually quite painful to acquire. But you can pay a couple hundred bucks and in an hour get some sort of graffiti etched on your shoulder or calf that serves the same purpose –it makes you look like you've lived through something, and only you (and your tattooist) know what it was.

In bonsai also, scars are highly valued. All you have to do is down a six-pack of Bud heavy and try juggling a few sets of giant Masakuni concave cutters to see what I mean. I'll bet you can't. Anyway, the high value the ER doctor will place on patching up your forehead and reattaching the end of your nose will amaze you. It's just the end –it can't be worth that much! Unless you don't have one. Ultimately, it's just making room in your bank account for more money anyway, so don't worry about it. No one else at your office party will have a story as good as that. Believe me; I know.

And the scars on our bonsai trees from decades of hard living are also treasured marks of character. The silver jins and sharis, the bent and twisted branches, and the rough, contorted trunks tell the tale of a relentless struggle to thrive, or at least survive, in an often hostile and impoverished environment.

And it's not just the trees in my greenhouse that have these scars! Mother Nature herself is not always so good of a gardener as you might imagine. She must partake over often of the fruits of her own vines, for she often forgets to water for weeks, or even months, on end. And then when she does water she is just as likely to pour a whole month's worth of water in an hour, as she is to give a drop in a month.

And that's not all, for she lets it freeze during the growing season, keeps it too warm during the dormant season, sends hard hail against fresh flowers and gales of tree-toppling wind when the ground is soft from too much rain.

In bonsai the end result of this careless exuberance, for those that survive it, is sometimes beauty. Other times, it's just a bad tattoo.

For instance, last year I went with a friend to a place I knew to collect some pine trees for

bonsai and found the whole area had been battered by hail a few days earlier. The ground was a green carpet of freshly sheared pine needles and the trees themselves, large and small, were denuded and scarred; with missing bark, needles, shoots and broken branches, all from a devastating rain of large hail. I had seen large pines severely beat up by hail once before, but never the small pines beneath them too. The damage was amazing.



The trees looked so torn up that I began to wonder if they would be strong enough to survive transplanting. So, we dug a couple of the less mangled ones and then left to find a different area.

The trees we dug hung on and made it through the year, though they looked as ratty as an old cat making hairballs behind the couch (I got one of those). This year they are looking a little stronger and have new buds popping out to replace some of the foliage they lost.

But what caught my eye was the scars. As they healed, the hail gashes made elliptical diamonds of shari running along the upper side of the branches and trunks. I have seen similar scars thousands of times on the branches of old pines before, but I never knew exactly what caused

them. I'm not sure I ever really thought about it; just, "something" caused some scars along the trunk. It made shari, which is good, and I didn't worry about it. But now I know.

I've worked for 35 years in the woods in the Black Hills and have not run into that level of hail damage before. But now I see these old pines must encounter this type of hail at least a few times in their long lives. Undoubtedly, some don't survive it. But the ones that do, have scars.

## **Stirring Things Up at the BSOP Circus**

By Lee Cheatele

Bonsai Society of Portland President

Back in December of 2015, the ABS Journal Newsletter printed an article titled "Bonsai Circus...A Success Story." It was a short story about how the Bonsai Society of Portland had, in a few years, grown from a club of about 175 to a membership of 250. Now, a year and a half later, our membership is over 350 strong and continues to grow.

The 'how' of that growth was the most important aspect of the 2015 story. We attributed the success in large part to our dynamic general meetings. When the original story was written in 2015, our meetings consisted of what we termed our "Nine Ring Circus". At the time we had nine arenas of activity at each gathering. If you didn't get to read that article, the nine arenas included: a meet & greet table, a show & tell table, a Q&A table, a vendor section, a raffle for items donated to the club, a silent auction where members can sell their trees (20% goes to the club), a library of over 1000 items, a hospitality table providing coffee and treats, and our regular program. The purpose of that article was to give other clubs some ideas on how to attract new members. Since 2015 we have added a tenth ring to our

Circus. We now have a two-sided formal display at each meeting which includes a free standing back drop with tables on each side. Formal displays are created by our more experienced members consisting of show quality trees replete with show quality stands and accents. The idea of this was to encourage our members, especially the newer members; to let them see what consistent bonsai practice can yield. A worthy goal for all of us.

However, that is not the reason for this article.

The purpose of this writing is to extend an invitation - one that will benefit the entire realm of bonsai hobbyists. BSOP has grasped an exciting opportunity to team up with Ryan Neil of Bonsai Mirai. In March, 2017, we began a series of seven educational live streamed demonstrations being filmed as part of Ryan's Tuesday night "Bonsai Mirai Live" streamlines. These programs take place at our regular club meetings on the fourth Tuesdays of each month through November, 2017, except for July and August when BSOP does not meet. During these demonstrations, Ryan explains procedures that are currently being employed at Bonsai Mirai. The topics are applicable to the present time of year and provide a continuity that is often lacking in bonsai club programs. Ryan's demonstrations always involve several delightful specimens from his garden.

What I really want to share with you, though, is that we have the privilege of publishing all of the streamlines filmed at our meetings. Providing links to these videos from the BSOP website allows our membership to watch the program a second or third time, to catch or repeat something they may have missed during the live presentation, or even to pause the film for taking notes. This is an especially significant benefit for our newer members, helping them learn the how

and why of creating bonsai from one of the best bonsai instructors around.

The most exciting part of this project is its availability to everyone via the public portion of BSOP's website, *PortlandBonsai.org*. I mean everyone. No login, no password – just look for **Mirai Videos** on the main menu and select any of the programs recorded to date. Anyone with an interest or curiosity about the art of bonsai can access, with no fee, these remarkable videos via our website... Yes, you read that right... **FREE** Ryan Neil bonsai instruction.

You may ask: Why would BSOP do this? Be assured this is no trick; no strings attached – it is simply BSOP's way of meeting our mission goals – “To promote interest in and the enjoyment of Bonsai, and to assemble and make available information on the culture of Bonsai.” So please enjoy the videos, and pass the information on to everyone you know who is interested in the art of bonsai.

## Dancing With Trees

By Dave Paris – Rochester, NY

If you've ever seen the movie WALL-E, there's a scene where the captain asks the ship's computer to define “dancing.” The computer responds with “A series of movements involving two partners, where speed and rhythm match harmoniously with music.” (the music itself won Best Instrumental Arrangement – if you'd like to hear it, enjoy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-7LIojfezw> alas, I digress).

In so many ways, the very best bonsai are created as a dance between the artist and the tree. Unexpected events happen. A branch dies. A new branch appears unexpectedly. Foliage we had depended on weakens. Adventitious buds arise where we had hoped but had no way of making it happen, shy of a graft.

We take turns leading in the dance. When we first sit down with the tree and we're examining it, the music starts. Sometimes the tree takes the lead and we follow along in time. At other times, we take the lead and hope the tree is in harmony with our vision.

Also like dancing, there comes tempo changes, unanticipated moves while the tree is taking the lead. In order to create beauty, we need to follow that lead and adjust our own moves accordingly. Sometimes this leads to a minor change, sometimes a major.

The one thing we cannot do, if we hope to produce a truly beautiful bonsai, is to be a wallflower partner. We must switch leads with the tree, being an active, attentive partner. A pre-bonsai, sitting on the bench, being watered, fed, and given basic care against pathogens and pests, will grow no more beautiful than if it were planted in a forest and left to dance with nature.

We must be attentive to changes in the tree and adjust our initial vision. The entire dance is not scripted. Barely any of it is. We both take a bit of a break while the tree is dormant over winter, but as time passes, the tempo, the rhythm of the dance changes. We adapt our vision and bring out the beauty the changes in the tree have offered us as an option.

As I prepared on tree for display at the upcoming National Shohin Exhibition, I found images of the tree from seven years ago. Not only had the tree changed, but I realized I had changed as well. I was able to see new potential in the tree from my personal evolution down the path of bonsai, and the tree itself had changed due to good growing years and poor ones. Years of minimal fertilization and heavy fertilization. A year that saw a record low temperature average in February and a year that saw a record high



average temperature. Some branches that had started out weak never grew stronger and some that were strong had gotten too strong, despite periodic pruning during each season to balance the total energy across the entire tree.

While working on that tree, I thought of others that I'd like to bring with me to potentially display. Each with its own soundtrack, rhythm, tempo, and favorite types of dance. I found myself caring less if the tree won an award, and more about if the image of the tree that was continuing to develop enhanced the emotion I was trying to evoke with my initial design vs. the design that had evolved through the back and forth dance I had with each tree over the years.

The takeaway that I drew was that the dance between the tree and myself was for our enjoyment. If others appreciated it, then so much the better as the joy is spread and the emotion evoked. The dance, the journey through the years with each tree was where the magic of bonsai resides. To be sure, this is not meant as a get-out-of-jail-free card to call a stick in a container a bonsai. Instead, it's a wake-up call to realize that we need to master the technical manipulation, understand the horticultural needs and timing, and *then* the real dance of evoking emotion through the give and take of the lead can bring us amazing results we can continue to enjoy, season after season and year after year.

## A SPECIAL INVITATION

If for some reason you cannot attend the very special 50th Anniversary ABS/BSF Convention, you can still enjoy a part of history. Purchase a commemorative book, *New World Bonsai 2017*.

Along with comments by a number of world class seminar teachers, the book will include professional portraits of 50 displays of beautiful bonsai that have been chosen from over 100

submittals for exhibit at the Convention. Enjoy in hard copy the beauty of equal numbers of both tropical and temperate trees.

Pre-order in advance of the Convention and pay only \$20 per book plus shipping and processing.

Click [HERE](#) to pre-order *New World Bonsai 2017*.

## Upcoming Events

June 23-25 2017 – U.S. National Shohin Exhibition. Kannapolis, NC



September 14-16, 2018 – NW Bonsai Rendezvous. Portland, Oregon. Hosted by BSOP and PNBCA Visit <http://portlandbonsai.org> for more information.

## Newsletter Submissions:

Please send submissions, upcoming events, article ideas, raves, rants, and so forth to [dave.paris@w3works.com](mailto:dave.paris@w3works.com)

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