

## RMBS HERITAGE TREES - Pat Deutschman

### RMBS Heritage trees- passing on a collection

"Bonsai has a beginning but no end" - John Naka. A bonsai is a living heirloom that can be passed down for generations. How can you create a plan to ensure a bonsai's survival after you are no longer able to care for it? That is the essential question we will explore here.

When the time comes to pass along either an entire collection or just a few trees to another caregiver whether it be due to the bonsaiist health, age, moving/downsizing, or just wanting to take the tree out of the collection to make room for something else, the decision can become emotionally difficult. Just hoping that the next caregiver will love and tend to the trees with the same level of personal commitment may be unrealistic. The next person to nurture the tree will ideally have a similar affection as well as sufficient expertise for that species in order to keep the tree in good health, the skills to "advance the design" and appreciation for its history. Sadly, we had firsthand experience when this does not happen. My husband, Fred, "lost" a number of his prized bonsai after leaving them behind in Florida to be cared for by a local bonsai "expert" who either gave some away or neglected their care and they died before we could go back and retrieve them! Fred's bonsai were all mostly tropical species and the foster caregiver worked primarily on cypress and buttonwoods. Thus, the mistaken assumption of interest for species the caregiver did not grow on his own- a bonsai is a bonsai- is somewhat surprisingly not the same to everyone. The emotional attachment to a long-term bonsai development relationship is difficult to measure and quite difficult to pass on.

So, here are some things to consider as you ponder the future of your "special" trees. Each tree has a story to tell, but you may be the only one who knows it! Keep a written record of your bonsai. Besides the tree's origin and approximate age, it has a unique history of time in training, styling or trimming protocol, diseases it has overcome or is susceptible to, as well as its own quirks and habitat where it thrives. The Denver Botanic Gardens keeps an up to date log on each of the trees in its collections documenting the history of each bonsai and its care requirements and updates to all the above. This log is the tree's history and will stay with the tree to help ensure its required level of care regardless of who the caregiver is.

Some bonsai artists and nurseries attach an identifying tag on every bonsai to help maintain a record of each tree. Some photograph the tree and attach the photo to the log the trees history. Like our family ancestry, knowing where we came from is part of who we are, the more we know the more we have a full understanding of what makes us who we are.

So, what can you do with your trees when it is time to pass them on to someone else? Create a succession plan for your trees and don't leave it up to someone else's judgment who is not familiar with your trees. One current practice is to donate the trees to the Denver Botanic Gardens. The Gardens will accept one or all trees as an "in kind" donation. They commit to either keep the tree(s) in their permanent collection or donate the trees to a good home. Some may also be donated back to the RMBS to be auctioned off as a fundraiser for the club. The one thing that will not happen to the tree is it will not be destroyed. This is a very comforting pledge considering the amount of time and patience, attention, expense and

artistic creativity that was invested into each tree, some for decades. All the bonsai in the collection at the DBG are 2nd or 3rd generation trees so they have begun with someone else first.

Attached to this newsletter the RMBS Heritage Program Guidelines. This program was created to provide care for a member's bonsai collection in the event of an emergency, sickness, age deterioration or death on either a temporary basis or to assist in either the sale or donation of a collection.