

The "Roots" of a Heritage Tree
By Pat Deutschman

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending the popular "Beginning Bonsai" class at the Denver Botanic Gardens taught by RMBS's Larry Jacket and Hal Sasaki. The class, always sold out months in advance, was attended by a dozen eager students hoping to become knowledgeable about bonsai in about 7 hours. Of course, as anyone who is successful at bonsai knows, it takes years of practice, lots of dead trees and some serious coaching to rise to the level many of our members have achieved. But what struck me was this class was made up of just young people. I thought about the journey ahead of them and the advantage of their age while embarking on what could be a pursuit that would last them their lifetime.

Over the past months I have written about some trees considered "Heritage Trees" because of the time in "training", and/or age or their individual legacy of ownership/care givers. These trees truly exemplify the result of that initial journey someone took many years ago themselves. As I have followed a "Heritage tree's" history from several decades ago (perhaps when it was in its glory) to now, I heard about branches that died, styling that was changed, repotting, periods of dormancy or just time itself that transformed the tree from what it once was to what it is today. But the real story I think is in the tale of its beginning. What is at the "root" of a bonsai's story is the person who reimagined this tree as a bonsai to begin with. Each bonsai artist has a unique vision for what the tree will become. As does many meaningful aspect of life, it takes many years of nurturing to sustain and perhaps realize that vision.

There is a lasting legacy of bonsai artists that dates back to the early days of the Denver Bonsai Club or its subsequent "Junior" club which is now the Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society, in which members have been inspired, taught, assisted and welcomed into the bonsai experience by fellow members and most importantly, those senior members with decades of experience. Each of these experienced bonsaists brings to the club a history of not only perfecting successful skills and techniques but also memories of those previous members who they had been inspired or trained by. The resultant "Heritage Tree" is, of course, the true testament to these "roots".

Over the next four months (hopefully with better weather) leading up to the 50th Anniversary of the RMBS I will be featuring some of those senior club members as we walk down the lane of memories but also highlight their own collections that represent their years of devotion to this art form and what will most assuredly be considered "Heritage Trees" of the future.