

From January 31, 1983 QUARTERLY issue:

HISTORY - THE BONSAI BUMS

Once upon a time, there was a bonsai club. It had no name, no dues, no officers, no official meeting dates or places. It lasted happily for over twenty years without by-laws or minutes or treasurer's reports.

This club was composed of a small group of nuts who loved highballs, fine food and wines and above all, trying to turn trees into bonsai.

Once a year there was a collecting trip to some high, secret place. Mornings were devoted to the search for the ultimate tree. In the afternoons came The Orgy.

One memorable feast included Beluga caviar brought from Russia by Dr. Bert Bruenner just for this special occasion. Others were a whole filet of beef by George Schenk, lemon chicken a la Bob Shields, French red and white wines contributed by Dr. Cyrus Rubin and fabulous salads and desserts made with various wines. Getting back down the mountain was sometimes an adventure in itself.

Of course, there was one unifying factor---Kelly Nishitani was our teacher. He didn't say much. He just pruned and wired trees. He was dear and kind and inflexible when it came to good taste in bonsai.

When Jane Blogg wanted to form PSBA, she came to the Bums. We helped as best we could.

Connie Raphael

(ED. NOTE: The foregoing article by Connie Raphael about the "Bonsai Bums" is the first in a series about the historical background of PSBA. The last sentence of her article modestly understates the importance of the "Bums" in PSBA beginnings. Our first president, Dr. Bert Bruenner and first vice-president, Robert Shields, were "Bonsai Bums". The first secretary, Sarah Bernstein, was the wife of "BB" Dr. Gerald Bernstein, and "Bums" on the first Board of Directors were Connie Raphael and Dan Robinson. Sadly, Kelly Nishitani died shortly before PSBA was organized. Some "Bonsai Bums" are no longer active in PSBA but those who are still members are Bert Bruenner, Bob Shields, Connie Raphael, Dan Robinson, Don Milliken, Tak Nagasawa and Dr. Ronald Szymanski.)

From March 31, 1983 QUARTERLY issue:

HISTORY -- THE KELLY NISHITANI UNIT

In 1959, it all began as Unit #73 of the Arboretum Foundation, identified as the Bonsai Culture Group.

MARY MAKI had just returned from a year in Japan where she had studied under Yuji Yoshimura. It was natural that she seek out KELLY NISHITANI, the patriarch of bonsai in this area, who was acquainted with others of the same interest. The initial group, MARY RICHARDSON, CONNIE RAPHAEL, HAZEL PRINGLE and VIRGINIA MOFFET added JANET WARD, JANE BLOGG, VINCENT SIMEON and HELEN CULLITON to round out a workable bonsai unit, with Kelly and Mary teaching.

Kelly and Mary were an excellent balance, he of the "I learned at my father's knee" approach and Mary of formal training and experience. High standards were set with a serious approach to the art. The following year (1960), as a tribute to Kelly, the group became known as the Kelly Nishitani Unit.

By 1962, it was felt that the bonsai unit was sufficiently knowledgeable to teach a beginners' class, followed the next year by another beginners' class and an intermediate class. From this intermediate class evolved the Mary Maki Unit.

In 1961, with high hopes, much bravado and no money, they undertook an exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum with support from the "Bonsai Bums". As a special attraction, Mr. Yoshimura was invited for demonstrations and workshops. It was successful in creating a greater interest in bonsai and in establishing a sound financial basis upon which to further that knowledge. On alternate years thereafter, exhibits were held at the Art Museum, with Kelly's and Mary's high standards of quality to guide them.

Perhaps the crowning achievement of the Unit came in 1972 when the American Horticultural Society hosted a convention with international visitors at the Seattle Center. The Kelly Nishitani Unit, though at that time inactive, was invited to present a bonsai exhibit in the Modern Art Pavilion. With sensitive staging provided by the Art Museum and wholehearted participation of other bonsai groups, the exhibit was outstanding.

In 1969, the Unit as such became inactive as an Arboretum Unit. However, the original purpose of furthering interest in

bonsai was accomplished by the giving of financial contributions from still available funds. The Main Seattle Public Library received a collection of representative bonsai books for viewing in the Fine Arts Department. The Unit was at least partially instrumental in the formation of PSBA in 1973 when the need for an all-inclusive centralized organization became obvious. A substantial donation was given to PSBA in Kelly Nishitani's memory to insure a good financial foundation. Further funds were given to the Japanese Garden in the Arbor-

etum, and finally, it helped underwrite, with PSBA, the excellent photography of the 1981 PSBA exhibit at the Modern Art Pavilion.

Kelly is no longer with us. He died in 1969, just before the last of the Unit's bonsai exhibits. Mary Maki is still pursuing her interest in bonsai in Amherst, Massachusetts. To them go the thanks of many people for outstanding instruction and a deep appreciation of bonsai which remains as we repot, prune and shape.

Jane Blogg

HISTORY -- KELLY NISHITANI

Reprinted from April 1974, Puget Sound Bonsai Newsletter, Mary Richardson, Editor

Vol. 1, No. 4

Seattle, Washington

April 1, 1974

REVIEW

Vice President Bob Shields presided at the February meeting in place of our president who was recuperating from his vacation spent in the hospital. Those who paid their dues received membership cards. The Brooklyn Botanical Garden Film on Bonsai was superb. It is the opinion of the Board members that this film should be shown again at a later date. Good program on air layering by Jim Nakahara and cleft and slant grafting by Tak Nagasawa. Their demonstrations and the display of grafted trees inspired us all.

The highlight of the meeting was Jane Blogg's presentation of \$2000 to the Puget Sound Bonsai Association from the Kelly Nishitani Guild for the purpose of bring qualified Bonsai speakers to Seattle. The check was presented in Kelly's memory and to further his dream of a large and active Bonsai Association in Seattle. We thank Mrs. Helen Tuell, the Guild president, and all present and past members of the guild. For those of you who missed the opportunity of knowing Kelly Nishitani, here are some of the memories from a few of his many friends.

MEMORIAL

Kelly Nishitani - who was he? Japanese born - coming to the U.S. as a small child - assuming the patriarchal assignment on the death of his father - suffering the indignities of internment during World War II - returning without bitterness to rebuild his nursery business - teaching karate and holding the award of the black belt - always loving and teaching bonsai. A gentle man and a gentleman. This was Kelly.

Kelly's dream of an active bonsai association in Seattle began in 1957 at the arboretum with a nucleus of about 12 people and two goals. 1) A permanent collection of fine trees in the Arboretum. 2) A greenhouse to contain a collection. Interest has slowly spread through other guilds. Today we are still trying to follow Kelly's artistic and technical principles.

The years of the 1960's were the golden years for Kelly. Numerous requests from garden groups - much in demand for demonstrations - even as far as Vancouver, B.C., and Bellingham. He was free of business responsibilities because his mother could mind the shop and he was free for lectures and tours with visiting firemen from other parts of the U.S.

Our first year the group had no name designation - in 1960, when we decided to be identified as the Kelly Nishitani Unit of the Arboretum Foundation, he so humbly remarked that he went home and told his mother and "she wept". The bonsai shows at the Art Museum were extremely popular and raised money for the museum, the arboretum and the bonsai units. Kelly set high standards and stressed quality. The last exhibit Kelly was restricted physically but personally put his stamp of approval on each tree only to die of a heart attack the Sunday before the show opened. We all felt that the exhibit itself was an anti-climax because he had made the decisions but it was a huge success. At his funeral were people of all races, all walks of life whom he had touched with his love of people and from whom he had the response of respect and admiration.

How the good things came back to Kelly in return for all he gave. The love and compassion and companionship of the "Bonsai Bums" who drew Kelly even closer after he suffered amputation of both legs. The physical strength of the men filled in where Kelly couldn't - transporting him - lifting him - taking care of his needs with dignity and affection. Still expanding his horizons - Kelly Nishitani brought bonsai into full bloom in Seattle. Let's keep his dream alive.

From the August 31, 1983 QUARTERLY issue:

HISTORY ---THE MARY MAKI UNIT & PSBA

Over ten years ago, the MARY MAKI UNIT of the Arboretum Foundation, along with the "Bonsai Bums", the Kelly Nishitani Unit and other groups, had a part in the formation of Puget Sound Bonsai Association.

MARY MAKI had learned the art of bonsai in Japan. For several years, she taught those in her Arboretum Unit not only the traditional art but a love and respect for bonsai. She was a good teacher, as was Kelly Nishitani, but sometime after Kelly died, Mary moved to Massachusetts. What a loss it was to Northwest bonsai, with both mentors gone! The Mary Maki group, however, have continued to meet to this day eight times a year at Jefferson Park Fieldhouse. This group's members, in 1973 when PSBA was formed, were JOCELYN HORDER, ENID ESHOM, MARGE CHRISTENSEN, MADELEINE LUTHER, RUTH RICKS, LEE LAYMAN AND IRENE WHEATLEY. Of these, all but the last two joined PSBA when it was organized and have continued in their membership since. Later members of the Mary Maki group were LUCILE STOWELL, MARGOT FRANKLIN, BEVERLY McDONALD, EVELYN DAVIS and BERNICE SMITH. Of these, the first two are long-time members of PSBA. MARY MAKI herself still lives in Massachusetts and is still teaching bonsai, though by direction only, not by demonstration. SHARON MUTH saw her at the recent ABS symposium in Boston and reports that Mary's hands are badly crippled with arthritis, and she is unable to work with the trees as she used to do.

In the days of the sixties and early seventies, interest in bonsai was growing by leaps and bounds here in the Northwest, as well as all over the U. S. Classes and clubs met all around the Puget Sound area. Everett had a bonsai club, of which NORMA COHEN and OLGA LOW were members. Tacoma had a group, an offshoot of classes taught by DAN ROBINSON. Spectacular bonsai shows drawing from all the groups were held.

Eventually, however, the need for a centralized organization became apparent. Most of the units were comparatively small and wished to remain that way. There was no room for growth, yet demand for knowledge and instruction was increasing. It was felt that an amalgamation into a larger unified group would result in greater resources, both in finances and in bonsai talent, to attract qualified bonsai demon-

strators from around the country and to bring together local people with an aptitude for teaching, demonstrating and otherwise dispensing their accumulated knowledge.

And so PUGET SOUND BONSAI ASSOCIATION was born. In May, 1973, the organizational meeting was held. With a gift of \$2000 from the then-inactive Kelly Nishitani Unit, we were off to a good start. DR. BERT BRUENNER (dear old Numero Uno!) was our first president, a position he held for the rest of 1973 and for 1974 and 1975. Then came JANE NELSON, 1976-1977; LEO CUNNINGHAM, 1978-1979; SHIRLEY STAFFORD, 1980-1981 and DAN ROBINSON, 1982-1983. We have grown to over 300 members with the fervent hope and desire that the early purpose for which we were formed, dispensing of bonsai knowledge and education, still holds true! VIVE LA PSBA!

* * * * *



1983 PSBA TENTH ANNIVERSARY BONSAI SHOW!

May 21-22, 1983:
Museum of History and Industry,
2161 E. Hamlin Street
Seattle, Washington