

# SHIBUI BONSAI KAI

## NEWSLETTER

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MONTH: February 2021

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Dear Bonsai Friends

The Floreum has still not been handed over by the builders so, unfortunately, is not available for our meeting. So, our next meeting is going to be held on Saturday 20 March 2021 in The Environmental Centre, in the Johannesburg Botanic Garden, THOMAS BOWLER ENTRANCE, ie. Around the corner from our usual car park entrance at 14:00. The entrance is through the big double gate, opposite the school playing field. Drive straight into the car park entrance and straight, through another palisade gate, and turn left. The environmental centre is on the left-hand side. The centre has valuable historical assets inside so we are not permitted to make a mess or have tea in the centre but can do so from the outside kitchen. Trevor will be doing a small demonstration for us and this will be followed by a hands-on workshop. Please bring a Bonsai to work on and there are tables available. This will be our first opportunity of the year to see each other so please come and support us. Naturally masks properly worn and sanitising is a necessity for the afternoon. As we have not seen many of you for over a year now, please, we need to see you all again, so do turn up.

We would like to thank all those who came to Brenthurst for our last meeting. It was a very hot afternoon, but the Bonsai were weeded and some maintenance done. The work area at the back was swept out and all the weeds removed and left spick and span. We decided not to move some of the deciduous trees out from under cover until the weather started to cool down to prevent leaf scorch and damage from the sun. Mrs Oppenheimer very kindly invited us to round off the afternoon by enjoying ice cold water in the magnificent 'Nguni Kraal' at little Brenthurst.

Hi Derry,

Thanks for the newsletter. I liked Mike's before and after photos - pictures are worth a thousand words and good advice after all the rain we have had.

Stay safe.

Regards,

Ian.

Another before and after, this time a large Bottle brush, planted in a drum shaped Mica pot. One of the Heritage collection from Brenthurst. It was left for a year to grow out, untrained, except for somebody

breaking off new growth, who knows why, a few months ago. The dead bits were cut off, the old wire removed and partially rewired. Now it needs more detailed wiring, repotting, left to grow again to heal over some wire damage and planted into a suitable container. We have had a problem in the past with the weaver birds nipping off the new growth when building their nests, but this has not happened during the last year.



Before: Front



Back



After: Front



Back

Something for the newsletter if suitable

A plant I won at Shibui raffle. Nobody knew what type of tree it was. Tree has just been left in Nursery bag at home



After January 2021 initial pruning and bit of wiring. (excuse lots of wire around base, but a lot of roots were wired in position)

According to Nursery it is a Indian Hawthorn



A small fig cutting from Dem at club towards end 2019. Planted in little pot and left to its own devices. Repotted and some wiring done and 2 huge side roots cut off. About 12 cm tall



Small stinkwood approx 10 cm tall that I stuck in a pot with some moss. With the last 2 weeks rain with moss grew like mad and little mushrooms appeared two days ago



Derry if photos or content not good enough, please don't use them.  
Regards Anthoney

Thank you Anthoney, all contributions gratefully received.

An interesting and inspiring bonsai article, courtesy of Graham Potter of Kaizen Bonsai, perhaps for a future newsletter:

### Life Can Hit Us All Pretty Hard Sometimes

Bonsai is not easy! For many just keeping a little tree alive seems to be impossibly hard. It might be because they are over-complicating things, who am I to say. I am of an age where I likely have a longer past than future. I have been involved in bonsai for more years than not, thirty odd as I recall.

There are two very important things you will need in order to succeed in bonsai. Patience being the primary one. Trees move at a pace inconsistent with the 'modern' world. The other is perspective. I remember telling somebody that he needed to prune new shoots back to a couple of leaves. His reply? "What's a shoot?" Being new to the keeping of bonsai trees the poor lad had no idea what that meant.

Having more than thirty seasons under my belt gives one a great perspective. I know what's going to happen, all things being equal. I know how what I do today will affect my plants in the future and largely how they will respond and develop. Before I had that all I could see was what was in front of me. As I worked trees I found it all very disappointing. No matter how hard I tried, even today, newly worked trees leave me cold.

For sure, over the years I did a few clever things that folk seem to like. However, for me the real magic comes as my clumsy fumbblings disappear. The magic of bonsai comes from the trees response to our work. At best we can point a tree in a certain direction and hope it goes with us. Early in our journey this is more likely to end in failure than not but with time, practice and perspective it's possible our empathy and understanding will result in better outcomes.

Personally, I have always preferred to work with a tree, giving it the time and space to become beautiful. I find that better than foisting my ideas upon my subject and brutally hammering it into submission. This may well take longer but bonsai is NOT something for folk who are in a hurry. Years in the saddle have taught me to care less about what other folk might think, bonsai is not about making US look good it's about making little trees look good, and in that respect playing the 'long game' is the only option.

I have been very lucky (or was it hard work) to become the steward of some very beautiful old trees, some are bonsai, some will be bonsai but they do all have an inherent magic of their own. As a rule the harder the life of a collected tree the greater the magic it portrays. It's all about triumph over adversity, it's inspiring. Folk in bonsai tend to get very excited about deadwood but the focus should always be on the live bit. Bonsai and hope are all about the future and making the best of what we have. Life can hit us all pretty hard sometimes and those hits can leave scars. There's not much we can do about that but we do have control over what we do after. Often those that took the greatest hits in life go on to do the most inspiring things.

On occasions it almost seems like getting a slap down was the best thing that could have happened. I have several examples of that in my own life. In the moment it seems rough but in time positives emerge, perhaps not what we would like or would have planned but, as they say we have to play the cards we are dealt.

So, recently I had to hitch up my sense of perspective when faced with this particularly uninspiring field elm. I bought a whole batch of these a couple of years ago. I would never have chosen this one but when buying large amounts of stock I have to take the rough with the smooth.

It looks a lot like a sledgehammer with a busted handle. A strange inverted T shape with ninety degree angles. Add to that all the best branch structure emerges from one side. The first branch on the left has a poor angle with the ones above it all emerging from a single knuckle. The upright trunk has absolutely no taper but thank fully what branching there is is reasonably well structured. Obviously, there is a big cut in the top and another below the little stump on the left of the initial part of the trunk.

It took me a while but eventually I figured out it was time for one of those hard hit's if this was ever going to be worth taking forward. I would like to think I saved this from being made into a mallet.



Life Can Hit Us All Pretty Hard Sometimes – Field elm bonsai material. What to do?



Life Can Hit Us All Pretty Hard Sometimes – It gets worse before it gets better.



That's a lot of wire.

Some hefty branch bending.



In five years this will be quite something.....hopefully.

Thank you, Mike B., I have not included some of the photographs.

Reading this brought back something I learned way back in 1976 when I travelled to the USA for the Bicentennial celebrations and to attend my first BCI Convention held in Washington DC. On arrival in New York, my first stop was a visit to Brooklyn Botanic Garden to meet Dr Stephen Tim the Taxonomist at the time. Stephen introduced me to Frank Okamura, the curator of the collection, and we spent a few hours together viewing the Bonsai. In my ignorance, I casually mentioned you must need a great deal of patience to achieve such good results. In the usual very Japanese polite way, Frank said to me no, 'Patience is what you need when you don't like what you are doing'. This has remained with me all these years and is so very true. - Derry

For those who do not know, our friend Pieter Loubser has recently had a hip replacement operation. Pieter, we all wish you a speedy recovery and know by now, you will be getting around more comfortably, albeit slowly and on crutches.

I have just had an update on The Floreum and been told we can use it for our meetings again. Unfortunately, when I tried to make our bookings for the year, I was told somebody had jumped the gun with the info and it would appear 'the right hand does not talk to the left hand' and there is a communication problem somewhere. So, if we can use The Floreum next Saturday for our meeting, we will get back to you next week, otherwise, we will have it in the Educational Centre.

Birthdays in March: Four this month, Elizabeth on the 5<sup>th</sup>, Paul on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Mike B on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and Craig on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Many happy returns to you all and we wish you many more happy and healthy years.

Hoping to see you all on the 20<sup>th</sup> and **please check your inbox to confirm the venue.**

Sincerely

*Derry*

CAKE DUTY ROSTER:

March: ..... and.....Volunteers required

April: .....and.....Volunteers required

Each person to provide one plate of 'sweet' and one plate of 'savoury' please

**REMINDER!!** Please note, it is the duty of the members providing goodies for the tea break to set out the cups etc as well as to wash up afterwards and repack the tea trolley. Many thanks.

COMMITTEE:

President:	RUZA WHITAKER	(082) 873 7955	TREVOR BOTHAM	(082) 784 7581
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Banking Details: Nedbank – Rosebank Gardens Branch – 195 805:  
Shibui Bonsai Kai: A/C # 1958 289 906

**PS: All committee members, we will be having a committee meeting at 13:00 sharp on the 20<sup>th</sup>.**