

Having Your Anniversary Cake, and Eating It Too?

Michael Riley ~ New York, NY, USA ~ <riley2362@aol.com>

HAPPY 75TH ANNIVERSARY TO THE SOCIETY AND THE JOURNAL that rocked the world – well, every great idea must have been a carefully planted seed at just the right time and in just the right pot. For Elvin McDonald, that was 75 years ago when he published his first 12-page GLOXINIAN (June-July 1951 issue) and paid two cents to mail it to what would soon be 2000 subscribers.

We might assume that his world and ours has changed a lot since then. But the journal that was the foundation of The American Gloxinia Society (now The Gesneriad Society) has been a rock of stability throughout much of this time. Our journal kept a steadfast pace during the past 75 years, not only reflecting our activities, but continually stimulating new ideas and information to keep up with the routine of newly evolving taxonomy and horticulture. The consistency of our editors has been remarkable and after only twenty years of serving as editor did Jeanne Katzenstein hand the proverbial pen to Peter Shalit in 2013.

The leadership of the society has been exemplary during these past years. The Board of Directors has planned wisely for advancement in serving a broad and diverse membership. Changes are necessary and often relative to finances. In 2003 the individual dues were increased to \$25. And today they are still \$25 – imagine! A friend recently said to me “I can’t afford to not join The Gesneriad Society.” In 2011 The Gesneriad Society introduced a Green Membership for \$20, providing for the electronic distribution of the journal. This option is a boon to all Green Members, especially those outside the United States, since it provides them with the journal as soon as it is published and without the additional costs of international postage.

At the turn of this century, the Frances Batcheller Endowment Fund had \$154,000 invested, producing revenue to support our Society’s operating expenses. Today the fund holds over three times that amount in support of our many activities. The Elvin McDonald Research Endowment Fund has been actively making grants to students for scientific research for over 25 years. The Nellie D. Sleeth Scholarship Endowment Fund was established by a bequest from our late former Treasurer in 2004 to make educational grants. Each of these funds boasts over \$200,000 in invested assets now. Our newer Conservation Fund and Students and Speakers Fund operate on donations and are active in those areas.

In 2005 the membership voted to change the name from the American Gloxinia and Gesneriad Society to The Gesneriad Society and to change the name of the journal from THE GLOXINIAN to *Gesneriads*. The intention was to update the terminology and appeal to a more international public. Everyone knows that “a Gloxinia is not a Gloxinia” anyway, right? We all survived and now social media has numerous groups of gloxinia growers that number 10-20K. We kindle the passion!

Changes come in the form of active members. Unfortunately, we have lost several of our older members over the past 25 years. It is difficult to imagine that Frances Batcheller passed in 2010 after leading Shows and Judging for almost 40 years. She referred to herself as “a hardy perennial.” So many gesneriad pioneers have died in the last 25 years, including Hans Wiehler, Maryjane Evans, Bill Burt, Al Buell, Charles Lawn, Mike Kartuz, Judy Becker, and others, but their memory lives on in our work.

This century brought about an awareness of scientific work in gesneriads that has grown quickly and fostered many incredible changes. Field trips, through the guidance

of Hans Wiehler, John L. Clark, Stephen Maciejewski, Mauro Peixoto and others, have led many of us through the rainforests and mudpuddles all over the world to experience untold adventures with a firm touch of reality to see gesneriads where they were born. Seventy participants and 34 presenters attended the World Gesneriad Research Conference in 2010, which was sponsored in part by the Society. It was held at Selby Gardens, with Anton Weber as keynote speaker. The conference enabled gesneriad scholars, explorers, and conservationists to form alliances that led to an abundance of scientific research, exploration and publication.

As a result of networking at that conference, the Conservation Committee formulated a Memorandum of Understanding with the Guangxi Institute of Botany in China. In 2014 the Society made a sizable grant to the Gesneriad Conservation Center of China for research and promotion. That year a number of Society members made the first Society group trip to China to explore for primulinas.

New plant material (species and hybrids) continues to be published and introduced from all parts of the world, particularly Asia and South America. Genera have also been thoroughly investigated and reorganized. Dale Martens and members of the Gesneriad Hybridizers Association have not missed a step in the process and we are delighted with the exciting choices of new hybrids. The GHA meetings at each convention aim to introduce convention attendees to new introductions by holding a free raffle. So much material is on offer that everyone in attendance is guaranteed to leave with at least two packets of cuttings or seeds. The growing and exhibition of these new plants make the participation in a flower show and in our journal a “Best In Show” every day of our lives.

The Seed Fund of The Gesneriad Society continues to be a source of endless delight. For many gesneriad lovers it is the most important reason for joining the Society. I find myself reading the lists as intently as any in-depth article because the images that pop into my head create a mild delirium. What a valuable resource to the world of botany and horticulture! Yes, I collect seed for the Fund, and a large section of my refrigerator is my private seed vault which holds the promise and potential for each tomorrow. Some of my friends may be pushing up daisies in the next 25 years but I will still be wrestling with my titanotrichum, for sure!

We celebrate these historical milestones along the path every 25 years or so, but the curious thing about history is that it just keeps happening! On the occasion of our 50th Anniversary, President Jon Dixon wrote that this was a Golden Age of Gesneriads. Yes, the past 25 years may seem like a new wave of scientific work has washed over us, giving us an abundance of new species and hybrid plants and a continued enthusiasm among those who grow and promote them. Now, as we move into the next 25 years, time seems to have recently taken a giant leap forward in terms of how we communicate. The pace of our daily lives has quickened, facilitated by mobile devices, pads, pods, discs, chips and bots. Assimilating the new information at a quickened pace will be a challenge. But there is one thing that is certain – we will appreciate our gesneriads with a greater understanding of the complexity and diversity of this plant family.

The Shopping Mall

“OZARK” Sinningias, African Violets and other Gesneriads. Dave’s Violets, 1372 S. Kentwood Avenue, Springfield, MO 65804 (417) 887-8904 Email: <plantman57@att.net> (no catalog). www.davesviolets.com.

MRS STREP STREPS – Streptocarpus, Primulinas, and other Gesneriads. Email for list of available plants. Kathy Spissman, 4086 Brownlee Dr., Tucker, GA 30084. Phone (770) 939-5289. Email: <mrsstrepstreps@comcast.net>.