



Roots & Branches

The Origins and Directions of the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society

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Twenty-Five Years Later: A Special Time For Cyril Grum



Tying tree to beam



Tree lifted out of the pot



Teasing out the roots



Cyril and Jack examining roots



Trimming the roots



Trimming complete



Positioning tree in the pot



Untying the tree



Moving tree back to display

One of the highlights of Cyril Grum's substantial bonsai avocation happened in March of 2015, twenty-five years after that significant introductory class. Cyril enjoyed a one-week long "internship" at the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washington, D.C.

By Trudy Bulkley

The home page of the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washington, D.C. explains: *The museum's collection began in 1976 with a gift of 53 bonsai trees from Japan to commemorate the United States Bicentennial. The collection has grown steadily with the addition of pieces from North American bonsai masters and a penjing collection from China. Now, more than 300 specimens rotate through the display tables and pedestals of three pavilions and a special exhibits gallery.*

The museum's gardens are more than a beautiful backdrop to the bonsai; they are designed to prime the viewer for a calming experience surrounded by the finest selections of flowers and foliage. Visit often to see the bonsai and gardens change through the seasons.

During that week in March 2015, Jack Sustic and Cyril worked from 8 – 5 every day. Twice a day the trees were watered, each man responsible for half the collection. It was springtime, so there were many trees to repot, prune, wire and style. It was a thrill to work on Goshin, John Naka's famous juniper forest. Goshin (Japanese: "protector of the spirit") is a forest planting of eleven Foemina Chinese Junipers (*Juniperus chinensis* var. *foemina*), the earliest of which Naka began training into bonsai in 1948. The eleven junipers represent each of Naka's eleven grandchildren.



Seen watering the Yamaki Pine, Jack Sustic, then curator of the museum, accepted Cyril's offer to spend a week with him, as a volunteer, learning and working. To learn more about The National Bonsai and Penjing Museum visit: <https://www.bonsai-nbf.org/>

Cyril's ultimate bonsai experience happened on the final day of his internship, a memorable grand finale. Jack Sustic, Cyril and three other volunteers repotted the Yamaki Pine. This tree, a Miyajima Japanese White Pine (*Pinus parviflora* 'Miyajima') is over 400 years old and had been in the Yamaki family in Japan for at least six generations. Written records on this tree date back to 1625. It is one of perhaps only two bonsai, worldwide, still living today that have documented histories for close to 400 years. It survived the bombing of Hiroshima. The Yamaki Pine was given by Japan to the United States in 1976 in honor of our bicentennial celebrations. The tree is massive and deeply moving. The Yamaki Pine stands today as a symbol of our human ability to transcend deep and searing hostilities and violent conflicts and yet create enduring beauty, responsive to the deepest impulses of the natural world.

The Yamaki Pine not only carries a distinctive and impressive history, it also has an impressive weight, around 400 pounds. In March 2015 the tree required repotting. Needless to say, it was no small repotting venture. Those five individuals responsible for this endeavor wrapped a fire hose around the trunk and attached it to a beam on the roof end of the workspace. The tree was put on a jack and they lowered the jack to get the pot off and worked on the roots and repotted it. It is almost fantastic to imagine how many times and under what conditions that aged tree has been repotted over its significant history. To be a participant, who, once again, enabled the survival of this Japanese white pine in a container, has to be counted as an almost ultimate bonsai experience. "Almost" ultimate because, to quote Jack Sustic, "I always like to say bonsai is like a verb. It's not a noun; it's doing." For Cyril, it was a very special time. He even got a citation from the Department of Agriculture for his work. We thank him for sharing this experience with us.

Previous issues of this publication are located in the [History section of the AABS website](#)

NEXT WEEK: Ron & Tam Milostan: The Dynamic Duo of the AABS

HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH OUR 50TH CELEBRATION

1. To help us in this celebration effort, all Ann Arbor Bonsai Society members present and past, and all others wishing to contribute are invited to submit personal statements (60 words or less) to be published in our Yearbook. Each text contributor is also strongly encouraged to submit a favorite photo (with caption) of a bonsai tree or a bonsai activity to accompany his or her personal statement. (We can scan old prints or digitize color slides for anyone needing this help with old pictures.) [Upload Form is here.](#)
 2. Let's all Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AABS in style with shirts that have our commemorative logo printed on the front. We have a few shirts remaining which will be shipped upon ordering. Shirts are priced at \$20 which includes domestic shipping. The available colors and sizes (adult unisex) are listed below:*
- Medium: 4 black, 2 grey
 - Large: 3 black, 4 grey
 - X-large: 1 black, 3 grey
- Please Place Your [Order Here.](#)



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