Confessions of a Dabbler

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All right, I admit it. I am a dabbler. I am not the one to whose collection other enthusiasts point with admiration and awe. I just have a simple little collection. And, do you know what? I am happy with what I have.

I probably started like many others. I had heard about Venus Flytraps and had become fascinated with them. Plants that can move—and use that movement to trap animals. This was mysterious. When I was about twelve, I found one for sale in a grocery store. I begged my mother to buy it for me, and eventually she relented. With shaking hands, I got it home and took it out. All right, now I have one of these weird plants, I thought. Of course, the instructions that came with it were scant, and on some points outright wrong. It said I should give it little bits of hamburger and did not say much, if anything, about watering. Of course it died very quickly. But my fascination did not.

Fast forward a few (OK, many) years. I passed through college and was a couple of years into my career. Once more, it happened: I ran across another Venus Flytrap in another grocery store. Once more, I bought it. This time, though, the instructions were a little better (either that, or I was better able to understand them—you know how it is with maturity). I had moved to an area with much better libraries and bookstores, so I read some books. Soon I (supposedly) knew what I was doing. Even so, I still did not have much hope because of what had happened to my first Venus Flytrap, and since every plant I have ever had has died within two months of my care (I have a real problem with knowing when there is enough water).

But, lo and behold, this plant lived. I kept it on the balcony of my apartment where it caught its meals. It was easy to water correctly—I just kept it standing in a tray of water. At last, a plant that I could not over-water. The plant lived. A year later, I bought another from the same grocery store. And so, for a while, I had two. Then, I do not know why, one of them died.

As the years progressed, the remaining plant thrived. I probably made many mistakes along the way, but the Venus Flytrap survived them all. It moved with me when I bought a townhouse. It moved again when I moved in with my girlfriend. It provided a connection point for her five year old daughter and me. Isn't it amazing how fascinated kids are with these plants? I sometimes think that those of us who keep these plants are just the lucky one who do not outgrow that fascination.

My Venus Flytrap grew too large for its small pot, so I transplanted it late last year. I had five small pots of Venus Flytraps and I was "plant sitting" one I had bought for my girlfriend's daughter, who had wanted one of her own. My girlfriend and I moved once more when we married, so my original plant has now been through four homes.

I have visited *California Carnivores* a couple of times now. (Ironically, it works out that I can go when I am leaving for my vacations, rather than coming back. I do not think a plant would like to go backpacking with me.) Last January, I went to a carnivorous plant seminar at the University of California at Santa Cruz. As part of the seminar, all the attendees were given a Cape Sundew and a Purple Pitcher Plant. Also, we saw some of the carnivorous plants at the University Arboretum.

Recently, while in the local home supply store, I picked up a Cobra Lily and a *Nepenthes* plant. The *Nepenthes*, I killed within a month. The Cobra Lily is still hanging on.

I would really like to say that I am becoming more of an expert at growing carnivorous plants. But, as my experience with the *Nepenthes* shows, I am probably not much better than when I started, just a little better informed. It would be nice to say I am plan-

ning on creating an extensive bog garden and growing all sorts of rare, exotic and beautiful carnivorous plants. But, I am realistic. I realize that I will probably never do any such thing. I do not have the time, talent or the inclination to do so.

But, do you know what? I am OK with that. I like reading about and looking at carnivorous plants. I really enjoy the plants I am able to grow. It brings me a lot of pleasure and I very much like it when my plants allow me to spend more time with my daughter. I am satisfied with what I am—a dabbler. And so, I now share with pride, my collection:



Russell's dabblings.

THE ICPS 2000 WORLD CONFERENCE PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

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Here at last are the winning contributions for the ICPS Photography Contest, held at the 2000 World Conference in San Francisco. The three judges for this event were myself, Bill Weaver, and Barry Meyers-Rice.

The photographs taken by Chien Lee (Malesiana Tropicals) were so superb that he won many of the awards of the contest. Unfortunately none of his images were available for this issue. We hope to present some of his photographs in a future issue of Carnivorous Plant Newsletter. The names of the contest categories and winners (in parentheses) were:

Plant in habitat (Chien Lee for "*Nepenthes pectinata*");

Plant in cultivation (David Ahrens for "*Sarracenia flava*");

Close-up/macrophotograph (a tie—David Ahrens for "*Sarracenia flava* lid" and John Brittnacher for "*Sarracenia alata* and spider");

Insect/animal interactions (Thomas Carow for "*Nepenthes tobaica* and *Thomisus nepenthiphilus* spiders", on this issue's front cover);

Original art/abstract (Eric Schlosser for "*Utricularia alpina*");

Plant and human interaction (Chien Lee for "Woman with *Nepenthes ampullaria* cooking vessel").

Each winner will receive one year's membership in the ICPS.

Honorable mentions were given by the judges for:

Rarest/most beautiful taxon (Chien Lee for "*Nepenthes campanulata*");

Photo by person under 16 (Matt Martinez for "Sarracenia leucophylla");

Funniest photo (Tina Kessler for "Fisheye view of *Sarracenia flava*").

All three of the Judge's favorites went to Chien Lee, for his "*Nepenthes pectinata*", "Woman with *Nepenthes ampullaria* cooking vessel", and "*Nepenthes ampullaria* in habitat".