

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 6-7-06) Requiem for Heronswood © 2006

Today's column is in loving memory of all the great times Dan Hinkley, Robert Jones, the Heronistas and Heronswood gave to our Kitsap Community. I know we'll never lose the community spirit and contributions Dan, Robert and the Heronistas gave to our horticulture community in the Pacific Northwest (and the rest of the world).

Even if a person weren't a plant collector, they could always revel in the luxuriousness of the plants and display gardens at Heronswood. The classes offered were incredible and enlightening. Visitors were treated like royalty even if they didn't purchase any plants. The nursery catalogue (until this year) was pure poetry. The words were delicious and the descriptions were always enticing and intriguing. It made you hungry to learn more about plants, not to mention wanting to collect some of them.

A substantial portion of nearly every one of the Heronswood garden open events admission proceeds were contributed to our Kitsap Regional Library and to the Elizabeth C. Miller Library at the Center for Urban Horticulture in Seattle. Our Kitsap library system has an extensive collection of gardening and horticulture books purchased from the Heronswood funds. In addition, in June of this year, Heronswood was scheduled to host a native plant weekend with many of our local native plants persons as speakers. The event was to benefit Stillwaters Environmental Center in Kingston.

The phone calls, emails and conversations I've received this past week have been brimming with praise for Heronswood, Robert, Dan and the Heronistas and also full of despair and anger at this abrupt decision by Burpee to close our revered Heronswood. We've even been hoping and dreaming someone in our Pacific Northwest garden world would purchase Heronswood and preserve it forever. We sadly fear that won't happen. I'm hoping Heronswood will rise from the ashes like the Phoenix.

Dan's words from what I think was the 2004 Heronswood Catalogue express the heart and spirit of the gifts he's given us all as gardeners. If I remember correctly he wrote the words as he was landscaping their new home in Indianola. He wrote:

“So why is it we wish away the youngness of our gardens? In a wink, the seedlings we coddle are already trees, and the perennials fill the void and puerile vines mature and secure the arbor. There is no revisiting the childlike garden, short of moving and starting it once again—itsself unthinkable as we, too, are no longer youthful but bloated with years and many regrets.

Yet it is exactly this that I will do, once again, as I strive to make another garden and make it the most beautiful garden in the world. I will again scribble my passion upon a canvas of open ground and stand with a dazed expression on my face, a gallon pot under my arm, burdened with indecision.

As I do, I will reflect on those nascent days of my first garden and the guilt that would blossom in me for having done just that, retreating indoors at dark, mentally exhausted and feeling as if I had accomplished nothing at all.

In retrospect, those were my most productive moments. My garden was, in fact, planted through the moments I'd believed I'd lost.

So I will not regret these moments again, ever, as I attempt in my mind, to create the most precise of color combinations, with plants too tender, too aggressive, planted too close together from friends too generous while listening to the Mariners play on my headset.

And with each pot I place in the earth, I will extract a few regrets from my pockets stuffed here and there and gently scatter them in the bottom of each hole for future harvest.”

Dan's poetic words from the Heronswood catalogues will always filter through our memories; the calm, quiet behind-the-scenes strength of Robert and the friendliness, horticulture zeal and kindnesses of the Heronistas will stay with us as we treasure our memories of Heronswood. Thanks for the memories and the love of gardening you've each instilled in us.