

ONE-NIGHT STAND

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Or I should say, one-night bloom. This photos is of a Night-Blooming Cereus (*Cereus greggii*), a plain-enough looking plant from South America that blooms for one night only. It opens at dusk and is gone by dawn. It is what I personally consider the most amazing flower I have ever seen, amazing not only in its size (7-inch blossom), but it also has THE most incredible scent of any flower I have known. The fragrance of this flower is not only better than the finest perfume, but it reaches beyond my ability to smell and somehow penetrates into the brain itself. It is pungent like smelling salts, but delightful and informative in its penetration, producing for me as much an insight as a sensation. If it could be bottled, I would buy some. It is not a scent for male or female, but beyond that.

Last night one of our *Cereus* plants bloomed, a single blossom open to the night. It was the only bud on the plant, but it brings back so many memories from when I first really discovered plants, and so I will tell some of that story, for those who might be interested.

My passion for plants goes back to around 1971, when I began to collect house plants. And I was serious about my collecting until every window we had at 114 N. Division in Ann Arbor was

filled with them, shelf upon shelf. This obviously was leading somewhere, and the 'where' of it ended up in my restoring some run-down greenhouses up in the town of Evart Michigan (three hours north of where I lived in Ann Arbor) and going into the green plant business – selling house plants to flower shops.

And it was a real uprooting. I had just married a month or so earlier and had lived in Ann Arbor most of my life. Suddenly I was talking about leaving my incredible apartment and house situation, selling most of my huge collection of books and records, and moving myself right out of my home town to a tiny town in mid-Michigan. This was not a minor move, but one that turned my life upside down, closing the door on my bachelor existence once and for all. One month I was there, the next I was gone from Ann Arbor.

Margaret and I took what little we had and moved to Evart Michigan where I took over the old Shore Greenhouses (three of them), which had fallen into disrepair. And it was a rush against time, because winter was coming on and it was already late summer. Once I get an idea in my head, I am hell-bent to follow it out, so I jumped into this, hook, line, and sinker. And I took my new wife Margaret with me, who was just getting used to my Ann Arbor apartment and the almost-celebrity of our life there. As an eligible bachelor, I had been a well-known man-about-town.

All I knew was that I loved plants and wanted to grow them. And a struggle it was, from dawn to dusk. I arose at first light and was soon high on the bare rafters of the greenhouse, stripping the old putty and paint, and installing/ sealing new glass or newly-cleaned glass. At the same time, our two English Bull Terriers were having puppies. As a bachelor, my English Bull Terrier "Manley" and I were a known sight around town, always out walking. Manley was named after Gerard Manly Hopkins, one of my favorite poets.

A female Bull Terrier was given to us as a wedding gift by our friends and what amounted to a very-short honeymoon was our trip to western Pennsylvania to pick up Manley's wife, who was promptly named "Mother." She was white, but with a black patch over one eye. Well, due to our inexperience in separating dogs in heat, mother soon lived up to her name and we had puppies. And all of this as we tried to beat the oncoming cold season. I was busy.

We managed to get only one of the three decrepit greenhouses closed-in before winter. My 1966 Dodge van (which for years had the "Prime Movers Blues Band" written all over it) had been repainted and now sported "Erlewine Plants" on both sides, plus it was sprayed with foam on the inside to protect the house plants we were raising from freezing.

Well, I could tell you stories of four-foot long pipe wrenches that I could barely lift and the huge boiler in the basement that heated the greenhouse with steam. It was scary to even go near, much less work with. One day while I was on the road selling plants, Margaret forgot to turn off the water to the boiler and the entire basement was knee-deep in water, and the boiler was still running! It was a fast trip back home for me and a scarier trip through the basement to wrestle that boiler back under control.

And then there was the advent of white-fly and other plant pests that found us bombing the entire building with Parathion gas (deadly pesticide) and having to abandon it for at least 24 hours. The small apartment where we lived was attached to the greenhouse, so we had to leave home too.

There we were (Margaret and I, plus our two dogs and all the puppies), after setting off the deadly gas canister, driving west out of Ewart toward my parent's home in Big Rapids, with the sun setting before us. I believe we probably had a six-pack of Ballentine Beer (the cheapest we could find) on the engine mount between us as we drove into the sunset. Back then, that was how it went down. My mom found a place for us to sleep, puppies and all. She always cooked the best meals in the world.

I am running out of space here, so I will spare you the 'sturm und drang' story of how bigger businesses drove us out of our little business, leaving us stranded in winter with no money to pay the bills. It is not a fun story anyway and it ended with one of those large businesses hiring me to run their greenhouses in Apopka, Florida (near Orlando), some 19,000 sq. ft. of glass. Of course, this meant moving to Florida, complete with all we owned (which was not much), plus our dogs and all the puppies.

If nothing else, we were game and I can still remember the little Italian restaurant in Apopka where Margaret and I would (very seldom actually) go to. You could bring in your own bottle of wine or beer. That was about our only distraction from running the greenhouses and getting our new home (full of mold and mildew) into livable shape.

I loved the way plants grew in Florida and was deep into it when I discovered that some of the immigrant workers who I managed were being exposed to Parathion in powder form. Parathion is a cumulative poison. You don't get sick all at once, but with repeated contact you gradually get very, very sick. I would explain this to the workers, but then watch them handle the Parathion powder with their hands, see it working into the skin around their waists, and them not heeding my directions or warnings. Crazy.

This was not something I was willing to be a part of, so I gave my notice, packed my family of dogs and we moved back up north to Ann Arbor, where the kindness of a friend let us live in an attic room, Margaret, myself, our two dogs, and the remaining puppies. This was the middle of winter, and it took until the following spring for us to find a real place to live, after which I began doing astrology full-time. No more greenhouses. That is the short of the story, brought on by last night's single bloom.