The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

By Dr. David L. Roberts, *The Plant Doctor LLC a.k.a. The Tree Doctor*

MY FIRST 60 YEARS WITH THE LANDSCULPTOR *(WELL, INDIRECTLY)*

The year 2020 C.E. represents the 60-year anniversary of the organization that we know as the Michigan Green Industry Association (MGIA), formerly the Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association (MDLA). This association had humble roots beginning in 1960 with guidance from some brave souls. It's also the 60-year anniversary of a publication we've come to know affectionately as *the Landsculptor*. Well, to be completely transparent, MDLA's initial publication was called the *MDLA Reporter*, then *the Reporter*, later *the Landsculptor Journal* and finally *the Landsculptor*. Hence, I hope readers of this article will not mind if I partake some poetic license and assume 2020 marks the 60-year anniversary of the MGIA and *the Landsculptor*. It is a milestone to be sure.

So, when Diane Banks, Executive Director of the MGIA, suggested I make a few comments in my next article about my involvement with MDLA/MGIA and *the Landsculptor*, I thought, I may as well devote the entire article to the recognition of the association and its premier publication. Perhaps it might be described as Serendipity that propelled me into my field of interest and study, which eventually led me to *the Landsculptor*. So, let me begin by saying, "It's a small world" (Photo 1).

Photo 1: It's a small world!!

IN THE BEGINNING

Although I have already related in previous articles some of my early interest and development into the field of plant science, specifically Plant Pathology, I thought it might be interesting to provide a few more details.

As unusual as it may seem in a period where women were supposed to be good wives and mothers and remain at home, my mother graduated from Ohio State University in 1938 (Photo 2), eventually married my father, had three sons, and, likewise in turn, was determined to ensure all her children had a college education.

I had many friends in high school, but one of my dearest friends was Denise Seliskar. Dr. Carl E. Seliskar, Denise's father, was a Plant Pathologist who worked at the nearby USDA Forest Research Lab near Delaware, Ohio. In visiting the Seliskars and their nice, new large home, I thought they had a rather affluent standard of living from the income of a Plant Pathologist/Scientist. I learned from Carl that his scientific research involved Dutch Elm Disease (DED), which was a major problem in the Midwest from the 1950's through the early 1970's. One of his projects was grafting an American Elm scion (DED-susceptible) onto a Siberian or Chinese elm root stock (DED-resistant), with the hope that the root stock would confer resistance to the scion. I used a "cleft" graft to join an American elm top (shoot=scion) to a Siberian root stock. After the science fair, I planted the elm tree, about the size of a pencil, into my parent's front yard on the family farm.

To make a long story short, six years later, I received a call from Dr. Seliskar who asked about this tree. I replied that the tree had grown to over 12 feet tall and appeared quite healthy. He was puzzled but amazed! Apparently, as he explained, all of the 100's to 1000's of grafted trees the USDA performed "broke" due to graft incompatibility. He asked if he could visit the tree and subsequently brought a team of interested USDA scientists along to examine it.

Photo 2: My mother, Ruth Elizabeth Warren, graduated from college in 1938, and, like her father, strongly urged her children to attend college. In addition to my comprehensive training in college to become a scientist, I probably got some of my free-thinking and independence from my mother.

That tree grew for 30 years and reached a height of approximately 60+feet (Photo 3A), measuring over 30" diameter at the graft union (Photo 3B), before succumbing

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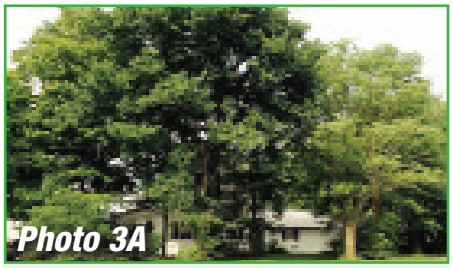

Photo 3A: In 1970, I had successfully grafted an American elm onto a Siberian root stock as part of a high school science project, perhaps initiating my career in Plant Pathology. That grafted elm (center left) grew to approximately 50-60 feet tall on the family farm by the late 1990s.

Photo 3B: My father, here in his mid-80s, loved this elm tree that I had grafted 30 years previously, partly because of its uniqueness and because by the late 1970s it was the only surviving grafted tree of 100's to 1000's performed by USDA researchers. It even gained some prominence in the local press. The graft union is visible near the base of the tree in this photo and measured over 30 inches in diameter. Note that a Siberian stem is emerging from the root stock; this stem is still alive today as its own stand-alone tree after the American top died from Dutch Elm Disease in 2000-2001.

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to DED in 2001. Incidentally, Denise went on to become Dr. Seliskar, as a marine Biologist on the East Coast.

THE COLLEGE YEARS

In my junior year in college at Ohio State University, I received a letter from the Dean of the College of Agriculture indicating I needed to declare a major. I knew my major would likely be in the general field of Agriculture. Harkening back to my high school days interacting with the Seliskar's interesting life and profession along with Dr. Seliskar's research with saving trees, I chose Plant Pathology as my major, perhaps arguably, the most difficult field in the plant side of Agriculture (Photo 4).

I moved to East Lansing to pursue my PhD at Michigan State University (MSU) on a scholarship and for my PhD Dissertation Research, I investigated the cause of decline/death of a selection of creeping bentgrass known as 'Toronto' on golf greens. This was a big deal at the time because some of the National PGA tour courses were afflicted with the disease and the disease was frequently referenced in publications and on TV. My research was quite controversial because several universities were competing to find the answer. My investigative work superseded that of other scientists at other universities and led to the discovery of the first Bacterial Wilt disease on turf grasses in North America (Photo 5A). A collaborator on this research was Dr. Karen Klomparens with the Center for Electron Optics (Electron Microscope) at MSU (Photo 5B). Our association blossomed, and we have been together as partners for more than 35 years (Photo 5C).

Talk about a 'small world' Karen's father, Dr. William Klomparens, was also a Plant Pathologist at The Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo, MI. Bill had fought in the South Pacific during World War II (Photo 6). After the war, Bill married Ruth (Photo 7), attended MSU on the GI bill and received his PhD in Plant Pathology. This is astonishing given the number of Plant Pathologists around the U.S. (not many).

Interestingly, because of the lack of housing on the MSU campus after the war

Photo 4: This is a photo of me taken during college at about the time I declared my fateful decision of majoring in Plant Pathology.

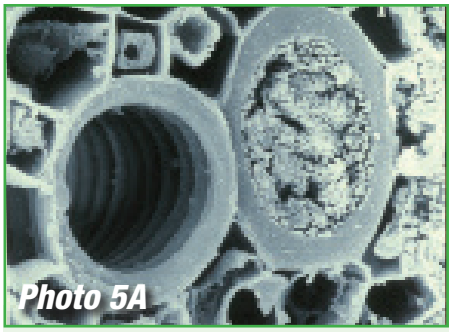

Photo 5A: This unusual, classic scanning electron micrograph was taken by me around 1980 and represents the discovery of the first bacterial Wilt Disease on turf grasses ever encountered in North America. One xylem vessel of the bentgrass stem is completely plugged by bacteria while one appears "clean" (note secondary thickening ribs).

Photos 5B & 5C: Dr. Karen Klomparens and I collaborated on the turf/bacterial wilt project (5B). Subsequently, we became lifelong partners (5C) and have now been together for more than 35 years.

Photo 6: Dr. William Klomparens (right) is talking to his wartime buddy Bruce Patrick (center), owner of Patrick's Landing Resort near Cedarville in the UP. This Photo was taken long after Bill's retirement; the two remained life-long friends, and Bill even built a family summer cottage near Bruce's resort in the Les Cheneaux Islands. The author (left) is listening to their "war stories."

Photo 7: After fighting in the South Pacific in World War II, William Klomparens married Ruth and attended MSU where he received his PhD in Plant Pathology. It's a small world.

Photo 8: Many universities around the country had improvised housing for the vast numbers of soldiers returning home after WWII ended. Due to the lack of student housing, the Klomparens lived temporarily in Quonset huts on the MSU campus. (Photo from MSU archives)

and because of the flood of GIs returning home after the war, the Klomparens family lived temporarily in Quonset huts on the MSU campus (Photo 8). By the way, Karen would advance to Dean and Vice Provost of The Graduate School as a very respected and admired administrator (I'm not biased!). Her father was more than proud of his daughter.

1990: DIANE ANDREWS (BANKS) ASSUMES THE HELM

The year 1990 marks the pivotal year for our Association as Diane Andrews is hired as the first full time, Executive Director of the MDLA (Photo 9). Two years later, Larry Wright who was the President for the Association is hired as CEO. The industry can thank Diane (and Larry) for the extraordinary growth and development of the Association and *the Landsculptor*.

Photo 9: A very fortunate event for the green industry was when Diane Andrews joined The Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association in 1990 as the first full-time, paid employee. This photo shows her on her first day on the job. Diane would become Executive Director and guide the MDLA into the Michigan Green Industry Association (MGIA) and oversee the development of *the Landsculptor*.

This was a fateful decision for our industry because over the ensuing three decades, Diane would demonstrate leadership abilities rarely exhibited by others; these abilities would steer MDLA into the Michigan Green Industry Association (MGIA) in 2002, as MDLA had grown well beyond the Metro Detroit region. Today, MGIA is one of the most vigorous and visible green industry associations in Michigan and beyond. And, *the Landsculptor* magazine has evolved into an award-winning trade publication for the green industry.

My relationship with the MGIA and *the Landsculptor* has been a long and mutually respectful affiliation. I have been writing for *the Landsculptor* for more than 25 years and as a monthly contributor to *the Landsculptor* for nearly 20 years. My articles have chronicled the arrival and control of numerous diseases and pests in our landscape. The one pest that has brought much attention to our state is the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

Enter the EAB: In 2002, after approximately one year of investigation into the cause of ash decline in SE Michigan, my research led to the discovery of the Emerald Ash Borer (Photos 10A & 10B). I began research on EAB, without funding and often in collaboration with industry professionals who were dealing daily with this pest in the field.

My articles in *the Landsculptor* during those tumultuous days kept the industry up-to-date on our findings. While many felt I was disseminating anecdotal information, it was actually based on field-testing by industry professionals.

The reason I am bringing up the EAB debacle in this article for the 60-Year Anniversary of *the Landsculptor* is because the EAB struggle was a cataclysmic historical event for many years for the MGIA, its publication, *the Landsculptor*, and its members/supporters. There were varying viewpoints on how to handle the EAB situation, causing a huge divide among government, academia and industry.

Photo 10A: This rare photo was taken by the author immediately after the adult EAB emerged from its exit hole (right) in 2002. The photo was used by me and many others in publications and on websites.

Photo 10B: In preparation for a documentary on the EAB, I stimulated advanced metamorphosis of overwintering larvae and early emergence of these two EAB adults by incubating them in warmer temperatures before spring warm-up. In order to feed them, I also had to force this early foliage from ash trees. I named them "Henry and June" in preparation for their debut on the big screen.

Billions of ash trees have been destroyed, costing people in North America billions of dollars without even assessing the consequences to the environment. In many of my so-called "controversial" articles published in *the Landsculptor* and on my website in those days, I pleaded that we must all work together to defeat the EAB menace. The EAB failure in Michigan (and North America) represents a prime example of what Not to Do in moments of crisis.

I am eternally grateful to the MGIA and the

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industry for their support in the EAB. This represents a prime example of all of our relentless devotion to our plant industry, even in the face of great adversity.

MY 60 YEAR "ASSOCIATION" WITH *THE LANDSCULPTOR*

As I stated previously, I have been writing articles for *the Landsculptor* for over 20 years in a monthly column. It has sometimes been stressful to meet the deadlines and to come up with pertinent topics after so many publications, however it has also been fun and very rewarding.

One prominent person in the industry calls me a 'Rockstar' whenever I see him. So, at times, I thought about developing an alternate career such as joining a rock band and hopefully getting my picture on the cover of 'Rolling Stone' (Photo 11). However, I could not carry a tune nor play a 'geeeetar.' So, my rock band career never materialized. In 2000, I received the coveted MGIA Chairman's Award' and finally got my picture on the cover of *the Landsculptor* (Photo 12), a far greater honor than I could ever have imagined, even more so than the 'Rolling Stone.'

Photo 11: At times I thought about an alternative, perhaps supplemental career such as joining a rock band, with the possibility of getting "My Picture on the Cover of the Rolling Stone." It didn't work out even though this mockup looks pretty decent, eh?

Photo 12: The grand prize came to me when I got my picture on the cover of *the Landsculptor* in 2001. This honor was far greater than I could ever have dreamed of, even with The Rolling Stone. Incidentally, that handsome dude standing next to me is Rick Lazzell who also received an award that year.

What keeps me going, what keeps me publishing in *the Landsculptor*, even though I know my articles are sometimes personal, kooky and eclectic, is the feedback I receive from many of the readers. Please allow me to share several recent comments I have received:

> *"Hi Dave, I just wanted you to know that I received my late husband's September issue of the Landsculptor magazine and saw my alias "Linda" and the photo of my front bed. I laughed my head off when I saw your article! . . . Thank you again for your time and advice."* ~ Susan

> *"Just a quick note: Your article on ash borer killing us was right to the point. I have several large ash trees lining my drive . . . they've been dead for 3 or 4 years . . . I never once thought the whole tree could come crashing down . . . Thanks for your thought-provoking article."*~ Rick

> *"I've been reading your articles in this publication (The Landsculptor) for a couple of decades. In fact, it's the very first place I turn to when I get each new issue. I just wanted to tell you how amused I was to see that photo of you on that pig . . . "*~ Joanne

The Landsculptor begin its journey in 1960 as a four-page newsletter. So, 2020 essentially marks the 60th year anniversary of this organization and its publication. While contemplating a topic for my article to meet the deadline of the present issue, Diane emailed me and disclosed that while she was perusing the MGIA archives, she found a reference to a conference speaker named Dr. William Klomparens in a 1960 issue of the MDLA Reporter, later to become *the Landsculptor*. She wondered if a Dr. William Klomparens, who was scheduled to deliver a lecture on turf diseases at an upcoming MDLA program, was related to Karen. In shock I replied, "Yes, that is her father . . . who is also a Plant Pathologist." Such a small world!

Throughout the years, I have been fortunate to develop and lead dozens and dozens of educational walking tours for the Association and its members. I have also had the pleasure of speaking at their Trade Shows and Conventions along with stand-alone individual programs. The MGIA's mission is to provide quality education for the industry and they have succeeded 'ten fold!' Happy Anniversary to the MGIA and *the Landsculptor*!

Dr. David Roberts has retired from Michigan State University but intends to remain active with the industry. He is CEO and CBW (Chief Bottle Washer) for The Plant Doctor, LLC. Contact information: 248/320-7124 and treedoctordave@gmail.com.