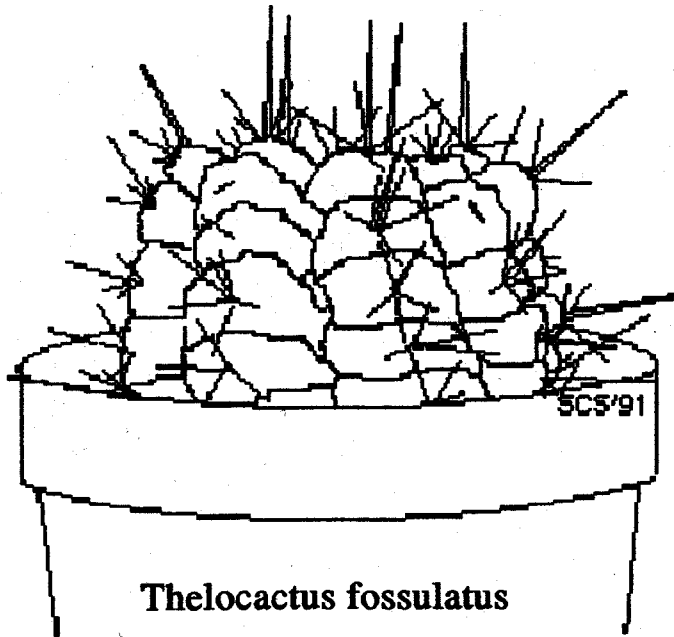


THE CENTRAL SPINE



December 1994

THE CENTRAL SPINE
PUBLISHED BY

President:
Editor:

Ken Jantz
Stan Skirvin

EDITORIAL

As I begin the task of editing The Central Spine, I wish to thank the previous editor, Vera Gamet, for nobly and capably performing this function for the members of the Central Arizona and Cactus and Succulent Society (CACSS) for so many years.

There is no way that I can improve upon the judgement and acuity Vera displayed as editor during all her years of faithful service.

As a computer junkie, I can bring the advantages of typography and layout which modern DeskTop Publishing makes accessible to ordinary folks. In terms of content, only time will tell.

It is my hope that I won't find myself publishing only such writings as I can wring from my beloved Joan and from myself. It will be great if other members of the CACSS will contribute writing and graphics for future issues. It will be nice, even if not so great, if members will bring to my attention material which they think would be interesting for the pages of The Central Spine.

Please let me hear from you. I will accept printed or typed material or computer disks. I will help you compose an article. With your permission, I could record a telephone conversation and create an article which you could review prior to publication. I would accept suggestions of topics on which you would like to see articles published.

Try me.

Stan Skirvin, Editor
948-2515

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contributed by Vera Gamet

BELLS ACROSS THE SNOW

Frances Ridley Havergal

In memorium
1994

Paul Diaz
Whit Evans
Ilza Hahlo
Larry Fischer

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
Has it really come again,
With its memories and greeting,
With its joy and its pain?
There's a minor in the carol,
And a shadow in the light,
And a spray of cypress twining
With the holly wreath tonight.
And the hush is never broken
By laughter light and low,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

O Christmas, merry Christmas!
'Tis not so very long
Since other voices blended
With the carol and the song!
If we could but hear them singing
As they are singing now,
If we could but see the radiance
Of the crown on each dear brow,
There would be no sigh to smother,
No hidden tear to flow,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

O Christmas, happy Christmas,
Sweet herald of good will,
With holy songs of glory
Brings holy gladness still.
For peace and hope may brighten,
And patient love may glow,
As we listen in the starlight
To the bells across the snow.

Our Visit With Meena Singh by Joan Skirvin

Jim and Electra Elliott drove to Tucson on Friday 21 October to pick up Meena Singh who had given her talk to the Tucson Society the previous day. She later said she had done some "botanizing" around Chuck Hansen's greenhouse as she had arrived the day previous to her talk there and had to wait until Friday evening for the Elliott's ride to Phoenix.

My first impression of Meena-- She is a small, 5'2" woman, a little plump and pretty. Her hair is very dark with the beginning of a few grey hairs and cut short. She was wearing a green print long-sleeved high necked dress with long full pants pulled tight at the ankle and she had on flat sandals. She speaks very well and clearly; our only difficulty in understanding her was with names. Indian names, tongue-twisters for us anyhow, especially the many syllable ones, were very difficult. Usually we could understand the plant names although pronunciations differ.

We settled Meena into our guest room and retired about 11:30 or so which is late for me.

I am an early riser and was up and having my first cup of coffee when Meena appeared, bringing a gift of an elephant, one of the kind handcrafted in India. We ate and by then it was light enough to go outside and walk about our yard, tour the greenhouse and shadeframe and haworthia gazebo.

Meena's interest is euphorbias. She identified for me a small volunteer seedling which I thought might be an *E. millii* hybrid, as *Euphorbia duranii*. As I have *E. duranii* and it does bloom for me, that is the name I will put on it until it blooms when I will know for sure. It certainly grows slowly enough to be *E. duranii*.

Meena stopped before a trailing monadenium with its nice caudex showing that I had labeled *M. Yattanum* and said it was *M. Majus*. I couldn't quarrel with that for the other side of the label said *Majus*. She asked for a cutting and I had fortunately rooted some cuttings so was happy to share.

It was 9 a.m. by then so we decided to get along to

the Desert Botanical Garden before it got too hot. As it was the first day of the DBG's Fall plant sale, the parking lot was pretty crowded with lots of people arriving and leaving the sale area.

Meena particularly wanted to see a Boojum tree, so we looked for a big one and took each other's pictures standing in front of it. We were disappointed that the cactus house and the succulent house were not open to the public to walk through. This was the first time in my 25 years in Phoenix that I had seen a gate blocking entrance to these two houses. I surmise because everyone in security was busy at the sale. We continued strolling the paths. Meena said many of the acacias or similar ones grow in India. We spotted a desert milkweed which she said looked identical to one in India, but it was identified with a different specific name.

Admiring the Boojum in front of Webster Auditorium and the *Pachycormus discolor* close to the windows of the offices on the west side of Webster, I had to confess I hadn't noticed it before and was very pleased to see it as it is the largest *pachycormus* I have ever seen in person. As I recall, the trunk was several inches in diameter and it was maybe six feet or so tall. The planting bed is above the level of the path there and of course we couldn't get too close. It was a pleasant surprise for me to see it.

We saw some African euphorbias planted among cactus along some paths and Meena thought that was not good planning. She did like the large beds of *coryphanthas*, *mammillarias* and *theleocacti*, although we were surprised to see *gymnocalyciums* and *notocacti* planted with the *thelocacti*. In fact, one of our discussions was of a plant she thought was a *Echinocereus knipplianus* but I thought was a *gymnocalycium* as I don't believe *E. knipplianus* grows that large for us here and in my experience would probably have burned up.

It was disappointing to us that we saw very little blooming. The cactus seemed to have finished and the shrubs and wild flowers were just starting.

After lunch, Stan and I decided to show Meena more of our surrounding area so we headed north on Scottsdale Road. We stopped briefly at Carefree Cactus to say hi to Stan Jones and show Meena his retail greenhouse.

We then continued to Carefree and decided to go back down Pima Road and out to Fountain Hills via McDowell Mountain Park. Pima was closed to through traffic however, so we continued out Cave Creek Road to the Bartlett Lake turnoff. We decided not to go the 14 miles to the lake and backtracked. I haven't been out that way for many years and was impressed at the new, very large southwestern style houses being built there. We also noticed far fewer saguaro and speculated that it was high enough to be too cold for their survival.

Stan wanted to show Meena how he had cataloged our Euphorbia collection on his computer, so while they did that I improvised dinner. Meena had declined our invitation to eat at a new restaurant not far from our home that specializes in India-style food, much to my regret as I would have appreciated her opinion.

Like just about everywhere things are changing in India. Meena said castes were much less apparent. There were fewer servants although their household still has a young man who is their live-in servant. She has a tailor who makes her clothes. This was a fascinating story. He comes when she has enough projects to keep him busy for several weeks. She says he sits on the floor and cuts out and hand sews and also uses a non-electric (foot powered) sewing machine. Meena said he could make five cotton dresses in a day, but one made of silk of a different design might take a whole day. His pay was the equivalent of about \$3.00 per day plus breakfast and a large lunch and tea at four. She said when his daughter got married the people he worked for were expected to provide the bride's dowry, some saris and perhaps some sheets or other household things. Meena said he was agitated about family difficulties he was having when she left and she would be interested to see what happened when she gets home.

In a later talk Meena said manufactured items like washing machines, refrigerators, microwaves, are difficult for them to purchase. She described to us how the foundation and basement of her new house is being built; by hand, carefully setting aside the

excavated soil as it would have to be used later for filling in. The area of India where Meena lives does have earthquakes and the construction she described for her home sounded to us like what is required for large commercial buildings in our country.

Sunday morning we bare rooted the plants and cuttings Meena wanted and emptied one of our photo slide carrousel so she could start getting her slide show ready.

When we had done as much as we could I called my friend Dolores, who lives a couple of miles away, and took Meena to see Dolores' greenhouse and desert tortoise.

I think Meena enjoyed seeing another succulent enthusiast and she also enjoyed seeing Dolores' doll collection. Meena remarked that many of her international cactus and succulent friends collect - tropical fish (real) and glass, porcelain, etc. statues of dogs, cats, pigs, frogs, owls. She said many European houses are full of collections.

By this time we had to get back, get Stan, load Meena's baggage and set off to the Maricopa Extension building on Broadway where we were having our meeting.

Meena had slides of ceropegias in habitat, euphorbias, jatrophas, sansevierias, dischidias, hydnohytums, etc. Her photos of the mountainous terrain on the Deccan plateau and the mangrove swamp area of the Andaman Islands off the East coast of India gave one a feeling for the variety of climates our plants grow in. No wonder we have difficulty growing things from an area that can get 300 inches of rain a year. Meena was very careful to point out that these areas had perfect drainage; no standing water. It rained and drained!

We hurried to pack Meena's slides after her lecture and got her to the airport in plenty of time to catch the shuttle bus which was taking her back to Tucson where her plane was to leave early Monday.

In parting from Meena I felt I had made a good friend and was sorry to say goodbye. She did promise to write.

A VISIT WITH PAUL HUTCHINSON by Stan Skirvin

[Mid-morning of June 3, 1994, a bus sat at the entrance to the Tropic World Nursery (TWN) in Escondido, California, waiting for the nursery to open or for someone to come out and greet us. "We" were the folks who had flown to San Diego and there boarded a bus for visits to places in Southern California of interest to collectors of succulent plants. The delightful trip, as all should still remember, was organized by the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society and "we" were members of the Society.

Because I was not particularly anxious to acquire plants (Joan takes care of this), I found myself more interested in talking with Paul Hutchinson, owner of TWN, as much as possible. This article is an account of as much as I can remember of that visit and a rambling, intermittent conversation.]

After what seemed to be at least half an hour, a car made its way from the far end of the TWN property to our bus. Paul Hutchinson boarded the bus and was introduced to us by Jim Elliot. Someone else who knew Paul said that he hoped Paul was well, but was told that it was pointless to ask someone on kidney dialysis if he was well.

Paul told and pointed out to us the portions of TWN which were on and off-limits to the public. He explained that we would be shown the library and propagation greenhouse before turning us loose in the public sales areas. He said that there were many unique plants in the greenhouse and we were not to pick up any potted plants.

The propagation greenhouse, called the Wallace House, which I estimated to be about 60 x 120 ft., is located at the far end of the TWN property from the parking lot entrance.

The Wallace Library, which will be accessible to researchers and scholars, is housed in a large, double-width mobile home. It is located just beyond the propagation greenhouse.

The facility names recognize the financial contribution by H. B. Wallace, a member of our

Society. Based upon the subsequent conversation, the grant from Mr. Wallace seems to have been about the only pleasant thing that has happened to Paul in recent years.

We were split into two groups for the visit to the Library because of the space. I went in with the first group, but decided to stay on when it was the second group's turn.

Shelving was still being installed and books placed at the time of our visit. Most of the titles which I noticed were familiar. Decidedly unfamiliar and very impressive was Paul's personal bound log book. It listed specimen plants collected on his many expeditions and also the several dozen new taxons (species) which had been named after him.

Paul also showed me a huge folio succulent plant volume from the 1943 5-volume definitive documentation of the flora of Argentina. Each pair of pages had the Spanish text description on the left and a lovely pen and ink drawing of the plant on the right. It was very impressive at what I estimate to be about 16 x 26 inches with a couple of hundred pages. Paul named a very reasonable price at which it could still sometimes be found, but then he added that it was in Rio de Janeiro bookstores.

Paul bitterly stated that professors at University of California in Berkley had prevented him for getting grants to further his work. He claimed that he had been blocked in many ways by prominent individuals in the succulent plant field in this county. This included giving plants to people who never gave him what they had promised in return. He named them; I won't.

Paul mentioned having always been a controversial individual. (Jim Elliot subsequently agreed with Paul's self-judgement.)

Paul left the Library to go to the propagation greenhouse before I did because the Library had a needed restroom facility. When I went into the

greenhouse, I was stunned to see our people in the greenhouse picking up potted plants and carrying them either to Paul or to José, Paul's manager, for potential pricing. I remembered Paul's "firm" instructions while lecturing to us in the bus. I didn't learn until a CACSS meeting a couple of months later that this was apparently a game because both Paul and José had, during my absence, invited folks to bring plants to them for possible pricing!

After viewing the plants, some impressive by their size and others by their rarity, in the propagation greenhouse, we adjourned to the commercial section of TWN. I walked around with Paul for a while until he decided that it was time to sit down.

Paul showed me unique monstrous growth on an *Echinocactus grusonii* (golden barrel) in the massed bed of them that faces the freeway frontage road for what seemed to be 50 feet or more. He planned to propagate the growth via grafting in the future and said he was still looking for a suitable name. I rattled off a suggestion and he remarked that the wife of a plant hybridizer of note (can't remember the name) had been good at coming up with cutesy names.

I spoke disparagingly of "pseudo field botany" as practiced by someone like the late Kurt Backeberg. I once read that he felt that a trip into Mexico was not a success if he couldn't name one new genus and two species or varieties at every train stop. When I suggested that taxonomy without detailed field studies was a waste of time and pointed out that Backeberg had published a varietal name for growth that was subsequently found to be a lethal mutation on a species of *echinocereus*, Paul strongly disagreed. He stated that financing was simply not available for sustained field studies. He said that a botanist was fortunate, if able to bring back new plants from a field trip, to get someone to identify and publish them; and then to derive any financial benefit from such discoveries once they got into the trade.

At one point, Paul expressed his disappointment that someone had failed to send him a promised *Adromischus herrei* in some kind of deal. Somewhat ingenuously, I told him that Joan and I had the plant, but no collection data for it. He said that our source would ensure that it was a separate clone and offered to trade something

for a leaf. Not wanting to become another name on Paul's list, I told him that we'd talk trade after he received a plant from us. (Joan has rooted a plant for Paul and I hope to send it to him Real Soon Now.)

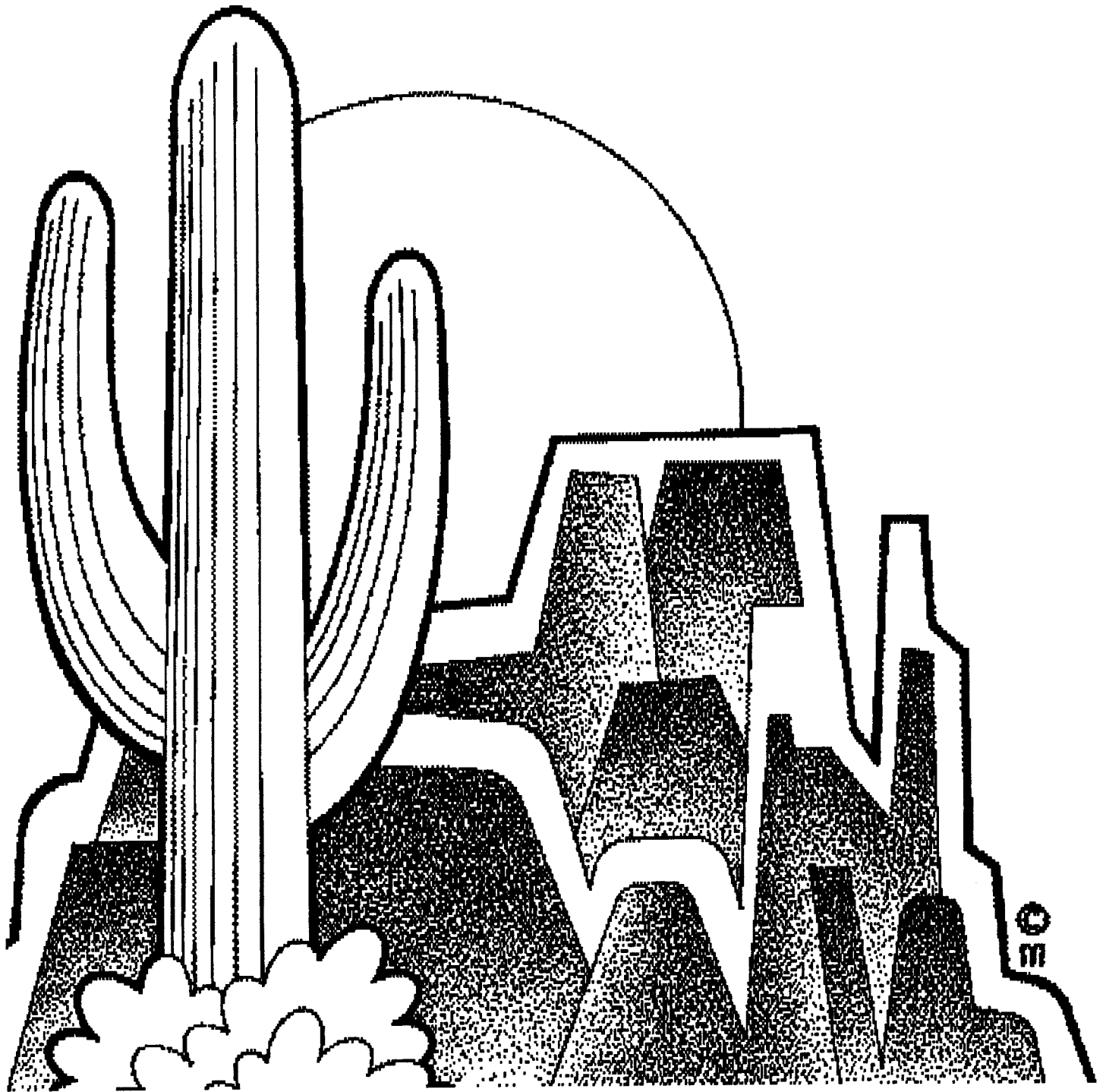
Paul described from whence sprung a deep personal distrust of all travel agents. He had been a partner in a travel agency and the partner had disappeared with all possible cash and left Paul with a huge debt. He had sold virtually all the land he owned to pay back most of the debt. He said that he could have paid off the complete debt if he had sold TWN, but that he wasn't willing to do that.

I have tended to have the view that we succulent plant collectors are kind of a special group of people. Paul gave me a somewhat different view.

Paul made it clear that he was somewhat distrustful of the folks who came to TWN as a group of collectors (as we had). He said that a member of such a group had once stolen the cash box at Griggsby's Cactus Garden. He also described refusing to let a group bus leave the TWN parking lot when he happened to notice that a very rare plant had disappeared from the propagation greenhouse. He boarded the bus, told the people what had happened, and informed them that he was going to call the sheriff to have the bus and the possessions of everyone aboard searched. On his way to the phone, someone caught up with him with the missing plant, saying that the culprit had confessed and surrendered it. Paul said that he still wanted to have the individual arrested, but the group leaders importuned him out of it.

Paul Hutchinson is obviously a very bitter man. Without independent corroboration of some of his claims, one could say that he felt set upon to the point of paranoia. However, I recall how deeply affected my energy and my ability to think were during my brief personal experiences with kidney infections. I have to admire Paul's ability to function as well as he does.

*[Prior to the visit and conversation described above, I had known little more about Paul Hutchinson than that he owned TWN and had been the discoverer of *Borzicactus madisoniorum* (usually misnamed as *Submatucana madisoniorum* because of Backeberg) in Peru. Jim Elliott subsequently told me that Paul had led botanical expeditions to South America while still an undergraduate at the University of California in Berkley, but had never graduated. He confirmed Paul's self evaluation as being a controversial individual. He also said that Paul had been a kidney dialysis patient since, I think, the 1970's.]*



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