

*Far, far in the forest, before I think where I go,  
 Solitary smelling the earthy smell, stopping now and then in the silence,  
 Alone I had thought - yet soon a troop gathers around me...  
 Collecting, dispensing, singing in spring, there I wander with them...  
 Here! Lilac, with a branch of pine,  
 Here, out of my pocket, some moss which I'd pull'd off a live-oak in Florida, as it hung trailing down,  
 Here some pinks and laurel leaves and a handful of sage...  
 And twigs of maple and a bunch of wild orange, and chestnut,  
 And stems of currants, and plum-blows, and the aromatic cedar;  
 These, I, compassed around by thick cloud of spirits,  
 Wandering, point to, or touch as I pass, or throw them loosely from me...  
 I will give of it - but only to them that love, as I myself am capable of loving.*

- Walt Whitman, "Leaves of Grass"

## Florida's Exotic Plant Godfather Heads West

Over the past 30 years, quite a few lucky folks in Florida have wandered in the woods behind a loping gnome by the name of Dan Austin. Many of these outings have been to Fakahatchee Strand in the Big Cypress area of southwestern Florida. The Fakahatchee harbors North America's greatest concentration and diversity of orchids along with a myriad of other rare tropical and sub-tropical plants. There, Dan has truly been in his element, sharing his wonder and knowledge, somehow in a sort of curmudgeonly manner, as if he were spreading a benevolent natural history virus.

In 2001, Dan is vacating his biological sciences chair at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. His wife, Sandy, and he are leaving Florida's permanent damp for the drier clime and pinion scrub near Tucson, Arizona, where they have already spent many summers.

Other rumors (including his spontaneous generation from an unfurling morning-glory blossom) to the contrary, Daniel F. Austin was born May 18, 1943 in Paducah, Kentucky. With age, his youthful interest in frogs, snails and slime never waned. While earning his bachelor's degree at Kentucky's

Murray State University, he focused botanical studies on the mint family (Lamiaceae). Graduate work at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri led to his master's and doctoral degrees. During graduate school, he focused on the Convolvulaceae, and today remains a world-renowned expert on the morning-glory family. Specimens from around the world continue to pour in for his analysis. He also developed a special interest in ethnobotany; the human uses of plants. This was almost a defensive reaction to repeated questions like, "What good is that plant anyway?"

He strongly supported many environmental movements in Florida, often because he saw, more clearly than most, how quickly Florida's wild wonders were disappearing. He helped found Florida's environmental sensibility both philosophically and concretely by being there at the start of the Florida Native Plant Society and its local chapter in Palm Beach County, the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, Florida's Endangered Plant Advisory Council and the Society for Economic Botany. His 1985 work with Dr. Grace Iverson, "Inventory of Native Ecosystems of Palm Beach County," laid the



logical framework for the County's acquisition of more than 22,000 acres of environmentally sensitive lands. These lands were saved through a \$100 million bond referendum approved in 1992.

And how does one value the impact of the thousands of students Dan has educated during his career, many of whom have carried his torch into environmental work in the private sector, government and academia?

During the early days of the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, his frank nature landed him in the driver's seat

for development of FLEPPC's list of invasive plants. Having seen an early stab at such a list, he quipped, "This list stinks! It is totally inadequate!" Of course, that led to his designation as "Listmaster," and his resultant list has had impacts including State and County legislation and landscape code changes, and pledges from Florida's horticultural industry association to stop producing and distributing dozens of listed plants.

Another instance where Dan's frankness rebounded on him a little involved the doubtful (in his mind) identification of the Asian temperate-zone plant, kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*), in the sub-tropical Everglades in the 1990s. "Kudzu just couldn't make it down here," he pronounced. So he headed into the field, convinced of finding a similar, but tropical, vine, like cow-itch (*Mucuna deeringiana*). But once there, he scratched his head, muttered something, but readily acceded that it was, in fact, kudzu, and helped formulate a management strategy. Such occasions clearly illustrate that Dan Austin is nothing if not an empirical scientist! (Note: It turned out that, in the 1950s, a County soil service had planted kudzu in the Everglades on a flood levee as a soil erosion experiment. It had been mown quarterly for forty years, until mowing frequency was decreased as a belt-tightening measure. Then, the persistent kudzu rootstocks sent their vines out across the Everglades landscape.)

At Florida Atlantic University, Dan Austin's presence was felt far beyond the classroom. During his 30 years living in South Florida he saw the landscape change from a narrow Atlantic coastal corridor of development to strip malls and subdivisions sprawling miles westward. Of course, in the process, vast areas of natural Florida disappeared. He fought for, and succeeded, in establishing a 90-acre natural preserve on the FAU campus. The preserve is a true refuge for remnant populations of endangered plants and animals, as well as a convenient field learning laboratory. But it has repeatedly been proposed as a great place for more pavement and its future seems clouded. Dan's colleagues, students, and friends will continue fighting for

its preservation. (Although the odds of winning against the latest proposal seem daunting; the FAU administration wants an alumni-warming football stadium erected there).

Dr. Austin also established an herbarium at FAU which comprises one of the Florida's most valuable and comprehensive plant collections. Lately, botany, unlike football, hasn't attracted as much fanfare, and funding, as many other collegiate pursuits. The future of the herbarium likewise seems uncertain.

Dan's received countless awards

from thankful folks in Florida. We know we'll miss him. He feels that the greatest threats to our natural areas are people, and he fears that encroachments will continue with population increases. It will be difficult for many Floridians when Dan and Sandy take up permanent residence in Arizona. However, feel free to stop in for a *fajita* when you're in the area. You can even bring along unidentified plant specimens. Just remember that Dan doesn't do grasses. -Mike Bodle and Ray Miller.

## Notes from the Disturbed Edge

### Chapter 2

...Can we break freeeee from Lygodium... A car whizzed by the intersection, ten feet from her hindquarters. These were the outer reaches indeed, the northern edge of a cypress swamp that stretched south for a mile. Somewhere out there he was pulling Brazilian pepper seedlings, while she reconned the perimeter, carefully applying herbicide to pillars of Old World climbing fern that reached 30, 40 feet into the canopy. Within two weeks the horrible insidious plants would be dead, spirits returned to their native range, leaving masses of wiry stems and desiccated leaves to decay. Long days — she slipped back into her role as temptress nightingale, draped in a flowing veil of climbing fern, blowing in the wind (of course, her wafting garment would be silken, faux fern, for she could only guess the range of windborne alien spores). I can feel something inside me say, I really don't think I'm strong enough... another car flew by, and she heard the next one stop. A designer-clad remnant of a woman cast a sideward glance her way from the tinted depths of a red camaro, and she heard the door locks click. Oh yeah? Climb that guardrail Gucci girl, jump this ditch, and humble yourself as you enter my world, you vehicle-impaired Jezebel — I rule on this side of the curb! The painted lady raised her eyebrows, grimaced and pulled away as the light turned green. Man, did I say that out loud? she wondered, as taillights faded. Maybe she had been out too long... Oh well, another day, another piece of mother earth to reclaim from the exotic invasion. What am I supposed to do, just sit around and wait for you, well I can't do that, cause there's no turnin' back... she danced on to the next hideous mass of climbing fern — Yes, you would definitely look good in brown. Meanwhile, far south, he bent to pull the millionth seedling. You weed you weed, whoah oh ho, ain't you gotta go... Some folks are just meant to be together.

- J.A.

An excerpt from "The Adventures of Hack Garlon and his buxom sidekick Squirt."