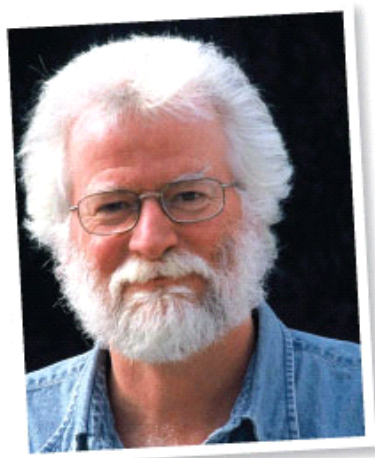


12/1/2020

Ghosts of Columns Past

John Friel



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An exasperating year sputters to a close, making this issue the right time to clear the cutting room floor of leftovers from previous columns. It's tough to get everything in under one's word budget some months. Let's start with a few quotes and finish with a gift suggestion.

"The Chinese have a natural aptitude for business ... they may gradually absorb the riches of the rest of the world."—Father Armand David

That prescient pronouncement is from "The Species Seekers" by Richard Conniff, a tome I've praised in This Space previously. A Catholic missionary to China in the mid/late 19th century, "Père David" was also a botanist and zoologist extraordinaire. His Latinized surname and given name adorn many species of flora and fauna, e.g. *Buddleia davidii* and *Clematis armandii*. In his many years in Asia he faced down bandits and warlords and was the first

Westerner to ID literally hundreds of plants, animals and birds. He's best known for playing a role in saving a unique species of deer from extinction.

"Rainfall always shoots over the mark on one side or the other ... if it is not too dry, it is inevitably too wet." —Karel Capek, "The Gardener's Year"

Capek was probably grumbling about your garden-variety inconvenient weather swings, a few degrees or inches this way or that, when he penned those lines in 1929. But his sentiment also fits the manic extremes of 2020, with record hurricanes in the Southeast U.S. and record wildfires in the Northwest.

Capek wasn't just a gardener or a garden writer. The Czech author coined the word "robot" a century ago for his stage play, "Rossum's Universal Robots." One wonders if he foresaw a future where automatons would play a starring role in horticulture.

I found the Capek quote in *GreenPrints*, a charming, quirky gardening magazine subtitled "The Weeder's Digest." I met Editor/Founder Pat Stone 20-odd years ago and have since encountered him at various green industry events from Baltimore to Vancouver. We appeared on the same speaker slate in Utah, but Pat doesn't just speak. He sings and accompanies himself on the mandola. What's that, you ask? As a mathematician or logician would express it, Mandola : mandolin :: viola : violin, i.e., a slightly larger instrument, pitched lower. In Pat's words, "A mandola is a mandolin that's reached puberty."

Learning that Pat was a fellow whitewater canoeist, when he came to PA to speak I invited him to paddle my favorite stream. It was obvious immediately that the guy was really good. Rapid after rapid, that impression was reinforced.

Next time we met, he had canoed the Colorado River through Grand Canyon. Now, I've rafted the Canyon three times. The Colorado's rapids make a half-ton, 18-ft. oar raft feel very small. They can, and often do, flip such rafts, condemning their occupants to a long, ugly, frigid swim. I'm trying, and failing, to imagine piloting a canoe through Lava Falls. He did it.

So is that why you should subscribe to his magazine? 'Cuz he's a madman master boater, a musician and a speaker you hope you don't have to follow?

No, don't be silly. Make it part of your GC's library, if you have one, because it's a collection of true gardening stories—a fun, informative and inspiring read. A subscription would make a fine Thank You! gift to a prized customer or perhaps a raffle/loyalty reward. This IS the last GP issue before Christmas, after all, and I promised a gift suggestion. Tell Pat (www.greenprints.com) I sent you.

Merry Christmas to all and to all a better 2021. **GP**

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