

A very short story of my cactus life
by Bert Hendriksen

I first got interested in cactus when I was 14 years old. I lived in a small town near the geographical centre spot of British Columbia where only trees grow. One summer when on a family vacation to the Okanogan which is B.C.'s only real desert which is shared with the state of Washington, I was walking with a friend, when I stubbed my toe while wearing sandals. That is when I noticed a small cactus pad stuck painfully to my toe. Yet even through the pain I was filled with amazement that I saw my first cactus ever! At that moment I was hooked, literally.

I later found out that this cactus was called *Opuntia fragilis*. I was in my early 20's the next time I saw another cactus but this time it was in a store. I was so amazed at the geometry of the potted plants that I bought 3 cactus that day, and from that moment on there was no stopping me. I bought every book I could find on the subject which led me to find out (in my amazement) that there were more people crazy about cactus and that there was even a Society in the USA all devoted to cactus and succulents. After one year of being a member, and I knew I was hooked for life, so in 1976, I became a lifetime member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America. It was a huge cost for me at the time spending a whopping \$200 in US funds. Later at a Rock and Mineral show in Victoria B.C., I found a group of ladies trying to put together a Cactus and Succulent Society. Even though Victoria is a 2 hour drive from Nanaimo where I live, I joined whole heartily. I was President on and off for a total of 5 years.

Disaster struck me literally while I was at work in the planer room of the sawmill where I worked, as a Millwright. A 15 ft long steel (i) beam broke off the wall and the tip of the beam hit me in the forehead. Then the 75 pound chain hoist came flying down and hit me in the face and broke several teeth and sent me spinning around. I fell to the ground hitting the base of my skull on an adjusting rod shaped just like the old model T Ford starter rod. The rest is history, that was in Nov. of 1995. I lost everything I had. I had to sell my house which I had built mostly by myself. It was sold at a huge loss and I ended up with hardly anything as the real estate market had just crashed. I could not drive as I do things like driving to work instead of the doctors office, and I would treat red lights as if they were stop signs. I sold my whole cactus collection except for 2 plants that were full of spider-mites. I still have them today and they are alive and well in an unbelievable place outside in my now locally famous back yard. My story is very similar to JOB as from the ashes of almost nothing I now live in a beautiful house with my wife who helped me through all the difficult times. We designed and built the house together. We have been married now for 21 years and have a 12 year old daughter who we are so proud of.

Around 2005 - 2006 I started to feel a bit better, and I regrew most of my collection from seeds I had pollinated and stored away for 10-15 years in the fridge. From that point on there was no stopping me! I decided I wanted to see how hardy some cactus could be. I started experimenting planting cactus outside some with protections other without. I could not of even guessed which cactus could survive if it wasn't for Steven Brack, his method of rating cactus with a cold hardy number was the reason for my success. Today, I now have a wonderful outdoor cactus garden which defies what any book in the past would tell you about how to properly grow cactus. This is the beginning of a new age of growing cactus in cold, wet climates that before seeing my slideshow or hearing about me other professional cactus growers would tell you was impossible. You will have to see my Zoom slideshow lecture to believe me. I still have problems with short term memory, but my long term memory is as intact as any other 66 year old. I look forward to talking to you all and answering any questions you may have.