

Ta Ghent, beyond, and Back

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Of course it was the lure of the great inter-European bonzo show that lured me and my drinking buddy Krunk to endure 16 hours of airline food and trash movies to see what Herr Pall called ZE BEST BONZAI IN ZA ENTIRE VORLD. Not quite so – the show was a bit disappointing. Eight to ten of the trees were a joy to behold. Another dozen were really good with only a few alterations or manipulations required to make them super. That left a hundred bonzo bushes, often huge ‘n impressive, that received my re-design critique to my two students. Hands gesturing, heads turning or slanting, bodies moving around the trees, it was always possible to find a better design. All the while, a thuggish oaf-guard glowered at us, often interrupting with DON’T TOUCH, which we were not doing. There were then another 30 Japanese trees of great craftsmanship and boredom. Another twenty trees were just bad, even if the show was juried. The worst was a sickle tree with a wimp branch dragging out of the great curve.

The show layout was very good – stretched canvas backdrops and table covers. Some of the presentations of artifacts and companions were more fun than the trees. Some were presented with complete dullness. All the big pots were boring or just plain bland except for three I duly noted to my beer break requiring students.

And yes, the beer. You had to stand in a long line to buy tickets to stand in a long line to get your beer and then walk a quarter mile to the food stand to wait in line for your hot dog. You waited in a long line to get your ticket to stand in line to get a wristband to show you belonged. You stood in a long line to buy a ticket to stand in line to piss. Consequently, Krunk and I walked into the back of the nursery and fertilized the bonzo stock for free.

Pall was astonished to see me there and fussed that he could not arrange “things” for me. That was the idea behind being secretive about the trip. Later, I complimented one of his larch and he gave me a free beer ticket. This I accidentally dropped in the toilet that night, washed it off, and stuck it back in my pocket. Later, perplexed, Pall accosted my whacko Swiss student, fetching me a beer. “VAT IS NICK LENZ DOINGK HERE, NOT TELLING ANYBODY? Answered my student: I don’t know – he told me to fetch a beer and I always obey my master. Moments later, Krunk came by and claimed: Hey, Walter, Nick pissed on your beer coupon. I VILL NEVER GIVE HIM ANOZER VONE, he grumbled. Much fun in the land of lines. Little humor was visible anywhere. But I did have my Pall piss beer.

Ghent is a delightful town to spend a couple days in. There are 3 cathedrals of excitement and a 12 story clock tower of medieval clunk construction, all very cool to be in. There are myriad canals of stinky water and dying water birds, so the streets are very narrow and go nowhere. However, trolley cars run everywhere, so the antique streets with no cars are covered by a canopy of trolley wires. Quite enough of the medieval architecture of the filthy rich Bush lovers remains along the canals to give you the feel of a 600 year old city, and it is ornate. Unfortunately, their concept of restoration is to gut the houses except for the façade and put a concrete modern building behind it.

There is a restored castle very close to where we stayed. They had a large display of medieval torture. According to the Bush schemata, thumbscrews, inside barb collars, and a slow stake burning would not be torture, but a fast burning or a multiple limb amputation would, so we would never do that. VE WUD NEVER DO ZAT!

The food was pretty good, especially the vegetable stuff that seemed fresh from the field rather than stupor-marketed. No duck to be found anywhere, but the beer was heavenly, the main reason Krunk wanted to go. For lunch he would have two entrees for my bowl of soup and for dinner, three. His beer consumption was 2.73 times mine and he usually ordered triple strength. He was happy.

But not altogether by our cheap accommodations. We were in a limited B&B. That means that it was a house only 20 feet wide. The first three nights we spent in the attic, reached by a ladder. The access hole in the floor frightened me somewhat, being tottery, but there was a sink and crapper. The landlord, a consummate hippy artist of fun stuff, and alcoholic, shared the second floor with a charming unfinished transvestite who spoke only French. In the back yard, a disheveled and rotting mess of curious plants, including the one legal marijuana plant, were brown and stinky with the season. Willy the dog shat all over, including the walk to the cabin in the back where we stayed for a couple of nights. At our arrival, Krunk asked the landlord where food could be found, as he was faint from hunger. The man immediately took us out on a beer binge that left the Krunk bloody and scabbed when he fell over. The landlord liked to show off his belly boils by taking off his shirt. He also liked to show his hairy legs by taking off his pants. At one time, he brought up blankets in the raw and Krunk had to literally kick him back down the ladder to keep him out. As I napped in the cottage one evening, he came in, kissed my cheek, covered me with a blanket, and went back out to tell Krunk: "This is a mystery – there is someone in there I don't know. And that wasn't the bottle of gin afternoon.

We left a day early for the Dutch coast and wound up very close to the Amsterclam airport International, but on the ocean dunes. Grabbing some beers, wedging through the barbwire fence, and violating the national dune reserve, we soon found ourselves alone and isolated in a strange and lovely habitat, without power grid, freeway, or windmills. I didn't know such a place could exist in modern Europe.

And of course, US customs sucked. The lines were considerably longer than those of the bonzo show. The drug dog did more than sniff my bag - my crotch also, and licked it. The fascist cop handling the hound yelled at me: CREEP, DON'T TOUCH THAT DOG! EVERY ONE STAY IN LINE SINGLE FILE! We went through baggage security twice. The second time, I asked the glowering fat woman why I was being searched and she answered: YOUR BAG IS DISORDERLY. She fished around in my pill bag and her eyes widened with triumph and joy. And then she pulled out my toothbrush. THIS IS DIRTY! And she trashed it. Whee. Welcome back to Empireland.

Yes Nicks "review" is,... What is.....HIS

Mine is from a laymens point of view and I'm sur Ahndie, tha Swiss, would also agree...THE GINGKO WAS AMAZING...everyone should send DANNY USE a thank you card...!!!!

Travelin' wid an Ogre:
Ta Ghent, beyond and Back

From tha cold January aftahnoon whenst we'z wuz decided I knew it would be a great adventure. The Ginkgo Show wid Nick Lenz,..... many of you know of him, I am fortunate enough ta call him friend first, Bonsai mentor and teacher of many things second. (preacher included)

Flight night wuz fun; an introduction to Opera...(I carried a DVD player) az a Rock & Roller this wuz "entertaining", especially with four or five Vodkah nips and subtitlez.....tha Ogre chuckled and pharted appropriately.....

I love tha people at tha Amsterdamn scairport, all very helpful, even tha six foot seven heavily armed security..."Wrental Cahz are Dat Vay" – nuthin' like our return to our own country...(seemed more like Prison Guards, specially when tha dog snipned Nicks Crotch, an naught mine)our car wuz a trip in itself, sum weird steering wheel anti-theft device, but..... with Nick wearing both pairz of glassez and southerly our direction, we were off. Driving is naught hard in Europe you just need to read Dutch or Flemish and learn traffic signs before arriving. Surprisingly I wuz naught given tha opportunity to give anyone "tha bird" ...They were kind and courteous except when wanting to pass a slow, lost Amerucan. Many a time I thought that they wanted to git in tha back seat an question Nick about hiz evil doin's in Europe.

Az Nick haz posted, our lodgingz were "interesting" ta say tha least...Alcoholic artist landlord, a charming French transvestite and "Willy" tha dog, a wonderful animal in that's he's in tha wrong place, a rotting garden with a very healthy Marijuana bush in full bud. At best it wuz close to everything. Gent iz COOL...!!!! A walkin'/bikin' town fir sure...Tha food in tha right placez iz wonderful, I have been a Chef fir a quarter century...an.tha nose, Knowz tha BEER...? heaven with Angels perched on rims

Tha SHOW.....!!!!

Upon our finding it, parking wuz on tha street, we found a spot near some Mafioso looking man and upon our approach he turned and spoke..." Nick Lenz..... and you must be Krunk" It wuz Nicks whacko internet student from Switzerlandie....a revolutionary Swiss with distaste for strong willed Germanz, desirez for plantings such as Nick cherishes, dreamz and schemez. "Ahndie" iz also a potter of delightful talent.

The entry to the show was remarkable..!!! Many big name affaciandoz and also a small number of friendz, az Colin Lewis's trip pulled in as we arrived....Brian a friend of mine and Nicks plunked Nick with a hallew..!! Nick had naught knowed he wuz a comin' ta tha show, ..secrets wid'in secrets....

Tha New Yahk boyiez on tha Colin bus were befuddled by seeing Nick Lenz on tha side walk.

Aftuh being searched fir cameras, paying our Euroz and be'in bracted we were allowed ta enter.....

What joyz ta behold...!!!..faboulus treez, monstah treez and tha most exquisite shohins. Tha three of us "Andy" ran fir tha farthest back cornah and they-uh my Bonsai life began ta change....Tree upon tree, Nick would discuss each, individually...what about this branch, look at it from he-uh, tha flow iz wrong, ugly pot, beautiful taper, anuthah Helmut; let's move on...Amazing Japanese craftsmanship on this bonzo bush....I thought it would blur in my mind....I still see tha Scotts pine with it's soooo lime-sulphured incredulous deadwood, a Trident Maple so massively ovah rock (I met tha Brit who displayed it, he does Bonsai from a wheel chair, his name I do naught recall, but hiz tree iz etched in my mind) and anotha Trident with the most massive, smooth base....perfectly healed. Tha Shohins were in exquisite detailz, 3rd biggest highlight of tha show..!!!!!!!, (next to tha whimsie rabbit companion displayed by one artist)...Su Thin must have had to smile and drool.

It was tha OLIVES that took centah stage.....from Spain.....17 hours in what we term an 18 wheelah.....I forget tha ARTISISTS name and will regret naught mentioning it he-uh....we Amuricans can nevuh do a show like this without commitment such as this...remember folks ...tha show iz only fir two dayz..!!!!

There were monster olivez, complete with Devil horns and graceful, Ballerina olivez with such hollowed trunks...an Ballerina grace...apparent stories told fir all with eyez...best an mos wonerfull treez of tha show..!!!! I think that Nick picked one as his favorite.

Tha worst though was a Larch shaped into tha European euro symbol..it may have been a statement, but none of us would have allowed an inside branch on such a graceful curvebut, Nick did receive his free beer for complimenting Walter on hiz good looks....

None that did make naught tha sojourn to LAARNE will evuh contemplate tha true worth of this show...as a laymen who has been fortunate ta find that bonsai people like a good Chef around....ya missed out..!!!!!!! Tha peace, tranquility and friendship that I have found in this Bonsai journey were elevated to a high that I hope nevuh leaves me....

Tha most interesting part of my travelz wuz aftah tha show. Nick an I, loose in Europe....We had planned to drive down threth Holland on arrival day but...Instead with more time and our lodgings becoming less interesting we headed back North...maintaining a seaward magnetisim az tha Ogre's and my fetish waz upon tha North Sea....to hiz grimness and my "lack" of local driving knowledge...many of our viewz were blocked by immense "dunes"..... On our last day.....We found lodgings next to a National Wildlife Preservation area.

With a few beerz stashed in pockets...Nick and I wandered out alongside a well paved trail that bordered this area guarded by concrete pillarz an barbeded wirez that kept vagrants from approaching tha Dunez.....of course, as in all worldz..., tha childrenz had a sneaky hole...an we'z found it...out we went...to a place of exquisite, quiet beauty...myself an tha ephemeral poacher...collector, before poaching existed in a much quieter time an age. He stalked an stumbled threth tha landscape of rolling, sandy hillz..almost childlike with contentment and glee in an undiscovered land. With a last beer for Belgium, Holland and North Sea.... tha Ogre and I, tha Chef Krunk sat an watched tha light dissipate into tha steel grey cloudy evenin'...at peace with all we'd seen an mos happy with our January secretive plannings