Peter D'Amato

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Abstract: Peter Anthony D'Amato, the inimitable pioneer of carnivorous plants, founder of California Carnivores, and author of *The Savage Garden*, passed away from cancer on the afternoon of 26 June 2024. He leaves behind his brother, Dino D'Amato, his niece Tara Page, his nephew Anthony D'Amato, and of course his California Carnivores tribe that loved him and called him family.

The California Carnivores (CC) tribe truly is a family, and I am proud and grateful to say that we all made sure that Peter had our love and support every step of the way even when it was hard. Helping him through all of this was always our priority. He remained our top concern even as we moved the nursery and kept it running.

Peter was diagnosed with lung cancer almost two years ago. He was optimistic about his treatment and insistent that we not share the diagnosis with anyone in the carnivorous plant community until he beat it or passed. It may seem strange to some, but those of you who knew him well will probably understand—he couldn't handle an outpouring of heartfelt messages. He and I have often marveled at the vast and amazing community that has sprouted from the seeds he planted so long ago. Building this hobby and helping to create the wonderful community that formed around it was one of his proudest achievements. He was genuinely amazed and delighted by how much we have accomplished as a group.

Peter founded California Carnivores in 1989, and we were open to the public for over 30 years, so he crossed paths with many of you. Those lucky enough to have chatted with him at the nursery know that he was a kind-hearted but sarcastic soul who was always generous with his time and knowledge. He had a strange charisma—not unlike the plants we grow that drew you in. He would ensnare you with his fantastic storytelling skills, quick-witted jokes, inquisitive nature, and passion for the natural world. Peter always tried to get to know our customers and considered many of you friends.

Peter was always asking people questions in a world full of people who only wanted to talk about themselves. He would almost always ask our customers, "Where ya from?" If their answer was anywhere other than the Bay Area, he would always say, "Oh, how dreadful," and then cackle. (It was one of his favorite jokes.) He really did remember where they were from, though, and he'd go on to almost interview people as he rang them up at the register.

Even as he went through his brutal fight with cancer, he would interview every nurse or doctor in the same way. "How long have you worked here?" he would ask. Most of us would be asking to assess their experience level, but Peter always just wanted to connect and get to know them. There was an unmistakable genuineness and openness to his interactions with everyone. It was a huge part of the magic and success of California Carnivores, and it is something that we have strived to carry forward. If you visited California Carnivores, you would leave with a bunch of new carnivorous

plants that you now knew you couldn't live without and were excited to return and see your new friend Peter again.

I think everyone already knows that Peter excelled at growing carnivores. To get to know Peter as a person a bit better, let's start with "where ya from?" like Peter always did…

He and his little brother Dino were born in the Bronx, New York, to Anthony and Eleanore D'Amato. His father was an Italian-American who owned a bar and sold real estate. He looked like a character from "The Sopranos". His mother, the daughter of an American soldier, came to the U.S. as a teenager from Germany. She and her sister came over together after WWII, speaking no English and carrying little more than the clothes on their backs.

Figure 1. Young Peter with one of his reptilian charges.

Peter was born 4 April 1954—a feisty Aries with a Libra rising and moon. He would always say that the Libra balanced him out and was why he wasn't a more argumentative Aries.

His parents moved the family to New Jersey when he was a boy. Young Peter was obsessed with the natural world, writing, dinosaurs, catastrophes, Godzilla, and horror movies. Old Peter loved all those things too!

During junior high school, his parents relocated the family to Mystic Island, a new development built on a salt marsh across the bay from Atlantic City. Peter always said they used to call it "Mistake Island" because it had been built right on the water, but it made for an amazing setting to grow up in. Picture a normal suburban development with a canal behind every house leading out to the bay. Each house had its own dock behind it. Young Peter would spend hours watching the little snails and horseshoe crabs on the shore and taking his dinghy out to look for sea horses and the other fish that fascinated him.

Mystic Island was also near a vast pine forest known locally as the Pine Barrens. As the name suggests, most people saw it as a wasteland, but for Peter it was a sacred playground of insects, reptiles, amphibians, and eventually, carnivorous plants. He often took the creatures he found home where he carefully tended to them in old fish tanks. Peter's dad was the realtor who sold everyone their home on Mystic Island, so the D'Amato's were well known in the seaside community. Peter, however, was also famous in his own right as "that kid with all the snakes" (Fig. 1).

He was also the kindest of souls. Even as a little boy, he loved and respected these creatures that most people considered creepy and crawly. As an adult, he still remembered the names of the other little boys who killed snakes or frogs and how horrified he was when it happened. "I was appalled!" he'd say with his hand on his hip.

Ironically, the man who spent most of his life growing and selling carnivorous plants could never hurt a fly. He could often be caught at the nursery rescuing ladybugs from sundews or even wasps from pitcher plants.

He'd return from watering and say, "I just rescued a yellow-jacket from a *Sarracenia flava.*"

"You rescued a yellow-jacket!?" I'd say incredulously.

"Yes!", he'd confess. "I couldn't stand to see the look on his poor little face!"

His younger cousin, Frank, remembers that when they were kids, Peter would take him and his other cousins into the basement and terrify them with scary stories. Peter loved all of the classic horror movies like Frankenstein, Dracula, the Werewolf, and of course, the Creature from the Black Lagoon. He had a subscription to "Famous Monsters" magazine which he also kept. I found a whole box of them when we were cleaning out his house. He ordered his very first Venus flytraps from a mail-order ad in the back of one of the magazines. The adjacent ads were for things like X-Ray Glasses and cap guns. "The World's Most Unusual Houseplant" was three bulbs for a dollar; shipping was 39 cents. A few weeks later, three trapless *Dionaea* bulbs showed up with some growing media and bad instructions. Peter potted them up according to the instructions and placed them into a dark terrarium by the heater in his room where they promptly died. This used to be the standard Venus flytrap experience. I think this initial disappointment is what made Peter really want his customers to have a better experience than that.

Not to be discouraged, Peter ordered more plants from the Carolina Biological Supply Company shortly thereafter. He started a journal for his carnivorous plants, tracking their growth daily. Sundews and pitcher plants were drawn on the cover. By the time he was 14, he had a beautiful terrarium full of temperate carnivorous plants that he entered in the county fair. People had never seen anything like it, so a photo of young Peter with his carnivorous plants was published in the local paper (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Peter displaying his carnivorous plant terrarium at the local fair.

Those of you who have read and loved his book, "The Savage Garden," will not be surprised to learn that young Peter was also an avid writer. Actually, I would have to say it was his true passion and probably even a more significant part of his identity than carnivorous plants. "I WAS the school newspaper!" he told us often proudly. While most kids that age were writing simplistic sentences about their cat, little Peter was writing a sequel to "The Birds" and a story about the creature from the Black Lagoon, which took place on Mystic Island.

By the time he started high school, he had filled many small spring-bound notebooks with horrifying illustrated stories that he called his "8th Dimensional Series". He kept absolutely everything, so we still have all of these. They are actually scary and amazing to read!

One of the things that made him so special was his fascination with the bizarre and unusual. While most people try their best not to focus on anything that doesn't comfortably fit within their worldview, Peter would only look deeper into the phenomenon. This fascination was one of the things that drew him to carnivorous plants and made us fast friends.

For the school paper, he wrote a nonfiction article on the Jersey Devil of the Pine Barrens. He even went alone to interview an older man living in the Pine Barrens who claimed to have seen the monster's pale humanoid body, its bat wings open, and its glowing eyes staring down at him from atop a telephone pole.

A local newspaper called "The Sand Piper" bought and published young Peter's articles, some on seahorses and regional history, one of which was titled "Abominable Snowman, Fact or Fiction?"

However, a story called "Our Daily Bread" published in the school paper cemented him as a writer and caused an uproar at school amongst students and faculty. It was the story of a young couple and their baby trying to survive in an anonymous apocalypse. It was significantly ahead of its time. It ends when the couple, now starving and out of options, are forced to cook and eat their baby. You can imagine how that went over in the early '60s, or even now for that matter! Parents were called, but from that day forward he was in his mind and everyone else's…a writer. Peter was delighted.

Peter loved to write, and he wrote everything out by hand with a ballpoint pen. Even when he wrote "The Savage Garden," everything was done by hand (and most likely by candlelight). He loved candles. We always joked that he was like a Victorian trapped in modern times. It was one of the things that we loved about him.

He started keeping a daily journal when he was 17, a habit he maintained throughout his life. It's hard to express how important his journal was to him. He kept track of everything in it, documenting not just his daily activities but also the weather, his dreams, and even his meals.

Even as a boy, he had a keen intellect and was an avid reader. He loved books on all manner of eclectic topics and theories; aliens, earthquakes, ball lightning, electric universe theory, metaphysics, Sasquatch and yes…carnivorous plants.

It's hard to fathom now, but at the time there were only two books and two National Geographic articles on carnivorous plants. Peter had checked them out from the library over and over again, carefully committing them to memory. He had caught the bug. I think he was probably the very first little carnivorous plant kid in the modern sense. So, he was shocked and incredulous when one of his classmates, Russell Driscoll, leaned over to him and told him, "I know where fly-catchers grow." Russell took him to Tuckerton Lake in his hometown, where indeed they found purple pitcher plants as well as round-leaved and thread-leaved sundews. He often talked about this day and how the light shined through a *Drosera rotundifolia* leaf as he held it up to the sun. This was Peter's first in-person introduction to carnivorous plants.

We have always marveled at how much that seemingly insignificant moment between two kids in the ‘60s changed Peter’s life and the lives of so many others. Ripples from this moment would undoubtedly go on to change my life and the lives of so many others. Like a stone thrown into the lake, ripples from this moment are still expanding today.

Peter loved to make people laugh as much as he loved to shock them, so he was also a masterful prankster. I feel that no biography of Peter would be complete without these two of his favorites from high school.

Once while working at a diner, he saw a huge cricket crawling around on the floor. He told the lady he was working with, not to worry, and assured her he would catch it. Then he palmed a pickled beet while she was staring at the cricket. He knelt down and pretended to grab the insect. As he raised his hand, he squished the beat and the red juice poured out from between his fingers and down his arm while the young lady screamed and tried not to pass out. Success!

This next one was one of his favorite moments of his young life, and he would regale us with the story often and with delight. He and his friends had an abandoned cabin in the Pine Barrens where they would hang out. Peter had crafted a plan. First, he took his tape recorder and hit record. He cleverly let it record only silence for 15 minutes or so. Then he started with a few low groans and then a few more increasingly ominous ghost noises. Each noise was louder and more terrifying with pauses in between for suspense—a trick he’d learned from one of his heroes, Alfred Hitchcock. Then he invited all of his friends to hang out in the cabin that evening. He went to the cabin ahead of time and hid the tape recorder outside one of the broken windows. He hit play just before his friends arrived. They sat and chatted while the recorder ran through the first 15 minutes of silence. The first strange noise interrupted their conversation. “What the #%^$was that!?” He asked them. He stoked their growing fear. The noises came again and now his friends got really scared. As the sounds crescendoed, his friends ran terrified into the dark of the Pine Barrens as Peter stayed behind riotously laughing.

Later, you could find evidence of Peter’s dark sense of humor and love of pranks scattered throughout the nursery. Yes, you would come to CC and find a beautifully maintained, world-class carnivorous plant collection, but you would also find a little dog food bowl set out with plastic body parts in it. He had written “Audrey II” in black magic marker on the front. Right next to it was a small box that said “Open Me”. The more curious customers who opened it would be surprised to find a plastic severed finger or a glass eye staring up at them. We kept a carefully placed severed foot by the front door to the nursery for decades. Two or three times a week, a kid would carry it off and leave it somewhere else. Peter would always retrieve it and return it to its proper spot as soon as they left. In the very early days, he even had a big spider on a string that he could drop from the register onto unsuspecting flytrap teasers. He always boasted that they had to take it down because he nearly gave an older lady a heart attack one day.

He was a drama kid too. He and his high-school drama friends didn’t think that the regular drama department was doing enough plays, so they formed the independent student drama association to direct and perform even more. He kept this flare for the dramatic throughout his life. He was a gifted public speaker and gave many fascinating lectures on carnivorous plants. He was mesmerizing to listen to whether he was talking about the plants he loved, explaining aquatic ape theory or telling you the plot of Rosemary’s Baby. He had this way of recounting every detail perfectly in chronological order. In short, he was an excellent storyteller.

When he graduated high school, he attended the University of Miami, drawn by the tropical weather and palm trees he loved. Actually, Peter loved palm trees almost as much as he loved

carnivorous plants. He had albums full of palm photos and would doodle them into the margins of his journal.

Halfway through this 3rd year there, Peter came out as gay. His parents were not initially supportive and stopped paying for school. He was forced to drop out and return to New Jersey for a short time. That's when he received a telegram from his best friend, Liz Brown, that would change his life. "Come to San Francisco. This is where all the gays are!"

In 1974, he did just that. He bravely got into his powder blue Volkswagen bug and drove cross-country from New Jersey to California. Eventually he settled in "The Castro", the famous gay district of San Francisco. This is where he met fellow plant enthusiast, Bill Barnett, who worked at "Tommy's Plants," on Castro Street right down the block from Peter's home. It was there that he saw *Drosera dichotoma* 'Giant' for the first time. Before this, Peter had only seen the smaller temperate *Drosera* like *D. intermedia* and *D. rotundifolia*. Clearly, he wasn't in New Jersey anymore! Bill also gave Peter a catalogue from World Insectivorous Plants (WIP) which the famous Bob Hanrahan ran. Peter's passion for carnivorous plants had been rekindled, so he began to order plants from WIP.

He was working at Levi Strauss as a clothing engineer but was not feeling particularly satisfied with his life's direction. He had started to come up to Guerneville for the weekends to write. Guerneville is a small town in Sonoma County, nestled among the majestic redwoods, with the beautiful Russian River running through it. It had long been the summer retreat for wealthy San Franciscans looking to escape the city in the late 19th century. By the 1960s it had been all but forgotten as air travel allowed for more far-flung vacations. In the 1970s, the burgeoning gay population of San Francisco rediscovered the town and opened numerous gay resorts there. Eventually Peter moved to Guerneville where he managed one of these resorts called "The Highlands".

It was at this time that the AIDS epidemic was starting to explode in the gay population in the Bay Area and all over the world. Randy Shilts (Fig. 3), the famous author and journalist for the San Francisco Chronicle was a regular at the resort. He and Peter quickly bonded over their passion for writing and became good friends. Randy was working on his most famous book, "And the Band Played On". Thousands of people were dying of this strange new disease that nobody wanted to acknowledge, let alone do anything about. Randy wrote the book to bring national attention to the disease, which it did. It's hard to say how many lives he saved, but he was truly a hero. Randy would come to Guerneville every weekend and visit with Peter. He would tell Peter what he was researching and go over his latest work. Randy didn't get tested for HIV until after the book was finished because he wanted to maintain some journalistic distance from the topic. Sadly, when he was tested it was positive, and Randy died in Guerneville in 1994.

Figure 3. Peter with Randy Shilts in Peter's hobby greenhouse in Guerneville.

Peter lost many, many friends to the AIDS pandemic. He said he lost count at nearly 300. Thanks to Randy's early warning, Peter was spared, but he was left rattled and with a newfound perspective on the

fragility of life. He reassessed his life's path and decided to make some changes. So, in 1989, he started California Carnivores. It was a crazy, semi-desperate idea to start a carnivorous plant nursery at a time when nobody even really knew what they were. There is something so pure and magical about Peter starting the nursery in an act of soulful defiance of all that loss and uncertainty that was surrounding him. He just wanted to spend the rest of his life, however long that was, doing something that he loved and that mattered to him. There's probably no better way to spend your life than that if you're lucky, skilled and just plain determined enough to pull it off. Peter had a good life doing what he loved. He started selling Venus flytraps, bought from Bob Hanrahan, wholesale to local nurseries. Bob had a now-famous property in Alabama where he had planted out acres of existing wetlands with all manner of carnivorous plants.

In 1988, Peter co-founded the Bay Area Carnivorous Plant Society (BACPS). This key organization fostered the growth of the carnivorous plant community, when it was just Geoff Wong, Judith Finn, and Joe Mazrimas meeting in Chuck Powell's living room. The second meeting was at Peter's house in Guerneville. They had all met at the San Francisco Plant and Flower Show. Peter said, "It was a wonderful show because it didn't have any of that landscape crap. It was all the different plant societies displaying all kinds of plants like ferns, orchids, and bromeliads." Tony Rhea noticed that Peter subscribed to Carnivorous Plant Newsletter and contacted Peter about displaying plants at the show. In many ways this was Peter's debut into the small but growing carnivorous plant community here. Peter had been collecting and growing carnivorous plants but didn't really know anyone else locally who grew them. This was about to change.

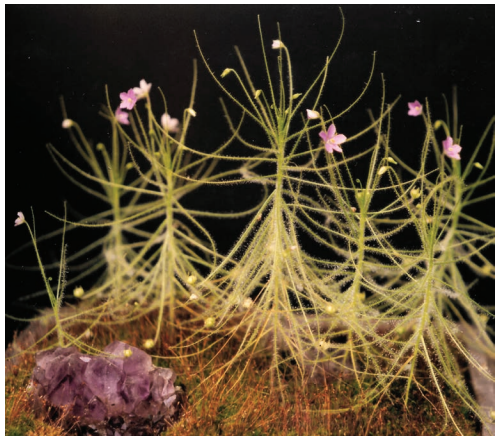

Figure 4. The perfect little pot of *Byblis liniflora* that Peter displayed at the San Francisco Plant & Flower Show.

Peter brought many perfectly grown plants to the show including a little brown bonsai pot full of *Byblis liniflora* decorated with amethyst crystals (Fig. 4) and a *Drosera tracyi* in a black ceramic pot that was top dressed with Lake County diamonds (quartz crystals). His beautiful plants and decorations caught the eye of Geoff Wong (Fig. 5), and the rest was history. The carnivorous plant growers judged each other's plants and gave out awards, but they weren't eligible for actual show prizes because they didn't have a proper society. That's what led them to form the BACPS. It was the first carnivorous

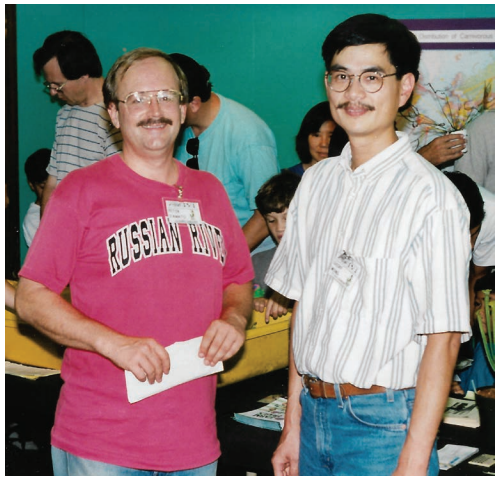

Figure 5. Peter and Geoff Wong at one of the BACPS meetings sometime in the early 90s.

Figure 6. Peter introducing a customer to carnivorous plants on the sales floor at the original location of California Carnivores in the early 90's.

plant society in the U.S. and has inspired the formation of many other societies throughout the U.S and all over the world.

In 1990, Peter found a greenhouse to rent and opened California Carnivores to the public (Fig. 6). It was the first carnivorous plant nursery to be open to the public in the U.S. It was relatively small compared to what CC is like now, but it was truly magical. I still remember how excited I was to go there as a kid.

A local TV show called "Bay Area Backroads" discovered the nursery in its first year, and the publicity quickly put CC on the map as a local tourist destination. The nursery was also the subject of numerous magazine and newspaper articles. Peter showed the plants many times on various television shows and was even part of a short documentary called "Well Fed" about people who grow carnivorous plants.

California Carnivores was also one of the very first nurseries to make use of the newly forming World Wide Web. In 1994,

Figure 7. Peter holds up a *Nepenthes truncata* in his hobby greenhouse. Photo by Randy Shilts.

we started shipping orders all over the U.S. The web page was simple back then—just a basic availability list with contact information so you could call in or email your order. Peter never liked sending plants bare-root because the plants would often take months to recuperate from shipping. It was a major barrier for most people learning to grow the plants, so we developed our method of shipping in pots with cups taped as a dome on top. This allowed us to get potted plants to people with very little stress from shipping. It really helped Peter to grow the nursery and the hobby in general. Over the years, it has become an industry standard.

Figure 8. Peter holding the very first plant of his namesake with "Little Nell" peeking over his shoulder.

Peter bred and named many cultivars throughout his career. Names like *Sarracenia* 'Lamentations', *S.* 'Abandoned Hope', *S.* 'Spatter Pattern', and *S.* 'Extreme Unction' hinted at his macabre personality. When his friend Bob Hanrahan passed away, he named *S.* 'Bob Hanrahan', our very best *Sarracenia flava* var. *rugelii*, in his honor.

In the early 90s, Dr. Marabini in Germany crossed *Nepenthes ventricosa* with *N. lowii* and sent a few seedlings to Bill Baumgartl. Bill named the best one *Nepenthes* 'Peter D'Amato' in Peter's honor (Fig. 8). What's fantastic about this plant is that it looks like a dark red *N. lowii* but grows like a *N. ventricosa*! It is still a must-have plant in *Nepenthes* collections today. It can even thrive on a windowsill, but as his long-time friend, Barry Rice, penned about the cultivar in his own book on carnivorous plants, "The grotesque Peter D'Amato is best kept in a greenhouse."

Sadly, Peter's father died suddenly in his forties when Peter was young, so he never really saw all the great things that Peter accomplished.

Shortly after the nursery opened, Peter drove cross-country again to move his mother out to Guerneville. He remodeled his house to turn it into a duplex where she lived for the rest of her life. "Little Nell", as Peter called her, was a fixture at the nursery in the early days (Fig. 8). She worked there with Peter and did most of the production potting back then. If during a visit to CC, you met a small woman in a sundress with a blonde bob and thick German accent, that was "Little Nell".

In 1998, he wrote the award-winning, best-selling manual on growing carnivorous plants, "The Savage Garden". It quickly became and has remained THE book on growing these amazing plants. It has been in print for 25 years, practically unheard of for any gardening book. It won the book of the year from the American Horticultural Society and the Pen and Trowel Award from the Garden Writers of America. Shortly after it was published, Peter went on the Martha Stewart Show. He scolded Martha for triggering the flytraps, taught her how to make a bog garden and shared his plants with a national audience.

In 2001, Peter partnered with Dr. Mickey Urdea, a long-time CC customer and friend who saw the immense potential of California Carnivores. Together they moved the nursery to Sebastopol where they built a brand-new state-of-the-art greenhouse. This second incarnation was twelve times

bigger than the greenhouse he had started in! The nursery thrived in this location for over twenty years. It was a botanical wonderland with a sales-floor carefully curated by Peter himself and a wonderfully maintained display collection. If you loved carnivorous plants, it was a pilgrimage that you had to make. We welcomed enthusiasts from all over the world. It was awe-inspiring for the thousands of visitors we had over the years.

By 2022, however, California Carnivores had become pot bound. Our roots had circled around and around that greenhouse's walls and we simply needed more space. And then, with the COVID pandemic, we made the difficult decision to close to the public for our own safety. Meanwhile, Americans trapped at home in lockdown were looking for ways to self-soothe. Suddenly, orders began to pour in—the interest in the hobby exploded! We used this surge in sales to buy our own property where we could send down deep roots and expand operations. We started the Herculean task of moving the nursery and the third incarnation of California Carnivores was born! Our new location is triple the size! Every day our small but devoted team works tirelessly to make California Carnivores even better. As with all transitions, sacrifices must be made. Unfortunately, the zoning of our new location doesn't allow for retail sales, so the nursery will remain closed to the public. The blessings of our new location far outweigh this downside, and we have used the extra time to really focus on reaching even more people through our online presence. Peter was overjoyed and amazed at what we accomplished.

He retired from working at CC about 4 years ago and began writing his novel, "From a Crevice in Hell". Unfortunately, he left it unfinished because he never could figure out how to end it. Writing it consumed him during those years. He always came into the nursery to tell us about it or read us the latest passages.

It starts off with the murder of a wealthy old eccentric here in Sonoma County. Someone had killed him and stolen a rare plant that he kept, called the Lucifer Plant. The old man had discovered the plant in the late 1800s as a Victorian explorer. He had been scaling a mountain in Borneo in search of new botanical wonders when he slipped into a malaria-driven delirious state…or was it another dimension? While there, aliens gifted him a seed and a mysterious metal cylinder. The plant that grew from the seed was, of course, carnivorous. When fed human flesh, the plant could create an addictive serum that gifted immortality. The old man had kept himself alive all these many years with the serum until he was murdered for the plant. The murder mystery goes from there as a horticultural writer assists a police officer with her expertise while they slowly fall for each other. Together they try and figure out who murdered the old man for the plant and for what nefarious purposes. Was it the opportunistic tissue culturist with plans to capitalize on the serum or the leader of a satanic society who have secretly worshiped the plant since its discovery? Things really heat up when someone opens the mystery cylinder, inadvertently releasing a human cordyceps plague on the world. Will the Lucifer Plant be our only hope? Sadly, we'll never know.

Peter was a very early member of the ICPS and wrote 39 articles for CPN including his "Savage Garden" series and contributed observations to the News and Views section. We surprised him with a well-earned lifetime achievement award in 2018 at the ICPS conference. The ICPS and every other carnivorous plant society in the world backed it. People lined up to speak and tell Peter how he had influenced their lives. We had a small sterling silver *Nepenthes macrophylla* pitcher made for his award. He was deeply touched and "totally blown away!"

He taught us how to grow these plants, but more than that, how to appreciate them and see the beauty in the unconventional and bizarre. So many of the people he inspired to grow carnivorous plants have gone on to inspire so many more. He called it a "slow-motion explosion," and again, he was just so amazed by how far it had blown up today.

Even when I was a boy, Peter always told me, "Take care of the plants and the plants will take care of you." I have carried this mantra in my heart for almost my entire life. I have carried it like a torch even in dark times and that light is at the very heart of the friend-family we have built here. I can tell you that building CC, and contributing to the hobbyist community hasn't always been easy. But I personally rode that mantra like a horse to a place where all my childhood dreams came true. We didn't do it for money but because we wanted to spend our lives doing what we loved. We wanted to make carnivorous plants more beautiful and more available. We wanted to share them with you so they would bring you joy and connection to the natural world too. We wanted to show you how beautiful they are, so maybe we would stop destroying them in the wild. We wanted to save the plants.

And in doing so, we have been blessed with happy lives well spent doing what we love with dear friends…making our dreams come true. I have been so grateful for every minute I spent building this nursery with Peter, and of course, with all the other people it takes today. I have been honored to gently take the reins as he retired. I'm so proud that I was able to grow the nursery until it was able to make good dreams for even more people come true too. I have seen this mantra work miraculous things in my own life, and I truly believe it could be the solution to many of man's problems today. It's a plant world, after all, and a sustainable world for humanity that depends on building cycles that turn like cogs with the natural cycles of plants. We must nurture as much as we harvest. We must give as much as we take.

For me personally, I am losing one of my oldest and best friends, a childhood idol, and someone who was just so integral to making me the person I am today. We met when I was eleven and by fourteen, I was volunteering at the nursery in exchange for plants. Our paths have been joined for so long that I can't even really imagine what my life might have been like if we had never met. "Formative" probably isn't a big enough word.

I will miss so many things about him. I will miss our long intellectual talks. I will miss the way he laughed and his mischievous smile when he cracked a joke. I will miss appreciating the plants with him. Although I am now surrounded by folks who love these plants, I cherish those connections, too. Peter and I appreciated them in the exact same way. My world is lonelier now that I can't marvel with him with child-like wonder.

I'm grateful for so much, for all the time we got to spend together and all the sarcastic jokes we shared. I'm grateful for the wonderful livelihood he gave me and for teaching me how to do it so well. I'm grateful for all the interesting books and ideas he exposed me to; for all the long fascinating talks about evolution, the origins of consciousness, UFOs, Velikovsky, and the ever-present carnivorous plants. He had such a rational yet open mind that resonated perfectly with mine, so we always had such wonderful talks about so many interesting things. I'm grateful that he lived to see the nursery become so successful. I'm grateful he got to see the new location and the beginnings of the great things we are doing here. I'm sad that he won't see all that comes next. I know he's at peace knowing his work will thrive and continue.

Worry not – the nursery is in capable hands. It has been under my careful stewardship for a long time now, ever since Peter quietly retired a few years ago. We have the best team in the biz. We will continue to expertly care for our plants and ship five days a week.

Peter's life was touched by lots and lots of people, too numerous to mention here. Please forgive me if you weren't mentioned specifically.

Peter spent most of his life carefully caring for carnivorous plants and fostering the community that grew up around them. You can continue to honor his memory by ensuring that the hobby grows. Nurture your plants and teach someone else to love them too. Above all…stay kind.

There is lots more I could say, but Peter always accused me of "blathering on" when I write, and he specifically warned me against it when I wrote this.

So, for now, I'll leave you with a Ram Dass quote that Daniela shared with me early on during this transition.

"We're all just walking each other home."

Figure 9. Damon Collingsworth with Peter D'Amato in November 2022. Photo by Daniela Ribbecke.

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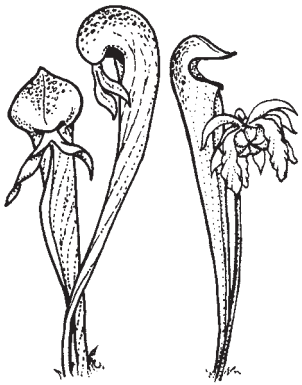

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Front Cover: Peter D'Amato sitting on a dock in North Carolina on the ICPS conference field trip in 2012. Article on page 44.

Back Cover: Checkerspot (Melitaeini) caterpillars on *Pinguicula medusina* in Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo by Arthur Yin. Article on page 66.

Carnivorous Plant Newsletter is dedicated to spreading knowledge and news related to carnivorous plants. Reader contributions are essential for this mission to be successful. Do not hesitate to contact the editors with information about your plants, conservation projects, field trips, or noteworthy events. Advertisers should contact the editors. Views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, not the editorial staff.

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