

## IN MEMORY OF A MENTOR—DON SCHNELL (1936–2019)

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A long, long, long time ago, I was a fresh graduate from college, marking time for the summer before I started graduate school. On a trip to a grocery store, I encountered a display of Venus flytraps. Smitten, I decided to try to grow them. This was not my first try. Oh no, I had tried as a child repeatedly, but killed them every time. But now, with a physics degree under my belt, I was a scientist. I would research and learn before I tried to grow the plants.

My local library had several books on carnivorous plants, but I quickly realized that they were essentially junk. Only two seemed to have merit. One—by Adrian Slack—was lovely but seemed to be pitched to a European audience. The slim book by Don Schnell, however, was just what I wanted.

And that book changed my life. It introduced me to a whole set of fascinating plants, it described how they could be grown, and most importantly, it emphasized the plants in the wild. It is probably true that I've read that book more times than any other. Indeed, to write this memorial, I pulled the book off my shelf—it's pretty beaten up—and am paging through it. As I do, I'm overwhelmed with familiarity. I've studied every sentence, every word. This book was my key to a new universe. Through modern eyes, it might seem a bit quaint—but I'm so biased I cannot see from that vantage point.

Over the years, I began a casual correspondence with Don. He was thoughtful but opinionated; tolerant of my errors, but quite ready to point them out! We discussed field observations and thoughts on (mostly) *Sarracenia*, but also *Utricularia*—which he freely admitted was inadequately treated in his book.

Then came his retreat from the International Carnivorous Plant Society, and of course Carnivorous Plant Newsletter, both of which he cofounded. I was selected as one of the next generation of enthusiasts to take over. Don was very gracious in giving us free reign over the journal, but also sent me a letter with several pages of very stern advice. I felt I was asking for his daughter's hand in marriage—and he wasn't completely sure I was qualified!

Don's legacy in botany will probably be most strongly remembered in his contributions to *Sarracenia*. He did much of the work that set the landscape for our current interpretation of the genus—even if you do not agree with all his perspectives, you cannot deny his contributions. (I continue, at every turn, to encourage the adoption of “Schnell's pitcher plant” as the common name for *Sarracenia rubra* subsp. *gulfensis*.) His second book was, once again, vastly important in summarizing our knowledge of plants in the US and Canada. And his third “book”—Carnivorous Plant Newsletter—is still in publication.

Hearing, just yesterday, that Don passed on—well, was a punch to the gut. I'm sure many will write more succinctly about his various publications and contributions to botanical history. But for me, he is most important in the influence he had in redirecting the trajectory of my life.

For a detailed discussion about Don Schnell's contribution to ICPS and CPN, see the 2011 article by Peter D'Amato, The Savage Garden: “The creation and early evolution of CPN” ([https://legacy.carnivorousplants.org/cpn/articles/CPNv40n2p56\\_59.pdf](https://legacy.carnivorousplants.org/cpn/articles/CPNv40n2p56_59.pdf)).