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# The Vireya Venture

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Issue No. 56 March 2005

## Editorial

### *Good Reception for Issue #55*

The first of the revived series of The Vireya Venture (TVV) newsletter seems to have been well received. Many people responded that they liked Issue #55 and wished us well for its continuance.

Thus far we have received responses from 42 people who want to subscribe to TVV and we expect that more will come in over the next few months. Of these responses 26 were from Australia and 16 from overseas countries, mostly the USA and Europe. Many people also sent money to help with the distribution costs – thank you very much, you are most generous.

We want to sincerely thank those of you who helped spread the word that TVV is back in circulation, particularly E White Smith, Editor of The Vireya Vine newsletter from the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Washington USA and Sherla Bertelmann, President of the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and Veryl Ann Grace, Editor of that Chapter's newsletter Viva Vireyas!

Also, a big thank you to those who sent contributions to this newsletter issue and to those who have said they will send something in the future. It is quite amazing to learn about who around the world are vireya enthusiasts and what they are doing with their plants.

Letters in this issue demonstrate that some people seem to live in a 'vireya heaven' while others struggle under difficult conditions. Hopefully TVV can help spread the word and give support to those who are isolated or 'under attack'.

Although we have started well with this revived series of newsletter we definitely need more contributions for the next issue and we also would like more subscriptions – the more



*Unnamed vireya hybrid produce by Graham Price - (R. Tropic Summer x R. zoelleri Island Sunset) x R. Robert Bates.*

the better. So, if you can pass on the message to you friends and fellow vireya enthusiasts and encourage them to subscribe it would be most appreciated.

This issue contains both chatty letters and more formal contributions – a good mix. Sorry, no free give-aways this issue. Lyn Craven was happy to receive five responses to his offer of give-away species plants. Has anyone any other vireyas they want to offer to fellow enthusiasts?

We hope you enjoy this issue of TVV.

Graham and Janet Price, Editors

Please send letters, notices, articles and requests for subscription by mail or email to:

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Fax: 03 9639 5480  
or by Email to:  
[lithic01@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lithic01@bigpond.net.au)



And a big hello from Minnie.

## Letter from Mitch Mitchell

Dear Graham and Janet,

Ever since starting our ARS Hawai'i chapter in the mid nineties we felt it was important for those of us with Vireyas to share with those who also enjoyed them. You must realize that in those days very few people even knew how to spell Vireya let alone know what it was.

So those of us with Vireyas in bloom began to take those cuttings to monthly meetings. Because I was one of the few who had been bitten by the Vireya bug at that period in time I usually had more cuttings to share. And "share" has always been our central theme, because someone taught us that the more you give away the more you have.

Early-on we decided the most practicable way to share our cuttings at meetings was with a lucky number drawing. Getting cuttings to the meetings in a presentable condition was a problem until one of our members designed and built what he called a "Flower Flute" using plastic pipe into which he drilled holes for tubes that held water.



The first photo shows what it looks like when tubes of flowering cuttings are first being inserted.

The next photo shows the completely filled Flute being admired by Dr. George Argent who was visiting us as our featured seminar speaker.



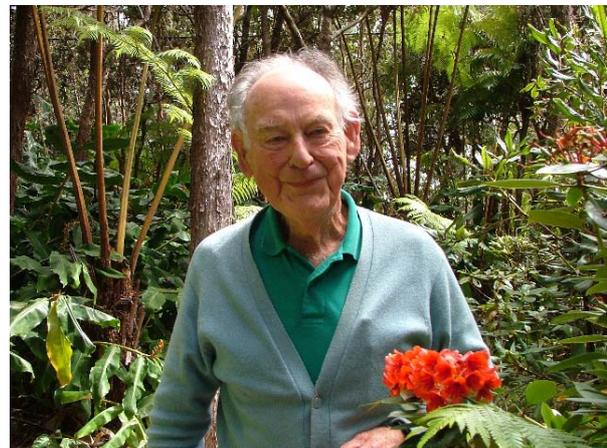
The third photo shows the Flute loaded in the boot of our station wagon just before we drove to our monthly chapter meeting.



Between meetings my wife Sandy enjoys decorating our dining room table with a centre piece of Vireyas.



And Sandy says: Mitch is always uplifted by Vireyas in bloom, particularly species like this *R. rarilepidotum*.



Mitch Mitchell Hawai'i Chapter ARS  
[mitchellr012@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:mitchellr012@hawaii.rr.com)

## NOTICE

Some recipients of T V V will already have heard this sad news, but, for those of you who haven't, here it is.

### VALE

#### DR. ROBERT (BOB) WITHERS, OAM

It is with sadness we advise of the passing, in January 2005 after a prolonged illness, of Dr. Bob Withers, a fellow vireya enthusiast and member of the Australian Rhododendron Society.

Bob was an authority on most things about vireyas and was similarly knowledgeable about camellias and lilliums. He gave generously of his time as a judge at many ARS shows and was a keen photographer of flowers. He was a successful hybridiser of vireyas, camellias and lilliums and published widely, including many articles in the ARS journal. Bob was the recipient of several honours, particularly the Order of Australia in 1995 for services to horticulture.

Many of us will long remember Bob's advice, kindness and friendship and we will miss him. We extend our deepest sympathy to his family.

Graham Price

## An Interesting New Vireya

Ed: Lyn Craven in Canberra recently advised of a new registration by the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The following is more or less Lyn's message.

From Lyn Craven 15 February 2005

Dear All,

Not being sure how many of you people belong to the US society, I thought I'd mention this item out of interest. My copy of the 'Journal Amer. Rhododendron Soc.' 59(1) 2005 arrived yesterday. I see that a Hawai'ian has registered one of the seedlings from the cross 'Hunstein's Secret' X 'White Giant' (see pp 55, 57 of that journal).

The thing of note is that the corolla proportions are more or less the same as in 'Hunstein's Secret' but up to 190 mm wide. That is a large flower! The inflorescence has up to 8 flowers and is up to 425 mm in diameter!! White Giant has pretty big flowers

but its long corolla tube detracts from the overall visual effect.

Quite some years ago now, John Rouse asked me to send away the seed of this cross for him but I cannot remember now just where it went. Certainly some went to the US and I think that some may have gone to Oz Blumhart. I wonder who else got some?

I sowed some of the seedlings and I gave a flat of seedlings to Murray McAlister and Bill Taylor a couple of years ago for the Aust. RS collection. I think you guys better whizz out and see that they are doing OK. I still have a flat of seedlings, about 600 mm tall, and I am going to separate them (when we get a cool change) and put them in separate pots. I may wait until the current youngest growth has hardened up and take a few cuttings, just in case they resent being ripped apart.

Now that this seedling in Hawai'i has shown what can be achieved, what we want to go for is the F2 of that cross. I hope that gives you people something to think about.

Best wishes, Lyn Craven

Ed: The following are photos of the two parents; leucogigas and konori, taken from the Website of Chris Callard: [www.vireya.net](http://www.vireya.net)



*R. leucogigas 'Hunstein's Secret',  
photo by W Moyles.*



*R. konori 'White Giant', photo by R Currie.*

Ed: After receiving Lyn's message I contacted Mitch Mitchell in Hawai'i and asked if he could help me find out more about the cross and who made it. Mitch sent the following reply.

17 February 2005

Dear Graham,

Yes I can help with your questions re Lyn Craven's message to you. Lyn sent seed from that cross to Bill Moyles when he ran the ARS Seed Exchange. It was given the ARS number 94-47. I understand that John Rouse made the cross: leucogigas "Hunstein's Secret" x konori "White Giant" - Craven.

I got some of that seed and from the resulting grex I propagated 3 plants. One I named and registered "Namaste" in honour of the white tiger in the Hilo Zoo where our Hawaii ARS chapter has created a Vireya public garden.

Another plant I named and recently registered it as "Sweet Marni" in honour of my granddaughter. Clearly the latter is the one Lyn Craven mentioned to you. As requested I attach a photo of the flower.

Aloha, Mitch Mitchell



*R. Sweet Marni, photo by M Mitchell*

Ed: Mitch, thanks for the information about 'Sweet Marni'. A truly wonderful flower. Maybe one day you might consider making the F2 cross yourself and then follow Lyn's example and distribute some seed around the world.

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## A Letter from Germany

14 January 2005

Dear Janet and Graham Price,

Hello this is Germany calling. Sorry my knowledge about the English language is very bad. I hope you don't get a shivering when reading these lines. That's what is left from school.

I am a reader of Vireya Vine, RSR, E. White Smith USA. Would it be possible to put me on your E-mail list for 'The Vireya Venture'? I wish you have more luck than others before.

I have just one vireya - R. kawakami, which I keep in my bathroom. In our climate you can't grow Vireyas outside - too cold in wintertime. The local authorities won't give me permission to build a greenhouse.

I live on a hillside at Wuerzburg in Lower Frankonia, northern part of Bavaria State, Germany. In other words, 1 hour by car to Frankfurt/Main-Airport.

Thank you very much Janet and Graham.

Yours sincerely,

Kratz

[hllkratz@freenet.de](mailto:hllkratz@freenet.de)

Ed: Thanks for the letter Kratz - what is your first name?. I wonder if it is possible for someone to send you a few cuttings of other vireays? - presuming of course that you want to fill your bathroom with vireays!!

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## Letter from Graham Snell

Dear Ed.,

15 January 2005

Congratulations on your effort to revive "T.V.V.". You were not the only ones to be disappointed when the newsletter went into recession (or what ever the word is) and your first edition is right up there with the best in my opinion.

Knowing how much work can be involved, both you and Janet, as well as the previous editors, deserve all the accolades we can give them for the time and effort they have put into the project. I do hope you get plenty of support, to make your editorship rewarding, as well as lightening the task.

Also, thank you for the invitation for me to write a summary of my Vireya activities for inclusion in your first issue. I hope you continue that idea as there are a number of interesting people I would like to hear about that we have lost touch with since we moved from Melbourne.

One of my disappointments in the past with such a newsletter has been that sometimes when a question is asked, or an opinion given, often there is no response. But I believe Janet must have the right approach because surely no one could not respond to her contribution.

"Flowers on Sticks" indeed. But of course she is quite right!

In the early days of growing Vireyas that is just what most of them were. Most of the early species that were grown were just sticks and a lot of the early hybrids were displayed as a flower on a stick. After all, that is how most of them grew in the wild, straggly plants stretching for the light in amongst dense grasses, other shrubs, or way up in trees growing as gangly epiphytes.

We were told they needed shade, so shade they got. And any enthusiast worth his or her salt would grow many more plants than there was space to put them in, so the pots were small and they had to be crowded together to prevent them all falling over!

So what else could the poor plants do but grow upwards, as nature had prescribed. The miracle is that they did actually flower! To emphasise the point, when nurseries started selling Vireyas, most of the plants sold were just sticks, with or without flowers, and plants distributed through Aust Rhodo. Soc. meetings were admittedly mostly young but sticks just the same.

I can assure you, Janet, that your Graham is now using tried and true methods to rectify the problem, for obviously that is how you see the natural growth habit of Vireyas to be, i.e. a problem. Roses, I haven't a clue. Hopefully someone else will respond to that one. I cannot keep roses alive, whatever their shape.

Of course there are some gardeners to whom the straggly shape of a particular plant has (artistic) appeal. Who are we mere nurserymen to question such an opinion if that is the plant they want? On one occasion I had an 8 ft. high single stemmed "Hari's Choice" in flower. It was just about touching the shade area roof and a particular customer just had to have it. The problem was, how to transport it in a relatively small sedan. I had smaller, bushier plants of the same hybrid, but no, it had to be the big one.

In the end I offered to deliver all his purchases to Brisbane and it was only when shown where it was planned to position this plant that I realised the method in the madness. The house was a high set Queenslander and not only could the flower that was just opening on top of this very tall stick be admired closely, but also the perfume could be appreciated at close quarters, from the veranda.

Of course the answer to all this lies with the breeders. A good number of compact bushy

hybrids already exist, such as "Kisses", "Apricot Soufflé", "Very Vermillion", "Haloed Gold", "Lochmin", "Cristo Rey", "Charming Valentino", "Neesa", and "Saxon Glow", to name but a few. Maybe other readers could add to this list and a complete list could be published sometime, Ed?

Once again, Congratulations. Long may your computer hum.

Graham Snell Ph. 07 54942179.  
2 CLIFFORD ST, MALENY, QUEENSLAND 4552

Ed: [Ok Graham, I'll take the suggestion and start compiling a list of compact bush hybrids. Can other enthusiast please send me their suggestions.](#)

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## Letter from Hans Brentel

23 January 2005

Dear Mrs. and Mr. Price,

I am very interested on your Vireya Venture Newsletter as I always have an interest in Vireya news.

In the last years I have made many travels looking for Vireyas - to Sumatra, Borneo Sulawesi, Flores and five expeditions in Irian Jaya (New Guinea ). I found many plants and have brought new ones into cultivation.

I am sending a picture of *Rh. glabriflorum*, which I found two years ago in the Oranje Mt. in Irian Jaya. Best Wishes.

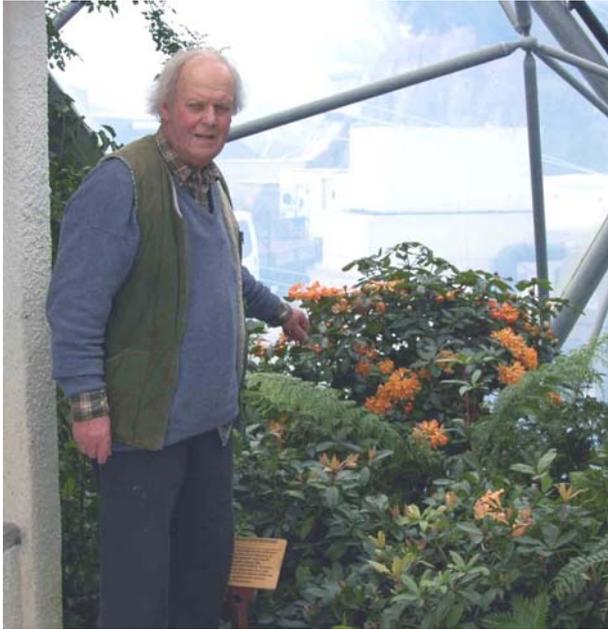
Hansjörg Brentel  
E-mail : [aon.912002871@aon.at](mailto:aon.912002871@aon.at)



*R. glabriflorum*, photo by H Brentel.

Ed: [Hans, this flower is magnificent. What is the plant like? Have you done anything with it - have you selfed or crossed it with anything? Do you have any seed? Have you distributed cuttings? Geeeeee!](#)

## VIREYAS - THE UK SCENE



*Christopher Fairweather - 21 February 2005*

Having walked through the jungles of Malaysia and wandered around Mt Kinabalu in search of vireyas, it is obvious that they thrive in this tropical hothouse.

What amazes me is that they can still thrive in our dreary U.K. winter. Perhaps thrive is too strong a word, they actually survive, which is still surprising. From the end of October until late February light levels are low. Temperatures fluctuate from a few degrees below zero to at best 10 to 15 degrees C. Perhaps global warming is helping a bit with milder winters and earlier springs.

Despite all this these exotics from a warmer climate do survive. With cost in mind we keep temperatures in their winter glasshouse quite low, giving just a few degrees above zero to keep out the frost. On my house I have an unheated conservatory and I find they live there quite happily despite the fact that temperatures must at times be only a degree or so above freezing. A few leaves turn red and some drop off. We do of course get some casualties. When spring arrives and the light and temperatures rise, they all grow away with considerable vigour.

One thing we have to watch in winter is watering. Over wet compost combined with poor light will lead to leaf drop and dead plants. So the policy is to keep the compost quite dry giving a little water once a week.

Perhaps we all suffer the same pests, not too bad here. Vine weevil we can usually control

with chemicals, even so the odd one gets through but not serious. Our most wretched pest is the long tailed mealy bug, this is a persistent little devil that is often hard to eliminate. Here the mealy bug attacks certain vireyas, especially ones with big fat buds where the pest creeps right inside. It is just a case of constant attack with various chemicals.

When the danger of frost is over, usually in late May when the Chelsea flower show is on, then all our vireyas move out to their summer quarters, under light shade. Here they flourish in our cool and sometimes damp summer weather. So what we lose in the winter we gain in the summer. All our plants remain in pots all the time. There are fairly frost free areas in the UK and a few growers in Cornwall are trying to see if they grow outside. Personally I am a bit doubtful, I think they will struggle.

Vireya growing over here is confined to a limited number of enthusiasts, which I am glad to say is growing slowly. Orchid growers are perhaps the most successful as both plants will grow happily in similar conditions. Many houses now have conservatories, which can be useful for growing vireyas during the cool months. We put up displays at some of the major flower shows and in April 2004 we put up a big stand at one of our royal horticultural Shows in London. For this we received a silver gilt medal and also the Rothschild Challenge Cup for the best Rhododendron display of the year.

So slowly we are exposing these lovely plants to a wider public and getting some recognition. Perhaps they will never become a commercial crop but we are seeing increased interest from some European pot plant growers. We supplied quite a few to the Eden project in Cornwall and I am glad to say they are doing well - Golden Charm was in full flower on my visit last week.

They remain a challenging section of the rhododendron family that was first introduced in to the UK around 150 years ago by Veitch's nursery in Exeter, Devon. So who knows they may well make a comeback. In the meantime they continue to excite us with brilliant flowers for twelve months of the year.

Christopher Fairweather

Holder of the national collection of hybrid vireyas.  
Member of the Royal Horticultural Society  
Rhododendron Committee.

Author of the booklet *Vireya Rhododendrons*.

Website: [www.vireya.co.uk](http://www.vireya.co.uk)

## More from the UK

### *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist.* Second Edition (RHS, 2004)

For the first time in more than 45 years the names of all rhododendron cultivars have been drawn together into a single publication. This new Register and Checklist incorporates a record of names known to have been used for cultivars or Groups (formally known as grexes) within the genus *Rhododendron* up to the end of December 2002. It thus covers all azaleas, azaleodendrons and vireya rhododendrons as well as the core of hardy rhododendrons. All names published in the 1958 Register and the forty subsequent supplements are included, together with a very large number of additional uses of names which have come to light in the course of ongoing research. In all some 28,000 uses of names are recorded. Nearly 700 of these are vireyas: ranging from the early Veitch hybrids through to the burgeoning stream of new cultivars from the southern hemisphere.

Duplicated uses of names are treated individually wherever they are known to have occurred. Whilst the registration system exists to try and prevent such duplication (and it has certainly helped to reduce their occurrence) no such voluntary scheme can hope to eradicate the practice of re-use entirely. It will be of value to *Rhododendron* enthusiasts to have such multiple usages highlighted with as much information provided as possible to distinguish one from another.

Botanical nomenclature and classification followed in reporting on parentage and origin of the cultivars and Groups follows the *Rhododendron Handbook* 1998 (RHS, 1997). This is based on the revision of the genus pioneered by David Chamberlain and James Cullen and published by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The vireya treatment in the Handbook represents an updated account of this section by George Argent.

When the information is available each entry lists details of parentage, the names of those involved with the raising, naming, introduction and registration of each cultivar (and the relevant dates), combined with a description of the plant. Clearly if all the information listed by the Register comes direct from the raiser or introducer this will be authentic and thus the Register builds up to be a valuable resource beyond its purely nomenclatural function.

The system of International Cultivar Registration, organised under the auspices of the International Society for Horticultural Science, exists to try and prevent name duplication and to ensure all names are formed and published according to a set of international rules (contained in the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants*). The RHS has acted as ICRA for *Rhododendron* since 1955 and makes no charges for its services, which include provision of a smart registration certificate once a new name has been registered.

However, this is a voluntary system and if it is to work and to produce useful results for the horticultural community the co-operation of all concerned is required. It should be emphasised that the Register is not there just to account for the names of the best cultivars, but all names in use. The Registrar is not responsible for assessing a plant's value or distinctness: that must be the concern of the raiser/introducer and that is the stage when vigorous selection should be practised!

Unfortunately vireya breeders have not always set a good example by registering their plants and it is due to the generosity and hard work of a number of enthusiasts (Chris Callard in particular) that the Register & Checklist contains all that it does in this regard. If the ICRA has been at fault in not promoting itself more effectively to vireya growers it is hoped that this note and the appearance of the new Register and Checklist will help bring it to the attention of more of those who share the enthusiasm for these tropical beauties.

Anyone able to add to the published accounts or point to errors is strongly encouraged to write to the International Registrar. The new Register and Checklist is currently available from the RHS at £90.00 (post free in EU, plus postage elsewhere). Orders should be sent to Simon Maughan at RHS Publications, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE (Email: [simonmaughan@rhs.org.uk](mailto:simonmaughan@rhs.org.uk)). Discounts are available for orders of 5 or more copies.

The International Rhododendron Registrar (Dr Alan Leslie) can be contacted at RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB, England (Email: [alanleslie@rhs.org.uk](mailto:alanleslie@rhs.org.uk)):. Registration forms can be obtained from this address or directly from the RHS website at: [www.rhs.org.uk/plants/registration\\_rhododendron.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/registration_rhododendron.asp) It is planned to publish Annual Supplements to the Register with the first one due out in 2005 actually covering the years 2003-2004.

Dr Alan Leslie

## Email from Dick Chaikin

Hello Graham, Florida, 11 January 2005

I am sure you do not remember meeting me in 1988, but I sure remember you and all the good folks over there. Would you please be so kind as to sign me up for the Vireya Venture revival. Haven't seen it for so long but read about it in the Vireya Vine which I just got.

All those hurricanes blew me away as far as Vireyas are concerned. Lost all except Budgen and Cape Cod Valentine and CC Sunshine, and Calavar. The last is about gone, so I quickly took some cuttings. The others were chopped down so as to grow from below. The fatalities were either blown away (planted in loose medium) or they were just destroyed by the condominium gardeners, thinking they were gone, I think. Anyway, I have very few left.

Hope things are well for you and yours. Have a very healthy, prosperous and happy year ahead.

Vireyaly yours, Dick Chaikin

[Ed: After receiving this enticing email from Dick I emailed back and asked for more information. The following is his reply.](#)

G'day Mate,  
Yes, there were two hurricanes which recently hit my area but 4 hit the state. I had researched quite thoroughly re hurricanes and temps. I found a lot of coconut palms here and knew that if one can grow those one can grow vireyas. Cold hardiness is similar for each.



*Dick Chaikin sent this photo of himself in his new habitat of Hurricane Alley in Florida.*

AND, no hurricane has hit here since 1928. It seems the Bahamas deflect them enough to either go north of us, or south of us. This time it compromised north/south and hit 2 towns north of us squarely on the nose. Thus, we were in the southeast quarter, the best of the 4. But that was not enough to protect us. We ended with many banyan trees with 10 foot root balls lying down. Seems we prune the accessory roots the plant sends down from the branches because they are unsightly. But that makes for a smallish root ball which is quite a shallow one and easy to tip over.

We had over 2600 trees damaged or down. They had to number them for insurance purposes so that's how I know how many there were. These were landscape type trees brought in from nurseries. None were here before the community was built. Now they have to replace the trees with grass, because the tree farms were also hit and there is a shortage of trees. I myself replaced one tree with a bunch of begonias! Granted there is a tiny monkey puzzle tree in the midst of them, tho.

I have found that vireyas like a loose mix similar to that of orchids. Thus, the obvious conclusion is that in high hurricane force winds, vireyas will up and run away, never to be found. I lost all my vireyas in this manner with the exception of Calavar, Cape Cod Valentine, Cape Cod Sunshine and George Budgen which were protected by the side of the house.

Suspecting that my hand injury was OK enough to do a few cuttings, I allowed Mitch Mitchell to send me a few. I have just harvested all the dead ones and realize that my injured hand is just not good enough to do it successfully.

You probably never heard, by the way, but when I went to visit a stroke victim in the hospital back in 1997, he shook my hand quite hard to prove he was still the man he was, and cracked some bones in my hand. Couple of surgeries later, I had to quit dentistry because of my lack of dexterity. And that's why I also had to quit Cape Cod Vireyas.

I have received a shipment of rooted plants from Bovees and from the Bertelmans, Sherla & Richard from Hawai'i. These are all doing quite well - 3 in flower as I write this. So, yes, I am still into vireyas. I have branched out into tropical hibiscus, which have deeper roots so they all came through well in spite of being in the open, and just started some Bomarea seeds in the hope that they might cover some of the bare spots.

Vireyaly yours, Dick Chaikin

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[Ed: The next Issue of The Vireya Venture , Issue # 57, is scheduled for production and distribution in June 2005.](#)

Goodnight from Minnie.

