**‘The Fall and Rise of Lazarus’**

Long standing member Ed gave a presentation around his Swamp Cypress nicknamed “Lazarus” in recent years. This tree has gone through a major renovation due to some interesting circumstances. Read on for more details….

This tree has belonged to Ed for many years and in its earlier form it was grown as a formal upright, meaning the present large deadwood was the originally the main trunk of a slightly larger tree. This tree won a number of awards over the years and was Ed’s pride and joy. As it was growing, it constantly sat in water and he would throw fertilizer into the water each week.

Unfortunately at one of these times he mistook a bag of copper sulphate for his regular fertilizer and unwittingly gave the tree a heavy dose of copper sulphate. The tree became poorly and realizing what had happened, he removed it from the tainted water and immediately planted it in the ground, where he waited to see if the damage was fatal.

The tree lost all leaves and for all appearances was dead and gone, much to Ed’s distress. Even scraping on the trunk and branches, no living tissue was to be seen. Ed said his ‘goodbyes’ and had a bonsai funeral (like us all) but in his words, “I just couldn’t just throw the carcass away”. For some reason known only to him, he watered the carcass, when eventually he was amazed and thrilled to see a small twig starting to emerge from the side of the ‘dead’ trunk and where it earned the well-deserved nickname ‘Lazarus’, rising from the dead.

With careful attention, this small shoot was grown on and developed over just a few short years, was trained and wired into its present form you see today. The main trunk was taken off and torn away with jin pliers, but has not been carved at all. The large jin has been painted with lime sulphur to help preserve the naturally soft wood and to give a lighter weathered appearance. It now grows in a medium of pure diatomite and is fertilized weekly with Charlie Carp and Seasol.

For the benefit of the members, Ed invited member Craig to provide a critique on the tree in its present form and to discuss possible future options.

FYI - A critique should only be at the invitation / permission of the owner of the tree and is intended not to ‘pick it to bits’, but to provide a considered appraisal of the tree in accordance with established bonsai “rules”. The intention should be to highlight the positives of the tree and discuss any possible actions to address its flaws. It should be a positive and educational event. Any faults of the tree will be pointed out with the intention of discussing what can be done to either eliminate or reduce or mitigate their appearance.

Craig’s Critique of Lazarus

What is the feature of the tree in its present state? The stump is the feature, therefore it may be best to further grow and train the tree with this feature in mind.

The tree now is perhaps too strong and vigorous for the stump and is actually competing for the viewer’s attention, as per Craig’s single drawn image. If the tree were to be tilted to the right, but as a left facing semi cascade (as per the two drawn images) with the growth quite reduced and the stump worked over some more, you’ll notice this gives the illusion of a more powerful tree of a cypress surviving through adversity and (copper sulphate) hardship.

Also consider the thickness of the branches. In general, it is too difficult to work with branches that are too thick for the structure of the tree. If we don’t deal with thick branches now, there will be bigger problems with the structure in the future. Bonsai is about cutting back and growing on. It is easier to grow on thinner branches than to hide or deal with branches that are too thick.

We should be letting our trees grow out and develop strong growth, then cutting them back past where we want them to be, in order to get new advantageous growth that is trainable. This is the cycle of developing health and vigorous bonsai.