



CBS PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR VOLUME 67

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CBS PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR VOLUME 67

Dear Colleagues,

Normally, this end-of-year President's Report would have been written from start to finish by the recently elected incoming President of the Society: a botanist who, normally, would have been elected by affirmation among wine-fueled toasts at the Society's annual banquet, which, normally, would have been held in the previous spring. This new President would, normally, have had the benefit of several months' worth of Council meetings to become familiar with the current year's milestones, activities, and discussions before embarking on the, normally, happy task of writing their first President's Report. In any normal year, the first two sentences of President's Report would not include five uses of the words "normally." But the year 2020 has been so rife with exceptions, delays, shattered protocols, professional catastrophes, and personal tragedies that few formalities — including the drafting of this report — have remained untouched. Below, we reflect on the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ebb and flow of Society business as well as on the ways in which, by forging ahead to conduct business as usual, we enjoyed some very bright spots, too.

The pandemic's first mark on our year took form in the Council's decision to postpone the 2020 annual banquet — scheduled to take place in early April — for what we first thought might be only a few months, but what we now know will be for more than a year. Given all that has happened since April 2020, it's hard to imagine now how difficult this decision was when we had to make the call in early March. Were we being too cautious? Had we lost our sense of adventure? Would it be safe for the Society president (in lockdown in New Haven, CT) to fly to San Francisco? None of us has any second thoughts now about the wisdom of the judgement to cancel the banquet, but it was a decision not lightly taken, as the banquet is such a high point of our year. Moreover, Brett Hall, our host for the event, which was to take place in the Arboretum of the University of California, Santa Cruz, had planned a set of festivities that the Council was anticipating with great joy.

The pandemic's second mark on the Society's annual cycle was its effect on the transition between presidents. Between stay-at-home orders, cramped home offices, remote teaching, recording lectures, and the childcare challenges that boggled millions of minds throughout the western U.S., the pandemic disrupted everyone's lives so deeply that the Council realized that we had to re-think how best to approach the usually exciting and high-spirited challenge of selecting and successfully inviting a (normally)

unsuspecting colleague to serve a three-year presidential term. We recognized, too, that the pandemic had unambiguously reduced to a tiny sliver everyone's "extra" bandwidth (which is never abundant to begin with!) for taking on new responsibilities. So, we wanted to wait a bit until everyone had time to adjust to the "new normal" before seeking a new president. And, without a banquet packed with post-field-trip botanists ready to pass the proverbial torch, the Council had to devise a Plan B for how to transfer the office of president. So, in short, the Council was slow to pop the question to the candidates who we coveted for the job, and it took a little longer than usual for the decision to be made. Happily, in a great stroke of luck, the Society's incoming President, Dr. Amy Litt, accepted the Council's invitation to lead the Society for the next three years, while the outgoing President, Dr. Susan Mazer, promised to show her the ropes. Dr. Litt's election was cemented by the Society's members through an online vote, but the protracted process resulted in yet another mark of the pandemic on the Society, which is that this President's Report is being written not by one president, but by both of us. In short, this is not a President's Report, but a Presidents' Report.

As the two of us considered the past year, we noted several bright glimmers that are worthy of note. First is the Council itself. The Society has greatly benefitted from the insights and suggestions of its First Vice President, Dr. Joshua Der (California State University, Fullerton), which are consistently innovative and productive. Similarly, the Council's two new members at large, Dr. Muriel Poston (Pitzer College) and Dr. Nishi Rajakaruna (Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo), and our Outreach Coordinator, Dr. Lorena Villanueva-Almanza (a recent PhD from the University of California, Riverside), provide both energy and wisdom that will help us to design and to usher in our collective commitment to increase diversity in, and accessibility of, the botanical professions. Our newsletter, *Nemophila*, was designed and published under the creative hand of Josie Lesage (PhD student, University of California, Santa Cruz), a position that in the upcoming year will be assumed by Dr. Rachael Olliff Yang (a newly minted PhD at the University of California, Berkeley), who will be stepping down as our Membership Chair. And, of great importance, looking back through the whole of the last presidential term, Susan Mazer is particularly grateful for the guidance and steel-trap-historical-memories of Nancy Morin (Recording Secretary), David Margolies (Treasurer), Andrew Doran (Member at Large), and the tireless leadership of *Madroño* Editor in Chief, Dr. Justen Whittall (Santa Clara University),

who also took on double duty in his service as a judge and award-granter at the Santa Cruz and Santa Clara County (virtual) science fairs in spring 2020. The four \$100 first-place awards and two \$50 second-place awards granted to these young botanists by the Society are perhaps the happiest payments we made this year, and were likely among the most appreciated checks received!

But the science fair award winners weren't the only promising botanists to receive funds from the Society in 2020. In spring, we received 13 compelling applications for the Paul Silva Student Grants, awarded annually. As was the case in 2019, the Council was unable to restrain ourselves from granting four awards (up from the historical average of two awards per year). Ernesto Chavez-Velasco (University of California, Santa Cruz) will use his grant to investigate interactions between coastal fog and drought, and how they affect water use and endophytic fungi in the coastal prairies of California. We've all wondered whether and how coastal fog may mitigate drought stress, but Ernesto's work will take the extra steps of examining how fog may affect fungal virulence and how moisture may affect the ability of endophytic fungi to become established. Jenna Ekwealor (University of California, Berkeley) will explore the roles and genetic basis of UV tolerance and UV protection in mosses of the Mojave Desert. How do those gametophytes do it? Jacob Ewald (California State University, Chico) will conduct a challenging project on *Mimulus guttatus* and *M. glaucescens* to evaluate which of 14 prospective reproductive isolating mechanisms prevent hybridization between these species in the wild (or *do* they hybridize after all?). Finally, Michael Mulrow (California State University, Chico) will examine the factors determining community composition in lichen communities of ultramafic and sandstone outcrops across a maritime gradient in California. The combinations of field, greenhouse, and lab work represented by these studies hold the promise of unraveling the kinds of vexing botanical mysteries that are impossible to ignore if you spend any time observing plants outdoors.

Several other hopeful thoughts and plans for action comprise our consideration of 2020. Now that we're all so Zoom-adapted, the feasibility of reaching large audiences to spread the word about western U.S. botanical research has increased exponentially. Accordingly, the Council is now consider-

ing how to take advantage of this medium to promote short-talks, mini-symposia, dissertation defenses, and full research seminars of Society students, postdocs, and faculty, particularly botanists of color. We know that educators are increasingly recognizing, and helping students to appreciate, the contributions and accomplishments of botanists of color (explore the *Growing Black Roots: The Black Botanical Legacy* lecture series sponsored by Holden Forests & Gardens), and the Council looks forward to assembling and disseminating among educators ways in which we can all make our courses and research groups maximally welcoming to everyone who has a soft spot for plants. The future of Botany – and the natural world – depends on such openness, and we welcome your ideas for how we can achieve it. And, while we're on the topic, please don't hesitate to contact us or anyone else on the Council if you would like to consider serving as a Council member or to suggest a prospective member for our consideration. We're currently seeking a new Membership Chair, Corresponding Secretary, and Outreach Coordinator, so if you're looking for one of the most engaging service positions available anywhere, this could be a great match.

Sincerely,



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