Dear Reader:

As this little volume is a series of communications between two friends deeply involved in the improvement of ornamental hibiscus, it seems quite appropriate that the usual introduction found on the lead pages of most books be presented in the form of a letter to the reader. After all, anyone interested in ornamental hibiscus is a friend of the writer and, therefore, a joint addressee of the letters reproduced herein.

First in order is a presentation of the leading characters. The reader is advised that precedence in naming the first one is not dictated by her knowledge of the genetic history of ornamental hibiscus, but by her charm, and willingness to sacrifice self-interest and conform to the wishes of a somewhat ephemeral husband. I refer to Ella, the little four-foot eleven-inch tall lady I married 57 years ago. While she appreciates the beauty of hybrid hibiscus, her hobby is Yorkshire Terrier dogs. She has been a fancier of the breed since 1933 and has many American and Mexican champions to her credit. Obviously, her service as "Madame Secretary" of the world-wide search for new hibiscus species meant that she had to give up, for the time at least, her own hobby.

The second and third in our list of characters should be introduced together - the writer, and Joe Staniford the recipient of these letters. However, to Mrs. Sue Schloss, dynamic and apparently indefatigable Executive Secretary of the American Hibiscus Society and editor of "Seed Pod" must go the credit for the publication of "Hibiscus Around the World". Here's why:

Several years ago the writer Xeroxed several copies of "Letters to Joe", written on the first "expedition," and bound them in booklet form. A copy was sent to the American Hibiscus Society for its "Archives". Sue read this and insisted they be published, together with letters on the second and third "expeditions".

The history of the writer's love affair with hibiscus is made clear in the letters which follow, but Joe Staniford's place in the hobby, although substantial, has not been told.

He began as a collector, as did the writer, in the early 1950's and by 1956 had all of the varieties available locally in his yard in Pasadena. That year one of his associates (he was then Assistant Chief Architect for the County of Los Angeles) called his attention to an article in the National Horticultural Magazine concerning the new interest in the hybridization of hibiscus in Florida by members of the American Hibiscus Society. My name was mentioned as being one of the founders of that organization in 1950 and an active member of the group participating in improving ornamental hibiscus.

Surprised to learn that another "aficionado" lived close by, Joe called on me and recalled in a recent letter that "you loaded me down with a large number of varieties that I did not have". Joe and I became close friends and he soon became "hooked" on hybridizing, an avid pollen duster, adept at grafting and proper handling of propagation material.
I had already become associated with the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum at Arcadia, close to my ranch at Monrovia and not far from Joe's home. He began to spend part of his Saturday and Sunday mornings at the Arboretum with me. We set up a project designed to develop hardier cultivars for Southern California conditions, crossing such cross-compatible species as were then available to us. These included the Hawaiian whites, H. arnotttianus and H. waimeae and the Hawaiian reds, called H. kokio. Later, H. denisonii, origin unknown, was added to our list.

In 1961 I was offered a position as managing director of British subsidiary of the Germain Seed Company, Los Angeles, with headquarters in London. Germain had purchased the Filcoat Process for pelleting seed and had been approached by the British Sugar Corporation to set up a cooperative research deal leading up to an exclusive distribution contract with the Sugar Corporation. My job was to work in close cooperation with the agriculturists of the 17 sugar beet factories in England and Scotland, making field tests, etc. Pelleting seed made it possible to use spacing planters, thus eliminating costly thinning. I was quite surprised to learn that there were 420,000 acres of sugar beets planted annually in the British isles, but after the first season, when it seemed that I had seen every acre, I was sure this figure was correct.

Ella and I spent three years in England. However, we always came home for the late fall and winter months.

Joe "minded the store" while I was away and reported the progress of our project faithfully. And all was not sugar beets with me - I spent my spare time at the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society, and in the library of the British Museum of Natural History. I was able to read just about everything in print on ornamental hibiscus, and copy many old color prints of the flowers.

In 1963 Joe and I decided that we must have other cross-compatible species for use in our project and thus began the first of our "expeditions". This was, in effect, a return to my job in England by the way of the Pacific Ocean.

We left Los Angeles the middle of October, 1963, and arrived in England late in February, 1964. The letters that follow were written during this trip. Letters written on the second and third "expeditions" with a suitable explanatory introduction are also included in this volume.

As ever,
Ross H. Gast

P.S. Joe Staniford retired as Chief Architect for the County of Los Angeles in 1976 and now owns a condominium in Hawaii where he spends several months a year. He has again become a collaborator, assisting with my work on the Hibiscus Evolutionary Garden, Waimea Arboretum.


PART ONE
October 20, 1963 - March 1, 1964

Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Malaya, Ceylon, India, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea

Honolulu, Hawaii
October 20, 1963

Dear Joe:

Thirty years have passed since I called Hawaii home, years which have not let me forget the old Island saying: "to leave Hawaii is to die a little". However, it has been my good fortune to have been able to return often and while saddened by the commercialism of the Islands, nothing has really changed for me. Sitting here tonight on the lanai of this garish Waikiki Beach hotel, I can close my eyes to the glare of tourism, and the soft caress of the trade winds and the sensuous fragrance of the tropical night brings to me the same feeling of tranquility, repose and mutuality of spirit that I knew in my earlier Hawaiian years.

So if I fail to do all of things I promised to do, and do not visit all of the people I promised to see during my ten-day visit here, I know you will understand and forgive me. I am again involved in an old love affair, one that began thirty years ago; as with a well-loved woman, Hawaii's favors are irresistible.
But I do want to write you frequently during our journey to England by the back way, so to speak, to share my hibiscus happenings and observations. These letters will be poor pay for the stay-at-home job of minding our Los Angeles State and County Arboretum hibiscus project. Baby-sitting for a thousand hibiscus seedlings and a sizable "stud farm" of parent stock is a real chore. Andy, you have promised to graft in all of the scion wood I send along from foreign parts, under official permit. I'll try to be selective, but you know me when I have a sharp knife and a new hibiscus crosses my path!

Also, I hope to get off the seat of my swim trunks long enough to do some more research on the history of hibiscus in the Pacific area. About all we know is that Captain James Cook found a double red which his botanist called H. *flora plena* - double flowered hibiscus - in Tahiti when he made his first visit there in 1769. Early explorers also saw this species in Tonga, the Marquesas, and other Pacific island groups settled by the Polynesians. E.D. Merrill, great Pacific botanist, calls it "a pre-Magellan, man-introduced ornamental species from the West", referring, of course, to the East Indies.

Banks and Solander - the latter having been Captain Cook's botanist - recorded the double red in their journals as the species H. *rosa-sinensis*, for Linnaeus has so classified it in 1753. This same double red was the first flower in this classification to be described in European horticultural literature, having been called *Ketmia Javanica* by Gilbert Miller, who is said to have been the first to grow H. *rosa-sinensis* in Europe in 1731. He described the double red in an early edition of his Gardener's Dictionary. *Ketmia* is an old name for hibiscus, yet I have seen no reference as to its being a native of Java, as the name would imply.

But in this connection, it is interesting to speculate on the fact that the Polynesian people were supposed to have originally come from India and through the East Indies, thus probably brought the hibiscus with them. The late Peter Buck, famous Polynesian anthropologist and for many years director of the Bishop Museum here, in his *Vikings of the Sunrise* says: "... in remote ages the ancestors of the Polynesian people probably did live in some part of India and worked east, but myths and legends transmitted orally do not reach back that far. They must have sojourned in Indonesia in order to reach the Pacific; the Polynesian language has affinities with Indonesian dialects. During their stay in Indonesia, saltwater entered their blood and changed them from landsmen to seamen, and ... they turned their gaze toward the eastern horizon and embarked upon one of the greatest of all adventures".

Still another anthropological relationship between Polynesian migration and hibiscus species which are cross-compatible is the fact that when peoples now called Polynesians left India and pushed into the Pacific by the way of Indonesia, other waves of the same stock are said to have turned southward in their double-hulled canoes to populate the African coast bordering the Indian Ocean, and particularly the islands of Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius. And it is precisely in this area - and only in this area - that have been found hibiscus which are cross-compatible with H. *rosa-sinensis*, the native Hawaiian white and reds , and the endemic Fijian species H. *storckii*. These are H. *schizopetalus* of Southeast Africa and H. *liliflorus* from Mauritius and possibly H. *denisonii*, origin unknown.

Apparently the distribution of in the Pacific by the Polynesians did not reach either extremities of their migration, New Zealand on the south, and Hawaii on the north. While the Maoris of New Zealand, like the Hawaiians, have no written history, there is nothing in their orally descended history or mythology to indicate that H. *rosa-sinensis* reached either island group.

The double red hibiscus is not the only Asian native plant which is believed to have been carried into the Pacific during the Polynesian migrations, but its presence there was discussed freely by Eighteenth Century botanists because it was the only double flowering plant found in the Southern Hemisphere at that time, either native or introduced. Apparently the hibiscus had been the subject of a great deal of human selection, from either sports or chance seedlings, before it was taken into the Pacific. In fact, it was fifty years after the first double hibiscus was introduced in Europe that the single appeared in English greenhouses. By this time, the English had introduced from China and were growing crimson, yellow, buff and even white varieties of double hibiscus.

Of particular interest to me is H. *storckii*, found by Dr. Berthold Seemann on the Fijian island of Taveuni, and is described by him as a low-growing shrub with a light pink flower in his Flora Vitiensis published in 1865. He named it for his assistant, Jacob Storck. As you know, one of the reasons why I am stopping off in Fiji is to try to locate this species, although I am informed that it has been lost to cultivation. It has the same chromosome count as the hibiscus species we are now using in our work at the Arboretum, and thus could be valuable to us.

It is rather strange that propagating material of H. *storckii* was not brought to England at the time of its discovery, for Dr. Seemann worked with Kew Gardens and was sending back material to Kew Herbarium. Furthermore, hibiscus was at the height of its popularity as a "stove plant" in England during this period and many new forms of -H. *rosa-sinensis* and other hibiscus species were offered by nurserymen.
Later: After several years of study of the Mascarene species it is now believed that like the Hawaiian reds, there are several forms closely allied to *H. Lililíflor*, including *H. fragilis, H. columnaris* and others yet unnamed. The writer has some of these in his greenhouse, under observation. - RG

Another reported species which interests me is *H. denisonii*, which we now have, but have not was yet bloomed. It will cross with the species with which we are working. Little is known of the origin of this one; it was brought to England by B.S. Williams, English nurseryman, about 1875, and offered by him as a pot plant because the very small plants produced "large creamy white flowers", and modern horticultural literature still refers to it as a white. It was apparently named for William Denison, Governor of New South Wales, at the time the first material was sent to Kew, and the same man who sponsored Dr. Seeman's stay in Fiji.

I saw and photographed *H. denisonii* at Kew a year ago and recorded it in my notes as being a "delicate pink" in color. The color photographs were taken in a poor light but they also show the flower to be pink. Both Paul Weissich and Dr.Y. Tachibana have *H. denisonii*, and they confirm the fact that it is pink in color, although turning to white late in the day. So I am beginning to wonder if *H. denisonii* and *H. storckii* could be one and the same. On this trip, I hope to be able to see the true *H. cameronii*, for as you know, there has been a horticultural scramble on this one for over a hundred years, in fact, almost since its introduction into England from Madagascar in 1837. I am now convinced that the *H. cameronii* as described in most modern horticultural literature, is not the true *H. cameronii*, for as you know, there has been responsible for listing *H. cameronii* as one of the progenitors of the modern hibiscus hybrids in a lot of literature on the subject, including my own. What has been erroneously called *H. cameronii* is the pink known by many names, *Puahi Bishop* in Hawaii, and *Versicolor* in Southern California and Florida. It is very popular in Fiji and other Pacific Islands, and goes under many different names. Although certain reports from India indicate that *H. cameronii* has been crossed with *H. rosa-sinensis*, there is no proof that these crosses, too, were not with the pink referred to above. Dr.Y. Tachibana of the Osaka Botanic Garden reports that he has been unsuccessful in his efforts to cross the true *H. cameronii* with *H. rosa-sinensis*, but I want to see it and possibly secure seed, as it may be a candidate for the ancestral species for which we are seeking.

All has not been hibiscus here in spite of the fact that my letters might indicate this to be true. I have been spending of my time waist deep in the surf, photographing my grandson Roddy who, as you know, is on his second visit to Hawaii with us. He now comes in on the big waves, standing up on his board, and of course I must record this on film. Also, I sit on the beach a great deal, waiting for people to say: "Who is that little boy on a surfboard, coming in standing up on those great big waves?" Then I quickly answer "That's my grandson, Rodney. He's only eleven years old."

I go on to tell them just what a smart youngster he is in every way, so as I give them the full background on this remarkable lad. But I fail to understand why they seem so disinterested, particularly when I am just trying to answer their question.

As ever,
Ross

Honolulu, Hawaii
October 24, 1963

Dear Joe:

I was reminded of my own early years in Hawaii yesterday when I visited the office of Paul Weissich, Director of Botanic Gardens here. There I renewed my acquaintance with Mrs. Colin Potter, Mr. Weissich's office manager. Mrs. Potter is the daughter of the late Allen Bush, for many years in charge of the grounds of the University of Hawaii, and one of the most avid pollen dusters of his day.

When I arrived in Honolulu in 1935 for a "tour of duty" in the University Agricultural Extension Service, about fifty per cent of the plantings on the campus were hibiscus. I was attracted by the great variation in form and color of the blooms. While my own specialty was vegetables, I had already had a few years in the dahlia hobby and inclined toward floriculture. Each morning I looked for new colorings in the grounds plantings, and observed that many of them were covered with little white tags. These were Mr. Bush's markers, I learned, the record of his crosses. I began to follow him around the campus when he was doing his "dusting", and in a very short time, was "hooked". While it was not possible for me to go into the hobby on my own for a few years, my interest in hibiscus dates back to those walks and talks with Allen Bush.
The Kapiolani Hibiscus Garden here has been closed for several months because a large number of the plants were lost, largely from chlorosis. However, a thorough job of soil renovation has been done and the plantings beds have been raised to provide better drainage. According to Mr. Weissich, the Garden will be re-planted in a few weeks with plants provided by the members of the local hibiscus Society and the Botanic Garden nursery. In addition to a large display of modern hybrids, the garden will have its educational side, with all of the Hawaiian native hibiscus represented, as well as many of the "oldies" - first generation hybrids developed in the early days of hibiscus hybridizing in the Islands.

So as to have an authentic representation of the native Hawaiian species, Mr. Weissich has made several field trips to other islands during the past two years. On one of these he brought back a new form of *H. arnottianus* from Kauaii. It is now established in the Garden, a real beauty - pure white, a tre-mendous bloomer and one can smell the fragrance almost from the moment one enters the Garden. I've sent cuttings of this to you, together with scion wood of a large number of other species and varieties. Also, I have asked Mr. Weissich to send you a ground plan for the Hibiscus Garden so that we can use this in laying out the proposed hibiscus garden at the South Coast Arboretum.

Other than Augie Miller, I have not visited any of the local breeders yet. It is my understanding that only the Millers, Nagao and Asato, are very active at this time, but, as I said, I have not been around very much.

My visit with the Millers was, as usual, a real inspiration. They are sticklers for form, color and, above all, petal substance. What is more, they recognize the importance of sound plant structure. In recent years both the Millers and Nagao have released varieties under which winter quite well with us. The Millers have some unreleased beauties as well as some fairly new ones which are not as yet known on the mainland.

Hawaii has been called the "melting pot of the races", and so it has been with hibiscus. However, I did not realize the extent to which the pioneers in this field had drawn on other parts of the world for hibiscus species and cultivars to use with their own native species until I turned up two articles on this subject in the Archives of Hawaii the other day, both published in the "Friend", an early Hawaiian magazine. One was written by Alonzo Gartley, and appeared in 1913. Gartley is credited with having produced *Agnes Galt*, perhaps the most widely grown hibiscus in Southern California today, and the other was authored by Gerrit Wilder and published in 1920. Wilder is known for the several cultivars named for various members of his family, some of them still grown in California and elsewhere.

These articles, with the Hawaiian Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 29, "Ornamental Hibiscus in Hawaii", which was issued in 1913, give us a clear picture of hybridizing efforts in the islands during the period 1900-1925 when thousands of hybrids were produced and shown in Hawaii.

I am sending copies of the articles mentioned above, and perhaps we can have them published in the American Hibiscus Society quarterly "Seed Pod".

In this connection, folks here seem quite surprised when I ask for cuttings of some of the older forms rather than of the modern hybrids. They cannot understand why such varieties could be of interest to us, even when I explain that these "oldies" are to be used in our breeding program at the Arboretum, a program designed to develop hardier cultivars for Southern California conditions. Hardiness is something they cannot recognize as important, for theirs is the ideal climate for hibiscus and plant and root vigor are not a problem here. Yet, it seems that in spite of their advantages, the old introduced forms are most commonly seen in dooryard and park plantings; although they are referred to as "hedge hibiscus", they are the varieties which persist, even here. So I think that we are on the right track in collecting these forms for our work.

Unfortunately, anyone who wants to go back to first principles here in Hawaii finds it difficult to locate many of the fine old F1 seedlings which were the result of the work of Giffard, Gartley, Holt, Wilder, and others. In fact, it is almost impossible to find many of the varieties developed by the late J.A. Johnson who died in 1947. I brought over a list given to me by Mr. Johnson in 1946 as being the varieties which he used as the basis of his own breeding program, but could not locate any of them. Undoubtedly they would be called "primitive varieties" by Hawaiian breeders today, but I have had them all at one time or another, and I am sure that many of them represented the foundation stock from which many of the exotic modern hybrids were developed.

It may be of interest to you that on this list was one called Hawaiiana. Mr. Johnson told me that it was a form of Hawaiian native white which he had collected in the Puuulu district of Oahu. It is very fragrant, as you know, and until a few years ago I believed that it was a native form. However, later classifications by Roe and Degener indicate that Hawaiiana is quite possibly a F1 hybrid, with *H. arnottianus* as one parent. But this one was the "daddy" of Ross Estey, Roddy Boy, and many other varieties which we
now use in our breeding program. I sent it down to Florida quite early in 1948, as I remember, and L.K. Thompson used it in producing that fine yellow named for the late great Florida plantsman, Jim Hendry.

This trip to Hawaii has fully hardened my conviction that while Hawaiian hibiscus fanciers have led the world in the development of the flower as a novelty bloom and will undoubtedly continue to do so, our own efforts in Southern California must take a different direction. Because of our climatic conditions, we must go back to earlier forms and continue to develop strong plant and root qualities first, then gradually improve the bloom. Of course, those of us with greenhouses can bloom and enjoy the Hawaiians, and even develop a few exotics of our own. But for landscape planting we must have special types, "tailored" to our own conditions, hibiscus which will fit in every garden and respond to ordinary care. Only in this way can the beauty and satisfaction of our hobby flower be enjoyed by everyone, thus giving our work any degree of horticultural significance.
We leave here for Fiji on October 27; we will put our grandson on a plane for Los Angeles before we take off for Suva. As I told you in my last letter, the self-styled "King of the Junior Surfers" spends most of his daylight hours with his beach boy pal, Mene, out where the high ones break. Both of us will leave here with regret, but for different reasons.

As ever,
Ross

November 1963

Suva, Fiji
November 1, 1963

Dear Joe:

We, like Fiji, and the Fijians, even on such a short acquaintance. This morning we were served tea in our room by a Fijian houseboy who wore a huge hibiscus over his right ear, and after dinner tonight we had coffee in the hotel's "Hibiscus Room". And during the day we visited a number of local hibiscus hobbyists who were proud to show us their fine collections. However, before I tell you about these visits, I should give you a bit of background on Fiji.

Fiji is a British Crown Colony, and might be called "Little England" in may ways. For anyone who has lived in Great Britain feels very much at home here - bed and breakfast hotels, morning and afternoons teas, driving on the left hand side of the road, and the colorful ceremony of changing the guard at the Governor's Palace in Suva every morning.

The group consists of over 300 islands, less than half of which are inhabited. Most of them are of volcanic origin and are thus "high islands". The total land area is 7,000 square miles, more than half of this being the principal island, Vita Levu, on which Suva, the capital, is situated. Other large islands are Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and Kadavu. There is a population of approximately 415,000 people, of which 205,000 are Indians, 175,000 native Fijians, and 11,000 Europeans, Chinese, Rotumans and part-Europeans. The Fijian people are classed as Melanesian, but as there has always been close contact with Tonga and Rotuma, both populated with Polynesians, the Polynesian influence is strong.

Abel Tasman, the Dutch explorer, sighted a few of the Fiji Islands in 1643, but it was not until 1800 that the first white settlers came - most of them deserters from English and American whaling ships. By 1860, British interests were discussing annexation and this was effected in 1874 when the ruling Fijian chiefs signed over complete sovereignty to England.

The Colony is ruled by an Executive Council and a Legislative Council, presided over by a Crown appointed Governor. Both bodies have European, Indian and Fijian representatives elected by popular vote. The political situation here is rather complex due to the population make-up, and they will have to face some tough political programs in a few years, it seems.

The principal economic activities in Fiji are sugar production, gold mining, and tourism, the latter becoming more important each year. Fiji also produces an appreciable tonnage of copra.

Before we left Los Angeles, I had been in correspondence with Mrs. Jean Murray of Suva, the Arboretum correspondent in Fiji. I told her that I wanted to stop off in Fiji not only to try to locate H. storkii, but also to see the Islands. I told her that H. storkii did not seem to be represented in collections around the world, and that presumably Fiji was the only place to find it. She wrote
Later: Proving that I am a poor political pundit, Fiji was given her independence a few years ago, and the change has not met with any political problems. - RG

On our arrival in Suva; Mrs. Murray showed us through her beautiful estate. She has a nice collection of hibiscus, many of them recent Hawaiian hybrids. As I had sent her some seed a year or two ago, she had two of my seedlings in bloom; they were not outstanding as to flower, but one plant, obviously a Hawaiian seedling, was ten feet high.

We have also checked over the large hibiscus plantings in the Botanic Garden and other public gardens, but nothing resembling H. storckii was in evidence. These gardens had some old Hawaiian varieties pictured in Bulletin 29, with many cultivars which I took to be local hybrids of these varieties. I have sent you scion wood of these.

We next visited with K.C.L. Perks, who has the largest collection of hibiscus in Fiji, insofar as we could learn. Furthermore, he is a hibiscus enthusiast of the Stanford-Gast school - all out for the flower. He, too, had most of the new Hawaiian hybrids, but he favors the older varieties, particularly the ones which he believes were originated in Fiji, varieties which he is trying to preserve. Here again we had much in common.

Perks has never seen H. storckii, or heard of it by name, either. He did have one plant which appeared to be much like that described by Seemann, but it was not a pink - it was a white with a pink flush over part of the petals. I took it as one candidate for H. storckii, but with no real conviction that I had found the endemic Fijian species.

Through friends in New Zealand, we were contacted by Mr. and Mrs. Sandy Muir, also hibiscus fanciers. They drove us up to their lovely home in the hills above Suva. As we entered their living room, my eye caught a flash of color on a low center table and it turned out to be a beautiful arrangement of Ross Estey. I thanked them for their thoughtfulness in featuring this particular flower and they replied that inasmuch as they had bought it in California, they would display it for a Californian. Naturally, our hosts were greatly surprised and delighted when I told them that it was one of my own originsations, named for grandson Ross Estey Walton. I was thrilled, you may be sure, to find "Ross" in such a beautiful setting; the flowers were huge - larger by at least an inch than they are in California.

I asked the Muirs if they had ever heard of H. storckii, and they had not. However, Mrs. Muir said that there were a lot of Storck's descendants living in Fiji. Later, I did meet Vincent Storck, grandson of the man for whom Seemann named the species. He is the owner and operator of an excursion launch business in Suva. He told me that his grandfather, a botanist, had sailed from Europe to Australia with Dr. Seemann in 1856, and when the latter was sent to Fiji in 1860, Storck came along as assistant. He did not return to Europe, however, but settled back in "the bush", about 50 miles up the Rewa River on Vita Levu. He continued to collect plants and send them to Kew and other gardens throughout the world, but there remains no record of what he sent. Today, the Storck homestead has gone to jungle, to be reached only with great difficulty by river boat and by foot. It was hardly possible that any plantings, or even dwellings, remained, Vincent Storck said, so I ruled out a visit there.

Hoping that he might give me a lead, I visited John Parham, the Government botanist, who is just finishing reading the page proofs of a new book on the flora of Fiji. He said that he had collected for many years on Fiji, but had not seen H. storckii.

When I was in Mr. Parham's office, I was able to see his copy of Seemann's Flora Vitiensis and again check his description of H. storckii, and to see the colored drawing of this species. As the drawing was made in England, from herbarium material, and from Seemann's written description, it is perhaps not accurate - old horticultural prints seldom are. However, insofar as calyx, bract, leaf and stem characteristics, Seemann's description of H. storckii would apply to several plants I have seen here.

In this connection, I am not a botanist, but I have observed over the years that there is a great deal of variation in size and shape of the leaves of most hibiscus species and practically all cultivars, depending on where the plant is grown. Furthermore, a species will be described as having so many bracts when, in fact, there is often a different number of bracts on flowers of the same plant. So botanical descriptions are not always helpful in attempting to run down "lost" species.

Apparently you hit the nail on the head when you wrote, after reading some literature on Fiji, that you had never read so much about hibiscus in general and so little in particular. I have consulted old newspaper files, and spent several hours in the Government Archives, but found nothing about early day activities in hybridizing or showing hibiscus. We know, of course, that botanist members of the Wilkes Expedition saw H. flora plena when they visited here in 1840, and that Seemann commented on
the fact that it was a very popular garden ornamental when he was here in the early 1860's. But when, from where, and how many other varieties came, I have been unable to learn.

But there must have been considerable interest in hibiscus here during the early years of this century, for Hawaiian Experiment Station Bulletin 29, which, as you know, was published in 1913, shows that the early Hawaiian hybridizers brought many of their introduced varieties from Fiji. It is possible, too, that Indians, who came to Fiji as laborers many years ago, may have brought in some of the older forms from India.

Hibiscus figures importantly in the personal and economic life of the people of Fiji, however. Nearly every home, hotel lobby, store and office has a fresh display of blooms each morning - one sees housewives or houseboys out early picking blossoms for decorative displays, many of which are distinctive as well as beautiful. By ten o'clock there is scarcely an open bloom on dooryard or street plantings of hibiscus in Suva.

Each year Fiji has its "Hibiscus Festival", a week-long gala event featuring fun and frolic much like Aloha Week in Hawaii, or the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Colorful muu muus and bula shirts (the Fijian equivalent of the Aloha shirt) are the dress of the day and night. The trade conscious Indians, the largest ethnic group Fiji, have provided colorful cotton prints with hibiscus designs and these are favored for Hibiscus Festival Week.

The hibiscus motif is well represented, too, in locally made shell jewelry, wood carvings, etc. And TEAL, the New Zealand airline, has its well-publicized "Coral and Hibiscus Route" serving the Pacific Islands, including Fiji. On Vanua Levu, there is the "Hibiscus Highway", a winding stretch of narrow (by our standards) shore road which was originally bordered with hibiscus. However, the first hibiscus plantings were eaten by cattle, so it was decided to use poinsettias as a replacement. But it is still the "Hibiscus Highway".

A red hibiscus - one that looks like a *schizopetalus* cross - on a light blue background, has been used as the decorative motif of the Fijian nine penny stamp. I understand that throughout the Pacific the hibiscus stamps are very popular.

But in spite of this interest, there is, as I say, no mention of hibiscus in the printed history of the Fijian people. In an effort to learn if hibiscus had any ethnic significance as far as the Fijian people are concerned, I asked Nathaniel, the huge Fijian doorman at the hotel, if the flower was known and used before the Europeans were established in Fiji.

"Oh, to be sure", he replied in his soft-spoken perfect Australian-accented English. "Our people always served up white missionaries with a hibiscus over each well-charred ear."

That remark completed my research on hibiscus history in Fiji; I have been taking on weight recently, and I thought I detected a hungry look on Nate's face. And I have never looked good with a hibiscus over my ear.

As ever,
Ross

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Savu Savu
Vanua Levu
Fiji
November 8, 1963

Dear Joe:

With no more leads on the elusive *H. storckii* in Suva and having seen all of the important hibiscus collections there, we decided to fly up to this little village, hoping that in some way we might get over to Taveuni, twenty-five miles away. We found that while there is regular plane service to the island, there are no hotel accommodations open to us. We hope we can get over to the island by launch, however, even for a day; or better yet, wangle a bed at the headquarters of some coconut plantation.

Taveuni, 26 miles long and 7 miles wide, is called the "Garden Island" because of its excellent soil. It was the first island of the group to be developed agriculturally, and Sea Island cotton was successfully grown there nearly a hundred years ago. A study of
its agricultural possibilities was the reason for Dr. Berthold Seemann's visit in 1860 when he found \textit{H. storckii}. He was sent there by Governor William Denison of New South Wales.

Savu Savu is a real beauty spot, the view from the lanai of the little Hot Springs Hotel on a rise above the landing is unequalled in Fiji, at least that part of Fiji we have visited. It is not on a tourist route and the hotel, while comfortable, is patronized mostly by commercial people calling on the plantation owners. We were given the "best room", according to the genial Australian proprietor; the only one with a private bath. This bath turned out to be a shower, the floor of which was plywood covered with linoleum; the "drain" was a hole bored through the center! But it did have hot water, piped from a nearby spring for which the hotel took its name.

These springs, bubbling up over an area of about an acre, were the communal cooking and laundry grounds of the village. Each morning the native women brought their sweet potatoes, taro, meats, an other foods carefully wrapped in leaves and cloth, and these were placed in the spring for cooking. One area was given over to laundry work, with the clothing thoroughly boiled out in the spring water.

The panoramic scene from the hotel lanai out over the bay, and the myriad islands beyond, seem to change in color and form each hour of the day, and it became difficult for me to leave the easy chair that I picked for my own. I was told that I had contracted malua fever, the symptoms of which are a heaviness in certain parts of the body, thus explaining my affinity for my chair. For this condition I began to take a stimulant (Johnny Walker Red Label) and I was joined by a young man who introduced himself as the hereditary chief of the district. He was attracted to me, he said, because one of his ancestors was an American sailor. Also, I looked like his late father and as it was a Fijian custom to adopt a second father, he decided to choose me. Later my wife became his "mother" with elaborate ceremony, during which he presented her with a fine woven pandanus mat.

The evening progressed. My "son" gave me a complete run down on the history of Fiji, stressing the fact that the natives had suffered much in the hands of the white colonizers, just as has been the case in most island groups of the Pacific. As he warmed up on the subject he said that he felt his American blood asserting itself and called on me to join him, and, in the spirit of 1776, drive out the bloody British invaders. However, I urged him to consider the odds, so he decided to take us to a Fijian dance instead.

I must spoil my story here by telling you that while my handsome young "son" was of Fijian ancestry and in fact a hereditary chief, most of his immediate forebears were European - his father, whom I was supposed to resemble, having been an Australian. His family owned a large coconut plantation across the bay, and he had just been elected representative from his district in the Fijian legislature. He was graduated from a New Zealand university in liberal arts, and his particular cultural interest was American literature. Mark Twain was a favorite, but he seemed broadly versed in the entire field of his interest. His early American ancestor was William Driver, who returned to the States and became a well known shipmaster. It was he, according to legend, who first called our flag "Old Glory".

For story purposes, too, I would like to describe the dance as a primitive orgy with scantily clad females and savage-featured males sweating through their age-old rituals. But this was not the case. There was only one dance performed, and this was the Twist. True, some of the Fijian belles wore no shoes and others only Japanese zories, but many were in spike heels. Fijian costumes and muu muus were worn by most of the girls, but a few late design "shifts" were to be seen. And although most of the boys came in the traditional lava lava, a sort of wrap-around skirt, insofar as dress is concerned many of them could not be distinguished from London "Teddy Boys", the British prototype of the tight-pants-pointed-shoe characters in the United States.

But how they could Twist! Their natural grace and inherited ability to control hip movement gave them unusual advantage in doing this particular dance step - or is it a step?

I would also like to be able to write that I entered into the festivities with wild abandon and, placing a flaming red hibiscus over my left ear, unsuccessfully resisted the advances of the most beautiful belles of the evening. But I am, as you know, inherently truthful. Also, there were those years behind me. Also, there was my wife right there in front of me. So I danced one very un-Twisty Twist with a large Fijian lady - one of the barefoot ones. She suffered. And I went to bed.

As we were on the eastern side of Vanua Levu, with the full length of Tavenui in sight, I felt that because of a hundred years of contact I might find \textit{H. storckii} along the coast. So we hired a car and an Indian driver and covered some 80 miles of shore road, some of which was the "Hibiscus Highway" mentioned before. We stopped at many Fijian villages as well as at abandoned clearings to check over old dooryard plantings. However, it is impossible to penetrate far beyond the road margin in Fiji because of the dense native growth. As far as \textit{H. storckii} is concerned, our trip up the coast was a bust, but we did see some
unforgettable scenery. We spent another day or two covering every settlement on the East side of Vanua Levu with no luck. We did, however, receive an invitation to visit the home of a coconut planter who had quite a collection of hibiscus. To reach his home, we drove through a mile or more of well cared for coconut palms heavy with nuts. The dwelling was new and very modern in design and construction, and was situated on a rugged point of land with a fabulous view of the Vanua Levu coast. The lady of the house was from Tahiti, and on her many visits to her home island she had brought back many hibiscus cuttings. One of the varieties of which she gave me cuttings was a small variegated red and white cup-and-saucer type, a very nice addition to our collection of miniatures. The planter was born in Fiji and had been an avid hibiscus fancier all of his life. Yet he had never heard of H. storckii by that name, or any other pink variety close to that described by Seemann. And Tavenui in plain sight, only 20 miles away!

At one evening meal at the hotel, a table partner who was an official of the Burns, Philp Company, the big South Seas trading company, said that he planned to fly over to Taveuni the next day. I expressed the hope that he might be able to suggest some accommodations for me there, but he said that it was difficult to arrange this on short notice. He promised, however, that he would inquire around for the hibiscus that I had been searching for. He knew the island well, he said, having lived there for seven years. He also told me that a Mrs. Warden, wife of a Taveuni coconut planter, had developed a fine hibiscus garden there many years ago and had brought in numerous varieties from Hawaii and other places. She had also done some hybridizing, and it was his opinion that if H. storckii had been available, she would have used it. Also, he said that Mrs. Warden had been responsible for many of the true Fijian cultivars. She had left Taveuni some years ago. Our friend promised to check the Warden garden, or what was left of it, as well as to make inquires in his contacts with other planters. He has very much interest in my search for the elusive H. storckii and says he will put me in touch with one of his employees who is a descendant of Jacob Storck for whom Dr. Berthold Seemann named the plant.

During breakfast this morning the cook’s assistant asked permission to speak to us. He had learned that I was looking for a hibiscus, a pink one, on a rather straggly bush. There was such a plant in the garden of his former employer, a coconut planter some fifteen miles up the coast, he said. He had found it on Taveuni when he was on holiday there with friends and had brought it back and planted it himself. So off we went again, having secured the loan of the cook’s assistant as a guide. However, in questioning him more closely as we drove along, it developed that he had not seen this plant for a year or more, that possibly it had not been watered as the planter now lived in Suva. Also, that it was more of a white than pink and, although it was small and straggly where he found it, his plant had subsequently become very large. Furthermore, he had brought in four cuttings and that he hoped he could remember which was which!

When we arrived at the plantation, we found the garden in good shape. Our guide showed no hesitation but took us directly to a plant - or, more accurately, to four plants which apparently had been set as cuttings in a group. One had died, two others were alike insofar as leaf was concerned (there were no blooms) and the fourth had a leaf like the white with raspberry stripes that we have seen so often in Fiji. This one, said our guide, is the pink hibiscus. So once again I took cuttings and sent them on to you, still with no assurance that I had found another candidate for H. storckii. My doubt hardened when, on our return to the hotel, the owner explained that the cook’s assistant, although very reliable usually, was sometimes given to flights of fancy. Also, he explained, the Fijian people are pathetically eager to please - overly eager in some respects, and our boy had no doubt overheard our conversations and wanted to make us happy by locating the lost species.

Later: The picturesque Hot Springs Hotel was demolished several years ago and a Travelogue Motel was built on the site. And, according to an obituary in Pacific Island Monthly our Fijian "son” passed away late last year. - RG

As ever,
Ross

Levuka
Ovalau, Fiji
November 12, 1963

Dear Joe:

The first European trading center in Fiji was this little town of Levuka on the island of Ovalau. Because the earliest plantings of hibiscus were supposed to have been made here, we decided to visit the place. The trip was a tough one, particularly hard on the belly and the bottom.
We left Suva at 8 a.m. in an under-powered British car driven by an Indian who, judging from his performance at the wheel, had little to live for. Two hours later, after having covered fifty miles of narrow, gravelled roads mostly steep grades and curves - we arrived at a jetty near the little Fijian village of Londoni. Most of the inhabitants were out to greet us and to help us. But I thought it best to carry our own suitcases out over the jetty to the landing, a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile. We parked them there with bunches of dalo (taro), bananas, pineapples, cratered chickens, and other native foods and gear, to await the launch.

This proved to be a fairly good piece of equipment mechanically, but the seats were made of wooden rounds set too far apart. Consequently, on our arrival here, two hours and nineteen miles of channel waters later, our posteriors were as corrugated as the metal roofing on the wharfside warehouses.

It was a week-end, too, and a large number of natives of Ovalau who worked on Vita Levu were going home for a visit. As a result, we were packed in close, unable to shift our position. The channel was rough and the over-loaded boat pitched and rolled like a rodeo bronco. Soon I had a seasick Fijian mother resting her woolly head on my shoulder. She was very much a lady, however, and retained her breakfast, but not without a few near misses.

Levuka was the first capital of Fiji and it was there that the Group was ceded to England in 1874. After seven years, the seat of the government was moved to Suva, and Levuka gradually declined in commercial importance. Today it is a sleepy little port with a single street of false front buildings, looking very much like a Western movie set. It may come back to life soon, however, for Japanese capital is building a fish freezing plant here; a contingent of Japanese technicians and laborers is already on the ground, as are all of the materials and machinery for building and equipping the plant. Soon the trawlers will be brought over. This plant will give employment to a large number of local workers. One wonders why England, now exporting her capital to the United States through investments in huge New York office buildings, is not giving assistance to her own Crown colony.

On our first night in Levuka, we strolled down the street after dinner and were greeted by an old Scotchman who wanted to know how we liked his "big city". He told us that he had come to Levuka in 1906 to stay a year and has been in Fiji ever since! He said that he was a coconut planter, with plantations on Taveuni as well as Ovalau. When he questioned me as to our reason for being in Levuka, I told him that in addition to enjoying a pleasurable visit, I was looking for hibiscus, particularly the native species, a pink one, and asked if he had ever seen a pink hibiscus on Tavenui. He replied that he was not the gardener of the family, then turned and called his wife, a large, full-blooded Fijian lady. She said that she had at one time or another had all of the varieties of hibiscus grown in Fiji, but had never seen a plant and flower which looked like my description of H. storckii. And she was a native of Taveuni.

The next morning I called on the hostess of our hotel, where there is quite a large planting of common hibiscus, and asked her if she had ever seen a single flowered hibiscus as described by Seemann. She said that she had, and that, furthermore, there was a very old plant in her garden and that I could take cuttings. Before you could say "Kona" I had my knife out of my pocket. She led me to a plant at the far end of the garden; as usual, no blooms were in sight. But again I took cuttings to ship to you, and we shall see what we shall see.

Levuka is a quiet little town on the surface, very, very English natives included. From our hotel balcony we can look down on the town playing-field where hockey, cricket, and soccer matches are almost always in progress. And over in one corner, a few old Britishers who have missed too many boats, can be seen bowling on the green most of the day.

But at nightfall one could easily imagine a far different circumstance. From the Fijian village down on the shore we could hear the Fijian drums beating out a sombre rhythm. Of course, it's just a routine jam session over the kava bowl, but it could be a signal to light the roasting ovens. And the smell of the cooking fires drifting up to us in undoubtedly "short pig", or pork, but it is not difficult to imagine that it could be "long pig", the native way of referring to human flesh. The Fijians are now a sweet-tempered, kindly people, but were once a fierce, cannibalistic race; one cannot help but wonder if beneath their sweetness there still lingers a taste for a well-cooked human loin or rib roast.

Later: Two months after this experience, we read in the Australian papers that an over-loaded launch such as that described above had capsized in a storm while attempting to cross the channel from Kadavu to Suva, and 87 persons were drowned.

As ever,

Ross
Suva, Fiji
November 13, 1963

Dear Joe:

We're back in the "big town" again, but since writing you last we have seen Lambassa.

As Savu Savu we were picked up by the "Coconut Clipper", a small plane which takes off from a narrow runway between coconut trees, narrowly misses clipping the fronds, and, if your prayers are answered, gets you safely aloft into the Fijian skies.

Lambassa, a center of sugar cane production in Fiji, is on the opposite side of Vanua Levu from Savu Savu, a flight of about 150 miles. We had no important reason for this trip, but it had been suggested by son David, a model railroad buff, who told us that one of the world's most unique narrow gauge railroads operated there, and hinted that he would like to have some photographs and particulars to be used in one of his frequent articles in a national model railroad magazine. The trip proved to be a dud in all ways; the narrow gauge line had been modernized and was therefore of little interest; the hotel was about seventh class; the food was bad and the mosquitoes were in division strength and wore spiked boots.

We were warned before we landed; a fellow passenger, a lady who called Lambassa home, had been to Suva on holiday. As tourists or strangers of any kind seldom make this trip, she asked us why we were making it, and we told her that we just wanted to see Lambassa.

"My God! See Lambassa!" she said, laughing hysterically. "You can't mean it!"

An hour or so later, after we were established in the hotel, I went into the bar and there I saw our lady friend drinking with her husband, also a very bored creature. By my count, she drank three scotch and sodas before dinner, I had already seen enough of Lambassa to understand why.

There is a sequel to our experiences at Savu Savu. You will recall that I wrote about the Suva businessman who promised to check the Warden garden on Taveuni for H. storckii; I held very little hope that he would have time to do this, as he is a very busy man. But apparently I have not learned to fully appreciate the kindness and generosity of the Fijian people, both native and European. Yesterday I had a phone call from him; he had visited the Warden garden, saw the caretaker, described the wanted species to him, and had been given a cutting from a plant, the flower of which met this description. I lost no time getting down to the Burns, Philp Company offices. Unfortunately, I had failed to explain to my generous collaborator that a cutting for us is pencil-size, and he had taken a cutting which is from a half to three-quarters of an inch in diameter. But I mailed it to you, and I hope that you have a chisel and jack plane to shape the scion.

And, as was the case with all other H. storckii, the plant from which this cutting was taken was not in bloom, so keep your fingers crossed.

As ever,
Ross

Aboard the "Tofua"
En route Tonga
November 17, 1963

Dear Joe:

We boarded the "Tofua" at Suva for our long planned island cruise just before dinner last night, and are now about half way to the island of Tongatapu on which Nuku'alofa, the capital of the Tongan Kingdom, is situated. During the next two weeks we will visit several island groups in this trading vessel, which makes regular monthly calls with freight and passengers. On this cruise we will cross and recross the International Date Line, so do not be confused by the dating on my letters; we will have two days with the same date, and lose a day.
A twin-screw motorship, the "Tofua" is a tidy vessel of 5300 tons burden. She carries 73 cabin passengers, and about the same number of deck passengers, mostly natives who bring their own bed mats and sleep on deck. However, they will probably spend most of the night singing and dancing. I once worked on inter-island steamers out of Honolulu, and the nights aboard the "Tofua" will no doubt bring back memories of other nights long ago when the world was my oyster and there were pearls to be found.

You may wonder how we happened to book on this cruise. Well, Joe, it all came about through - you guess - hibiscus! Last year a retired Auckland, New Zealand, nurseryman visited us in Los Angeles and in our conversation he mentioned the Union Steamship Company monthly sailings to Fiji and other Pacific Islands. We were interested in this cruise, and told him of our plans to go to England via the Pacific in the fall. However, he warned us that because the company held most of its cabins for businessmen and government officials, it would be difficult to get reservations. We wrote the steamship company, however, and were advised that a February booking only was available.

Meanwhile, we had been sending hibiscus cuttings to a prominent Auckland produce man, a hibiscus fancier, Harvey Turner. In one of our letters we told him of our disappointment in not being able to get on the "Tofua" early enough for our plans. He wrote back air mail saying that he had checked with the company, and that our booking was now advanced to November, the month we hoped to secure! It seems that this fine gentleman and hibiscus lover always kept a booking on each sailing for one of his representatives, as he traded heavily in the islands. At his request, we were given his booking. Our cabin is large and comfortable. Hibiscus, what wonders are committed in thy name!

We are also receiving V.I.P. treatment aboard, as we are seated at the captain's table. This is proving to be exceptionally interesting, for Prince Tungi, oldest son of Queen Salote of Tonga, came aboard with us at Suva, and is one of the seven at our table. The prince, who is Premier and therefore executive head of the Tongan Kingdom, is a handsome, middle-aged man who carries his reported 375 pounds quite well. He was graduated as a Doctor in Laws by Sydney University, and we are told that he is a very progressive leader, especially in matters having to do with the advancement of the Tongan economy. He arrived in Suva a few days ago on board a freighter which he had bought in Holland to be used in transporting Tongan copra to processing plants and markets.

At the captain's table, too, is the newly appointed head of the ship's owners, the Union Steamship Company, on his first cruise to island ports. It seems that such moves as Prince Tungi is making by operating his own ships and other "nationalistic" ventures in Samoa and other islands that the company serves, is creating some concern. Obviously, the politeness at our table is a bit strained.

But the main purpose of this letter is to sum up my reactions, hibiscusly, to our three weeks in Fiji. I've written several letters to accompany the several shipments of cuttings, but these have necessarily been brief and hurriedly written.

While Fiji has hibiscus varieties not seen in Hawaii or elsewhere, some varieties common to all areas are grown there. In fact, the variety which we call Pink Versicolor in California, and is erroneously called H. cameronii (as well as Puahi Bishop in Hawaii) is perhaps the most widely grown hibiscus in Fiji, if park, street and public landscaping in general are taken into consideration.

Another very commonly seen variety is the one called H. archeri; at least, it resembles the one that is grown elsewhere under this name. The presence of this variety interested me because it is supposed to have been originated in the West Indies as a cross between H. liliflorus, and H. schizopetalus. But it would seem that as these two species are native to the south Indian Ocean area, hybrids would have occurred naturally or through pre-European discovery selection.

The old double red H. flora plena is popular in Fiji, too. But it will surprise you to learn that while most of the "oldies" are found in Fiji, I cannot recall of having seen one plant of Brilliant, the common single red. Considering its popularity in other parts of the world, it is difficult to understand why this one is not grown widely in Fiji.

The double pink which we call Kona is grown as Suva Queen in Fiji and is quite popular. But I saw no Agnes Galt or any other single pink resembling it in Fiji gardens.

The pink with a dark eye zone known in California and Hawaii as Painted Lady is quite common, as is the brick red single we call Princess Takamatsu, and also Flame. The H. schizopetalus hybrid Pink Butterfly, so widely grown as a hedge plant in many parts of the world, is seen in Fiji, as is the Pink Dainty, a smaller form. And I was surprised to find the little White Dainty, too. As you know, this one has always been considered to be of Florida origin, coming as a sport of Pink Dainty about ten or twelve years ago. However, in Suva garden I saw a plant of this that was over twenty years old producing both pink and white flowers.
Dear Joe:

As ever,

Ross

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Off Nukualofa, Tonga
November 19, 1963

Dear Joe:

This letter will have much more to say about Tongan royalty than about hibiscus, the reason being that Tonga has an abundance of royalty but apparently very few hibiscus. At least we did not see many during a long day ashore spent walking along most of the streets of this sunny little town and driving several miles over Tongatapu roads.

As I told you in a previous letter, Prince Tungi, Prime Minister of Tonga, came aboard at Suva, and was our table partner last night and again this morning. To the royalty-conscious citizens of New Zealand and Australia travelling with us, the presence of the Prince was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and the occasion of much dithering, particularly on the part of the ladies. But the Prime Minister seemed oblivious to it all; he appears to be a very charming, courteous and serious-minded gentleman with no "side" whatsoever. He neither drinks nor smokes, and last evening did not join the bingo game as it called for a shilling stake;
both he and his mother, Queen Salote, are devout Wesleyan Methodists. Tonga is one of the few countries which has a Sunday observance law written into its constitution and it is not lawful to work, engage in trade, or play games on Sunday.

However, this morning when we docked in Nukualofa, the Prince's status changed very quickly. A 50-piece Royal Band, together with a company of smartly uniformed police, was marshalled on the small pier to welcome the Premier. Also, most of the townspeople crowded at the head of the jetty out to the landing. When Prince Tungi went down the gangplank, he was no longer in a conservative business suit but wore the traditional dress of his people, with his special ta'o cala, of course. This is a wide belt or apron of plaited pandanus leaves, and the design indicates the family and the caste of the wearer. A black, custom-built Pontiac Safari drew up, and after the band played the Tonga national anthem, and a welcoming address was made by a high chief, our huge, friendly table partner stepped into the car which moved slowly out along the jetty and through the cheering crowds to the Royal Palace not far away.

But Tonga is not an opera bouffe kingdom, nor are Queen Salote and her son the often pictured rulers of a Pacific island kingdom. It is truly a kingdom, however, and the only one in the Pacific Ocean area, but is also under the protectorate of Great Britain which handles its foreign affairs.

Tonga consists of two main groups totaling 150 islands and, while the land area is only about 250 square miles, it occupies a broad expanse in the Pacific extending from 18 to 22 degrees latitude, south of the equator. Tongatapu and adjacent islands are what are termed "low islands" (the highest elevation is 60 feet), but much of the group are volcanic in origin, five of them with active volcanoes.

The Tongans are highly intelligent, aggressive people and once ruled a much greater part of the Pacific, even as far away as some of the Fiji group and Samoa. Today, this aggressiveness is given vent in all-out "Tonga for Tongans" policy, and in their trade relations, as a nation, and personally as well. Both the people and the government are very thrifty; a savings bank was established forty years ago, and 10,000 island residents are now depositors. The government has no national debt and last year its surplus funds amounted to $2,292,000. all carefully invested in gilt-edged Commonwealth securities. Such fiscal responsibility is all wrong, of course, and sooner or later Washington will send down a delegation to instuct these poor, benighted folk the advantages of deficit spending.

Tonga has a unique land system in that all property belongs to the Crown. However, every Tongan, when he reaches the age of 16, is entitled to a "bush allotment" of 8-1/2 acres and a town site of 2/5 acre. He pays an annual rental of $1.25 for his "bush allotment" and none for his town site. No foreigners may own or lease land; some Europeans are still working plantations under leases made many years ago, but when these run out the land will revert to the Crown. These planters will not be compensated in any way for their improvements. And beachcombers are discouraged - one cannot land in Tonga without a permit secured previous to his arrival, with a bond covering outward passage.

Prince Tungi, in his efforts to stabilize and improve the economy of his people, has brought all of the Tongan coconut planters together in the Tonga Copra Board, a cooperative processing and marketing organization. Small vessels operated by the Board concentrate the copra at three main points in the islands where it is graded and made ready for the market. I have already told you about the 2000 ton freighter purchased by Prince Tungi in Holland and brought to Suva by him last week. The major operations of this ship, I'm told, will be to transport coconut to Pago Pago in American Samoa where a new enterprise, the Coconut Processing Corporation, is being put into operation. The Tongan Copra Board purchased about 40 per cent of the stock in this operation, and will supply most of the 9,000,000 coconuts a year that the plant will turn into coconut oil, desiccated coconut coir, charcoal, and coconut flour. Coir is pulverized coconut husk, used for making wallboard and other building materials badly needed in Tonga.

In addition to the Tonga Copra Board, there is a Tonga Produce Board which handles bananas, watermelons, and other products. Prince Tungi is chairman of both Boards and, according to reports, chief economist and market strategist. For instance, prior to last year New Zealand allowed Tongan bananas to come in only on a negotiated quantity and price system which was not always favorable to Tongan growers. But under Tungi's leadership, a Japanese market for bananas is being opened by the Produce Board. The government also purchased a fishing boat last year, and all fish caught is sold through government stores.

We docked quite early this morning - too early, in fact, to see the ship maneuver through the reef entrance which takes some careful navigation, I'm told. The small dock is situated at the end of a wharf about a quarter of a mile long leading directly into the central area of Nukualofa and only a few hundred yards from the Queen's palace and Chapel. Along the sea wall, spacious lawns shaded with huge trees were given over this morning to the Tongan womenfolk who set out their varied goods for sale to
"Tofua" passengers. This once-a-month opportunity to sell woven baskets, beads, and other handicraft is an important economic event in their lives.

Hibiscus, of course, always takes precedence in our daily planning, so we decided to visit the palace area and the town before venturing farther afield. We found, however, that the palace grounds are not open to the public, but, as it was surrounded only by a low fence, we were able to get a good view of the gardens as well as the palace and the Queen's chapel. No hibiscus were in evidence; the plantings in general did not seem to be outstanding. A wooden structure of Victorian design, the palace was completed in 1882. A close view reminded one of a New England estate, circa 1890. Residents like to point out that Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip sent the night in the palace during their visit to Tonga in 1953.

Another reason for our visit to the palace area was to meet Tuimalila, one of the best known residents of Tonga. Tuimalila is a tortoise, said to have been given to Queen Salote's ancestors by Captain Cook when he visited Nukualofa in 1773. Although Tuimalila has reportedly attained great age, his days in modern Tonga appear to be numbered; in recent years he has strayed from the grounds on several occasions and now has a large dent in his shell as a result of a collision with an automobile!

While some hibiscus plantings were in evidence in Nukualofa gardens, it was apparent that the flower is not widely grown on Tongatapu. Perhaps this is because, being a low island, it is subject to hurricanes which heavily damage light shrubs. Of the varieties seen as dooryard plants, the ubiquitous *Versicolor* seemed to be most popular. *H. archerii* and the double red *H. flora plena* (which may be our *Lamberti*) were also noted. The latter was found here by early explorers.

Condition of hibiscus plants that were seen was not up to Fijian standards, and from our standpoint actually appeared to be "ratty". Apparently the Tongans go in for trade rather than gardening, as the following experience would seem to indicate.

As you know, the so-called "Tongan Rounds" - commemorative stamps - were issued last year by Queen Salote's post office department, and immediately received world-wide publicity because they were not only unique in size and shape, but also beautiful in design. From the very first they were in great demand by collectors; the face value of the stamps is one pound four shillings, Tonga, roughly $5.00 American, but today the asking price was from $15.00 to $20.00, although we were told that a set could occasionally be purchased at a lower figure. I did want a set for my daughter-in-law if I could get it at a fair price, so I went to the postmaster and asked where the stamps could be purchased.

"You can get them from a dealer in stamps", he told me.

"But where are these shops located - up in the village?" I asked. "No, just around here and there," he replied.
We had no sooner left the post office when we were approached by a huge, affable Tongan gentleman who greeted us thusly:

"I hear that you are interested in a set of commemorative stamps." The Black Market was open.
"Did you hear that from your brother-in-law the postmaster, or just overhear us talking to him?" I countered. In trade as well as in battle, the best defense is an offense.

"Oh no, sir," he said. "I am not related to the postmaster, nor do I eavesdrop. I am a deacon in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and the Church does not countenance sharp practices." This put me on my guard; I saw I was up against a smart trader. He then explained that he was only a poor man who had purchased a set of stamps for his children to cherish, but circumstances made it necessary for him to part with them at a very low price. We shed a tear for his children, and asked what he considered a "very low price".

With the prospect of a sale, our "dealer" began the age-old "buddy-buddy" tourist approach, asking us where we were from. We had the right answer to that one - we gave him the name of the English village where we live while working in England, the reason being that the asking price of everything in the South Pacific (and elsewhere, I'm afraid) to those "rich Americans" is nearly twice that quoted the English, New Zealanders or Aussies. We also adopted our best English accent - which is really not convincing, and took some care in our choice of words.

Our Tongan then explained that, while Tonga was an independent kingdom, they were under English protection and guidance. Therefore, as English people, he would make us a special price of eight pounds Tongan ($20.00) for the set. We thanked him for his consideration, but expressed the opinion that as we English had contributed so much to Tongan history, a price of three pounds ($7.50) would even things between us.

The bargaining proceeded amiably, but without a meeting of minds as to price or terms. Our man even offered us the stamp set for $12.50, plus a particularly gaudy Aloha shirt I was wearing; I to have his shirt in the deal. Of course, we would have to go...
behind the post office building to exchange shirts because if we were to be seen, Customs would charge him duty for the shirt, or fine me for dealing in men's wear without a license. I did not mind parting as with my shirt, but if I made the deal I would have to wear his as a nightgown, as the man weighed at least 300 pounds and was well over six feet tall.

So we regretfully broke off negotiations and proceeded on our hibiscus investigations. But it was not easy - our dealer decided to be our guide, for reasons too obvious, and it was only by pointing out another "Tofua" passenger who had told us that he wanted a set of stamps that we lost his services and his sales talk.

But as we approached the dock area on our return to the ship just before departure, our Tongan wheeler-dealer met us and followed us out on the jetty, his price coming down about a shilling a foot. At last, at the gangplank, I, being the soul of generosity, paid him three pounds, ten shillings ($8.00) and took the set.

Although the Tongan philatelic peddler seemed greatly dejected as he made the deal, once he had the money in his hands he brightened up considerably, and wished us God speed back to England. "But you sure talk like Americans", he said. "We are", I replied. "But I'm employed most of the year in England."

This was a devastating blow, and as we looked down from the rail to wave goodbye he had the look of a fisherman who had hooked a big one that got away. But if I had any qualms as to my part in the deal this feeling passed when a Tongan passenger at the rail told me that our dealer owned several hundred sets which represented the major holding of the commemorative set remaining in Tonga, and was not hurting financially in any way. After due reflection, I decided that I should have tried to wangle a landing permit, then negotiated with him for a partnership deal. By staying over a couple of boats, I might make enough to pay for this trip.

I have also decided to line up with the school of anthropologists who believe that the Polynesians are one of the Lost Tribes of Israel. At least this would seem true of that wave of Polynesian migration which reached Tonga.

At lunch time aboard, the news came through that we were to have a new passenger - none other than Queen Salote herself. She would be with us for the entire cruise, disembarking at Auckland where she has a home and spends part of the year.

Two hours before departure time the wharf again became crowded with people and the Royal Band and uniformed police took stations on the dock. It was a hot afternoon, but the Tongan people waited patiently for their monarch. Only those with suitable ta'oa valas were allowed on the dock, people of higher rank. Finally a long black Cadillac was seen emerging from the palace gates and, with a motorcycle escort as outriders, it proceeded slowly out over the wharf to ship-side, and other cars carrying the Queen's retinue followed. After a brief ceremony, the Queen boarded the "Tofua" accompanied by Prince Tungi; she was escorted to a special place at the rail in "officer's country," and the Prince left the ship. One of the Queen's retinue handed her a small walkie-talkie, and when the Prince reached the dock he went to his car and secured another piece of equipment similar to that given the Queen.

Then, as the band played the Tongan national anthem and the crowd sang farewell songs in their native tongue, the Queen, oblivious to this ceremony, spoke in what seemed to be the most endearing terms with her son, who was visibly affected by the departure of his mother. This conversation continued as the ship pulled away from the dock and headed out through the reef entrance.

Queen Salote is a large, handsome woman, 63 years of age. She has ruled Tonga since 1918. According to genealogical records handed down by word of mouth, she can trace her royal ancestry back 1000 years or more to the first Tui Tonga, who is said to have come to this island group from Samoa. Her great-great-grandfather was baptized in 1831 by missionaries of the London Missionary Society who came to Tonga in 1830. While the Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, and Catholic missions have been very successful in other island groups, over half of the Tongan people have remained in the Wesleyan Methodist church.

The attendance of Queen Salote at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in June 1953, and the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip to Tonga the same year, brought the little kingdom and its queen worldwide publicity. During her stay in England she endeared herself to all who saw or met her. She has been given all the honors that the British Government can bestow on a woman, including Dame Grand Cross of the Victorian Order.

So far, on board, she has a friendly smile for everyone and is, we understand, quite approachable. But the large, uniformed Tongan policeman standing outside the door of her cabin, will no doubt discourage autograph hunters. Also, she will take her meals in her cabin for reasons of protocol, not clearly explained as yet to us common folk.

As ever,
Aboard the "Tofua"
En route Vavau, Tonga
November 17, 1963

Dear Joe:

At this moment the "Tofua" is passing through historic waters; the mutiny of the "Bounty" occurred just three nautical miles west of where we are now cruising. If it were daylight instead of 11:15 p.m. we could see the island of Tofua (for which our ship is named), site of Captain Bligh's unsuccessful attempt to secure fresh water and supplies for his long journey west. The "Bounty", turning back to Tahiti with its mutinous crew, crossed our track close to this spot.

As you know, I have always been something of a "Bounty" buff and have a large collection "Bountiana" in my library. I knew that this cruise would take us in the general area of the mutiny, but did not realize that we would come so close to the spot in the vast Pacific where one of the greatest sagas of men against the sea began.

Even if I were not sure of my facts concerning the mutiny, I would have had an excellent reference source close at hand; when I questioned Captain Pete Bennett over after dinner coffee this evening I learned that he is a real authority on the subject. He had made a study of the exact location of the mutiny and proceeded to give us a detailed geographical account of what has become the most publicized episode in the nautical history of the Pacific. He then took us up on the bridge and, bringing out his charts of the area and the Pacific as a whole, traced for us Bligh's track on his 3700 mile voyage to the Dutch East Indies in an open boat with nineteen loyal crew members. He also pointed out the various islands in the South Pacific where the "Bounty" men tried to make their home in almost a year of indecision before they finally established themselves on Pitcairn Island, over 3000 miles west of here.

The story of the mutiny of the Bounty is well known; however, books and moving pictures have given little space or time to an explanation of the reason for the voyage of the "Bounty" into the Pacific. It was, as you know, to bring the breadfruit tree from Tahiti to the West Indies as a food crop for plantation slaves in the Caribbean. It has been this part of the story that has always held my interest, for this early attempt to transport live plants in volume halfway around the world in a sailing ship was at that time a bold, new horticultural adventure.

Today, when one can put live plants in a plastic bag with a little damp moss and ship them around the world (quarantine regulations permitting) it is difficult to envisage the months of painstaking effort which went into the preparations for the "Bounty" voyage. The entire interior of the ship was rebuilt and when ready for the "Bounty" was in reality a floating greenhouse. Comforts of the crew were given little consideration and the ship was deliberately undermanned, as sleeping space for one sailor would provide room for a dozen breadfruit plants. This crowding was the real reason for the mutiny.

Early voyages in the Pacific usually emphasized how easily two of the sailor's most essential needs were to be met in the South Pacific - the generous welcome of well-endowed, warm blooded young women and the fact that bread in abundance was to be found everywhere, growing on trees. Of course, we have learned that most of the idyllic writing as regards the habits and morals of the native ladies was mostly sales talk to make recruiting easier for subsequent voyages, but it was true that bread grew on trees - breadfruit trees, belonging to the Morinidae family. To this day breadfruit is an important part of the diet in the South Seas; we have had it served to us several times on this cruise. It is easily prepared and much like the potato when cooked, though rather dry and mealy and bland in flavor. The fruit is round, usually about eight inches in diameter, with rough, green skin or rind.

Captain James Cook had much to say about the value of breadfruit in the report of his first voyage. He stressed the fact that it was not only cheaply produced, but also a nutritious and healthful food crop. Obviously his comments did not interest residents of the temperate zones, but it did "ring a bell" for the sugar planters of Jamaica and Dominica in the West Indies. Not that they wanted to add breadfruit to their own diet - far from it. But they saw in the breadfruit a source of cheap food for their negro slaves. These slaves subsisted mostly on bananas, but when there was a heavy gale - and these were frequent - banana trees were blown over and then the plantation owners had to supply their slaves with purchased foodstuffs. The possibility of eliminating all food costs by the introduction of the breadfruit from the South Seas thus appealed to them greatly, and soon after Captain Cook's report was out, the planters made representations to their London bankers, who used their influence to
bring about the voyage of the "Bounty". The cost of the expedition was thus borne by the English taxpayer - evidently such wheeler-dealer lobbying tactics, which we now know so well, are not new.

It was estimated that the return voyage of the "Bounty" would take six months, thus provisions had to be made to keep the small breadfruit cuttings alive for this period of time. The directions for the selection, care and transportation of the plants were prepared by John Ellis, English botanist, and a member of the Royal Horticultural Society. I have the copy of his instructions, illustrated with drawings by the author, in my library at home and would like to have it here for reference. It gives a detailed description of the breadfruit tree and its growing habits, and shows a sketch of a transportable growing box with an ingenious watering system. It was not until fifty years later that Dr. Nathaniel Ward developed the Wardian case which made the transportation of plants less susceptible to transit losses.

With Captain Bligh were a botanist and a gardener, and when the "Bounty" reached Tahiti, Bligh immediately put these men ashore with several helpers to set up a plant collection station and a greenhouse for establishing the breadfruit plants. Each cutting or shoot was put in a tub in which it would eventually - it was thought - be transported to its planting place in the West Indies.

It took Captain Bligh's horticulturists five months to collect and establish 744 breadfruit plants; some historians have been very unkind in their comments on this delay, inferring that the "Bounty" men were principally engaged in propagation of a quite different nature. But somewhere near where the "Tofua" is now cruising the smooth tropical seas, the "bounty" mutineers heaved the 744 tubbed plants overside and five months' work went to the bottom of the sea. Captain Bligh was spared the sight as he and loyal crew members had been cast adrift several hours before.

When travelling in foreign lands, one expects to have some language difficulties. It was a great surprise to me, however, to experience some very distressing ones in New Zealand and Australia where they speak their own version of English. Such was the case tonight:

When discussion of Captain Bligh's treatment of his crew came up, I tried to get in my shilling's worth.

"Captain Bligh was a stickler." I began, and would have completed the sentence, "for discipline." However, Captain Bennett caught me up before I could finish.

"Captain Bligh was not a stinker," he said sharply. And before I could explain myself, he gave me a long lecture on Captain Bligh's character and ability, and defended his actions in every respect. When he had finished, I did not even try to explain that I had said "stickler" - apparently a word unknown to the captain - rather than "stinker", for although he is a quiet spoken gentleman, one could easily see that he was used to command without question.

It is well known, of course, that Captain Bligh was eventually placed in command of a second breadfruit expedition and successfully established this food crop in the West Indies. It is not so well known, however, that in spite of two costly voyages and the loss of many lives, the West Indian negro slaves steadfastly refused to eat breadfruit, baked, boiled, or otherwise!

Thus they were unsung mutineers of Captain Bligh's "Bounty".

As ever,
Ross

Neiafu, Vava'u
November 19, 1963

Dear Joe:

After threading her way through the Haapai Group during the night, the "Tofua" entered Vava'u Passage at six, and in the freshness of a glorious tropical morning we came topside to view a scene of incredible beauty. These are high islands, many of them rising sheer out of the sea, their shorelines lost in the shadow picture reflected on the calm waters of this island paradise. All were clothed in myriad greens so diverse in shading as to give clear definition to their rugged topography, and all were coming awake with the golden touch of the morning sun. At seven we rounded the island of Vava'u to dock at this grubby little
port, and the spell of beauty which had held us enthralled was rudely broken. But we were greeted by another scene, just as beautiful in its way.

Apparently most of the population of Vavau and surrounding islands had been gathering in Neiafu during the night, for when we arrived the dock was crowded with natives in their colorful Tongan costumes and a double line of uniformed school children formed the borders of the road leading up over the hill to the Governor's residence. For Queen Salote was to leave the ship for the day and her loyal subjects were at hand to pay homage.

When the word was passed that the Queen was ready to disembark, huge Tongan gendarmes cleared the dock area around the gangplank. The Queen first came to the port rail and native dancers and singers performed their ancient ceremonial welcome for their monarch. Then, as she left the ship, she was presented with a bouquet of flowers (no hibiscus) and, passing through an honor guard of uniformed Girl Scouts, she entered a vintage Hillman sedan - quite a come-down from her own great black Cadillac - and was driven slowly up the road to the Governor's palace through cheering lines of school children waving coconut fronds.

The beauty of the Vavau Passage and the unusual greeting ceremony for the Queen were certainly no indication of what we were to experience the remainder of our day. As a matter of fact, I should have gone back to bed.

We have not as yet learned to fully evaluate what people of the Pacific offer as their prime tourist attractions. So when the purser's office advised us that a launch would take all who wished to visit some of Vavau's unique swallow caves, we signed up and were soon on our way.

The prospect of visiting a swallow cave alone would not have been sufficient incentive for me to take a launch ride, particularly as our time here is short. However, I am an incurable romantic and I remembered that it was here in the Vavau group that William Mariner, an Englishman, was cast away in 1806 and resided for many years. On his return to England, his published adventures included a description of beautiful caves on some of these islands, and a recital of the poignant tale of young lovers who hid from an irate royal parent in the Cavern of Hoonga, a story on which Byron based his poem, "The Island". For this reason I did not want to pass up the opportunity to visit a spot with such a well known literary background.

Much to our dismay, we found ourselves retracing "Tofua's" morning track, and the views which had entranced us in the morning light were now just water and islands. After 14 miles in the small launch, we reached an island with a large cave opening which the boat entered at slow speed. We expected that we would be taken some distance through an underground wonderland, but the cave proved to be only about 100 feet long; after disturbing some thousands of swallows the boat turned back and out, and we were again underway on a 14 mile return trip to Neiafu. With apologies to Winston Churchill, I can say that never have I travelled so far to see so little.

Because so much of our day was taken up by the swallow cave tour, we did not see all of the island of Vavau; in fact, we were able to cover only the immediate port area of Neiafu. However, this offered nothing of interest insofar as hibiscus is concerned. Only a few plants of what we have been calling H. archeri, some very nice plants of Kona, and a few Pink Dainty were in evidence. Ornamental plantings as a whole were not particularly attractive, but we were told of several very beautiful gardens on some of the islands of the Vavau group.

Early tomorrow morning we stand off the little island of Niue, and will go ashore by launch. This island is known for the excellence of its plaited ware, particularly hats. I plan to purchase a wide-brimmed one to protect my peeling nose. My wife says that I do not really need such protection - that if I would keep my nose out of native back yards and other odd private spots where hibiscus appear, I would not be so badly burned. She swears that when I see a hibiscus bush my nose actually lengthens and that I make like a pointer dog.

Furthermore, each time I come back aboard the "Tofua" after an island stop, I am reminded that I smell like the pigs and chickens with which I often mingle when I see something I want to examine closely. However, I promised you complete and intimate coverage of the Pacific hibiscus situation and I am willing to go to any length to do my job properly - even if I do not smell so nice at times.

As ever,
Ross
Aboard the "Tofua"
En route Niue to Pago Pago
November 19, 1963

Dear Joe:

To the lonely island of Niue which is just now dropping below the horizon, the arrival of the "Tofua" once each month is an event of both social and economic importance as this ship is its only contact with the outside world. There is talk of the start of plane service by Fiji Airlines which now serves Tonga, and no doubt when the Tonga-Samoa copra run is fully established Prince Tungi's ships will call at Alofi, its port town where we spent several hours today. But until then "Tofua Day" will continue to be a holiday on this remote island, the day when "new money" comes in.

Geographically, Niue is a part of no other group; it is 300 miles east of Tonga, 350 miles southeast of Samoa, and about 500 miles west of the Cook Island group. Unlike Tongatapu, on which Nukualofa is situated, Niue is a high island, although almost entirely upheaved coral. Only a comparatively small part of its 100 square miles is cultivated. Although one of the first Pacific islands to accept Christianity, Niue was called "Savage Island" by Captain Cook after he met a decidedly hostile reception when he attempted a landing there in 1774. It was annexed to New Zealand in 1901 and became a part of the Cook Island Administration. Of the 5000 residents, only about fifty are Caucasian, mostly government and school officials and mercantile house managers.

The soil is sparse, but Niue produces coconuts, bananas and sweet potatoes for the New Zealand market, their transport being the primary reason for the once-a-month visit of the "Tofua." There is no wharf, and all day long the whale boats came alongside the ship with loads of produce and returned with supplies of all kinds. Today, however, was a special day: the "Tofua" brought in a two-ton Bedford truck, fire-engine red, and it was loaded on a platform mounted on a half dozen whale boats. I have seen this sort of thing done in Hawaii many years ago; in fact, I have had some personal experience with odd-ball lightering, so I could appreciate the way the "Tofua" crew put the truck ashore. As we took the launch at the Alofi landing to return to the ship, the new truck was still drawing great crowds from all parts of the island.

My own plans for our visit to Niue called for, first, a check on hibiscus plantings; second, a lot of pictures of this off-the-tourist-run island; and, third, as I mentioned before, the purchase of a hat. So when we landed and were told that the local school principal would drive us around the island in the afternoon, we decided to cover the immediate environs of Alofi on foot. This was not difficult, for there was only one street, a dusty road, with residences, stores and schools all grouped within several hundred yards of its length.

I saw very few hibiscus on my rounds, but more than at either Vavau or Nukuaioa, in the Tongas. According to one old-timer with whom I talked, the big double red *H. flora plena* is the oldest variety on the island, no doubt brought by the Polynesians when they made first landfall there. However, what we call *Kona*, the double pink, was very much in evidence. While we have no specific proof, this one appears to be a hybrid with native Hawaiian white as one parent; in fact, it is sometimes called *Double Agnes Galt* because the foliage and plant habit are similar, and the color is much the same. *Pink Versicolor* and *H. archerii* - if that is the correct name for the fringed single red that seems to be the most popular variety in the Pacific islands that I have visited - was also grown widely on Niue. I also saw the little buff double that is so popular in Fiji, and picked up a cutting of a single yellow which looked very much like an Hawaiian kokio hybrid. These Hawaiians seem to get around. Dooryard plants seemed to be pretty much torn up, and many of the houses were in bad shape. This, I was told, was due to a severe hurricane which occurred two years ago when several hundred houses were destroyed and all of the crops lost. The coconut crop is only now coming back. For many "Tofuas" after the big blow, the ship had little return cargo, but it did bring in cement and, under government supervision, a large number of cement block homes have been built. These are sold at cost on long-term contracts.

But weeds and unwanted grass come back fast in the tropics, and must be cleared away frequently from road margins, playing fields, and other public areas. I knew that this must be done, but I was a bit shook, for a moment at least, when I read the following bloodthirsty notice in the mimeographed Niue Daily News:

"Would the Alofi basketball girls please come to the green at 4:30 P.M. today? Please bring your bush knives with you."

The sight of a group of buxom young basketball players with long knives swinging from their belts would be rather disconcerting if it were not known that they were en route to a grass cutting session.
Even before the first launch was in from the ship, natives from all parts of the island were setting up their "market place" above the landing. Their wares were spread out on huge tapa cloth mats which in turn were laid out on the dusty margins of the road. The plaited ware was excellent in workmanship, but I was in the market for a hat - a special kind of hat. What I wanted was a wide-brimmed job of interwoven black and natural color pandanus strips, or lauhala, as we would say in Hawaii. I had seen one in Tonga, and as the lauhala hat I had bought in Hawaii thirty years ago was getting a bit ratty, eliciting sarcastic remarks from certain members of the family, I wanted to replace it. However, this two-color type was in great favor with the "Tofua" passengers, and by the time I completed my hibiscus tour of the village, the natives were about sold out. I did get one, however, but the price had gone up to three shillings, New Zealand, or nearly fifty cents. I hope it will last as long as my Hawaiian hat which, by the way, cost only twenty-five cents, indicating the alarming degree which the cost of living in the South Pacific has increased in the past three decades.

So when you visit me on my return, do not be surprised if you find me in a gaudy hibiscus-patterned Tongan lava lava instead of trousers, a bright-colored Fijian bula shirt, and my new, raffish, checkerboard lauhala hat. This costume should prove quite interesting for the Arboretum, too; even the peacocks will envy me.

During the morning I was able to get a large number of what I thought were unusual photographs, scenes that could not be secured elsewhere. For instance, I took a great many shots of a group of boys and girls, ages ranging from five to about fifteen, who were surfing in the bay. However, none had surfboards, but were manipulating all sorts of "gear" from wash tubs to crate tops. The lack of proper equipment did not spoil their fun, or their ability to ride the breakers, either. Nor were they inhibited by the fact that none wore a stitch of clothing.

As I said above, Niue is geographically isolated, a once-a-month stop on the inter-island run of the "Tofua". But already an American firm has set up an interesting operation there. Knowing that most unsolicited circulars posted in the States find their way into the wastebasket unread, this firm ships its mailings in bulk to Niue, already in envelopes addressed to its States-side "sucker-list". Then the Niue Weavers Association, a local handicraft cooperative, contracts to mail them after affixing colorful Niue stamps. You can bet that these circulars are seen by all who receive them!

Unfortunately, we did not get out of the Alofi area. The promised trip around the island did not materialize because not enough cars were available. It was just as well, however, for the "Tofua" completed her cargo handling early, and began to signal her departure. Niue is a beautiful island, but a month's stay could be a bit sticky, as our English friends would say.

As ever,
Ross

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Apia, Samoa
November 22, 1963

Dear Joe:

The tragic news of President Kennedy's assassination reached here at 9:30 yesterday morning as a bare flash picked up by the Samoan Government radio station. Additional news came in during the day, but even now we have few details as to what actually occurred.

We heard the first news under rather dramatic circumstances. I had a 9:30 appointment with Bayard Parham, Samoan Director of Agriculture. His second floor office is located close to the wireless station on the waterfront, and from the window we could look over the town and down on the shore to see the steel raft, "Age Unlimited", on which the 70-year-old American, William Willis, had arrived a few days before after drifting 6700 miles from South America. Mr. Parham was delayed a few minutes, and while we were waiting (and photographing the "Age Unlimited" from the window) his secretary, who had just ushered us in, came back greatly excited and gave us the news. She was a German woman and had language difficulties and, I am afraid, strong feelings against Americans, for in a torrent of words she seemed to be accusing us of the murder, at the same time giving us the bare facts from the wireless message.

Within fifteen minutes flags on all of the government buildings and ships in the harbor were at half mast. And as I sat talking to Mr. Parham, who came in during our first few moments of shock, I looked down on the waterfront to see the grey-headed "ocean tramp" Willis slowly lower the stars and striped on his Rube Goldberg catamaran. Last evening all social functions having
to do with our people on the "Tofua", as well as strictly local affairs, were cancelled, and Apia was a quiet town, a sincere tribute to the passing of our young President.

Later, we visited the Parham home for morning tea and I was given the range of their garden, which is located on the Experiment Station grounds. I found quite a few hibiscus, most of them "oldies" which Mr. Parham had brought over from Fiji where he had previously served in an agricultural capacity. The Parhams' son John is the Government Botanist in Fiji whom I mentioned in previous correspondence. Mrs. Parham's mother was the author of the book on Fijian plants which we use as reference.

On the Parham grounds I found an old single yellow that I have been looking for. I have never had it in our collections, but remember seeing it years ago in Hawaii, a very simple flower on a strong plant. The leaves are five-lobed and deeply cut, and I believe it to be a very primitive type. And to make the find of greater importance, the plant was covered with seed pods. This was the first seed I have seen on the trip so far.

While I was gathering the seed, I was joined by a handsome Samoan woman, also a guest of the Parhams. I did not hear or rather, could not understand her last name when we were introduced - her hostess just called her "Lifli". She had returned day before yesterday from Los Angeles where her daughter lives, and she gave me the latest news from Southern California. She seemed very much at home in the Parham garden and showed me around the grounds. Later, I learned that she was Lilli Mata'a, recently divorced wife of the present head of the Samoan government, and the highest ranking chief in Samoa.

Generally speaking, however, I found Samoa very disappointing hibiscus-wise, perhaps because I had heard that the flower was at its best in these islands and that there were distinctive varieties to be seen. However, I saw only two, one of which was the yellow mentioned above, that had any exceptional characteristics.

Of all the varieties in evidence here, the pink and white Dainty is perhaps the most common in street and dooryard plantings. Seldom did I see a plant which did not have both pink and white flowers - this sporting habit is accepted as commonplace by residents of Samoa. As I wrote you previously, the White Dainty is supposed to be a sport which appeared on a Pink Dainty in Florida several years ago, but apparently this sporting is general with this little H. schizopetalus hybrid which seems to be quite unstable, thus sports wherever grown.

I could find nothing in print on hibiscus in Samoa, even in the extensive botanical library in Mr. Parham's office. Few people know their varieties by name, but this seems to be generally true throughout the Pacific area. I was told that some hybridization has been done on this island, but that the man who was interested in this was in England on leave, so I have not tried to see his garden. As I understand it, his seedlings are quite simple in form.

Although I did not write you from there, we also stopped at Pago Pago in Eastern Samoa. Eastern Samoa comprises the large island of Tutila on which Pago Pago is situated, together with all islands of the Samoan group lying east of the 171 parallel of west longitude. It is administered by the United States Department of Interior, with the executive officer a governor appointed by the President.

At this time Eastern Samoa has a population of only 25,000, but it is growing rapidly, mostly because of the fact that high wages and the promise of the start of TV broadcasting later this year has drawn large numbers of Western Samoan immigrants. As usual, the United States government is quite prodigal with its spending in this area, and has assisted in bringing in a number of industries which provide employment. Tuna fishing and canning is the most important activity, but this, strange to say, is Japanese controlled.

We took a drive around Pago Pago and environs and walked around the town, but saw very few hibiscus. However, we did see a plant of Mrs. Hassinger for the first time in the Pacific, and also of that pinkish white single which Vavra collected, brought to California, and named President Masaryk.

Western Samoa, of which this little port town is the capital, comprises two large islands, Upolu and Savaii, and many more smaller ones. It has a population of close to 100,000 people, of which about 700 are European, and 12,500 are "Euronesian," a term used to classify persons of European and Polynesian blood. Until two years ago, Western Samoa was a Trust Territory administered by New Zealand, but it became a sovereign state on June 1, 1962, outside the British Commonwealth. New Zealand still maintains a resident commissioner who functions primarily as a diplomatic representative.

This island is very rich and productive, and the land laws are such that native Samoans can live in plenty from their land and by fishing. But under German developed; there are now 30,000 acres in cocoa, and the 1962 production was 5260 tons.
This will be another very quiet night in Apia. News of the assassination of President Kennedy still filters through, but it must be transcribed and placed on the ship's bulletin board before we can know additional facts. It goes without saying that the deck area around the bulletin board is the most popular spot on the ship. There is but one other American couple aboard the "Tofua", but if the entire passenger list were American, I am sure they would have reacted more deeply to this tragedy.

As ever,
Ross

Aboard the "Tofua"
En route Samoa to Suva
November 23, 1963

Dear Joe:

This is the last leg of our Island Tour - we are due to arrive in Suva tomorrow morning, then go on to Auckland, New Zealand, where the "Tofua" cruise officially ends.

In going over my Samoan notes, I find that I neglected to tell you of our visit to Vailima, the home of Robert Louis Stevenson, at the foot of Mount Vaea. Stevenson came to Samoa in 1890, in poor health, but it was here that he turned out some of his best work. He died in 1894, and is buried on the top of Mount Vaea above Vailima, a forty-minute walk over a steep, slippery trail. We did not go up for we were told that since the Samoan people have been given their independence and thus the responsibility for taking care of Vailima and the Stevenson burial site, the trail and even the tomb are deteriorating.

As you know, Stevenson wrote his own epitaph, and these lines are carved on his tombstone:

"under a wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie,
Glad did I live and gladly die
And I laid me down with a will.
"This be the verse ye grave for me;
Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

Stevenson's tomb on Mount Vaea looks down on the sea, for Stevenson was never happy far away from the sea and the sea is the background for some of his best writing. From my boyhood days I've been a Stevenson reader. In Hawaii many years ago I sat under the great banyan tree on the site of the former Cleghorn mansion at Waikiki: the tree that lives in literary history as the favorite rendezvous of Stevenson and Princess Ka'iulani, child-daughter of the Scotsman, Captain Archibald Cleghorn and Princess Likelike, sister of Hawaii's Queen Lilipukalani. She died quite young. Cleghorn was made governor of Oahu and was a leading citizen of Hawaii for many years.

Much against Stevenson's advice, this motherless young girl was sent to Scotland for her education:

"Forth from her land to mine she goes,
The island flower, the island rose,
The daughter of a double race . . . "

Stevenson wrote in her autograph album as she prepared to leave Hawaii. The young princess returned to Hawaii with her health greatly impaired by the rigorous winters of Scotland, and "the island flower, the island rose" died in the April of her life.

When I visited the banyan tree thirty years ago, the Cleghorn gardens were already covered with run-down, shoddy bungalows; today a great hotel, named for the princess, stands close by. Cleghorn is credited with being the first to hybridize hibiscus in Hawaii (1872) and my visit to the site of his garden was motivated both by my interest in Stevenson and the hope that I might find some plants of his earliest crosses. None were in evidence.
One of the best books on Stevenson's life in the South Seas is "This Life I've Loved," by Isobel Field, and I suggest that you read it. Mrs. Field was Stevenson's stepdaughter and, during his Samoan years, his amanuensis. Hers was truly a fabulous life, with close literary associations. Her brother, Lloyd Osbourne, under the tutelage of Stevenson became a well known author; her son, Austin Strong, was a famous playwright as was her second husband, Salisbury Field. At one time both her son and her husband had successful plays on Broadway.

But back to Samoa. I was very much interested in seeing the Vailima garden as I thought there might be plantings of hibiscus not found elsewhere in Samoa, because Vailima, after Stevenson's death, became the home of the Resident Commissioner for Western Samoa and is presently used for formal government functions. However, I found that there were very few hibiscus there, but among these was one old plant - a tree, to be exact - a Mrs. Lillian Wilder. This was the only true Hawaiian that I have seen in Samoa. Also, there were several plants of a little buff-colored H. schizopetalus cross much like the one that I brought back from Hope Gardens in Jamaica many years ago.

As I sit here in the "Tofua" library writing this letter, Queen Salote's grandson has slipped quietly into a chair across the large table, and is watching me closely. As you know - and suffer the consequences - I write very rapidly and this seems to intrigue the youngster. Each day he spends a few moments at my table as I do my daily stint with ballpoint.

However, he is not always the quiet, serious boy that I see now; mostly he's a bit of a rowdy. He and his tutor (who is also the Queen's secretary and aide) have the cabin almost adjoining ours, and nearly every morning the young prince greets me with a "Stick 'em up!" I must then leave the cabin and advance to the stairway with a gun at my back. His arsenal is quite formidable - it ranges from a pair of very ornate plastic Colt 45's to a life-sized, wicked-looking, pot metal burp gun.

The young man's name is AmiaiIwahami - Ammie for short, and he is the second son of Prince Tungi. The oldest son, in line to become the King of Tonga, will be graduated from high school in New Zealand this year and Prince Tungi told us that he will then be sent to Switzerland to study languages.

I will perhaps not write you from Suva, for we only spend one night there. However, we will be enjoying one hibiscus related event. This be a cocktail party given for the business men of Suva and their wives, by the Union Steamship Company, to introduce their new General Manager. Today we received an elaborately engraved invitation, the only passengers aboard who received one. Certainly the aura of Harvey Turner's interest is responsible!

As ever,
Ross

December 1963

Auckland, New Zealand
December 5, 1963

Dear Joe:

Our arrival in Auckland was enlivened by the discovery of a stowaway-in-reverse, and we were held up on the dock until he was found. I say "in reverse" because the culprit was a passenger who went into hiding before the ship docked so that he would not have to go ashore. You have probably guessed who he was none other than young Prince "Ammie", who, faced with the prospect of entering a strange New Zealand school, tried to hold out for a return trip to Nukualofa and the easier life in Tonga.

As we approached the dock, with New Zealand's largest and most beautiful city as a background, we noticed several cars lined up at the gangplank, practically blocking the approach to the ship. These, we soon learned, were waiting to take Queen Salote and her entourage to her Auckland home. In the group, too, were official cars of the New Zealand government, for protocol demands that Queen Salote be met in a style befitting her station.

The Queen, epitome of graciousness and charm, soon moved down the gangplank, acknowledging the greetings of her subjects temporarily residing in Auckland, and was met by New Zealand dignitaries in a formal manner. She entered her car, but the party
did not move off the dock. Minutes went by, with the Queen trying to retain her composure and the New Zealand officials standing by, obviously with some embarrassment. Activity on the dock came to a standstill, and soon the reason filtered through the crowd and on to the ship - the young Prince could not be found.

The situation became rather tense. One could sense that Queen Salote was quite concerned - she seemed to be having difficulty in concealing her feelings as a grandmother and at the same time maintaining her queenly poise.

However, after about fifteen minutes, young "Ammie" came down the gangplank, guided firmly by his tutor, and entered the car. From the expression on his face, one would think that he was approaching the gallows. Then the entourage moved off the dock and we lesser people were able to find cabs and go to our hotels.

Like Rome, Auckland is known for its hills, and like Los Angeles, it is spread all over the map. It is a clean city and from all outward appearances, a happy one. In all of our trips around the town we have seen no evidence of poverty - nor of great wealth either. New Zealand is, of course, a welfare state, and in such a limited geographical area it probably works out. But I rather sense that some of the people resent the economic controls placed on them and that they would rather risk being very poor if they were given the opportunity of becoming very rich. It is not possible to be either in New Zealand.

Hibiscusly, Auckland and the North island in general are "hot" - the interest in our hobby flower is quite intense at this time. Most nurseries are increasing their production of hibiscus, and several towns have announced plans for community hibiscus gardens. And a few nurseries and a goodly number of fanciers are importing new hybrids from Hawaii. However, except in the case of a few "old timers" there seems to be no real knowledge of the background or possibilities of the flower, or the rather restricted commercial range of modern hybrids.

We had good reason quite early in our visit here to believe that Auckland had become truly hibiscus conscious. We had just set our bags down in our hotel room and were having eleven o'clock tea when we were paged by a Mr. Massey Wood. I did not recall the name, but asked him to join us.
When introducing himself and Mrs. Wood, Massey explained that he had heard from a friend in Fiji that I was headed toward Auckland, so planned to meet the "Tofua". He missed us, however, perhaps due to the confusion created by the young prince. He has a large greenhouse tomato operation in one of the suburbs, and is also interested in ornamental plant production. He has decided to go into the business of growing hibiscus for sale on a wholesale basis and has already begun to build a special greenhouse adjacent to his tomato ranges for the propagation of hibiscus under a very modern mist system. He confessed that he knew little about the business, and wanted to take me on as a consultant. I did not want to do this on a job basis, but I have tried to be helpful. We’ve spent a lot of time together touring the area and visiting his beautiful modern home.

We started our touring the very first day we arrived. It was Sunday, and after our morning tea the Woods invited us to take a drive down in the country to visit a friend - his former commanding officer, in fact. We assumed that this would be a few miles away, but it turned out to be a 60 mile drive into the hill country where his friend operated a 1400 acre sheep ranch. On the way out we were able to get a very good picture of the North island area, and on the drive back, after a New Zealand afternoon tea - which is in reality a heavy meal - Massey took us over another route, one from which we were able to look down on the city of Auckland at sundown, a glorious view indeed.

I called Jack Clark, our retired nurseryman friend, after I became established in the hotel, as he had lost track of us. As you know, we had first planned to fly to Auckland an pick up the "Tofua" there, but when I learned that we could board her in Suva, we decided to wait for her in Fiji. However, I had neglected to advise Jack of our change in plans.

When Jack was in California last year, he told us that he had retired from the nursery business. However, after spending a day with him, I decided that he has retired like I have. He has leased his nursery to a very competent young nurserywoman, and she is raising a large number of varieties of hibiscus, many of them from wood brought in from Hawaii by Jack. Apparently the cuttings he got from us, and shipped to his son for grafting in, arrived in poor condition. Most of the scion wood I shipped you from here are from Jack Clark’s collection.

We have visited a number of nurseries, and also stopped by the home of Harvey Turner, the man who was responsible for getting us a berth on the "Tofua." He lives on Mount Albert, one of the really warm spots in the Auckland area, and has quite a collection of Hawaiian hybrids, many of them purchased from Nii in Honolulu. I had also sent him seed and scion wood, both of which are becoming established.

As nearly as I can determine, weatherwise Auckland resembles Los Angeles and Southern California in its treatment of hibiscus. It appears that cultivars which do well in our area are best adapted to this section as well. Apparently on the hills and slopes
there is little if any frost, and one can see many old plants of the common varieties of hibiscus in park and dooryard plantings. Also, few places in the central or northern section of North Island are far from the tempering influence of the sea. Yet there are many lower areas where temperatures do not permit the growing of hibiscus. We have not gone north of Auckland where the climate is even warmer than Auckland, and where we were told hibiscus grows at its best. As for varieties, most of those seen in park and dooryard plantings are "oldies", particularly the older varieties which I saw in Fiji from where New Zealand nurserymen secured most of their stock in earlier years. However, I have seen some interesting cultivars - apparently older hybrids or sports which displayed characters which, if they prove to be dominant, may be helpful to us in our breeding program. I hope that you receive the wood I sent in good order.

**H. flora plena**, the double red said to have been brought into the Pacific by the Polynesians, is very much in evidence, but as I have said before, there is no record of its having been brought as far south as New Zealand in the Polynesian migration days. Also very popular is a light pink single from Australia, called **Mrs. Thompkins**, said to be a sport introduced many years ago by a Sydney nurseryman, a strong, low grower, which is what we need in Southern California. Another outstanding variety secured at Harvey Turner's place is a large single red called **Simmonds Red**, said to be a good seeder.

Despite the interest locally in sophisticated modern hybrids, those I have seen did not look very happy here and I predict that they will survive only in the warm hill areas. They may persist for awhile, but climatically this area would seem to demand the same characters in hibiscus that we require in Southern California.

Early tomorrow I have an appointment with Harvey Turner at his office to see his produce operation and to thank him for his assistance in helping us arrange our "Tofua" cruise. While my time with him will be short because he is a very busy man, and also because we are scheduled to leave on a tour of North Island quite early, I suspect that there will be much talk about hibiscus and little about produce; I think that it can be said that Harvey Turner is New Zealand's most interested hibiscus fancier.

Our North Island tour takes us to the so-called "Thermal Regions" where the famous New Zealand geysers are being harnessed to produce electric power, and to several spots of scenic, but not hibiscus, interest. We will then return here, then take a plane to Christchurch on the South Island, where we are scheduled to take an eleven-day bus tour which will include such world-renowned tourist spots as Milford Sound and Mount Cook. As this section is practically hibiscusless, you will perhaps not have another report from me until we reach Sydney, some three weeks hence.

As ever,
Ross

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Bluff, New Zealand
December 11, 1963

Dear Joe:

If you will look at a map of New Zealand, you will find this little port town on the southernmost tip of South island; it corresponds to Lands End in England, and is, in fact, just about the same distance from the northernmost point of New Zealand's North island as is Lands End from John O'Groats - which is the northernmost point of mainland Britain.

As this is a sheep country with not a hibiscus in sight, this letter will have nothing of hibiscus in it except several Cook Island hibiscus stamps which I neglected to send from Auckland. I think they are very pretty and, of course, they do give a hibiscus flavor to this letter.

We are told that there are 3-1/2 sheep to every person in New Zealand, and I think we saw most of them yesterday on the way down here from Christchurch. And this morning we visited a great loading dock where the remainder of them, properly dead and frozen, were being loaded on a refrigerator ship on an ingenuous conveyor which carried the carcasses on an enclosed belt system several hundred feet from the dock freezer to the refrigerated hold of the ship.

The shipment of frozen meat is the only reason for the existence of this little town; it is really a bleak and inhospitable area. Off the coast, in the dim distance can be seen Stewarts Island, the only land between here and Antarctica.
We are really enjoying this bus trip; it is the first time we have ever gone in for this sort of travel. It's a "no sweat" deal; Charlie Watson, our efficient tour manager and driver thinks of everything and we just go along for the ride, figuratively as well as literally. There are 26 persons aboard, and we are the only Americans; most of the rest are New Zealanders or Australians. Included on the passenger list are two young Chinese, one born in New Zealand, and the other from Hong Kong, but temporarily in school in Australia. They are the leaders of the younger members of the party - in fact, the life of the entire party. To them and to the other youngsters, I understand that I am referred to as "Alf" - short for Alfred Hitchcock, whom, they say, I resemble. Quite a comedown from Henry Kaiser, for whom I have been taken while Hawaii, but some improvement over being mistaken for Bert Lahr on the streets of Hollywood.

It seems strange to see all the Christmas decorations up, and Christmas merchandise in the stores, just at a time when everyone is on summer vacation. And along the road, late spring and summer flowers are beginning to appear. Yesterday we travelled through a stretch of country where the road was bordered on both sides with a carpet of gold - California poppies at their best. And the hill slopes in this area are covered with Scotch broom, great yellow masses of vagrant bloom, once a dooryard treasure in a bleak land, and now a troublesome pest.

I hope I have a letter from you on our return to Christchurch reporting on the conditions of the first Fiji grafts, and advising whether or not the Auckland shipment arrived safely. There are several excellent hibiscus in these shipments, and I hope that we are able to get them established.

We have not as yet had confirmation of our flight over the 1200 mile stretch of Tasman Sea to Sydney, but we expect that it will reach us in a couple of days. I am looking forward to our time in Sydney for several reasons, not the least of which is an opportunity to read in the famous Mitchell Library. I want to check some botanical and horticultural references, as well as some manuscripts of a strictly historical nature that can be seen only at Mitchell. They have many of the original papers of Sir Joseph Banks, dean of the English horticultural world in the last half of the Eighteenth Century, and of Dr. Solander, Captain Cook's botanist.

Charlie is sounding off "First Call" on his horn, so I will have to close.

As ever,
Ross

Sydney
December 23, 1963

Dear Joe:

This letter will just report our safe arrival in Australia, and express our belated wishes for a happy holiday season for you and yours.

"Also, I want to pass along a South Seas Christmas story which appeared as an item from the Gilbert Islands, in the local paper, a story which, I think, deserves reading because it shows how all out these people will go to preserve their real interest in Christmas:

"Gilbert Islands, Dec. 22 - The Gilbert Island Colony vessel Moana Raoi was on its regular run last week, steaming about 20 miles south of Butaritari on passage to Marakei. Dusk was falling gently over a calm sea, reddening in the afterglow of the setting sun. Suddenly the horrifying shout of "pig overboard" was heard.

"The crew reacted with seamanlike alacrity to the news that Lulu the sow was swiftly vanishing astern into the darkening sea. The crimson shot waves became suddenly sinister.

"The helm was put over, the ship slowed. Men stood on the rail poised to leap over the side. Ropes were coiled handy.

"For a moment Lulu was lost to view in the dark blue swell, but was then seen swimming bravely - but away from the ship. With helm hard over and bare way upon her Moana Raoi slowly closed. With a splash, Tirerei, OS, plunged overboard from the port side. The sow changed direction and swam round the bow with Tirerei in pursuit. The rudder was put hard over the other way.
Tirerei closed and grasped Lulu who now struggled in panic, but he seized her and drew her towards the ship. Over the side went Tekeu, ship's cook, as the telegraph clanged slow astern. Then many willing hands helped rescued and rescuers back on board.

"Lulu clearly was in a bad way. Mouth to mouth resuscitation was mooted. However, two stalwarts, one on each side, grasped her hind legs and Lulu swung like a pendulum with water pouring out of ears, nose and mouth. An ear splitting squeal announced the treatment efficacious, and that Lulu felt the indignity not to say the immodesty of the position for a young lady of breeding. Meanwhile the vessel regained her course, engines were rung away and darkness fell, closing another episode of gallantry on the high seas."

"Very touching," you are thinking. "But what's Christmas-y about rescuing a pig?" So I'd better add the last paragraph of the story:

"When your reporter complimented the captain on the bravery of his men, he explained that Lulu the sow was the crews' Christmas pig, and her loss would mean the loss of their traditional Christmas dinner."

Merry Christmas
Ross

Sydney
December 30, 1963

Dear Joe:

Although we have been in Australia eight days, I have little to report, hibiscus-wise. We arrived on Sunday, and on Tuesday we flew 400 miles west to the little town of Griffiths to spend Christmas with an old customer and pen pal, Alfred Ngunan. He came to Australia from Europe in 1939, went into the fruit and vegetable growing and shipping business and has been very successful. Over the years he has called on me for information on equipment and supplies, and as he is also a fisherman, we have swapped a lot of lies about our respective catches.

With their children and grandchildren, the Nugans made us really feel at home; Christmas dinner included roast pig and roast turkey as well, with splendid Australian wines. In the afternoon we toured the district, visiting orchards and orchardists, most of them Italian migrants. It seemed quite odd to be eating ripe peaches, apricots and nectarines off the tree on Christmas Day.

The population of the Griffiths area is mostly made up of migrants from Europe, people who have come in during the past twenty or thirty years. There are about 11 million people in Australia, more than a million of them post-World War II immigrants. Of that million, more than half are not British. Indicating the diversity of the peoples which Australia has brought to her shores, in 1962 there were 68,000 Germans, 65,000 Dutch, 45,000 Italians, 31,000 Greeks, 27,500 Maltese, and 16,000 Austrians in that country. The flow continues due to generous assistance schemes under the Australian government immigration program. But only under circumstances are Negroes or Asians allowed to settle permanently in Australia; Asians now form a smaller proportion of the Australian population than they did a hundred years ago.

Back here in Sydney I spent a half day in the Botanic Garden, which is a short distance from our hotel. There we saw many large plants of hibiscus, mostly old forms grown in Southern California, but under different names. Crown of Bohemia is Morris Scobie; Lillian Wilder is Dawn; and Jamaica is Conqueror. In one shaded corner there was a group planting of H. arnottianus twenty feet high.

Yesterday we took a bus tour to the north of Sydney so that we might get a general idea of the country hereabouts. We visited some of the Sydney area beaches - they have many of them - and saw a large number of fine dooryard and street plantings of hibiscus, again all "oldies" well known to us. Among them were Common Red, H. flora plena, Kona, Agnes Galt, Lillian Wilder, Crown of Bohemia, Jamaica, Orpa, Jigoro (Hawaiian Golden), Pink Versicolor, Peachblow, Apricot (old single orange-yellow), and Princess Takamatsu. One called Cameo Queen, a single light yellow, was also seen; I think it is the same as our Luna.
There is a hibiscus nursery at Warriedeow several miles north of here, and I plan to go out this week. Kenneth Perks told me that it has the largest hibiscus collection in the Antipodes. Also, the owner, Lester Beers, is a member of the American Hibiscus Society.

From what I have seen, Sydney appears to be much like Los Angeles climatically. The older forms of hibiscus do well here, particularly close to the ocean, and many of the plants are huge, testifying to their longevity. But so far I have not seen any new forms or varieties that we have not grown at home at one time or another. In fact, this has been pretty much the case in every area we have visited, with the exception of Hawaii, of course.

As ever,  
Ross

January 1964

Sydney
January 2, 1964

Dear Joe:

I finally got around to doing a little serious hibisticating on Monday, paying a visit to Lester Beers, who operates Hibiscus Park at Warriedeow Beach, about fifteen miles north of Sydney. He specializes in hibiscus, and as we Aussies say, he does a fair dinkum job of it.

Beers propagates for sale about 120 named varieties which he has brought in from India, Hawaii and Florida. He sells 30,000 plants a year, mostly on their own root, in what we would call 2-quart containers. He issues one of the best hibiscus catalogues I have ever seen; I am sending you a copy under separate cover. This indicates that he gets from $1.00 to $2.50 for his plants, depending on variety.

He is a real merchandiser, too. As one enters his sales area, he must pass along a wall into which are built several round windows - or window boxes, really - and in each one is a display of blooms on coconut leaf ribs, attractively arranged in sprays. Then, in his sales room he has a large table about 24 inches high and painted white, and a flower of each variety, carefully labelled, is placed on the table every day to help influence purchase decisions.

Most of his varieties are old forms under local names. The only exception are the ones he secured from Brisbane, originally from Ceylon, and some newer Hawaiians recently imported from Nii Brothers. He agrees that while these latter are showy, they may not do so well here. Yet I observed that this year he is getting some very good growth on his Hawaiians, particularly his Miller and Nagao origins.

Beers is a horticulturist by education and training and he has tried to learn as much about hibiscus as is possible. He says that he has never found anything in the way of literature on the subject, but his catalogue and planting and care instructions are quite complete. He says that interest in hibiscus in Australia is growing very fast; that fifteen years ago one could not find any yellows here, and only a few varieties of any other color. He knew, of course, that some of the Australian nurserymen in the late Nineteenth Century supplied English nurseries with some special forms such as *H. denisonii* and *H. baptisti* but apparently in late years few new ones have appeared. However, he had two of Australian origin that I liked, and which I think may be helpful to us. One is a large 8-inch single light pink, a very precocious and free bloomer on a low-growing plant. This one is called Mrs. Thompkins. The other is a sport from *Kona* (*Kona* is *Mrs. Rose Davis* here) which is just like *Kona* in foliage, but the color is a dark reddish-pink - Shocking Pink, I think the girls would call it if it were a fabric. It is known as *Sabrina*. Both of these were shipped to you today, together with several other varieties.

I had hoped to find some seeders and seed here. However, the season is wrong for this, for summer has just gotten underway.

Next week we will go up the Brisbane in Queensland, the real hibiscus area of Australia, and then on up to Cairms which is about 1400 miles north of here and only a few hundred miles away from New Guinea. From there we will go out on the Great Barrier Reef.

As ever,

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Dear Joe:

I finally got around to doing a little serious hibisticating on Monday, paying a visit to Lester Beers, who operates Hibiscus Park at Warriedeow Beach, about fifteen miles north of Sydney. He specializes in hibiscus, and as we Aussies say, he does a fair dinkum job of it.

Beers propagates for sale about 120 named varieties which he has brought in from India, Hawaii and Florida. He sells 30,000 plants a year, mostly on their own root, in what we would call 2-quart containers. He issues one of the best hibiscus catalogues I have ever seen; I am sending you a copy under separate cover. This indicates that he gets from $1.00 to $2.50 for his plants, depending on variety.

He is a real merchandiser, too. As one enters his sales area, he must pass along a wall into which are built several round windows - or window boxes, really - and in each one is a display of blooms on coconut leaf ribs, attractively arranged in sprays. Then, in his sales room he has a large table about 24 inches high and painted white, and a flower of each variety, carefully labelled, is placed on the table every day to help influence purchase decisions.

Most of his varieties are old forms under local names. The only exception are the ones he secured from Brisbane, originally from Ceylon, and some newer Hawaiians recently imported from Nii Brothers. He agrees that while these latter are showy, they may not do so well here. Yet I observed that this year he is getting some very good growth on his Hawaiians, particularly his Miller and Nagao origins.

Beers is a horticulturist by education and training and he has tried to learn as much about hibiscus as is possible. He says that he has never found anything in the way of literature on the subject, but his catalogue and planting and care instructions are quite complete. He says that interest in hibiscus in Australia is growing very fast; that fifteen years ago one could not find any yellows here, and only a few varieties of any other color. He knew, of course, that some of the Australian nurserymen in the late Nineteenth Century supplied English nurseries with some special forms such as *H. denisonii* and *H. baptisti* but apparently in late years few new ones have appeared. However, he had two of Australian origin that I liked, and which I think may be helpful to us. One is a large 8-inch single light pink, a very precocious and free bloomer on a low-growing plant. This one is called Mrs. Thompkins. The other is a sport from *Kona* (*Kona* is *Mrs. Rose Davis* here) which is just like *Kona* in foliage, but the color is a dark reddish-pink - Shocking Pink, I think the girls would call it if it were a fabric. It is known as *Sabrina*. Both of these were shipped to you today, together with several other varieties.

I had hoped to find some seeders and seed here. However, the season is wrong for this, for summer has just gotten underway.

Next week we will go up the Brisbane in Queensland, the real hibiscus area of Australia, and then on up to Cairms which is about 1400 miles north of here and only a few hundred miles away from New Guinea. From there we will go out on the Great Barrier Reef.
Dear Joe:

The City Fathers of Brisbane must have anticipated my arrival here some years back, for they planted both sides of the entire avenue approaching the airport with H. tiliae, or hau, as we call it in Hawaii. These handsome trees are quite unique in that they have been shaped into huge "standards" - the trunks are bare up to about ten feet and the carefully trimmed "heads" branch out evenly along the entire planting. And they are now in full bloom; as you know, the flowers of the hau are rich yellow in the morning hours, changing to a deep orange-brown by nightfall.

We are at the Bellevue Hotel across the street from the Botanic Garden, and as soon as we were settled I called on the Curator, H.W. Caulfield. With him, we first looked over the so-called "Ceylon Collection". although I had seen some of these in Sydney, I had been looking forward to seeing the entire group, which, when introduced, numbered about 60 varieties.

You know the history of this collection, I believe. They were brought to Brisbane by the late L.H. Steenbaum, formerly connected with the Brisbane City Council, in 1955, from Ceylon. Most of them, I understand, were originated at the Peradynia Garden near Kandy where some simple hybridization has been done over the years. This Garden also published a bulletin on hibiscus hybridization, now out of print, but thanks to K.C.L. Perks of Suva, who has a copy, I was able to photograph the publication with my copying lens and will reproduce it for the Arboretum Library.

I was very much disappointed with the quality of the blooms. In fact, I can say without reservation that not one of them would displace any of the common sorts we grow in Southern California, but it is possible that they were not at their best as summer is just coming on here.

After satisfying myself that the Brisbane imports were not particularly valuable in our work, we looked over a collection of seedlings originated by a Mrs. Marjorie Blackman of Magnetic Island off Townsville, six hundred miles north of here. She has been hybridizing for some time, but unfortunately none of her cultivars were in bloom. Here and there in the Garden were very large specimens of most of the older varieties we know here, but the only plants that really impressed me were the H. arnottianus, the native Hawaiian white, which seems very much at home here, and seeds like mad.

However, my main interest in the Brisbane Garden was the possibility that I could find the true H. cameronii, Knowles & Westcott. Paul Weissich of Honolulu told me he thought he had seen this elusive species in the Brisbane Garden, so when Mr. Caulfield confirmed this, I lost no time in getting to that part of the Garden where it was growing. One look at the plants and the one bloom in evidence confirmed the fact that the early-day journals had described the species correctly, and that Indian and Hawaiian authorities, from Bulletin No. 29 down to contemporary references, had been confusing H. cameronii with what we call Pink Versicolor - a wide miss of the mark.

Actually, the coloring is very close to the hand-colored prints of this species published when it was introduced into England from Madagascar in 1837. It is a mixture of light rose and buff, and there are prominently darker maroon blotches on the petals. It is really a little beauty.

Although the seed pod of H. cameronii is covered with a hairy coating, the flower parts are exactly like those of H. rosa-sinensis. The staminal column is the same in form, too, as are all reproductive parts. The leaves are deeply cut, five-lobed, a form that so often shows up in our seedlings.

Could this be the ancestral species we are looking for? I know that Dr. Tachibana at Osaka has been attempting to cross it with H. rosa-sinensis and other species without success, but I want to give it a try myself. It is too soft to ship as scion wood, but I was able to secure some seed from Mr. Caulfield.

Brisbane, Queensland
January 13, 1964

As ever,
 Ross
In addition to the *H. cameronii* seed and scion wood of some *H. rosa-sinensis* cultivars, I am sending you cuttings of *H. insularis*. This is a large shrub with very small leaves, handsome in growing habit. The flower is a cream color with touches of maroon on the petal edges. I don't think that it is close enough to *H. rosa-sinensis* to be useful in our project, but it is a shrub which may do well in Southern California. It should not be confused with *Lagunaria patersonii*, a Norfolk Island native, although the blooms are somewhat alike. *L. patersonii* is already known in Southern California and there are many plants - I should say trees - on Catalina Island, where this species seems to find a happy home.

The Brisbane Garden also has a fine collection of native Australian hibiscus species, and are collecting more. These are, of course, somewhat outside our field, but I am bringing back seed of several, and Mr. Caulfield promised to send more to me. One little plant, *H. rhodapotatus*, intrigues me. It is a low grower with foliage and branches much like *H. fubiflora*. However, the flower is a flat single, about 4” in diameter, and brick red in color. It is a native of Queensland, I was told, and may therefore be too tender for us. But it is certainly showy.

You have no doubt been consulting the map of Australia in order to follow my kangaroo-hopping travel pattern, so you know that Brisbane is 400 miles north of Sydney. It is beautifully situated at the mouth of the Brisbane River, and the city sprawls for miles along the Queensland coast. We were told by a bus driver that the area of the city of Brisbane is exceeded only by that of Los Angeles.

The climate of Southern Queensland is very much like that of Honolulu. It is quite humid, and hibiscus seed readily all along the Queensland coast. I noted pods on an old yellow called *Bruceii* here; on *Shirley*, one of the varieties from Ceylon, and on a single pink called *Stella*. Of course, every plant of *H. arnottianus* is covered with seed pods. I asked Mr. Caulfield if there was any activity in hybridizing other than the work of Mrs. Blackman who I mentioned in my last letter, and he gave me the name of a local nurseryman named Ulrich who lives in a suburb near here, so I decided to visit him.

I found Mr. Ulrich to be a dedicated hibiscus fan, but he had not been long in the business of tossing hibiscus pollen around. He had a number of seedlings, most of them simple singles, but nothing that we could use here. However, I envied his set-up; evidently one can get pods to set over a long season of the year here on dooryard plantings. He seemed surprised to learn that I had to have greenhouse environment to get seed in Southern California.

The main problem here seems to be the lack of varieties which will not only seed, but produce desirable seedlings. Interest is growing in the hobby, however, and I predict that in a few years a large number of amateur hybridists will be producing excellent hibiscus cultivars all along the Queensland coast!

We fly to Cairns tomorrow. This town is 900 miles north of here, and only about 400 miles south of Port Moresby in New Guinea. It is supposed to be truly tropical in every way and we are looking forward to seeing some real hibiscus plantings.

As ever,
Ross

Cairns, Queensland
January 16, 1964

Dear Joe:

At this moment I'm wondering if the old government employees' travel form questions: "Is this trip necessary?" should have been given more consideration before we made the 900-mile flight up hereto Cairns. Certainly it has not added anything to my knowledge of hibiscus, for I found the same varieties here that are common in nearly every other place I have visited so far and, in fact, most of the ones I have seen are growing in my own yard.

However, we did want to see tropical Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef. Green Island, 16 miles off Cairns, is the easiest way to see a "sample" of the Reef, which stretches several hundred miles down the east coast of Australia. Only a few of the hundreds of islands in the Reef are visited, and Green island, where we spent yesterday, is a true coral atoll. It is only 42 acres "big", but is very popular with "trippers", as tourists are called in Australia.
A few hundred miles north of Cairns is the Torres Straits which divides Australia from New Guinea, and in an area 400 or 500 miles directly east of here the battle of the Coral Sea was fought.

Here in Cairns the hibiscus plant look much like they did in Fiji. This is perhaps because here, as well as in Fiji, we were visiting during the rainy season; however, they certainly look unhappy and the bloom is very sparse.

We visited a nursery, an orchid specialist who also produces a large number of hibiscus for the Northern Queensland area. It was obvious that most of the varieties were from the so-called "Peradynia" collection at Brisbane, although there were some Hawaiian "oldies" such as Kona and Mrs. Wilder. I did find a very good plant of baptisti, the odd variegated red and white that one sees in Hawaii occasionally. It is called Hawaiian Flag there. As I remember, this variety was found as a sport by an Adelaide nurseryman nearly a hundred years ago, and sent to England where it enjoyed a brief vogue as a hot house novelty. Also, I found a couple of poor singles, but as the plants were loaded with seed, I am sending you some wood. We need seeders, particularly old forms.

Cairns is the center of the Northern Queensland sugar cane industry, and the cane fields present a beautiful pattern in green from the air, or as one travels by car up from the coast to the Atherton Tableland area, situated over the coastal range. This section is known principally for tobacco production; temperatures drop down to 30 degrees there, but I noted many large old plants of hibiscus which were very thrifty and blooming profusely - much better looking than plants in the Cairns area. Apparently the low temperatures did not persist, for there was no evidence of frost damage.

The back country here is a tropical jungle, given over to palms, tree ferns, and other exotic flora. One can travel for days along "tracks" (roads) lined and sometimes canopied with dense jungle growth. It's a hothouse, and full of bush flies.

Tomorrow we take the long, 1400-mile journey back to Sydney, stopping only a few minutes at Townsville and at Brisbane. We have seen Cairns and sampled the Great Barrier Reef, but I am sure that had I known how little there is to see here, I would have spent more time around Brisbane and the lower Queensland Coast. This area seems to be the real happy home in Australia for hibiscus.

We stay only a day or two in Sydney, then make the 400-mile flight west over the entire continent of Australia to Perth. I'll write you again from there.

As ever,
Ross

Perth, Western Australia
January 28, 1964

Dear Joe:

Perth has a population of over 300,000, but I would say there is a hibiscus bush for every man, woman and child resident of this beautiful little city on the Swan River just a few miles inland from the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, I am sure that 75 per cent of the hibiscus here are Mrs. Wilder, or one of the Wilder seedlings. Next in preference seems to be what is called Wilders White, which is none other than the true H. arnottianus, the native Hawaiian white.

This is really an unusual situation; here, on the shores of the Indian Ocean, an area where early trade contacts were via hibiscus-rich South Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius, the old Hawaiian varieties are predominant. It is certainly a testimony to the efforts of the early Hawaiian hybridizers such as Gerrit Wilder, Alonzo Gartley, Valentine Holt, and others, and to the fact that interspecific crossing of the native Hawaiian species and old forms of H. rosa-sinensis does produce horticulturally significant hybrids.

There is very little authoritative interest in hibiscus here, in spite of the fact that the climate seems ideal for the culture of this exotic flower. On Monday, I called on the curator of the local Botanic Garden whose name had been given me by Dr. Stewart. He was out of the area, but I spent some time with his assistant. Outside of a few older forms used as landscape plants, nothing is being done at the garden with hibiscus.
This area is very much like Southern California in many ways. This is perhaps due to the fact that both Los Angeles and Perth are located close to the 30th parallel, only Perth is south latitude and Los Angeles is north latitude. The longitude, too, is practically the same.

Perth does not have a mountainous background as we do. The average annual rainfall is 35 inches, but like ours, is badly distributed. We are here at the very worst time of the year insofar as bloom is concerned - the countryside looks like ours does in August. We do enjoy the fresh fruits and vegetables which are grown locally and thus served field-fresh, but it does seem odd to have cantaloupe for breakfast in January - and at 12 cents a serving!

I plan to visit a local nursery if I have time; they have a salesroom here in town, and I have looked over their hibiscus. The manager told me that his firm is the largest grower of hibiscus here, and that the demand is quite good. However, they had nothing in stock except the older forms grown the world over, and did not seem at all interested in anything new.

The single pink that we call Mrs. Wilder, or Mrs. Lillian Wilder, is called Apple Blossom here, and another one of Wilder's pinks, the name of which I cannot recall, is called Dawn. The name Apple Blossom fits here because this variety grows to a height of 35 feet here, and when covered with pink bloom, does look like an apple tree from the distance. H. arnottianus also makes tree-like growth in this area and seeds freely.

Other varieties seen in West Australia in approximately the order of their popularity (local names in parenthesis) are: Agnes Galt; Kona (Mrs. Rose Davis); Orpath (Island Empress); H. andersonii (the bronzed leaf variety); Eleanor (Bronze King); Brilliant (Splendid); Princess Takamatsu (Flame); Ruffled Beauty (Cameo Queen); Lamberti (H. flora plena rubra); Jamaica (Conquerer); Hawaiian Golden or Jigoro (Mrs. J.D. O'Brien); Peachblow (Peachblow); Pink Versicolor (Suva Queen); and a yellow single which looks very much like Bloomin' Fool.

Obviously, there is little of interest in this list for us, but I am sending you a small shipment. One that I selected is a large red with a dark center zone; it looks like a strong grower. Another is a double yellow with a dark pink center zone; it is the old one called Collari, I believe. In all, I am shipping 14 varieties, none of which are spectacular.

I am enclosing a map showing you, roughly, where we have been, and where we plan to go from here. Also, please note that I have marked the mileage between South Africa and Western Australia; my geography at the start of this trip was certainly off, as I thought Mauritius was about 500 to 900 miles off this coast. Actually, it is 3500 miles. Madagascar is 4000 miles from here, and it is farther from Perth to Cape Town, Africa, than it is from Cape Town across the Atlantic to Rio de Janeiro!

My next letter will be from Singapore, where we will board the P & o Liner "Chusan" for England, with many stops between. The "Chusan" incidentally, is the same ship that we were on when we took a cruise from England to the Canary Islands and Madeira a couple of years ago, a cruise that also allowed me to collect several fine old hibiscus for our collection.

We made the Mediterranean Canary Island and Madeira cruise in July, 1962, boarding the "Chusan" at Southhampton, England. We had our grandson, Ross Estey Walton, 13 years old, with us on the trip - he had come over to England to spend his summer vacation with us.

I looked forward to this trip because the Canary Island (Spanish) and Madeira (Portuguese) were very important in early horticultural history. For several hundred years they were a stopping place, outward and inward-bound, around the Cape of Good Hope, for ships in the Indian trade. They also stopped at Mauritius in the Indian Ocean for victualing.

During this period Portugal established a colony at Goa on the Malabar coast of India, which as you know, figures importantly in the history of ornamental hibiscus.

In 1788, Spain established the Orotavia Botanical Garden on the island of Teneriffe, one of the Canary Islands as a plant acclimatization garden for plants collected in India and perhaps the Mascarene Islands. I was very anxious to visit there and see what they had in the way of hibiscus. If you remember, I sent back several old forms for our project.

We also visited Funchal, in the Madeira Islands. I was surprised to see some old Hawaiians, like H. arnottianus and Floribunda. As most of the Portuguese who were brought to Hawaii as cane labor were from Madeira, it is possible that there was some interchange of hibiscus varieties between the two islands.

Our flight will be over some stormy country, both weatherwise and politically; just the other day Sukarno ruled that Britshish or Australian planes, even for emergency, could not land in Indonesia if there were Malaysian passengers aboard. We have to fly...
directly over Indonesia, so I hope they have plenty of gasoline aboard, or are ready to unload any Malaysians overboard in case of trouble!

As ever,
Ross

February 1964

Singapore, Malaya
February 2, 1964

Dear Joe:

Despite the fact that the newly formed Malaysian Federation has made the hibiscus their national flower, a four-day tour of this 142-square-mile island and the immediate mainland area adjoining it (Johore) has not convinced me that their choice was a reasonable one. For Singapore is practically hibiscusless. Outside of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, I have seen very few plants, and most of them have been hedge rows of the laminated petalled red single, the name of which is still questionable in my mind. It is this hibiscus, by the way, which has been selected as the Malaysian national flower. My guess is that it is a schizopetalus hybrid.

We arrived in Singapore at sundown on Wednesday. Our flight was at 28,000 feet, and we passed over several islands of the Indonesian group, including Java and Sumatra. Looking down from such a height, these islands were in clear outline, deep purple in color, in a light blue sea. And the sun dropping below the horizon gilded the many rivers of the islands so that they looked like ribbons of gold.

Singapore was founded, as you will remember from your high school history, by Sir Stamford Raffles, who secured permission from the Sultan of Johore in 1819 to establish a trading post here for the East India Company. It was made a Crown Colony in 1867 and remained under this control until 1959, when it became a state with full responsibility for its own government. Last year Singapore joined the Malaysian Federation.

The geographical position of Singapore, astride the main trade route between Japan and China, and Europe, is such that it quickly became the trading center of Southeast Asia, and today Singapore handles the second largest tonnage of shipping of the world’s ports. From our hotel windows we can see more than a hundred ships either docked or anchored in the roadstead.

This small island has a population of 1,800,000 people, of which 78 per cent are Chinese, who, as is the case in most Pacific areas, are now in financial control here.

Some of the population statistics for Singapore are frightening, at least to the local European colony, and should give the heads of the new government real concern. For instance, 55 per cent of the population of Singapore is 20 years old or younger. The birth rate is very high—we were told by our driver as we passed the State Hospital that a child is born every eight minutes. Most of these births are Chinese. With a low death rate, and the majority of the population approaching marriage age and therefore child-producing age, there is a real population explosion now. Of the future, what? The government, far left-of-center politically, is taxing business heavily to build housing and schools, and these taxes are expected to double or triple in ten years' time.

The row with Indonesia is being aired in Stateside papers now, so you are familiar with the problems—the publicized ones, anyway. But one aspect of this situation was brought home to me as never before when I looked out of my hotel window today across the Straits of Malacca to see some of the islands of Indonesia quite clearly in the distance. For only by visiting here does one realize that Singapore, at the tip of the Malayan Peninsula, is practically surrounded by Indonesian islands. And within an hour by jet from the Singapore airport, one can be in Saigon where we are trying to save Vietnamese from Communism, or in Djakarta, where Sukarno is ranting and raving at our expense. Bankok, in Thailand, is but an hour and a half away. We see quite a few American Army fly-boys here at the hotel, no doubt on leave from Vietnam.

We looked forward to our visit to Singapore primarily because of the Botanic Garden here, and its Director, H.M. Birkhill. We met him at the International Horticultural Institute meeting in Nice, France, in 1958, and have been exchanging seed of some annual type hibiscus since. Also, horticultural literature reported that some work in hibiscus hybridization had been done at the Garden
many years ago, with *H. liliiflorus* used at that time. Another consideration was the fact that the Garden has a fine horticultural library.

However, I have had no luck in finding any reference to hibiscus hybridization; according to Mr. Burkhill, many library records were destroyed when the Japanese occupied Singapore during World War II. Furthermore, no hibiscus recorded as *H. liliiflorus* is now being grown in the Singapore Botanic Garden.

The Botanic Garden has a list of 19 varieties of *H. rosa-sinensis* which are propagated for sale. These include most of the old forms seen elsewhere, as well as several Hawaiian hybrids of the 1900-1915 period. There are no hibiscus plantings in the Garden proper; their entire collection is confined to the nursery area. It was interesting to note that the Garden nurserymen were producing a large number of standards for sale to the public, a form which we have never been able to popularize in the States.

On Friday we went out to the Botanic Garden early, carrying a large bag of bananas. These were not for our lunch, but for some friends we met there the day before - a colony of monkeys which has taken over a section of the Garden. It is the season when most of the females have young, and we spent a very amusing hour feeding the mothers and observing the care with which they carried their babies, both on the ground and in the trees. The males, each with his "harem", strutted about, demanding to be fed before their womenfolk, cuffing them into obedience. In fact, the firm manner with which they were able to manage their females was observed rather wistfully by one male visitor who decided that if humans really did descend from monkeys, something good has been lost along the way.

It goes without saying that Mrs. Gast does not edit my letters.

Today the Birkhils invited us to luncheon at their charming, 98-year-old residence on the Botanic Garden Grounds. As his father was at one time Director of the Garden, Mr. Birkhill has spent many years of his life in this house.

We're picking up the "Chusan" here tomorrow afternoon and will reach London on February 24. En route, the ship stop at Penang in Malaya; Colombo in Ceylon; Bombay in India; Aden in Aden Protectorate; Suez and Port Said in Egypt; Naples, Italy; and Gibraltar. I'll get off a few more letters to you as we go along, but I suggest that if you write us, address the letter to England.

As ever,
Ross

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*En route*
*Penang to Colombo*
*February 5, 1964*

Dear Joe:

From Singapore on to England we will be real tourists, rushing through a series of one-day stops, busy sightseeing from the time the boat docks until she pulls away for the next port, usually late in the afternoon. This is not our dish insofar as travelling is concerned, for we like to stay a while in places which interest us so that we can learn to know something of the people and the country. But it is perhaps just as well that we move along at this time for there is a good deal of unrest, politically, in the areas we will be passing through.

After a day in Georgetown, which is the urban area of Penang Island, we saw too few hibiscus to even mention. Our visit to the highly touted Waterfall Botanic Garden failed to disclose any plantings whatsoever of hibiscus, but we did see some very fine specimen plantings of *H. floribunda* around the various temples we visited on tour. We also saw some plants of a small pink which appeared to be of Hawaiian origin, as dooryard plants. An official of the Waterfall Garden, with whom we visited briefly, told me that he had never seen a yellow hibiscus on Penang Island.

We pulled away from the dock in Singapore last night in a heavy rain - the first we have seen in weeks. Fortunately, we were already aboard, and were on deck watching the always fascinating sailing-day scene on the dock. The sun was shining brightly and people were gaily shouting their farewells when suddenly the sky seemed to open and the rain came down in torrents. With
it came a strong wind which drove the rain into the covered deck area and we were drenched to the skin before we could gain the shelter of a companionway. Thus we learned about Asian weather - as unpredictable as its politics.

Toward sunset, the rain stopped and we again went on deck to enjoy a splendid view of the myriad islands of the Straits of Malacca. This famous waterway lies between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, and is 500 miles long, varying in width from 30 to 100 miles. Penang Island, on the Straits, is 377 miles from Singapore, and we arrived at Georgetown on Penang Island early this morning.

Like Singapore, with which it is linked by historical associations, Penang is separated from the mainland by a two-mile wide channel. Georgetown was founded in 1786 by Captain Francis Light, the island having been ceded to the East India Company by the Sultan of Kedah. It was incorporated with Singapore and Malacca in 1826, and in 1867 the three areas were created an English Crown Colony known as the Straits Settlements. Penang became one of the eleven states of the Malaysian Federation in 1959. It has a population of 350,000.

Penang is considered to be one of the most beautiful islands in the tropics, and although time did not permit us to drive around its 140-mile perimeter, or take the funicular type railway to the top of Strawberry Hill, 2500 feet in elevation, we were very much impressed with what we did see on our four hour drive around Georgetown and vicinity.

Unfortunately, the tour was not what it should have been, due to the lack of experience on the part of its sponsors, the Penang Tourist Association. This organization is typical of what one learns to expect in so-called "emerging nations" where nationalistic zeal replaces an established, experienced operation.

Newly staffed exclusively by native peoples, all of whom were generals, the operation suffered not only from the lack of privates, but also from the absence of planning of any kind. All of the physical facilities were available, but politics had apparently entered into the personnel situation, so each bus had four conductors - about one for every five people - and, fortunately, only one driver. However, he was constantly given orders by the four different conductors, as well as the "spieler", who, with a brand new bull horn, tried to find enough English to point out the various local attractions.

Mostly, we saw temples. They differed in appearance, but all smelled the same. The approach to all of these was lined with hawkers aggressively offering all sorts of cheap merchandise. This sort of thing is not new to tourism - the French do it, too, in a more subtle, but equally offensive manner.

The real problem, however, was that the Penang Tourist Bureau did not see fit to make available the most important requisite in tour operation. I refer to what is crudely but aptly called "Bladder Stops". As a result, many of the tour party spent the last hour of the tour with a strained expression on their faces, and took little interest in the scenery except to speculate whether or not it would be safe to step a few feet into the jungle to observe, maybe, the fauna and flora of Penang.

After departing from Penang, the "Chusan" left the Straits of Malacca and rounded the northwest corner of Sumatra. We passed the island of Pula Weh and as I write this (4 p.m.) we are entering the Bay of Bengal. Immediately to the north are the Nicobar and Andaman Islands which, on the Admiralty Charts, appear to be a continuation of the East Indian Islands. These charts, incidentally, are posted each day by the Navigation Office, with our position clearly shown on them and are quite revealing. For instance, all ordinary maps that I have seen of the area indicate one or two islands under the name of Nicobar and Andaman, but the Admiralty Charts shows hundreds of them!

We are now shaping our course direct to Ceylon, which is 870 miles away, and will stand off Colombo at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. We are looking forward to a day-long, seventy-mile and return drive to famous Peradynia Gardens, near Kandy, the capital of Ceylon. There is some question now as to whether we can safely make this trip in the time we have in port, but we shall see what we shall see.

As ever,
Ross

Off Colombo, Ceylon
February 7, 1964
Dear Joe:

We have just dropped the Colombo pilot and are heading on a north westerly course in the Gulf of Mannar toward Cape Cormorin, which is the southernmost tip of India.

Our day in hot, sticky Colombo began with the confirmation by the local P&O representative that it would not be wise for us to attempt the 144-mile round trip to Peradynia Gardens in the short day that was scheduled for our stop. I had arranged with the Chief Purser to have this man contact me as soon as he came aboard with the pilot. We were disappointed, of course, but from what we had heard aboard, we more or less expected that the trip could not be made.

I had also written the Director of Peradynia Gardens from Australia, advising him that I would have only six hours in Ceylon, and asked him if there were any private or public collections in or around Colombo that I might see. His reply was waiting for me; I advised that there were no private gardens of any kind, but suggested that I see the plantings at Victoria Park. He also enclosed a list of hibiscus varieties grown at Peradynia, and available for purchase as cuttings. A study of this list indicated that the varieties there were much the same as the collection shipped to the Brisbane Botanical Garden in 1955, which I saw there recently. There was also a second list - some new imports from Foster Garden, Honolulu.

The Peradynia list indicates that this garden drew on Hawaii during the early years of their hybridization efforts, perhaps during the period 1910 to 1925. The origin of each variety is given, and of the 90 listed, 16 were brought in from Hawaii and these were shown as being the parents of many of the hybrids originated not only at Peradynia, but in India and Ceylon generally.

The Hawaiian varieties listed were the old familiar ones, such as Luna, Mrs. Walker, Gold Mine, Wilhelmina Tenney, Prince of Japan, Anna Shaw; May Walker, etc. The names of the recent Hawaiian imports were not given.

So it is apparent that I did not miss much in not seeing Peradynia, especially with such little time, although the upland areas of Ceylon are much better suited to hibiscus than the coastal section, and we were told that street and dooryard plantings are quite varied and attractive.

There were a few varieties on the Peradynia list that interested me and, as the price and purchase directions were given with the list, I wrote the Director, enclosing the price of wanted cultivars, postage, a U.S.D.A. Plant Entry Permit, and some polyethylene bags and sphagnum moss, and asked that this material be sent through to the Arboretum marked to your attention. I hope the shipment comes through in good shape.

Ceylon has been called "Pearl of the Orient" and is famous for its scenic beauty and wealth of its native flora. The people are mainly Singhalese, who are said to have come from the Ganges Valley in India as early as 600 B.C. It was known to the Greeks and the Romans, and the Arabs named it "Serendib" and made it the scene of the Arabian Nights story of Sinbad the Sailor. However, it was the Portuguese who first established trading centers on the island, followed by the Dutch, and then the English who made it a Crown Colony until it was given its independence a few years ago.

With the Peradynia trip out of the question, we decided to hire a car and see something of the coastal area nearby, and also visit Victoria Park. First, we drove 24 miles north of Colombo to Negombo, a little fishing village. This was once a Dutch port, and the old fort and earthen ramparts are still to be seen. My reason for selecting this spot was that, as you know, I am interested in finding old forms of H. rosa-sinensis, and I felt that these might be seen in such areas as Negombo where the first trading ports were established by Europeans, and early contacts were with the Malabar Coast of India as well as the South Indian Ocean islands and the African West Coast. However, I saw nothing new in the way of older varieties - mostly varieties that I have found in almost every area I have visited, and, in fact, some that we have in our own collection.

Our rented car was a small Peugeot and our driver a wizened, bewhiskered Singhalese. He wore an untidy wrap-around skirt common in Southeast Asia and a pair of floppy sandals which he took off when driving.

When an Indian, or any other closely related nationality, gets behind the wheel of an automobile, it is much like putting a beggar on horseback. The change is remarkable - and dangerous; no longer is he the small fellow, meek and submissive - he immediately becomes noisy, domineering, and a very wild driver. Our man today was no exception and our ride to Negombo and back was a series of turns, twists and sudden braking on a narrow road heavily congested with bullock carts, rickshaws, elephants, and latest model Bedford trucks. When I asked him to slow down so that we would not have an accident, he stepped on his brake suddenly and hard, and as we picked ourselves off the windshield he said: "Look see! I got the best brakes any car in Colombo. Even if I hit people, I no hit 'em hard so to kill - just hurt".

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We were touched by his consideration for his victims, but were also happy when we paid him off at the wharf.

At Victoria Park we found a miserable planting of hibiscus, most of them cultivars on the Peradynia list, and some very unhappy Hawaiians. Undoubtedly the condition of the planting was due to the lack of water and care, although there seemed to be a gardener for every 100 square feet of park. However, most of them were making like statues, with the support of a hoe or rake handle; political leaf raking seems to be very common in the Southeast Asia.

While I did not see anything in the garden worth requisitioning, such would not have been possible anyway. For immediately on arriving at the Garden gate we were surrounded by a horde of hawkers, pseudo guides and child beggars. They followed us every step we took, so that even if I had wanted to open my cutting knife, the size of my audience would have discouraged any collecting.

In fact, in this area one does not dare set his camera or any other possession down even for a moment, as it will disappear. Another rule we soon learned was not to stray far out of sight of other responsible people; a few of our fellow-passengers have accepted invitations to be shown "a good picture view" by teen-aged youngsters, and have come back sans camera and handbag. Thus Americans make contributions to Southeast Asians, both personally and through Washington.

Later: No acknowledgement of the receipt of my order, no refund, and no plants have been received from Peradynia, although months have passed. We have written off the money as another American contribution to the welfare of emerging nations.

Of course, one does not learn to know what makes an area like this tick in a few hours visit It is apparent, however, that since Ceylon has been given its independence, the economic situation has deteriorated greatly and the government is practically bankrupt. An indication of this is the fact that the Bank of Ceylon representative who came aboard as we docked said that he would not buy back in sterling any Ceylon money except in amounts not exceeding that purchased before going ashore. The reason is that while the official rate is 13 rupees to the English pound, one can buy rupees ashore for as little as 33 rupees to the pound.

The great man-made harbor of Colombo was filled with ships of every nation, and more were standing in the roadstead, having waited as long as a month to come in and unload. The reason, we were told, is that some time back the dock workers went on a strike and their demands for higher wages were met. Now they come to work one day in the three, because they only work when hungry, and working every day at higher wage rates gives them more money than is required for subsistence. This situation has been quite common in areas where historically, even bare subsistence has been hard to achieve, and only time will cure it - time, and a few radio and television stations to first stimulate the sales of sets, then of the advertised products that these sets sell.

Hibiscus-wise, the most interesting garden feature in Colombo and Negombo was the very large plants of the variegated leaf types which we call H. cooperii and H. andersonii. We generally think of these varieties as rather low growing plants, but we saw many as tall as 15 feet. It is possible that there are several forms of the variegated leaf hibiscus, but that we have always referred to all with dark green, bronze tinted leaves as H. andersonii, or H. metallicus, as it should probably be called. Certainly the very large plants we saw today do not resemble in form the H. cooperii we have, for ours has trailing branches and makes a handsome hanging basket plant.

All of the variegated leaf hibiscus which I have seen have the same flower - a luscinated petalled red much like what the books say is H. archerii, said to have been developed in the West Indies. There was a great deal of social and economic-interchange on the part of both the French and the English between Mauritius, Madagascar and other South Indian Ocean islands in the early Eighteenth Century; the area was developed to sugar growing at that time, and some companies operated in both the Indian Ocean and the West Indies. It is easy to believe, then, that there were exchanges in ornamental plants.

After clearing Cape Cormorin we will turn sharply north and steam along the Malabar Coast famous in the early history of India. The principal port Calcutta, known in early days as Calicutt, which was the first place in India to be visited be sea by Europeans. Vasco de Gama, the famous Portuguese navigator, landed there in 1498 after he had rounded the Cape of Good Hope, the first European to take this route to India. Until the Suez Canal was built, Calcutta was the first port of call for European ships on their
way to the East Indian and Chinese ports. Stops in South Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius were made on this route, thus there were very early contacts by Europeans with hibiscus-rich areas.

In one of my very first letters I had much to say about the pre-European history of *H. rosa-sinensis* and allied species; particularly did I enlarge upon the fact that the Polynesian people, supposed to have originated in India, had brought the species to the Pacific in the centuries of their eastward migrations. I also mentioned the fact that one wave of the peoples called Polynesian had turned southward to the islands of the Indian Ocean, followed by Indian, Arabian, and other early traders. Then, as I have just written you, this same water route was the first to be used by Europeans in opening India and China to trade. Somewhere in the history of these long sea voyages, hibiscus was distributed throughout the entire area and on to China and the Pacific. But because it reached its highest development as an ornamental plant in China, and as most early cultivars were collected there and shipped to Europe, the species was given its name -rosa-sinensis, or "Chinese Rose".

Actually, "Chinese Rose" was the name commonly used for *H. mutabilis* in pre-Linnaean literature, and there has been some confusion in this area of nomenclature ever since. This is particularly the case in England where, for some reason known only to the English, *H. syriacus* is referred to in the nursery trade as *Rosa Chinensis*, although native to Syria.

A good case could be made for a change in the general classification of what we call *H. rosa-sinensis*, for this term is now applied to all cultivars, despite the fact that most of the varieties we grow now are hybrids resulting from crosses between what Linnaeus called *H. rosa-sinensis* and *H. arnottianus*, *H. kokio*, *H. liliiflorus*, and *H. schizopetalus* - and possibly *H. denisonii* and *H. storckii* as well.

The Malabar Coast, which we will pass during the night, is the generally accepted "home" of what is now called *H. rosa-sinensis*, but there is no definite proof of it. In fact, no one has yet identified the ancestral species; it could have originated anywhere along the early trade routes between Asia and Africa.

We do know, however, that it was first mentioned in European horticultural literature by Van Rheede, the Dutch botanist, in his handsome "Hortus Malabaricus", published in 1678. Van Rheede spent many years on the Malabar Coast. In his publication is reproduced a black and white print of a double hibiscus which he describes in such a way as to indicate that it is a true *H. rosa-sinensis*. He calls it "rose colored", but botanists of that day generally meant red when they used the term "rose colored". So in all probability it is the variety which was taken into the Pacific and to China, and later called *H. flora plena* rubra by English plantmen. Van Rheede called the plant by its native name, *Schem-pariti*, and nearly a hundred years later Linnaeus designated it as *H. rosa-sinensis*. In India the early Portuguese residents called it Fula Sapato or Shoe Flower because its flowers were used to blacken shoes.

But perhaps the real reason why the species is supposed to be native to the Malabar Coast is a statement made by Gilbert Miller in his 1768 edition of "Gardener's Dictionary". He described this double red hibiscus and said: "... this variety grows naturally on the Malabar Coast from whence came the plants in my garden".

Lunch call has just been sounded, so I must close - not that I need another meal. I have regained 15 pounds of the 20 pounds I lost in preparing for this trip; all of my trousers were altered in Fiji, and will have to be altered again in London, I'm sure.

As ever,
Ross

........................................

*Somewhere in the Arabian Sea*
*February 10, 1964*

Dear Joe:

Hibiscusly, Bombay was very disappointing; on a half day tour of the city's residential areas and its parks we did not see over a dozen plants, and these were varieties which you have in your own backyard! So if the Malabar Coast is the ancestral home of the species we call *H. rosa-sinensis*, as some early authorities claim, then one native seems to have suffered banishment.

We do know, of course, that there has been considerable work done with hibiscus in India, particularly at Lucknow Botanic Garden. Their publications indicate that some hybridization was going on as early as 1904, possibly much before this. Then,
during the time that the Hawaiians were making their great contribution through the use of their own native species in crosses with \textit{H. rosa-sinensis}, there is record of an interchange of varieties between Hawaii and India. Undoubtedly many of the thirty-three introduced varieties came to Hawaii from India, either directly or through Fiji, because at this time the first Indian settlers were coming into the Fijian group. And India had the native Hawaiian species in their collections as early as 1910.

However, from some of their publications it would appear that records of crossing were not always maintained. For instance, some early hybridizers claimed that they had successfully crossed \textit{H. syriacus} and \textit{H. rosa-sinensis}, at the same time admitting that no exact record of crossing had been kept. Furthermore, their early records show successful crosses with \textit{H. cameronii}. This indicates that they, like the early Hawaiian hybridizers, were possible not using the true \textit{H. cameronii}, Knowles & Westcott.

My reaction to Bombay is such that I do not like to even write about it. There, in a city where Europeans ruled for hundreds of years, 300,000 people still live like animals, without homes, mostly on sidewalks or road margins, with little or no cover. If the British were not able to eliminate this sort of thing in the centuries during which they drew on India's natural resources to build up their own great industrial and trading fortunes, then how can we, with our foreign aid program, military assistance and various do-gooder ideas, expect to make any progress? Furthermore, the money we send to these countries has been drawn from our own natural resources to a great extent, not from other lands, as has been the case with the true colonial powers. And these natural resources will not last forever.

One does not become a foreign policy expert overnight, so my comments must be weighed accordingly. I submit, however, that I am not without experience or understanding as regards the peoples whom we wonderingly call our friends, as I have lived with them much of the time during the past three years and made several extended trips to the Continent in the 1950's on business.

I would like to leave this bit of advice with you, to pass on to any friends who contemplate world travels: Americans travelling anywhere in the world should humbly recognize that their principal charm is their money and that their only virtue is a readiness to part with it.

Once this is learned, travel is less difficult, for an American knows just what is expected of him at all times, anywhere. If only Uncle Sam would learn this!

We are steaming on a course direct to Aden, on the Arabian Peninsula, a distance of 1650 miles from Bombay. Aden is the entrance to the Red Sea and is a British controlled port. We then go the length of the Red Sea to Suez, and through the canal to Port Said and enter the Mediterranean. We stop at Naples, then Gibraltar before reaching the Atlantic and turning northward to England.

Until this trip, and Red Sea to me has been only a small blue line on the map of the world - so thin, in fact, that it was easy to believe that Moses made a dry crossing. However, our steward tells us that to reach Aden we will be cruising out of sight of land for almost two days; the Red Sea is 1200 miles long and, at one point, 190 miles wide.

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba used this great ocean fairway for it was a rich trade route in ancient times. It lost importance when the Cape of Good Hope was rounded, but again, when the Suez Canal was completed, it took on new importance. While ships of every nation may be seen in this area, they are really British waters due to the fact that Great Britain has regained its position as the owner of the world's greatest shipping fleet. A recent English economic journal quoted R.G. Grant, Chairman of the Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom as follows:

"There are now over 20,000,000 gross tons of shipping under the United Kingdom flag, the largest trading fleet in the world. Furthermore, the average age of the vessels comprising it is well below that of the rest of the world. To replace these ships it is estimated that the cost would be something in the order of ten billion dollars. In 1963, British shipping earned abroad $1,574,000,000. This represented 95 of the total gross amount Great Britain earned by its exports, visible and invisible."

This is certainly quite a comeback over the past 20 years; the British merchant marine was practically wiped out during World War II.

As I write this, we are passing to the north of an island called Socotra; and will soon skirt Cape Guardafui in Italian Somaliland, which is the northeast "shoulder" of Africa. I recall that there is a species of hibiscus native to Socotra called \textit{H. scotti}. I remember that I checked it out from printed descriptions and it did not appear to be close to \textit{H. rosa-sinensis} botanically.

In passing this island and heading for the Red Sea I am reminded that we are moving out of the area which, traditionally, we have considered to be the home of the several hibiscus species which have been used to create our modern hybrids, the garden
hibiscus and the show forms which we have loosely called H. *rosa-sinensis*. Accordingly, there will be little about hibiscus in any future letters that I may write.

Later: It is now well established that the variety called H. *cameronii* in Hawaii and some other areas is really *Pink Versicolor*. This is due to a publishing error in an early English horticultural magazine which pictured *Pink Versicolor* as H. *Cameronii*.

As ever,  
Ross

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*Aden*  
*February 13, 1964*  

Dear Joe:  

We have just come aboard after a few hours in this steaming hot port town and will send this letter on the last ship-to-shore post, so that it will bear an Aden postmark.

As for hibiscus, we saw only a few "oldies" in the park. However, we did not get away from the main street for we were warned that there is a good deal of political unrest here and that we should stay in the city center. We noted that this area, too, is patrolled by many armed soldiers.

Accordingly, my lasting impression of Aden will be crowded streets, mostly carts drawn by camels, and sidewalks with veiled ladies. For this reason, I cannot vouch for the charm, or lack of charm, of the female population.

There are some fine shops, however, and we were able to buy some rather attractive cutlery quite cheap.

The ship's bulletin board tells us that we are going to get a bonus on this trip - an unexpected one. A tour to Cairo has been arranged, with visits to the pyramids and the Sphynx. Cars will meet us at Suez and while the "Chusan" goes through the canal, we will be driven 125 miles to see these tourist spots and Cairo. We will then be driven to Port Said where we will again board the "Chusan". My next letter will probably be from Gibraltar, where we stop for a few hours.

As ever,  
Ross

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*En route Gibraltar*  
*February 17, 1964*  

Dear Joe:  

The long trip from Cairo to Port Said where we joined the "Chusan" would have been rather boring had it not been for our driver and his 1951 Plymouth. The road was narrow, and bordered the canal most of the way. Our driver, an elderly Egyptian, swerved from one side of the road to the other. We thought that we were going to end up in the canal anytime. When I cautioned him to be careful, he said that the reason was that he had such a headache that he could hardly see!

We really had a hassle on our quick trip to Cairo, although it was quite interesting. Ella was determined to see the Pyramids and the Sphynx on camel-back. You can visualize what I looked like on a camel. All went well, however, except that our driver, hearing our American accent, insisted on shouting "Hi Ho Silver" all the way up and back. Ella's stirrups were short but she managed to stay aboard.
We then walked around downtown Cairo, had lunch at the famous Shepard's Hotel, tea at the Nile Hilton Hotel, then were driven down to Port Said, stopping at Ismailia for dinner.

While we enjoyed the role of a tourist for a day, I felt like I was playing hooky. Why? I did not even think of hibiscus. Perhaps the fact that I did not see any could be given as an excuse.

My next letter will probably be from Gibraltar, where we stop for a few hours.

As ever,
Ross

Mediterranean Sea
February 18, 1964

Dear Joe:

This letter, if it reaches you, will come through the services of the most unique "post office" in the world. It will be placed with some money in an empty bottle (Johnny Walker Red Label Scotch) and tossed overboard as we pass through the Messina Strait which as you know, is the waterway between Sicily and the "toe" of Italy. We have been informed that it will be picked up by a Sicilian fisherman and mailed if the amount of money enclosed is enough to pay postage, with a generous "service" charge.

If found, the fisherman generally complete the job so as to encourage the use of the "Messina Bottle Post" and there bringing them new suckers. I mean customers.

Here's hoping that you receive it. However, it is just possible that you would rather have the original contents of the bottle.

As ever,
Ross

[Later: The letter was duly received and Joe values it very highly.]

Bay of Biscay
February 18, 1964

Dear Joe:

Our day in Gibraltar was not productive, even as a tourist stop. Most of the places I wanted to see, such as the underground caves, were military reserves and therefore restricted. As far as hibiscus is concerned, I saw only a half dozen plants, all of them single reds.

We arrive in England tomorrow. I received several letters from the Los Angeles office at Gibraltar which changed my plans drastically. However, I will explain why later; purpose of this letter is to sum up the results of our four months trip to the Pacific, Antipodes, and Southwest Asia insofar as its contribution to the furtherance of our project objectives.

Mostly the value of the trip has been that my observations have confirmed my belief that there is little we can learn in the way of hybridization techniques, etc., from other parts of the world which will help us in our program for developing harder cultivars for Southern California conditions. We seem to have done our homework pretty well, and we are getting crosses and seed with no more difficulty than is being experienced in any area that I have visited. Of course, we are working in a greenhouse under controlled conditions - perhaps the primary factor in our success in this direction.
As for new species which are cross compatible with *H. rosa-sinensis*, the trip has not been very fruitful. The only known species with this character that we do not have - or at least, are not sure we have, are *H. storckii* and, as of now, I cannot argue against the expressed theory of Fijian authorities that it has been lost of cultivation. But it may show up in the material I have sent on to you.

As for *H. liliiflorus* and *H. fragilis*, native to Mauritius and other Mascarene islands in the South Indian Ocean, I have not seen either of these or found substantial information on them. It appears that the only way we are going to secure these species is to visit their native habitat.

Perhaps in the end, the greatest value of the trip will be the contribution to our "blood lines" of some of the old forms which I have sent back to you, and some of the local sports and hybrids that I collected which may be useful "as is" in Southern California gardens. Many of the older forms have been under cultivation for hundreds of years. They contribute what is called hybrid vigor when crossed. This statement might be challenged by authoritative people who would say that this vigor is possibly due to the fact that most oldies are primary hybrids themselves, or sports from original forms. However, our main interest is to try them out and see what they bring to our program.

Also, after seeing almost all hibiscus growing sections of the world, I am now fully convinced that we are selling hibiscus short in Southern California. Nurserymen tell us that the demand is falling off, and that they are propagating fewer plants than a decade ago. The reason, they say, is that there is a high incidence of frost and other losses, particularly in young plants. This may be true; our climate is a bit rough on certain types of garden hibiscus, particularly when the plants do not come from the nursery in the right planting condition, or are planted at the wrong season. Also, as you know, few of the Southern California nurserymen graft hibiscus, selling "own root" plants only.

I did find seed of true *H. cameronii*, as my letter from Brisbane indicates, and I am looking forward to working with this one. As for learning any more about the history and native land of *H. denisonii*, I had a dry run. But we do have it, any may find it useful.

When I get to England, I will visit Kew Gardens and check their collections again, but I have visited their greenhouses often in the past several years and found nothing new except, of course *H. denisonii* which I brought to our greenhouse. Also, I will read in the Royal Horticultural society library in the hope that I can run across references which will help us. But as I have spent a lot of time there, I do not hope to find much more. What I want to do is to see their collection of annual catalogues of old-time English nurserymen in the hope that these will give me some further line on *H. storckii* and others.

I have made one observation that should perhaps be qualified by adding that it was a seasonal one: As regards garden hibiscus, I note that they seemed at their best in subtropical rather than tropical areas, and where rainfall is ample but not excessive.

As ever,
Ross

Washington Hotel
London, England
February 20, 1964

Dear Joe:

We brought unseasonably warm weather to England - it is 60 degrees and quite pleasant. However, it appears that we will not be here long enough to enjoy it.

As I advised you in my last letter, I found several letters from Los Angeles waiting for me at Gibraltar. They indicated that the British Sugar Corporation has approved of our product and are ready to discuss an exclusive sales contract for Great Britain. This is what I suggest to my principals. The reason is that the BSC is a quasi-governmental corporation, with the government owning the controlling interest. In this way, they are able to assign acreage allotments to the individual farmer, so that over-production is seldom a problem. With an exclusive sales contract they can handle sales through their 17 factories in England and Scotland, and Germaines can confine their responsibilities to manufacture.
My instructions were that I should immediately contact the director of production of the BSC, at Peterborough, and arrange an appointment with him as soon as possible. This is a must in England, for you just don’t drop in on an executive here without writing for an assigned day and hour.

I was also asked to go to the office of our English attorney in Bloomsbury Square for legal instructions. For this reason, with the help of the purser, I cabled for a reservation at this hotel, which is within walking distance of Bloomsbury Square. The attorney's office is also the registered office of Germanis (U.K.) Ltd., of which I bear the prestigious title of Manager Director and member of the Board of Directors.

It was also suggested that when a contract was approved by our attorney I should return to Los Angeles as no more field work would be necessary. But before I returned I was to go up to Kings Lynn where I have made site selections for a factory and open negotiations for a lease. The property is owned by the city of Kings Lynn, and they will build a factory if a satisfactory long lease is signed for it.

Before I left Los Angeles I advised Germains that if I was successful in selling our product, and a site for a factory was selected, I would like to be relieved of my job. After all, I am 67 years old and want to retire (again) and devote my time to important things like hibiscus.

Before we return to Los Angeles, we want to go down to Southborough and bid goodbye to our friends at the Hand & Sceptre Hotel where we have lived for three years, and also the village. We want to walk across Southborough Commons, adjacent to the hotel, and through a small forest of Elizabethan oaks to the little village of Modest Corners and have a drink at the quaint pub, the Busy Bee, which dates back more than a hundred years.

I hope to get out to Kew Gardens again, and to the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society to bid goodbye to the staff. They have been very helpful to me.

As ever,
Ross

London, England
March 1, 1964

Dear Joe:

I have taken care of the assignments given me by the home office and have made reservations to fly home next Wednesday.

I found the BSC people quite cordial. They had a proposal ready for discussion and agreed to make certain changes that I requested. This was sent on to Los Angeles, with a copy of our attorney here. It's his ball game from now on.

After spending two days in Peterborough, I went on to Kings Lynn where I again checked the site I had previously selected in company of the city rental official, then suggested that they submit a formal contract direct to Los Angeles.

Ella remained in London, spending much of her time shopping at the famous Harrods Department Store. She has several things on her list, including some woolen unmentionables. I asked her to get me some woolen longjohns as I have found them quite comfortable in the winter, even in Los Angeles.

We spent a day in Southborough, but I did not get out to Kew. Therefore I cannot close off my report on our hibiscus-oriented trip with any hibiscus talk.

It is quite probable, however, that I will see you personally not long after you receive this letter.

As ever,
Ross
La Mesa, California
March 15, 1980

Dear Reader:

The letters which follow were written during our 1965 "expedition" to South Africa, the Mascarene Islands, and Madagascar. As these letters disclose, we were able to find H. liliiflorus and what we thought was H. fragilis. Recent studies proved that the latter was, in fact, H. columnaris. We have since acquired the true H. fragilis.

As usual, Joe Staniford did an expert job as baby sitter for our project at Los Angeles County Arboretum and took good care of plant materials which we sent home to him.

Hibiscusly yours,
Ross H. Gast
HIBISCUS AROUND THE WORLD

London, England
October 10, 1965

Dear Joe:

The Gast Indian Ocean Hibiscus rosa-sinensis and Allied Species Expedition arrived in London last week and is now comfortably established in a two-bedroom flat at St. James Court Hotel on Buckingham Gate, just two blocks from the Palace. However, the day we moved in, the Queen moved out, to Balmoral, in Scotland - a move which we did not consider quite neighborly.

In case you get the idea that this is a real swanky address, I should tell you that here in England, we are very democratic. For instance, the Queen's Household Guards, with their 100 black horses, live closer to the Palace than we do, and from outside appearances, their stables are just as plush as our hotel. In fact, you would get about the same effect if you built stables on Wilshire Blvd. in the heart of Beverly Hills.

England has been very kind, weatherwise. We have had a week of sunny days, with no rains. We are told that this is the first good weather this year, and in all probability it will be remembered as "that fine weather we had the first week of October, 1965". Certainly we cannot remember having so many sunny days during any of our many visits here, either spring, summer, or fall.

We have spent a great deal of our time so far showing grandson Rodney around London. This is his first visit. He's 13 years old, and his principal project is the making of a film to enter in the "Teen Age Film Contest" sponsored by Kodak. As he will go back around the world with us through the Pacific, he may get some good footage. He takes to photography, and has mastered his new camera.

The Madame Secretary of the Expedition is greatly disappointed over the fact there will be no major dog shows during our stay in England. She is drowning her sorrows in a shopping spree.
Now for some hibiscus talk:

As you know, I planned to visit Kew Gardens, for two reasons—first, to check on the Hibiscus rosa-sinensis varieties in their collection, and second, to call on Dr. Seeley, Curator of the Herbarium, and ask his permission to study Herbarium specimens of H. storckii, H. liliiflorus, H. cameronii and H. denisonii. Also, I wanted to see, if possible, specimens of the several species I had hoped to find on Madagascar and Mauritius. However, at the Herbarium, my main objective was to see its original specimen of H. storckii, collected in Fiji in 1865 by Seemann, and sent to that Kew. This I was able to do.

My reasons for wanting to see H. storckii have been covered freely in my letters to you from Fiji, and our later experiences with materials which I sent back, particularly a plant with the same leaf characteristics as H. denisonii, and a similar or closely similar flower description. This led me to believe that H. denisonii and H. storckii are synonymous, so I sent a specimen of this to Kew several months ago for comparison with Dr. Seemann's specimen of H.i. I was advised that they were not the same, but in the same report, Kew officials state that "We have no material on H. denisonii available for study here". This was a great surprise and disappointment to me, for I had seen and photographed H. denisonii at Kew several years ago.

Later, through L. Maurice Mason, I secured a scion of this Kew H. denisonii stock, and as you know, we have bloomed it, and used it widely in our crossings the past years. We have also grown this species from seed furnished by Dr. Tachibana of the Osaka Botanic Garden. Apparently the Kew Herbarium does not know what is growing in their own greenhouses. So I wanted to see Dr. Seemann's material and make my own comparison. I brought with me a specimen of our H. denisonii, which is, as I said above, the same as that grown at Kew.

In spite of the fact that Seemann had collected the material just a hundred years ago, the specimen was in good shape, except that the flower color was not distinguishable. His line drawings of the flower form, the seed capsule etc. were on this sheet, as were his original notes. This gave some additional information not found in his "Flora Vitiensis". For instance, it noted that the "petals are pink, with purple at base". Our denisonii also has a touch of purple at the base. The Seemann specimen had five bracts and 9 stipules, as does ours. And while there is a slight difference in leaf, you and I know from experience that leaf character of any one species of hibiscus varies greatly under different methods of culture, so I do not place too much importance on leaf description in species determination.

All in all, I would not want to say, after examining the Seemann H. storckii specimen, that H. denisonii and H. storckii are synonymous, but I am convinced that they are very close. In fact, I could say that like the H. rosa-sinensis, H. arnottianus and H. kokio, H. storckii (H. denisonii) is a polymorphic species, appearing in several different forms. As you recall, Ken Perks, of Suva, sent us through drawings of two other forms which he had in his garden. If I come through Fiji on our return, I plan to pick up all the forms which Perks has collected, as I am quite sure that one of them will be the H. storckii collected by Dr. Seemann, in Taveuni, in 1865.

I suppose our interest in H. storckii (H. denisonii) would seem rather odd to hibiscus fanciers who are working only on form, color and size for show blooms. But as you know, we are going for plant vigor, and our tests so far show that we get this by crossing H. rosa-sinensis and other true species. This year, with close to 500 H. rosa-sinensis and H. denisonii (H. storckii) crosses, we should also learn whether this cross downgrades bloom. If not, we really have a start toward the development of a strain of hibiscus cultivars which should have real horticultural significance.

In addition to Dr. Seemann's H. storckii specimen, I asked to see the three species in the Section Lilibriscus (HOCH.) that I wanted to find in Madagascar, as I felt that they might just be cross compatible with the species with which we are working. So they brought me most of the sheets they had on hibiscus in the Mascarene Islands, which include Mauritius, Réunion and Rodriguez Islands. Unfortunately their collection contained only one of the three I wanted to see - H. perrieri var. rosa madagascarensis.

That specimen, as the young Englishman who helped me said, was "a bit ropey". No flower was included, the leaves were small 1-1/2" long and 1/2" wide. It is shrubby, however, and could possibly be fairly close to rosa-sinensis. I hope to see a better specimen at Lisbon, and also the other two not available here.

In the collection was H. phanerandrus-BAKER. This one intrigued me, for it had a pink or red corolla about 3" in diameter, with perfect hibiscus form, and a long staminal column. The leaves are very small, however-about 1", in fact. It is a woody shrub, and I want to look it up later in Hochreutiner for a further description.

My great surprise, however, were the sheets on H. cameronii. There were several forms of this - at least two of which had the same flower as our H. cameronii, but with different leaves. As you know, our H. cameronii has deeply cut, 3-lobed leaves,
although some are almost entire. One of the specimens at Kew had perfectly round leaves, with even, small serrations or "scalloped" edges; another had heart-shaped leaves, but this one was called a "shrub" 8'-10' high which, of course, ours is not.

In the H. cameronii sheets, too, was a specimen called H. macrosolandra-HOCH. which looked much like our H. cameronii, but as I had no description of H. cameronii for a close check, I cannot say.

In a miscellaneous file in the Mascarene section, I found several forms of single hibiscus, pink and red, which to all appearances, were H. rosa-sinensis perhaps the common red, and a single pink. These were collected in Central Madagascar in 1883, by Baker.

So that I might examine specimens of H. liliiflorus and H. genevii, I was given the Mauritius file. This included several sheets on both - at least, they were so marked. But no examination and comparison of the specimens with the one we call Johore and with the common Floribunda, which I had with me were not very productive. In fact, the leaf shape and flower form of one specimen, though very productive. In fact, the leaf shape and flower form of one specimen, though not botanically compared, appeared to this layman's eye to be quite like Dr. Seemann's H. storckii specimen discussed above. At least the leaf shape, number of bracts and stipules were the same, and this flower, although in bad condition, resembled the H. storckii.

It was noticeable that no specimen of H. liliiflorus or H. genevii had luscinated petals which are characteristic of the H. schizopetalus hybrids. Thus, my earlier speculation that H. archerii and H. liliiflorus could be synonymous was not based on facts at least the facts as proven by herbarium specimens available at Kew.

In summary, my day at the Kew Herbarium did not add greatly to my notes on the Indian Ocean species, and it appears that only an examination of these species in cultivation or in the wild will give definitive evidence of true species status. I will try to get in another half-day there, however, and hope to see some specimens at the Lisbon Botanic Garden Herbarium.

Several people at Kew Herbarium are working on the flora of South Africa, but none of them could give me the name of anyone in South Africa to whom I could go for information and assistance in Malvaceae. I should also report that I was very well received by Dr. Seeley and his staff, one of whom, G.U. Lucas, was very much interested in hibiscus, and asked us to send him all of our publications.

I also visited the Kew Conservatories and checked the Hibiscus rosa-sinensis varieties now growing there. I made a list of several years ago, but there have been some additions. For our records, the Kew collection is shown below - some 28 different named varieties and some unnamed seedlings. Not all of the named varieties of seedlings were in bloom.

1. "The President" - our "Agnes Galt"
2. "Miss Betty" - a solid single yellow, with foliage like "Mrs. Hendry". This one is grown in Florida but I don't recall the name.
3. Double Red - H. flora plena- Lamberti
4. Orange Single - labelled "hybrid" - very simple flower
5. H. denisonii - just like ours
6. "Subviolaceous" - our "Orphah"
7. "Apricot" - same as ours, but has cut leaf
8. "Laterita" - this was not in full blossom, but bud indicated it could be our "Euterpe" or "Jamaica"
9. H. lutea plena - double yellow - we have had this old one
10. H. ballerina - just like ours
11. "John Kennedy" - like ours
12. H. archerii - same as ours
13. unnamed seedling - not in bloom
14. "Hendry III" - not in bloom
15. "Pearl" - not in bloom
16. H. cooperii - same as ours
17. cream, red eye - not in bloom
18. light yellow, red eye - not in bloom
19. "Feather Cloak" - same as ours
20. H. chandlerii - not in bloom
21. H. waimeae
22. H. clayii (H. kokio)
23. "Haywood Red" - acquired from Skipway - a large solid red bloom of exceptional quality. Appeared to be a graft just recently received. Much like "Kataoka Red"
24. "Linda" - not in bloom
You can see from the above list that Kew has little to offer us in the way of material. They also have other species of hibiscus, but I saw none that could not be secured from any of our regular sources much easier than from Kew.

In addition to Kew, I have spent several hours at the Royal Horticultural Society Library, which is within walking distance of this hotel. As you know, I have read everything available on hibiscus in this library, that is, the older literature. This trip, I have so far covered only two subjects: first, a review of the British Horticultural Abstracts, which gives all bibliographical data and a short abstract of all work done since 1931, in horticulture. This work comprises 34 volumes, but as it is well organized and indexed, I was able to take off all references on H. rosa-sinensis and allied species in two afternoons. This will help us as we have no comparable reference in the U.S.

I also saw all of the old nursery catalogues in this library - particularly those of the firms mentioned in the various early horticultural works as having anything to do with hibiscus. I learned very little new - most of the nurseries were offering from five to ten varieties as early as 1865, and have continued to do so. Neither the names or the varieties have changed much, and they include only the older forms of H. rosa-sinensis that we grow.

We will be here until Thursday, when we take off for about four days in Scotland. While there, I hope to visit the Botanic Garden, and Herbarium - no doubt you will have a report from there.

So far, I have not been able to get our Madagascar visa through, but I expect to receive it on Tuesday - also the landing permit for Kenya. Meanwhile, I hope this Rhodesian independence thing does not flare up into violence, as the entire South African Continent might not be so attractive to this traveller if it does.

I do not as yet have my Lisbon or Nairobi address, so if you write to me, send c/o Thos. Cook. As for here, we will try to book in at the same hotel on our return from Scotland, but you had better continue to address us at Cooks.

As ever,

Ross

London, England
October 11, 1965

Dear Joe:

My experiences here during the past ten days have fully convinced me that the days of free and easy travelling in Europe are past, and as for Africa, well, I’ll give you a full report later, but at this juncture, it looks frustrating. We spent the entire day getting a visa for Kenya, and after an hour at the Malagasy Republic Embassy - a long ride out into the Kensington area, I learned that I will have to have a letter of recommendation before I can land. This is supposed to be from someone in Madagascar, and not having any answer to my letter to Paul Girard, it appeared that I was up against a stone wall. Finally the attaché, who had only a little English, agreed to accept a letter from the American Embassy, which I shall try to get tomorrow.

The Kenya visa was not called to my attention by Cooks in Los Angeles - apparently they did not know of this requirement. However, I called the Kenya High Commission here and found that it was necessary to have a landing permit. This only required three hours, mostly to fill out forms. After I had the Kenya permit, I returned to the hotel to find a letter from Cooks, London, who are working on our Lisbon, Nairobi and Johannesburg hotel reservations, stating that we would have to have a landing permit for Kenya, and I should bring in my passports and they would obtain this permit. You can imagine what would happen if I waited for them to act - we're going up to Scotland on Thursday, to stay four days, and then back to London for one day only. It would take Cooks a week to do what we did in three hours. They were quite surprised when I phoned to tell them that I had the permit in hand, and they were to hurry along with the hotel reservations.
I should be used to all of this, after the time I've spent in England, but it seems to me that these people become more inefficient and careless with the years. Or is my blood pressure higher than it used to be?

I have accomplished nothing more on the hibiscus front. But in going over my notes, taken at the Kew Herbarium I found that in checking the H. cameronii material, there was one specimen that was first labelled H. rosa-sinensis, then the H. rosa-sinensis crossed out and the words: "H. cameronii, Knowles and Westcott" written in. The flower was pink to green in color - as nearly as I could tell from the specimen - and was about 5" across. The leaf was similar to H. rosa-sinensis.

Perhaps this could have been the reason for this mix-up in H. cameronii which has resulted in both Indian and Hawaiian bibliography to refer to H. cameronii as cross compatible with H. rosa-sinensis.

Grandson Rodney has a very bad cold, but mine has tapered off. This worries us, as he had a bad spell with pneumonia early this year, and he does not throw off colds easily. My belly ache has left me, and I'm again on TEACHERS - 70 proof only. Madame Expedition Secretary seems in the pink - more pep than any of us. She would move to England permanently if I would agree, as she feels so well here.

Time is running out for us here. I would like to have another hour or two at the Royal Horticultural Society Library, and a half-day at Kew, but with all of the red tape on "forward" arrangements, I don't think I'll have the time.

As ever,
Ross

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Edinburgh, Scotland
October 15, 1965

Dear Joe:

This letter, written in a cold, third-floor walk-up room at the end of a heavy day should set you straight about one thing - the exact status of hibiscus in this travelling trio.

We left London last night for the purpose of visiting the Edinburgh Botanic Garden, and showing grandson Rodney the beautiful Scottish capital. To make it more interesting to him, and to teach him some of the intimate details of British travel, I bought three berths on the 10:30 sleeper, which brought us in with the dawn. It was my idea that we would take the night sleeper back to London tonight, as I rebooked at the St. James Court Hotel for tomorrow night.

However, I did not fully check with the secretary of the Expedition. It seems that she had written to the Yorkshire Terrier breeder in Blackpool, who sells her dogs, and asked this breeder to write her, c/o British Railways Station Master, Edinburgh, if she had a bitch for sale. If she had, we would stop over on our return and pick it up.

Accordingly, as I was gathering up the baggage this morning, Mrs. Gast excused herself, and a few moments later, returned with a letter from her Yorkie breeder friend. The answer was "yes, I have a bitch, a fine show bitch", and named a very fair price. Mrs. Gast is the only American to whom this English breeder will sell, and as she described the bitch as being of real show quality, the opportunity was one which, Mrs. Gast said, should not (actually "will not") be overlooked. So it was up to me to completely re-arrange our hotels, transportation, etc. so that we could stop off at Blackpool and pick up the dog.

First was the job of finding a bed, as we would not be going back tonight by sleeper. Leaving Mrs. Gast and the boy at the station, I found a cab, and asked him to take me to some small hotel around the tourist area where I might find a bed on such short notice. In less than a quarter hour I was fortunate enough to book this room at the Abercrombie House, patronized, I understand, mostly by thrifty Scots from the North. I had the cabbie wait for me, so I was back to the station in a half-hour, after I left it, and with a place for us this night.

Next came transportation. If you will look at your map, you will see that Blackpool, the famous English holiday resort, is on the west coast of England, on the Irish Sea. The direct route from London to Edinburgh follows, roughly, the so-called "Great North Road" or Watling Street, of the early English. Thus, to reach Blackpool, we will be able to use our tickets, but change at Preston, in Lancashire and buy another ticket for Blackpool and return to the Main Line. And the schedule is such that if we miss a train,
or are held up in any way, we've had it, and the best we can do is to pick up the dog, and make it to our London hotel by midnight.

Actually, we leave here at 8:25 am, reach Preston at 12:00, and get the 12:25 to Blackpool to arrive there at 1:13. We must then get a cab to the breeder's house, negotiate for the dog, and get back to the station to catch the 5:10 back to London.

If it were Sunday, instead of Saturday, I would not try it, because on Sunday, the British Railroads do their "engineering", which is right-of-way maintenance in U.S.A. Trains are re-routed, and schedules never kept, so few people travel on Sunday.

Other arrangements were to wire the breeder and our London hotel as regards our new schedule.

Our trip up here was to see the Edinburgh Botanic Garden hibiscus collection, do a little checking at their Herbarium, and to show grandson Rodney the town - but not necessarily in that order. So - you're right - we took the morning city tour to St. Giles Church, Holyrood Palace and Edinburgh Palace, arriving back at 1:10 pro. By the time we got our baggage from the Station, checked out of the hotel, and had lunch, it was 2:05, and as the British Railway sleepers are much like trying to get some rest on a bucking bronco, I was tired. But hibiscus to the fore - and off I went to the Botanic Garden.

The hotel advised me I should take a No. 27 bus, and that it was a 15-minute out to the garden. I caught the bus, and with no seats on the "ground floor", mounted to the deck. I became absorbed in the conversation of several Scot school boys, and by the time the conductor came around to collect my fare and advise me where to get off, I was passed the Garden stop - when I inquired, the conductor said:

"Air ye daft, mon? Yu've gone three stops passed it."

Three stops is six blocks in Edinburgh, and long blocks too. I decided to walk it, in spite of the late hour, but also decided to pass up the meeting with the curator, with my credentials, in favor of seeing the hibiscus collection in the conservatories on my own.

However, much to my disappointment, the gateman advised me that they were closed - that all of the stock had been moved, and was no longer on exhibition. Then I remembered that about a year ago, I had written the curator on some matter, and had been advised that the Garden was building a new glasshouse unit, which was to be completed in a few months. Apparently the "few months" will be a "few years", as the new houses have not as yet been started.

I then walked a half mile to the Administration Office and Herbarium, to find that the curator was on leave. His assistant took me up to the Herbarium, where I spent two hours going over their sheets on Indian Ocean and South African Malvaceae. Their collection was small, but in good shape. In the Mascarene Islands section there were several specimens marked H. liliiflorus, and all different. One was definitely like our H. denisonii. All could have been H. rosa-sinensis hybrids. So I have just about come to the conclusion that H. liliiflorus is a polymorphous species like H. rosa-sinensis, and thus takes several forms. However, none of the flowers have lascinated petals - this form did not show up in any of the Indian Ocean specimens either here or at Kew.

There were three sheets marked H. cameronii, all of which were definitely pink H. rosa-sinensis, so it appears that the mix-up in this species is quite wide-spread.

I was also able to see "Cienfuegosia gerrardii", a near relative of hibiscus, which Dr. Parks asked me to secure, if I could, in South Africa. It seems to be rare, thus not in cultivation, although it is supposed to be the type species for the genus Cienfuegosia.

I found nothing else of any help to me in my prospective travels in the Indian Ocean.

Before leaving London, I was able to secure our visas for Madagascar. This took three trips to the Malagasy Republic Embassy, and a lot of laborious explanation, plus two days wait. Then, on my return to the hotel, with the visas, I found an answer to my letter to Paul Girard, the travel agent in Tananrive. He said that he had been in Hong Kong, thus delayed answering me. He confirmed the fact that we could go into Madagascar from Mauritius, so I will write him to arrange our transportation and our hotels. We'll go to Mauritius on our regular ticket, after we visit South Africa, then back to Madagascar, then return to Mauritius to continue our journey across the Indian Ocean to Perth, Australia.

It's "lights out" now - I have the alarm set to 6:00 am, so we can get out of the hotel comfortably, and not miss the 8:20. If we do, our entire day's schedule will fall apart like a house of cards. And thank God for my experiences of the past few years with English travel.
Later: In telling of the changes in schedule made necessary by the purchase of a dog, I neglected to say what was to be done with the dog. This may be the biggest problem of all. What I must to is to contact Spratts, the shipping agency on Monday, and make arrangements for shipping her to Janet Haines my sister-in-law, who is keeping our Janey. This is a big job in England, and we only have one day, as we fly out for Lisbon on Tuesday morning.

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London, England  
Sunday, October 17, 1965  

Dear Joe:

This letter will close off our English correspondence, for I'll be busy tomorrow getting the new dog shipped, and taking care of last-minute details. We have to leave for the airport right after breakfast Tuesday.

I've told you about my visit to Kew - I would have liked to go out again - but time did not permit. Also, I would have liked to visit the Herbarium and Library at the British Museum of Natural Science, but this too, was not possible, mainly because I had to spend so much time getting my Kenya and Malagasy visas.

I did spend a couple of hours at the Chelsea Physic Garden. My old friend was not there, but I got in anyway. I guess I was over-impressed with the Library on my first visit a few years back, but I found nothing new on hibiscus. Their shelves are mostly confined to old herbals; as you know, this institution was maintained by the "Society of Apothecaries", in the old days, so they were principally concerned with medical botany.

Another problem in all libraries here is that insofar as old publications are concerned, the cards are all author-indexed. True, you can consult Hortus Kewiensis, and pick up some subject references, but this I did several years ago, and this trip convinced me that I have seen them all.

However, they do have a subject index in their modern "Horticultural Abstracts", and, as I told you before, I have been able to get full reference, and even abstracts of all material on hibiscus since 1931.

The weather is still marvelous for England. If they only had some heat in these rooms, it would be really pleasant. Also, we have key trouble - in spite of the fact that this is a very large hotel, there is only one key to the rooms, and we cannot have this, as the maids, housekeeper, etc. all have to use it. Furthermore, the second day we came in, the lift broke down, and although we were assured that it would be repaired immediately, it's still inoperative, and we can either walk up six flights, or take the lift in another wing and walk around to our apartment. The English just cannot seem to learn how to run hotels; the "Reception" desk is always staffed with women, most of them very inefficient, and too many of them rude, and even impertinent.

It could be my age, but it seems to me that European travel has become greatly complicated with the years. Perhaps this is because so many Americans are travelling, and instead of appreciating the business that they bring to Europe, too many Europeans in the tour business try to be as nasty as they can. The reason, I believe, is that Americans, as a rule, are heavy spenders, and most Europeans envy our prosperity - it never occurs to them that on the average, an American in any job puts out about twice as much work in a day as does a European. This is particularly true of the English, and perhaps not true of the Germans.

But the fun in travelling in Europe is gone - particularly in such a situation as I am in on this trip, with young Rodney. We want him to see the so-called "cultural spots", and this means that we must travel the tourist route.

I was not so particular with my son, Dave. I never have had so much fun on a European trip as I did in 1956, when we toured Europe by car, and while we missed most cultural spots, we saw every automobile junkyard in Europe. In those days, one could drive from city to city, without worry about lodgings, as they were always available. Dave picked up several packing cases full of antique brass auto lamps, which he later sold at a profit - almost enough to pay for his trip. He also found that fabulous old car - the 1910 Bianchi - that year in a car shed in Switzerland. He still has it, and it's worth about $20,000.

As ever,  
Ross
You will probably hear from me next from Lisbon.

As ever,
Ross

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Lisbon, Portugal  
Tuesday, October 19, 1965

Dear Joe:

We flew out of still sunny England this morning, and landed here a few hours later in real California weather. In fact, on our drive to the city from the airport, we could have easily believed that we are just passing along a California country road, with olive trees, vineyards, and fruit trees bordering the road. And at the airport, in a parking planting, three huge single red (our Brilliant) hibiscus waved a many blossomed hello to us.

As we were up early, we sacked up for awhile (the old siesta custom prevails here, I'm told) then took a walk through an adjacent park. There I saw more single red, and single pink which I would call Mrs. Wilder. That's our hibiscus experience in Portugal up to now, but we're booked for a day-long trip to the country, and a return along the beaches, and the Tagus River tomorrow. The Botanic Garden visit will be scheduled for Thursday, although the so-called "Malvaceae expert" whose name Griffith gave me, failed to answer my letter.

I received your letters of October 13 and 15 yesterday, but before commenting on them, I'll button up our English chapter a little better than I did in my last letter, written Sunday night.

First, we had no trouble shipping the dog - we went to the Kennel Club for advice as to who we should use as a shipping agency and they suggested a Kay Stafford. She has a place out in the Kensington area, so we cabbed out. Unlike most English business people - particularly women, Kay took over, and arranged with Pan American for the dog to go non-stop, on the 12:00 pm plane today. This means that she lands there at 3:00 pm today. (I should, perhaps, use "landed" for you, but it should be "lands" for us, as we are 9 hours earlier than you here in Lisbon.)

I wired both Aunt Jennie and Sister - that the dog was coming in, and for them to meet the plane, so I don't think there will be any slip-up. We also instructed them to put her with a Vet for a couple of weeks, as she should be examined for ear mites, fleas, worms, etc. and given her shots. She was in scroungy condition.

Getting the dog off prevented me from visiting the Royal Horticultural Society Library again, and another hour or so at Kew. But I did complete almost everything that I set out to do in London.

In your letter, you commented a good deal on my report on the visit to the Kew Herbarium, and by this time you will have had my letter reporting on my call at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden Herbarium.

I should tell you that these "sheets" really tell very little, especially the old ones. They are just a few twigs and possibly a flower taped to a card about "10" x 16". There is no set selection of material - some have woody twigs - others apparently succumbed when cut. Leaf color and texture is gone, and the flowers are either brown, or show tinges of pink, even when the label indicates a red flower.

There is little information - the name of the collector, the date, and his guess as to what the specimen is. And too many of them seem to me to be guesses only. In most cases, the location where they are collected is noted.

It could do no good to photograph the sheets, and besides, Herbariums are dark holes and there is not enough light for my type of photography. I did make copious notes, and in some cases, made tracings of leaves on thin paper. But all in all, it was mostly an exercise in frustration. It did convince me, however, that outside of Florida, California and Hawaii, there is precious little known about hibiscus.

In summary, do not expect too much from my Herbarium research; it was much like trying to identify a human mummy.
As to the **H. cameronii** mix-up, it is quite possible that the specimens I referred to were quite old, and had been seen - or even re-labelled by Hochreutiner himself. I think we ought to prepare a paper on this subject, as confusion still exists.

I hope you have not addressed any letters to me at either Lisbon or Nairobi, as we will be here only 4 days, and Nairobi 3 days. On receipt of this, write me only c/o Thomas Cook & Sons, 36 A RISSIK Street, Johannesburg. I will visit Cook here, however, and leave a forwarding address.

As ever,
Ross

__________________________________________

Lisbon, Portugal
October 21, 1965

Dear Joe:

Some very nice things can happen to people who are interested in hibiscus, I learned today. Such as a visit to the apartment of a very charming Portuguese widow. She wanted to be helpful - far more helpful than I wanted her to be under the circumstances, but I turned out to be just another case where the language barrier resulted in creating an embarrassing situation. As of this writing, I'm still trying to explain what happened, but my wife still refuses to believe my story. But perhaps, I'd better tell you the story, or you too, may question its veracity.

It all came about through my efforts to find one F.A. Mendonca, who according to Austin Griffith, appears in a reference work in botanical research as being a specialist in Malvaceae and connected with the Center of Botanical Investigations here in Lisbon. His presence here was one of the reasons why I routed myself this way. The address of the Center was given as Rua Pedrocores 77, which is quite far out, close to the beach. I had written him from London, but had received no answer. It was my hope that the Center would have an Herbarium, and that inasmuch as the Portuguese were the first to visit the Malabar Coast of India, purported home of the hibiscus, this Herbarium might contain some very old specimens of **H. rosa-sinensis**.

This morning I phoned twice but there was no answer, so I decided to cab out to Pedrocores - as the district is called, and make a personal call. Ella and Rodney decided to come along.

It was a long ride out, but an enjoyable one, as our route took us under the great suspension bridge which is being built over the Tagus River, said to be the longest bridge of this kind in Europe.

Arriving at Number 77, apparently just a big warehouse-type building, I found the premises vacant, with a sign on the door. I asked the cabbie to read it, and take me to the new address. This proved to be almost all the way back to the hotel again, but in an older part of the city. The building had none of the appearance of a research institution, but I had the driver ask, and he was assured that the address given on the sign was located on the fourth floor of this building. So I barged in, located the concierge, and she took me up in a lift, and what is more, asked me to wait in the corridor while she announced my arrival. This seemed rather odd, but I'm never surprised at national customs, so I remained in the corridor for five minutes. Then the concierge opened another door, and ushered me into a very large sitting room, beautifully decorated with tapestries, oil paintings and marble statuary, and furnished as a living room, rather than an office. This sort of bugged me, again I stayed put.

This time, I waited fifteen minutes with Ella and Rodney in the narrow street with the cab meter running. I began to get a little antsy pantsy by this time, then the door opened, and a very attractive, middle-aged lady swept in, beautifully dressed in what I would say went for informal wear here. She gave me a friendly, and - well, I guess it could be called a seductive smile, held out her hand in greeting, and as she addressed me in French, I suppose it was my cue to kiss her hand. Not being very adept at this, I decided not to practice on such short notice, I introduced myself, and asked if she were Senhora Mendonca. My French is practically non-existent, so I addressed her in my very poor Spanish, and she answered in that language. By this time we were seated on a divan. She said she was not Senhora Mendonca, in fact, she did not know such a man. Furthermore, she did not have a man for her husband, the late Senhor Peiriera, God rest his soul, had departed this life several years ago and she was very much alone.
Each time I tried to explain the purpose of my visit, and to excuse my presence, which was, I said in halting Spanish, evidently a mistake, she refused to listen. No, she said, this is the right address, and she was the proper person for me to call on. Would I have a glass of wine before we discussed the terms of our business?

By this time you have perhaps guessed just what the situation really was - the charming lady owned the Pedrocores property, and the sign had been an advertisement of its availability for lease, and not the new address of the Center of Botanic Research. Our cabby did not know why I was interested in the address, but guessed I wanted to lease it.

At any rate, I finally made my excuses and bowed out, leaving a very disappointed lady, who had apparently risen from her siesta, dressed for a prospective lessor of her property, only to find that she had no customer, only a hibiscus-happy American, who had few social graces, no French, no Portuguese, poor Spanish, and a wife and grandson waiting downstairs in a cab.

Later, I called the Agricultural Attache at the American Embassy, and learned that the Center has moved to another city. So I guess I'll not see an Herbarium after all, and I'll have to remain under suspicion for the 40-minute wait.

As ever,
Ross

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Lisbon, Portugal
October 22, 1965

Dear Joe:

Under separate cover I am sending you two sticks labelled "Lisbon #1" and "Lisbon #2".

"Lisbon #1" is the one which looks very much like our Floribunda, and "Lisbon #2" is undoubtedly our Brilliant. However, I thought it might be a good idea to grow them under our conditions, for final comparison.

"Lisbon #1", as well as our Floribunda is very much like the description and Herbarium specimens of H. genevii, Bojer. I saw it in Madeira, and tried to get a stick back to you. However, it was one which did not come through.

So far, I have not seen "Madeira #3" here.

I am writing this as I have my continental breakfast in bed. Today, I plan to make another try to contact someone who can speak English and who is familiar with the garden setup here. because of their close association with England, I thought I would have no language difficulties here, but this was not the case.

As ever,
Ross

______________________________

Later:

Dear Joe:

As I felt that the advice of the American Embassy might not be accurate, I went to the American Express, and the receptionist traced down Mendonca for me. I went out to see him, but he had left for London the same day I arrived here, to work - of all places - at Kew Herbarium for a week.

However, his assistant gave me the name of the best Herbarium here - strangely, Mendonca's outfit does not have one. I went out this afternoon, but found no Indian Ocean species.

So it has been a dry run here, as far as any help on our problem.
Dear Joe:

I believe that Nairobi should be called the Garden City of the World; I have never seen such profusion of color or such a great variety of flowering trees and shrubs in both private and public plantings, particularly the latter. And credit for creating all this must be given Peter Greensmith, who retires in a few weeks, after many years in charge of Nairobi parks.

Hibiscus plays an important part in the public landscaping, in a very unusual way - here our hobby flower is grown almost exclusively as standards, and what is more, very tall standards. In many cases the standard is 8-feet high before branching begins. Almost all of the "oldies" are found here, and are grown this way.

I must admit, however, that the most color is contributed by bougainvillea, varying in color from white, through light yellow, bright yellow, orange, red and pink, grown in all forms, including tall standards. They have dozens of varieties here, due, I'm told, because they sport frequently, and these sports have been propagated.

I spent two hours with Peter Greensmith this morning, and he showed me around the City Nursery. He is very much interested in hibiscus, and has quite a collection of Hawaiian varieties, including Morley Theaker, Vasco, Miss Hawaiian, Frank Green, etc. He is not propagating them as he finds them poor bloomers, and difficult to root. As he has but few men who can graft, he confines his hibiscus production to the oldies. However, in retirement, he plans to grow all of the Hawaiians and has asked me to send him seed, which I will do. I will say that his Hawaiians, planted in 10 and 20-gallon containers, are doing very well, some of them being 10' to 12' high.

It's rather surprising to find hibiscus doing so well here. This very modern city lies at an elevation of 5500 feet above sea level, and one would suppose that it would get quite cold here. But these temperatures are much the same as ours, in fact, hibiscus-wise the area seems much like ours.

Greensmith visits Madagascar and Mauritius frequently, and gave me a lot of good tips as to people and places to see. But he confirmed Mason's statement that the hibiscus species we want are inaccessible. He says that we should by all means visit the Grand Comores Islands, as we can fly in from Tananarive and that now there is a good hotel there.

And as for the Seychelles - maybe you or Mrs. Staniford can help on this. Greensmith says that there is a U.S. Tracking Station - probably NASA, manned by Americans, and that they run a plane down to Tananarive about every two days. He says I could probably "hitch-hike" a ride up there. Does Mrs. Staniford have any influence at Jet Propulsion Labs? If so, she might clue me in on this. I will also write to Egolf for an assist.

We only have tomorrow as we fly out early Wednesday. We came on Sunday about 10:00 am, but we were so pooped that we went right to bed. We had been up and in our clothes for about 27 hours. Took the plane at Lisbon at 8:25 in the morning-this stopped at Barcelona, Spain, Nice, France, and arrived in Rome at 3:30 pm. We laid over there until 11:00 pm, and took Alitalia Air Lines, which stopped in Athens, Greece. We then headed for Nairobi - a 7 hour flight, with not an empty seat in the plane. It was a Boeing 707, with three seats across, and highly uncomfortable.

We will probably go out to the game park tomorrow so that Rodney can get some animal pictures. Also, I plan to get a few more hibiscus pictures.

Greensmith arranged for me to get any cuttings I wanted from the City Park Nursery, but I did not see anything worth sending back. We have all of them.
As ever,  
Ross

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Nairobi, Kenya  
October 26, 1965  

Dear Joe:  

I've just returned from another 2-hours visit to the City Nursery on my own, and while I did not see much that I did not have a quick look at yesterday, I did make some new observations.  

First, they have a greater collection of varieties than I first noted. There is no one place in the can yard where hibiscus are placed - they are spotted here and there, and only by covering the entire two acres was I able to assess their collection properly.  

Their collection consists of (1) all the "oldies" or most of them, (2) a dozen or more of the Peradynia hybrids from Ceylon, and at least 40 Hawaiians - not the very latest, but of the circa Surfrider, Gold Dust, Lemon Chiffon, Madonna, etc., which were shipped two years ago from Hawaii.  

Incidentally, I found out why the standards are 8 to 10 feet high- it is because they are so heavily used for sidewalk planting, and people must walk under them. I also suspect that in this form, they are less susceptible to "midnight requisitioning".  

The native foreman in charge of this nursery said that S.A. Perkins, Mr. Greensmith's assistant, had done some hybridization, and had taught him how. So I called on Perkins, it seems that he tried to make H. syriacus X H. rosa-sinensis, crosses, and also H. trionum X H. rosa-sinensis without success. He is no longer interested. He said that a local seedsman had hybridized, but really has not done much of it. He does have a collection of Hawaiians, however. I would have liked to see a man named Harries, a wealthy pineapple grower, who also has a collection of Hawaiians, and according to a local seedsman, has done some hybridizing. However, he lives nearly 100 miles away. Apparently he has not made a significant contribution, as Greensmith did not mention his name.  

Hibiscus does seed easily here, outside. The Ruth Wilcox (H. arnottianus) are covered with seed. Tomorrow, I am going to look over some plants for seed collection purposes.  

We are staying at the Stanley Hotel, favorite headquarters of American and European big game hunters. I am writing this while enjoying my before-dinner drink on the famous Thorn Tree Terrace, popular haunt of white hunters and their clients. In my mind I can see Ernest Hemingway striding onto the terrace with his retinue of white hunters.  

Personally, I have nothing but contempt for those who glory in killing wild animals just to have them stuffed - parts of them, at least, to hang in their studies. If I had to have a trophy of this nature, I would choose a white hunter or one of his clients.  

I hope that big white hunter sitting at the next table does not read my thoughts!  

As ever,  
Ross

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Johannesburg, South Africa  
October 28, 1965  

Dear Joe:  

Arrived here late yesterday afternoon, after a rather hectic flight from Nairobi. We were due to fly at 9:10 am, but the plane was 3 hours late. The flight originated in London, and we were advised that the hold-up was due to a call by Prime Minister Wilson for some top brass from Whitehall to join him in Salisbury.
To top it off, the S.A. Airways, the local staff of which is all native, failed to pick us up at the hotel according to promise, and we (as well as several others) had to make a dash by cab at the last minute. Then, at the airport, due to the delay, and the fact that the brand of English spoken in the emerging Nations is almost pure Swahili, our boarding was difficult. I assure you that the Scotch I was able to buy when we were aloft, was quite welcome.

We landed in Salisbury, Rhodesia, where we stayed 45 minutes. Prime Minister Wilson was conferring there with native leaders, but did not come down to the airport to ask my advice.

Cook's representative met us here at the airport to advise of a mistake in booking which meant that we stayed in the Langham Hotel last night and had to move over here today. A hassle, really, with 5 bags and two dependents.

Tomorrow, I will make all of my forward bookings alloting two weeks for Mauritius and Madagascar. The way airline reservations are be taken up in advance, on the Joberg-Perth run indicates that I'd better book now, or I'll find myself and family South African residents for the winter.

Saw only one or two hibiscus here. It's really out of their clement.

Sincerely,
Ross

November 1965

Johannesburg, South Africa
November 2, 1965

Dear Joe:

Just a note to tell you that I received your letter of October 27 this morning.

Yesterday, we went up to Pretoria and visited the Botanical Research Institute and Botanic Garden. A dry run, as far as hibiscus is concerned, and I'll give you a full report in a letter from Durban. We leave here tomorrow.

Spent all morning completing my forward arrangements, and we are now completely booked for our entire South African stay. This is quite a load off my mind.

Incidentally, it occurred to me that I better check back on Cooks and see if I had to have visas for Mauritius. Sure enough we do, and again Cooks had failed to advise us. If I had not thought of this, we would not have been able to land there. And as these visas could only be obtained from the British Consul in Joberg, had I not thought of it today, we would not have had an opportunity before taking off for Mauritius. So, at the expense of $4.50 and three hours of time, we got the visas. I wonder what happens to trusting travellers under Cook's "guidance"?

As ever,
Ross

Durban, South Africa
November 4, 1965

Dear Joe:

We arrived here late yesterday afternoon, and as my postcard, mailed today, shows, are comfortably situated in a very modern beach hotel. However, it has been raining - the FIRST rainy day we've had since we left England!
Now, as for a wrap-up on my Joberg stay, and additional comments on your letter of October 27.

As I premised in my previous letter, the Pretoria visit, while interesting, did not prove helpful in our hibiscus research. Dr. Codd was very gracious - these Africanders are really friendly and go all out for visiting firemen.

Dr. Codd turned me over to the man in charge of the Herbarium, and I spent an hour there. However, the Institute is entirely devoted to work on South African flora - they had no Mascarenes Islands species - no *H. rosa-sinensis* or *H. schizopetalus*, or anything which remotely resembled ornamental hibiscus.

Incidentally, in discussing *H. schizopetalus* with Dr. Codd, and also with Greensmith, at Nairobi, I have learned that this species is not South African, but supposedly native to tropical East Africa - that is, Kenya and Tanganyika. Even there, it is difficult to find in the wild state. Exell says, in "Flora Zambesiaca" that it "may also be native to Mozambique".

I found Dr. Codd also interested in the horticultural side of South African plants; although he cannot do any work in plant breeding, he is sympathetic and unlike most of the pure botanical scientists, he appreciates the importance of this work.

The very large (400 acre) Botanic Garden is devoted exclusively to plants native to South Africa. Dr. Codd took us through both the Garden and the Nursery. He then drove us to his home for a cold drink, and then across town to the Transvaal Museum, where Rodney spent some time and took notes for his report on South Africa.

At Dr. Codd's home, I took seed of *H. calycinus*; at the time, I thought it looked very much like *H. rockii*, so I checked in the new Bates work on "Cultivated Hibiscus" in Baileya, and he says they are very close. So maybe we can do a little hybridizing in these species.

However, my last experience in Herbaria at Pretoria convinced me that as a source of background data on species which may be cross compatible, they have little to offer. Furthermore, the personnel (with exceptions like Dr. Codd) have little or no appreciation for the horticultural development side of plants; they are taxonomists. When I ask permission to check their sheets, and spend only an hour or so, they seem insulted. Apparently, one is supposed to spend two hours on each sheet, making measurements, calculations, etc.

I am sure that I did not miss anything when I did not contact Mendonca. Undoubtedly, he is a botanist of world-wide stature - he is one of the authors of "Flora Zambesiaca". However, I am sure that the only plus I had in the Mendonca reference is what you compliment me by calling my "dalliance" with Senhora Perreira. Incidentally, the Madame Secretary has not yet accepted my version of the visit with the seductive Portuguese widow.

A Mrs. Dorothy Ryersbach just phoned. Sima Eliovson, a well known South African horticultural authority had written her that I was visiting Durban. She is just dying to meet me, she said, and will be glad to drive me around the area tomorrow, or any other day, also make arrangements for me to meet hibiscus and other people, including doggy people for Ella.

As I said above, the Africanders sure are hospitable.

I have seen very little hibiscus here, but just across the Marine Parade, there is a row including *Lillian Wilder*, *H. subviolaceus*, *Common Red*, and *H. rosa flora plena rubra*. The flowers were huge - I have never seen this size in the same varieties. I made a requisition of the *Lillian Wilder*, and a single orange, which I mentioned seeing in Joberg, but failed to collect there. These will be sent along in due time. *Wilders* were 7 inches across - no foolin!

There is also a lot of *Common Red* here, as there was in Johannesburg and Pretoria. In these two last mentioned places, at least 95% of the hibiscus seen were single red, and almost all were planted close to the house walls. The red grew to 15 feet high and many plants appeared to have at least 50 blooms.

I checked this red closely, and I think that instead of being our *Brilliant*, it is one that we used to call *Spanish Shawl*. It has a dark eye zone, and some crepe and ruffle. I will send back a stick for checking.

I did not mention the fact that both Joberg and Pretoria feature Jacaranda in their street plantings and they were in full bloom that week. We were driven to a high point in Pretoria by Dr. Codd, and looking down over South Africa's capital, the city looked like a purple carpet.
It's time for dinner - I'll write again from here.

As ever,
Ross


Durban, South Africa
November 10, 1965

Dear Joe:

This letter is to advise you that I am going to be only a tourist during the remainder of my stay in South Africa. Reason: this country has nothing to offer us in the way of either new species cross compatible with our hybrids, or cultivars which are of any interest to us. So far, all I have seen here are the usual oldies, to be found in any part of the world.

Furthermore, insofar as the Natal Coast if concerned, hibiscus has become quite unpopular due to the ravages of the hibiscus borer, which I mentioned in earlier letters.

As I told you - on our arrival here, I was called by Dorothy Reyersbach, a friend of Mrs. Eliovson of Johannesburg. She offered to take me to the Botanic Garden to call on Dr. Ernest Thorpe, the curator, I found Dr. Thorpe to be a dedicated orchid man, with some little interest in hibiscus - but not much. However, he gave generously of his time and showed me their hibiscus collection, and through their nursery where they propagate for public sale.

They have the usual "oldies" plus a collection of Hawaiian hybrids, sent them recently by Paul Weissich of Honolulu, which, though small plants, are doing quite well on their own root.

Thorpe's assistant, who is in charge of the nursery, was much more interested in hibiscus than Dr. Thorpe, and asked me to explain just what we were doing in the way of hybridization. Of course, it is just a question as this which triggers a 30-minute explanation by me. Strangely enough, it was Dr. Thorpe who seemed most interested, and when I finally ran out of verbosity, he said:

"I don't know why you are here, looking for information on hibiscus; I've been in most parts of the world, including Hawaii, and I do not recall of ever hearing so much detail on hibiscus, or hibiscus breeding, that is, on a project basis. You won't learn anything on the Natal Coast. No one in this area has ever hybridized, to my knowledge, and I was born here."

He then told me of the ravages of the hibiscus borer, which is quite a stinker, apparently, and pointed out two varieties which seem resistant. One was Lillian Wilder, which is widely planted here, and the other is Wilders White, or H. arnottianus. Dr. Thorpe did not know that Wilders White was a true species.

Later, it occurred to me that the fact that Lillian Wilder, a first generation H. arnottianus hybrid, and H. arnottianus itself, were both resistant to the borer, suggested the possibility that H. arnottianus and its F1 and F2 hybrids might be inherently resistant to the borer. I dropped a note offering this idea to Dr. Thorpe and said that I would send him some of our F1, if he thought my theory was valid. He phoned this morning, and said that he thought I had something, and asked that I send him material for trial. I promised to do this.

Accordingly, I would appreciate it if you would check over our can yard, and see if we have small - or reasonably small rooted plants of Ross Estey, Jim Hendry, Roddy Boy, 58-601, Ruth Anderson, Hawaiiana, or any other varieties that are F1 hybrids of H. arnottianus. If so, I would like to have you discuss with Glen the possibility of the Arboretum picking up the tab on the postage. I would wash the soil off the roots, pack the roots in sphagnum, bringing the roots and the sphagnum into a tight ball, and trying it closed in the bottom of a poly bag that is big enough to hold the entire plant. The leaves should be reduced, and the entire plant closed in the bag.

The shipment should be addressed to:

   The Curator
   Botanic Garden
I have written Dr. Stewart today as regards this matter, and I think he will be sympathetic, as it may mean the re-establishment of hibiscus as a landscape plant in this area.

Whenever I asked about hibiscus in this town, everyone suggested that I go on down to Margate, 90 miles south. There, I was told, is the place to see hibiscus. It is called the "Hibiscus Coast", and they have a Hibiscus Festival each year, choosing a Hibiscus Queen to preside.

Although our "Garden Tour" route, which we begin next Sunday goes to Margate, I decided to rent a car, and go down for the day. We chose yesterday for the ride. We travelled 186 miles at a cost of 25 cents per mile, and did not see more than two dozen hibiscus plants! What a disappointment.

Furthermore, I ran into bad luck in trying to get information on the Festival, or as regards collectors in this area. The man who promotes the Festival was on holiday, as was the Agricultural Officer of the area who is the advisor. I visited a nursery, but the proprietors were away and the lady in charge said that the finest collection of hibiscus on this Coast was at the Botanic Garden in Durban - the collection I had seen the day before!

The only hibiscus I saw were single red Brilliant or close to it, and a few yellow, much like California Gold. All were ratty; the nursery lady and others I talked to said the borer had wiped out most of the hibiscus on the Coast.

This morning, my local gardener friend called to tell me that she had heard that a Mrs. Vernon Crookes, of a very wealthy sugar planter family of Scottsburg, halfway between here and Margate, had exhibited some fine hibiscus at a flower show last year. I have written Mrs. Crookes, but don't expect to hear from her. If she still has hibiscus, no doubt they are some Hawaiian imports; these sugar cane growers in Africa work very closely with Hawaii; many of them have been men trained in Hawaii in charge of their field or mill operations.

You will be interested in one observation made on the 90-mile trip to Margate: the road runs close to the ocean most of the way, and when the land is not cleared for cane, the national growth is mostly Strelitzia Nicolai! As you know, this plant is called "Gast's Folly" in our household, due to the fact that I planted our hillsides to it, seedlings as nursery stock, but by the time it was large enough to market, I could not get rid of it at any price! So in addition to being a "dud" hibiscus-wise, the entire trip was a reminder of my bad judgment!

November 11, 1965
Ella has made some "doggie friends" down here - two sisters, who are the only Yorkie breeders in Natal. We have visited them a couple of times and last night we had them in to dinner. The husband, George Barrows, is just my age. He was born in South Africa as were his father and grandfather. He speaks English, Afrikaans, and seven African dialects. He is retired, but during his active years was in the theatre business, and met and managed tours for many of the theatre greats of England and America. He's very much the out-going type, and has given us a great deal of background on things South African.

Between Ella's doggie people and my gardener lady friend, we have been busy nearly every day and evening.

I am writing this before breakfast; today, we plan to go up to Pietermaritzburg, 50 miles inland. They have a fine Botanic Garden there. Yesterday, the local paper carried a story about a white jacaranda coming into bloom for the first time - a tree presented to them by the "Director of the Los Angeles Arboretum in 1962." I cut this out and sent it to Bill Stewart. Today, I hope to photograph the tree.

Yesterday, I received confirmation on my hotel in Mauritius, but not a word from Tananarive, Madagascar. I am beginning to get worried about our arrangements there, particularly the plane reservations from Mauritius to Madagascar and return. Yesterday I talked to the local representative of Air France, and was advised that space is very limited; they fly the route only twice a week, and use small planes.

Mention of Mauritius reminds me that so far, I have not seen, or even found anyone who has even heard of any of the species which I hoped to locate on Mauritius or Madagascar. All of the Herbarium specimens that I have seen at Kew, Edingburg, Lisbon and Pretoria were collected 50 or more years ago, and in the case of H. liliiflorus there were at least four different forms among the specimens studied. So I may not too optimistic over the prospects of finding anything of any importance. What we don't realize, I think, is that in setting up or project, we have developed far more background, in the way of live material and
bibliography as well, than has been the case with any other institution. True, the Hawaiians and the Indians have accomplished a great deal, but in the case of Hawaii, the work has been carried on by individuals with no records kept.

Before I leave here, I hope to put in a half-day on my notes on H. liliiflorus and set down all of the data I have, so that I will have a better perspective when I reach Mascarenes. I'll send a copy of this to you.

My gardener friend, Dorothy Reyersbach, has taken us to several gardens. Her interest in plants is very wide, and as she lectured to gardens clubs, etc. she is inclined to monopolize the conversation by emphasizing the good points of various plants. I could care less about most) of the things she shows me, and I guess my lack of attention bothered her. Finally she said, rather testily, "You don't seem interested in these unusual plants I am showing you."

I asked her to forgive me, and explained that I am so involved in my own hobby plant that I have lost interest in other members of the plant world. In fact, I had developed the bad habit of saying to myself - and to others - that "if it ain't hibiscus the hell with it".

As ever,
Ross

Later: A few weeks after I returned home I sent Mrs. Reyersbach some pictures of my seedlings and in her reply, asked that I send her some seed. I wrote back, promising to send her the first seed I had available, but only if she wrote "if it ain't hibiscus the hell with it" 50 times on a sheet of paper and send it to me. She took me seriously and complied. I sent the seed.

Durban, Natal, South Africa
November 12, 1965

Dear Joe:

Just received yours of 10/28, addressed to Johannesburg.

In spite of the fact that I had fully intended to be a tourist in South Africa from here on out, I hired a car and went up to Pietermaritzburg yesterday (52 miles) and visited the Botanic Garden. Nothing new - neither H. rosa-sinensis nor other species there. Never heard of H. liliiflorus. However, they did advise me that a local nursery - Carter's - had quite a few hibiscus and were getting in more. We drove out and met the proprietors, Schofield & Son. They were very cordial, and showed me everything they had - a very great surprise to me.

They had just received a shipment from New Zealand - not Jack Clark, but another large Auckland nursery. Among those received were Crown of Bohemia, under that name, Ballerina, Mrs. Thompkins, Bride, Kona (as Mrs. Rose Davis) and several others, mostly Peradeniya hybrids. He was also shipped - under another name - most of the "oldies" that he already had - much to his disgust.

He also grows Agnes Galt, and the Wilders, and Madelaine Champion. In yesterday morning's mail, he received Monrovia Nursery's catalogue, and I was able to boast as regards the number of mine on the list - Ross Estey, and the new ones out this year.

I have enclosed a news clip on the local Herbarium, which I have not, and will not visit. However, what the Director has to say about plants being lost to cultivation is very much to the point. I think we should realize that the species I will look for on Mauritius and Madagascar were last observed in 1900 by Hichreutiner - and we have no assurance that he actually saw live material, but made his revisions based on Herbarium specimens collected at a much earlier date. Thus we are rather naive in expecting to find them, at least under the same names. As far as H. Liliiflorus is concerned, I checked this morning, and find that I have four different descriptions of this one.

In spite of the fact that H. schizopetalus is native (or so they say) of Central Africa, I have not see a single plant of this either in Kenya or here.
This is the second rainy day we have had since we left home, which is quite a remarkable record. This is supposed to be the rainy season here.

Quite possibly I will not write again before we reach Capetown, on November 20, as we will be on our bus tour of the "Garden Route". If I had it to do over, I would have allotted less time here and more to the Cape - Mrs. Eliovson advised this, but I had been told that this was the hibiscus center of South Africa. It may have been before the borer took over.

Roddy is getting a bit of beach-time. He is more interested in biology than botany. Here, he is making a study of a species known as "homo-sapiens bikiniensis", particularly the female of the species. I'll admit that there are some very nice specimens on the beach here. Ella has to remind me to pull my eyeballs in, or, she fears, they will be sunburned! It is difficult for me to convince her that my interest is purely scientific - that I am just studying their anterior structure for academic reasons.

As ever,
Rossa

Capetown, South Africa
November 21, 1965

Dear Joe:

After six days by bus from Durban, travelling a thousand miles of South African coast which borders the Indian Ocean, we arrived here last night.

Our first half-day (we started at 2:20 pm) of the tour took us only to Margate, where, as I told in a previous letter, we had visited by car. Obviously, this part of the trip held little interest, particularly as it rained the entire way. I am glad that we had gone down before, as there would not have been any opportunity to check on hibiscus as we got in at 5:30. As a matter of fact, the entire tour down to the Cape was one of early starts and late arrivals. Furthermore, hotels chosen for us were mostly in city centers, or on remote beaches away from plantings of any kind, so I was not able to see very much in the way of hibiscus, except at St. Johns, where I collected several oldies. All but two of these were sent to Egolf; two will be mailed to you in the same mail as this letter. They are as follows:

Natal #6 = This is a large double cerise, very much like Orpah, but with a heavier bloom, and a large distinct maroon eye. It may be regional variation of Orpah, but I think it well worth testing.

Natal #8 = Is a double orange, much like Crown of Bohemia, but the eye zone (maroon) is large and distinct.

After we left Margate, we passed by one beach resort after another for about 50 miles, resorts with fancy names like "Leisure Land", "Portobello Beach". We then crossed the Umzimvubu River, and entered Pondoland, the northern limits of the Transkei, the great Bantu Reserve. Abruptly civilization seemed to fall away - white villas gave way to Bantu conical huts - hundreds of thousands of them, as far as the eye could see in every direction.

The Transkei - menaing "Across the Kei River", comprises 16,450 square miles, where 1,300,000 natives have been given their own rule, with the legislative and administrative headquarters at Umtala where we stopped Tuesday night. With the exception of a few traders, missionaries and advisory officials, no Europeans may live in the area, or own land there.

The Transkei is divided into four separate, mostly tribal divisions. The natives are what are called Xhosa people, to distinguish them from Hottentots or bushmen, of the southern part of Africa. However, all natives here are called "Bantu" - once they were called "Kaffirs", but this term is resented, the people preferring to be known as "bantus".

They are basically subsistence farmers, with some cattle and horses, and they live in much the same way as did their ancestors. Tribal customs and superstitions are basically unchanged, and while fine new schools and hospitals have been built in recent years, these have made little impact on the Bantus way of life, apparently. We are told that they prefer their old ways to the so-called European, civilization; while most of the men go out to the Transvaal Mines or the Natal cane farms on six-months contract to earn cash income, they always return to the Transkei. While they are away, their wife or wives - till the fields, and the youngsters take care of the livestock.
Note that I included the plural of "wife". We were told that one of the reasons why the Bantus prefer their own area, and their own (supervised) rule is that in the Transkei, a man can have as many wives as he can afford. This could be a mixed blessing in our own way of life, but Bantus can secure a wife for 12 cattle or $50 cash, and wives are kept not for ornament but for their contribution to the growing and preparing of their staple. "Mealies", or maize.

There are exceptions, of course, and we met one - Mr. Khotsi Sethuitsu, a pure blood Bantu, who is reputed to be worth $9 million dollars. He is herbalist-patent medicine manufacturer - who lives in a beautiful villa outside of Lusikisiki, the capitol of Pondoland, with his 14 wives and 22 children - 20 of them daughters - to his very great sorrow. However, he is comparatively young and frankly expressed to me the hope that his next 20 grandchildren will be boys.

His home, a unique structure of blue ceramic tile and leaded glass, stands along the road. It is not a regular tour stop, but our driver pulled up and asked if we wanted to visit. We thought it was just another tourist trap, where another contribution would be made for some corny purpose, but we were not only very wrong, but delightfully entertained.

It seems that Khotsi is a very outgoing individual, and likes company - the more the merrier. Also, he loves publicity - and one wall of his house is covered with newspaper clippings and photos and other evidence of visits of many writers and notables. Our driver had phoned in advance the hour of our arrival.

We were greeted by two natives in tribal dress, who announced our arrival with a series of sharp blasts on a trumpet made of the horn of some animal. The 14 wives, dressed in blue full length dresses, were lined up outside the door, and sang a song of welcome. Next, two natives brought huge tubs of water, and carefully washed the soles of our shoes. We were then allowed to enter a long room, where we were seated along the wall. The trumpet sounded again and "The Man" entered - a small, cheery-faced fellow dressed in a worn alpaca suit, much too large and much too worn for a multi-millionaire. He greeted us warmly, shaking us each by the hand, and asking each tour member where they called home. He made much over us, as we were the only Americans. When I introduced Rodney as my grandson, he asked me how many children I had fathered, and when I confessed that it was only two, he chided me for my lack of productivity. I did want to reply, "Well, Buster, how much help did you get from those big male retainers of yours? But I did not do so, being a guest, and furthermore, those big retainers all carried big knives.

We then were served tea and scones by the multi-wife "crew", and then had a tour of the premises. The rooms held untold treasures in ceramics, jewelry, etc. He is reputed to have a diamond as large as his fist. We were urged to take pictures, which we did, and when we had seen the house and gardens (no hibiscus) Khotsi escorted us back to the bus with his 14 wives trailing him. We left with them all waving goodbye, and wishing us "Good Luck" in both English and Pondo. Quite an experience.

There seems to be no doubt that Khotsi is a multi-millionaire. He is the son of President Kruger's coachman, who some say, inherited part of Kruger's millions. however, it seem more probable that the money comes from his huge sale of patent medicines and native remedies to the Bantus.

In his garage I saw a late-model Cadillac, a 1964 Chevrolet Impala, and a Chevy truck.

He is said to have paid $2,500,00 for building in Durban, paying cash which he carried in a suitcase to the office where the transaction was completed.

However, the average Bantu is housed quite differently than the villa of Sethuitzu. The dwelling unit is a round hut, walls about ten feet high, made up just about like our adobe structures, but of indigenous clay bricks. It is covered with a conical roof, made of thatch, supported by sturdy rafters. There is no opening at the top. There are no windows in the average hut, and the single door always opens to the East.

When a Bantu marries, he is given a building site, with small plot of ground adjacent to it, for his primary food crops. Mostly this is maize, but many are now planting vegetables, at the urging of the agriculturally trained native or white advisors. In addition, he receives from seven to ten acres of land, often as far as five miles away, for farming purposes.

As the family grows in size, additional huts are built; most family units, called "kraals" by the Bantus, have from three to six dwellings, separated by about 20 feet of open space. This is because of the danger of fire; while most of the cooking is done outside, the Bantu has a fire going in the center of each hut, and all too often, the thatch catches fire, and the dwelling room is destroyed.
After we left the Transkei, and skirted the coast again, I began to realize why the Margate people had called theirs the Hibiscus Coast'. Apparently the borer had not traversed the Bantu Reserve, for we were soon seeing hibiscus on every side - huge bushes, and beautifully trained and pruned hedges. And as Henry Ford said about his Model T - "You can have any color just so it is black" - ninety-five per cent of the hibiscus were single red.

At Port Elizabeth, fully half of the residences were bordered by thick hedges of single red, some of them ten feet high, and four five feet thick. Some owners have a security problem in Southern Africa, and the hibiscus is really playing its part in this.

These hedges are usually started from "cuttings" about 3/4 to 1" in diameter and 20" to 30" long. They are set in the soil about 6" deep in a criss-cross pattern. They are trained so that eventually the hedge cannot be penetrated by a dog, much less a human.

More about hibiscus later. Must close now.

As ever,
Ross

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Capetown, South Africa
November 24, 1965

Dear Joe:

I received your letters of November 10 and 17, both addressed to me here. As I read these letters, it is apparent that you will address another letter to me here; it will have to arrive tomorrow, as we leave tomorrow afternoon, for Joberg, where we take off for Mauritius on Friday.

We will be in Mauritius until December 10, and you might just reach us with a letter to "Hotel Chaland, Mauritius", if it is written on receipt of this. But I have my doubts of a letter addressed to American Express, Tananarive, will reach me.

We will be in Perth December 11-12-13, then on to Adelaide for only a day, so our next best address after Perth will be Sydney, c/o Thos. Cook & Son.

Yesterday, I rented a car and driver, and went down to the Cape of Good Hope, stopping at Kirstenbosch Gardens on the way. As you know, this is a National Botanic Garden, with only South African species. I checked, and found that they had only three hibiscus species - H. diversifolius, H. pedunculatus, and H. ludwigii. Both their diversifolius and ludwigii are the same as ours - as you know, we have quite a planting of the latter in the African section. However, I have always wanted to see if H. pedunculatus, and yesterday, I not only had the opportunity to do so, but also to collect a generous supply of seed. Although only one badly bug-chewed blossom was available, it is apparently quite close to H. cameronii - the leaf is exactly the same in shape and texture. Also, it is a small woody shrub, only 3 feet high. The flower is pinkish to blue, only 2 inches in diameter, although the plant was not exactly vigorous. The staminal column was much like H. rosa-sinensis, insofar as I could determine. I think that this one will give us some fun in crossing with both H. cameronii and H. rosa-sinensis.

I had a letter to Dr. Rycroft, the Curator of the Garden here, but he was out of town. However, the hibiscus were in a section taken care of by an old Kew man, Harry Hall, and we had a very nice visit. I could have taken the Garden with me, insofar as he was concerned, but I settled for almost all the seed in his one plant of H. pedunculatus.

We're just about ready to leave the hotel for the airport, to go to Joberg, so I'll finish off here.

On the Cape Tour, I visited Cape Province Nurseries, which produce all the trees, shrubs and plants for public plantings in the Cape Town area. They had only Common Red, Apricot, Lillian Wilder (they call it Apple Blossom, as they do in Australia), Madeline Champion (a reflexed orange single), Peach Blow and Canary Island, which, except for the leaf, is much the same as our Floribunda. It may be the original H. genevii.

Everything seems OK for the Mascarenes, but the closer I get the more stories I hear about the lack of knowledge, interest or cooperation in connection with native flora.
Will close now.

As ever,
Ross

Mauritius
November 27, 1965

Dear Joe:

We arrived here yesterday and are comfortably established at the Le Challand Hotel on the beach, close to the airport. The Le Challand was formerly the headquarters of the British Air Force. It consists of a main building, now used as a lobby and dining room, and about 25 bungalows, scattered around a large, beautifully landscaped garden. We were quite pleased to see that the long driveway that led to the hotel was lined with H. schizopetalus, heavily laden with bloom. At least a dozen hibiscus plants form the main planting around the headquarters. I noted several different forms of what we call Versicolor, were in bloom - pink, red, and orange. Many of these were seeding profusely.

We had a smooth, scenic flight over from Johannesburg. The route took us over the south end of Madagascar, the "Great Red Island", and as it came into view below the coloring of this heavily eroded terrain gave reason for its name. Also, its great size is realized when seen from the air - it is the world's fourth largest island and a third larger in land area than California, stretching down the South Indian Ocean for nearly 1000 miles.

The sight of Mauritius from aloft was rather disconcerting; its postage stamp size seemed to belie its prominent role in maritime history, and also it appeared to be almost entirely under cultivation, giving reason to believe that areas of native vegetation were limited. This indicated that we were not going to have the problem of organizing any extended plant hunting activity in the wild.

While in England, I read everything I could find on the history of Mauritius, as I felt that this might be of importance in our plant collecting effort here. I learned that it was the first island in the South Indian Ocean to be colonized by Europeans.

The first European to visit Mauritius was Pedro Mascarenhas, one of Vasco de Gama's captains, in 1506. The Portuguese did not colonize Mauritius, but they left a few domestic animals, and some monkeys.

The Dutch were the next to arrive in 1598. They established a fort at Grandport, and named the island Mauritius for Maurice, Prince of Nassau, their ruler. It's difficult to believe that it was from Grandport that Abel Tasman, sailed to discover Australia.

In 1638 the Dutch brought in colonists. One of the important items of food in their diet after they became established was a large, clumsy, succulently-fleshed bird called the Dodo. It could not fly, or run, and soon the last one disappeared in the cooking pots of the food-loving Dutchmen. This, it is said, was the origin of the expression "As dead as the Dodo bird".

As I have gained a great deal of weight, I am glad that in 1718 the French forced the Dutch out of Mauritius and ruled for over a hundred years.

In 1810, the English took the island, and since that time it has been an English Colony, although they are now pushing for independence. While the English rule Mauritius, the French are still the principal land owners, and everyone speaks French as well as English here.

Realizing the possibilities for raising sugar cane, the English brought in Indian labor and the Indians brought in the mynah bird and the mongoose. The mynabs killed off most of the beneficial insects and the mongooses took care of the beautiful native birds, but seemed to have formed a brotherly relationship with the mynabs, as they do not include them in their diet.

Mauritius has a land area of 720 square miles, and population of close to 500,000, of which 400,000 are Indians.
The principal products of Mauritius are children and sugar cane. The children are produced by the Indians, and sugar cane by the old French landowners. The birthrate of the Indians is increasing each year, and the standard of living of the Indians is declining. However, the colony of monkeys left by Portuguese 300 years ago has not grown any larger; they have limited their numbers to the food sources available to them. Considering the precarious nature of the island food supply, a study in depth of the birth control as practiced by this group of assertedly sub-human group of colonists would seem to be in order.

Port Louis, the main town, with a good harbor, had been a port of call for Portuguese ships on the route from their enclave at Goa, on the Malabar Coast of India and continued to be an important source of supplies for ship en route from Asia around the Cape of Good Hope.

It is well established that the species native to southeast Asia, and hybrids developed there, found their way to Mauritius very early. In fact, the first recorded crosses between *H. Liliiflorus* and *H. rosa-sinensis*, as early as 1828, were made by Dr. Charles Telfair, a British Army doctor, who remained as a resident physician in Mauritius after the British took over the island. His hybrids, described in detail and pictured in water colors by his wife, were published in English horticultural magazines. These reports stimulated interest in the hybridizing of ornamental hibiscus.

Dr. Telfair was a dedicated plantsman who collected plants throughout the Mascarene islands, and Madagascar, and even the African West Coast, sending them to Kew Gardens. He also designed public gardens in Mauritius.

Our interest in the Mascarenes and Madagascar, therefore, was not centered on finding the native species *H. liliiflorus* and *H. fragilis*, but also in seeing some of the early hybrids there. So I'll be reporting to you almost daily on my experiences here.

As ever,
Ross

Mauritius
November 29, 1965

Dear Joe:

Eureka! I have found the elusive *H. liliiflorus*, and obtained both wood and seed.

Last night the Manager of the hotel joined me on the veranda of the hotel, where I was relaxing with my usual Scotch and water - no ice. He is an Englishman who married into one of the wealthy land-owning families. He came here from England to take the position of Police Commissioner for Mauritius, but is now retired.

I told him my reason for visiting Mauritius and asked if he could suggest anyone who could advise me where to start my search for the native hibiscus. He said that he had on his staff, as a garden consultant, a Scot named Capt. Henry Adams. Adams had been Chief Forester of Mauritius, but he was now retired, that is, like I am. He now assists Hargreaves, the Hotel Manager in supervising the design and maintenance of the Le Challand grounds.

He phoned Adams who promised to take me up to the Black River Gorge, where he had seen a hibiscus "tree", but not being a botanist did not know what it was.

He drove me up to the mountains as far as he could, then we walked about a half mile to see the tree. Although interested, I was very much disappointed because it was not *H. Liliiflorus* or *H. fragilis*, but more like the kokio rockii of Hawaii. As it was not in bloom, further identification was impossible.

Captain Adams then remembered that many years ago he had brought down two trees of a flame-colored hibiscus and planted them in a small botanic garden in Curepipe, a town near the Le Challand. We then left the mountains, visited this Garden, and sure enough, the two trees were still alive, but in very poor condition. They were both *H. liliiflorus*, in full bloom and with many ripe seed pods. I secured an ample supply of both seed and wood, and both will be sent to you tomorrow.

The flower is difficult to describe, but I think I could best do this by just saying it is about four inches in diameter and shaped like a lily, hence its name, and the size and shape of *H. kokio*. However, the red is more towards orange, and it has orange-yellow
stripes or veins on the petals, and half of the back of each petal is orange-yellow, just as half the back of Puahi Bishop (Pseudo-cameronii) is white. Quite possibly the half and half effect of the latter comes originally from H. liliiflorus the staminal column is the same color as the petals, the pollen yellow and the pads red. The size and form of the column, the style, filaments, etc. are much the same as H. kokio. Also, it may be compared in form and shape with that little yellow I brought back from Samoa.

Just to be sure, I checked my notes in Cavanilles and found these trees to be true H. liliiflorus.

Captain Adams also informed me, of a Dr. Vaughn, a botanist who had taught at the Royal College here, but had on retirement developed a small herbarium at the Mauritius Sugar Planters Experiment Section at Reduit forty or fifty miles away from the hotel.

I phoned Dr. Vaughn and he invited me to come up to Reduit tomorrow.

As ever,
Ross

Mauritius
November 30, 1965

Dear Joe:

This morning I hired a car and driver, and went up to Reduit to see Dr. Vaughn. I found him to be a charming old Englishman - well, older than I am - and a dedicated botanist. I told him about the tree that Captain Adams had shown me in the Black River Gorge. He had a colored drawing of the flower and foliage, and while this flower was a mixed yellow and red and never opened fully, it was much like the Hibiscadelphus of Hawaii.

He told me that two trees of a hibiscus which he thought was H. fragilis were growing in Pamplemousses Garden, on the north shore beyond Port Louis, and suggested that I see them. He had not been to the Garden for some time, but he remembered the location, we were to enter the main gate, and proceed a few hundred yards to a monument, then turn left to the lily pond. I had no difficulty in finding the trees. There were two of them, but unlike H. Liliiflorus (at Curepipe), they were about 25 feet tall and columnar in form. Unfortunately they were not in bloom, but the leaves were thick and leathery, exactly like the Cavanilles sketch of H. fragilis - bunched closely at the ends of long branches.

I took a generous quantity of wood which I will ship to you from the airport. We are taking off for Madagascar in about an hour.

As ever,
Ross

December 1965

Tananarive
December 3, 1965

Dear Joe:

I could have spent the $700.00 which it cost me to visit Madagascar, more profitably at Las Vegas, insofar as tangible results are concerned. Tananarive is an interesting city, however, and seriously, I'm glad we did make the trip, even if it has not meant much plant-wise.

And as we have seen everything locally, I have changed our air and hotel booking and fly out tomorrow (Saturday) instead of Tuesday. This, perhaps, makes us the first tourists who have "seen" Madagascar in 4 days.
Actually, the reason why I moved up our departure date is first, I have accomplished all that I think I can here in the way of establishing relationships for our organization and the National Arboretum, and second, the monsoon season is early this year - we have had terrible lightning and thunderstorms with heavy rains each day, and flying conditions are rough. Another reason is the language barrier. Only one person at the hotel speaks English, and he can scarcely be understood.

Touring Madagascar means travel in small planes, as there are few good roads. And at this time of year, even the jet we rode on coming in almost flipped during a period of turbulence, so even if I had the time, I would hesitate before I did any flying on this island.

One must revise his geographical appraisal of Madagascar, at least, I have had to do so. I did not realize that it is 995 miles long, and 330 wide (average), and that it is larger in land area than France, Belgium and Holland combined. It is as long as the British Isles.

So, if I were to consider checking on the species I wanted to see, it would be just like taking a trip to Phoenix, Arizona (that is, the same distance as Phoenix) over winding dirt roads, with no hotels - at least, hotels as we know them. And the Great Red Island is really red; red mud roads begin just outside this capital city, except two main highways. These "main highways" are macadam roads, not engineered, 30-feet wide.

Yesterday I went out to a nursery seven miles out of town. After we left the highway, we had to travel 2 miles over almost impassable mud roads, with chuck holes a foot or more deep. A cloudburst occurred nearby, and while we did not get the full effect of it, we had a difficult time making the highway again.

Tananarive, from a tourist standpoint, is a very interesting city. It is said to have been founded by the voyagers who came from India at the time of the Polynesian migrations into the Pacific. These people, now known as Merinas, resemble the Polynesians, being quite large. They seem to have the same skills as the Polynesian people, except seamanship, for when they reached Madagascar they pushed up into the highlands and became "landlubbers".

The geological history of Madagascar is obscure. Hochruetimer, who published extensively on the flora of Madagascar, offers the suggestion that the island was the highest point of a sunken continent known as Lemuria, of which the Malagasy claim only Madagascar remains emergent.

Now, for plant talk:

Bosser, the only English speaking staff member at the Botanic Garden left some time ago for France. So on Wednesday, when I visited the Garden, my reception was not very warm, as the Director (or Acting Director) had not seen any correspondence as regards my prospective visit. However, his assistant did show me the only Malvaceae on the place, that is, the only ones that he knows about. As *H. cameronii* is said to be the native of Madagascar I asked if they had any plants in the Garden. He said that they did not.

After he had excused himself to take care of some visitors from France who, he said, rather pointedly, had made an appointment before they came out, we walked out to the car. I was then accosted by a large merina who, I had noted been following us around. Apparently he was grounds manager. In perfect English, he asked if I would like to see *H. cameronii*, then led us to a shady area; nearby where there was a very large planting of cameronii set as a ground cover! As with other South Indian Ocean species, it was subject to heteromorphism, with the juvenile leaves deeply cut, while the mature leaves were round.

I also gathered that they have had a belly-full of American orchid hunters, and in recent months new and more stringent regulations have been made by the Malagasy Government as regards collecting and shipping indigenous plants. I explained that our interest is simply propagating material and seed. But as I said, they have no budget for this sort of thing.

Today, I called at the American Embassy, and met the Ambassador himself. Not a very impressive character. However, he had an FAO man on his staff, James S. Reese, a graduate of Texas Aggie, and a man who could help us, and particularly Egolf. I'm sorry I could not spend more time with him - if I were alone, I'm sure he would take me up country with him, as he seems lonesome for some States-side agricultural talk.
I then went over to the United States' Information Service (yes, we have a large one here) and met Mr. Ross, the Director. He is a very pleasant chap, who calls Los Angeles his home. His wife is a native Angeleno. He was quite disappointed that I had not contacted him earlier so he could have us at his home - he had a dinner engagement tonight, and we leave tomorrow.

From the climatic statistics for this area, and from observation of the range of plants, I would say that Tananarive has much the same weather conditions as Los Angeles. There are not many hibiscus, but the ones I have seen are extremely large, old plants. So far, I have seen *H. rubra plena*, *Single Red*, *H. lamberthi* and *Toreador* (Jamaica). I saw Lillian Wilder (or Apple Blossom) here, too.

We will remain in Mauritius until December 10, which was the original date set for our departure to Perth. This gives me a few extra days in Mauritius, to rest, and complete my arrangements. I will write you in detail about these. I can say, however, that we're in excellent shape as to future cooperation in Mauritius.

As ever,  
Ross

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*Mauritius*  
*December 6, 1965*

Dear Joe:

We arrived back here at 4:00 A.M. - note the "A.M." - and when we came to the dining room for a late breakfast, we found that Mauritius had been invaded by United States Forces and that their command headquarters had been established at the Le Challand.

Specifically, an American Air Force rescue crew, with a number of NASA specialists, and a U.S. submarine came in the other day to take station for the Gemini flight. After several days in the wilds of Madagascar, hearing nothing but French, it was nice to listen to a Texas drawl, a New England broad "A", or a Bronx-Harlem mixture! And last night, sitting on the veranda of the hotel, we saw Gemini overhead. So everything is A.O.K.

We had a rough time making it back to Mauritius, sweating out every one of the 500 miles in a plane that bounced and bumped all the way.

Our trouble started when we left the hotel at Tananarive. The plane was scheduled to leave at 4:00 P.M., but on our arrival at the airport, we learned that it had been delayed and departure time would be 8:00 P.M. Little detail regarding the delay was available to us, because no English is spoken at the airport. Also, there was no restaurant, and we thought we would have to go without our dinner.

After we boarded the plane, the pilot took off half-way down the runway and aborted and dropped back to the runway. He then brought the plane back and we were told to disembark as repairs were needed. By this time some food had been brought out to the airport and we were given a meal.

The second take-off, at 9:45 P.M., was successful, and after 2 1/2 hours during which the prop-jet motors wheezed and sputtered, and the plane tossed us around due to rough air conditions, we landed at Reunion Island, where we disembarked and remained for 55 minutes. After a 45-minute flight, we finally landed here.

We were the only passengers on the hotel bus. When we related our experience on the flight over to the driver, he said that his son who worked at the airport had told him that the plane we were on had been scheduled to go to France for overhaul six months ago - that it was in very bad mechanical condition!

As ever,  
Ross

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Mauritius
December 10, 1965

Dear Joe:

We're folding up here this evening, prior to a 3:30 take-off across the Indian Ocean to Australia, so I'll catch up a few Mauritian matters not heretofore covered. However, as this letter will reach you sooner from Australia, I will hold off mailing it until we get to Perth.

Yesterday we hired a driver and took a drive around the Black River lowlands where Bojer reported that he had found the hibiscus later published as H. genevii on the grounds of M. Geneve, an early sugar planter in that area. I asked the driver to inquire as to the location of the Geneve residence, but no one could help us.

We then passed along the coast to a little park named for the famous Mauritius plantsman, Telfair. Just inside the gate I found a plant that fitted Bojer's description of what he called H. genevii. While I could be wrong, I took plenty of wood so that we could grow it and compare it with all printed references, and with herbarium specimens, which I have available at home.

Dr. Vaughn had us to tea this evening after we returned from Madagascar. He has a lovely garden and quite a large library. He is working on a book on Mauritius flora, but like myself, he is a dilatory writer.

I also neglected to tell you that through efforts of Dr. Weihe, Director of the Sugar Research Institute and a member of one of the wealthy "sugar families" here, there is a very fine collection of the older Hawaiian varieties on the Institute grounds. He also has some modern varieties from Hawaii at his home. He visits Hawaii frequently in connection with his work.

Insofar as I could learn from Dr. Vaughn, there has not been any hybridization carried out here. However, I am not sure he would know. These old French families, such as the Weihes, would not share their experiences with others - they're quite a close-knit group.

As ever,
Ross

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Perth, West Australia
December 11, 1965

Dear Joe:

As I had not sealed my last letter written in Mauritius, I will add a few lines before I mail it to tell you of an experience we had before we left.

Just as I closed the above letter, I had a phone call from Dr. Vaughn. He told me that he had made an appointment for me with Dr. Weihe at his office at 2:00 P.M. As I had to be at the airport at 4:30, and as Reduit is 30 miles away, I demurred, but he was insistent, assuring me that I had plenty of time. So I hired a driver, checked out of the hotel, and took off for Reduit.

I think the trip paid off. However, at first Dr. Weihe was a bit distant, but noting that ribbon I wear on my lapel-the ribbon for the decoration given me by the French Government many years ago, he became quite friendly. I don't ordinarily wear this ribbon, but just happened to have it on the coat I chose to wear that day.

He expressed his deep interest in what I have accomplished in the rediscovery of the Mauritius species and promised to do everything he could to help us. As he is "Mr. Big" in Mauritius scientific circles he is, with Dr. Vaughn, an excellent contact in Mauritius. He is a C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire) earned for his work as a geneticist in sugar cane research.

As ever,
Ross
Perth, West Australia
December 12, 1965

Dear Joe:

We arrived here yesterday after a 3500 mile, over-night flight across the Indian Ocean from Mauritius. This was the one flight that I did not look forward to with any degree of pleasure. For the South African Airways do not use jets, and the prospect of flying 2500 miles non-stop to Cocos Island worried me some. After all, I had the responsibility of a 13-year old grandson.

However, we had a real, "no sweat" flight - at least Ella and Rodney did. I did not get much sleep.

As I usually do on a night flight, I told the stewardess that my wife was not feeling too well, and that I would appreciate it if she could turn down enough seats to make a bed - that is, if they were available. They were, and Ella slept all the way to the Cocos Island.

However, Rodney and I sat together on a three-seat section, next to the stewardess' pantry. Rod stretched out to sleep and took up all of two seats, and as the night progressed he pushed me out of half of mine. Therefore, my body protruded into the aisle. Now, South African Airline stewardesses are not selected for their beauty. They are mostly middle-aged, and quite large, particularly in the posterior region. Accordingly, every time one of them answered a call, she woke me up with a bang - my shoulder, her posterior being the contact points. Thus I did not get much sleep.

We arrived at Cocos, a former British Air Force Base, just at sunrise. The airfield is situated on a very low island, surrounded by wide, sandy beaches-a beautiful sight from the air.

We were taken to the former headquarters of the British Air Force, and given a very hearty breakfast, a break of about an hour and a half before we resumed our flight to Perth.

We plan to stay here to two or possibly three days. I will not spend much time hibiscusing as I covered the subject after a visit last year. However, I am sending a shipment to you, which includes wood that I secured in Mauritius, but thought it wise to make the shipment from here.

We also want to go down to Fremantle, which is the port for Perth, and take a small boat over to Rotnest Island, for a day. We think Rodney would enjoy seeing and filming some of the quakkas which are native to the island. They are really very small kangaroo-like creatures. Tasman, the Dutch explorer, the first white man to visit the Island, thought they were large rats, and named the island "Rotnest", which, I suppose, means "rats nest" in Dutch.

The shipment mentioned above is listed on a separate page.

As ever,
Ross
Dear Joe:

We are leaving hereon Tuesday (21st) for Fiji. We moved the date up a day to pick up an Air India flight - the only daylight flight out of Sydney for Fiji. This means a good deal to us, for on these night flights - say those starting at 5-6 pm, we must give up our hotel room at noon, thus have several hours at loose ends, and an inconvenient arrival hour. Also, in this case, will no doubt fly over New Guinea and other islands, which may be interesting from the air.

Our plans after Fiji are indefinite -we have a booking with Air France for Papeete to Honolulu, but as they would only put us on the wait list from Fiji Papeete, this confirmation does not mean much, for obviously one cannot leave Papeete if he never arrives there. It is possible that we may get a flight over to Papeete, but Air France says there are several ahead of us, and Ella does not like the Tahiti idea, anyway. She is about ready to head home, and Ross and Rodney feel much the same.

This morning we went out to see Les Beers at his Hibiscus Park Nursery in Warriewood. It is quite a long bus ride, and quite uncomfortable because it was cold and raining - not hibiscus weather by any means.

My first impression of Les Beers' salesmanship was his display room, where he had about 100 blooms affixed to a panel board. Les is really going to town, business-wise! He can't supply the demand for Hawaiian stuff -at $8.40 for a 2-gallon size plant. He gets only about $1.25 for the average gallon on Cameo Queen, Mrs. Tomkins, Sabrina, etc., but has to buy 6000 plants a year from Alex Scott, at Brisbane, to take care of his retail and wholesale customers here.

Von Steighlitz was wrong in saying that my stuff was still in quarantine. Les has Winn Doxie in full production, and it sells well. F.C. 15, he says, is a tremendous variety with him, with very large blooms - better than Miller's Bill Stayton - none were in bloom today. He is also enthused with 55-1354, which, he says, will be one of his best commercial reds. Others of note which he saved were 58-601 not yet in commercial production Ala Moana, F.C.1, Ruth Anderson (the blooms are 8"), Sondra, and a couple of others which I forgot to record. Also, he has about a dozen seedlings from my seed just about ready to bloom, and 50 more in 2" pots.

Les has a lot of better Hawaiians now, although only a few in actual volume production. He sells about 60,000 plants a year. I wonder if a highly specialized business such as this would go in Southern California?

He also has a few local varieties which appear to be rather desirable, but I did not get wood - I feel that we should begin to cut down on new ones, and try to be more selective.

As for names, some of those used here are interesting. Original White Wings is Wrightii, Versicolor is Rose Scott, Jahore is Fiji White (why, as it is not white). He has a poor specimen of Fiji #1 which he calls Lemon Gem, Common Red, with the dark eye, is Java (Javonica?) and H. flora plena is Lambertii, Lillian Wilder is Apple Blossom and Gerrit Wilder is Dawn. I have other notes which I will bring back with me.

Your letter - or letters, mailed under date of December 10, reached Cooks on the 16th and I picked it up on the 16th. I do appreciate all the news.

As regards the cuttings you received - I am sorry to learn that they were a bit dry. I hope the larger shipment of H. liliiflorus, fragilis and genevii were better.

As regards H. liliiflorus, it is indigenous to all the islands in the Mascarene group, except Madagascar, according to Dr. Vaughn. However, he had never been told that it had been used for crossing, yet it has played an important part in the development of modern seedlings. Perhaps the reason is that it has not been in collections or yard plantings in Mauritius for 100 years.

Note what you have to say about our Madagascar experience. Joe, you just cannot imagine the deal we were up against there, and the utter impossibility of doing anything plant-wise, in less than a month or two months, and without a well organized

Sydney, Australia
December 18, 1965

Large Single White - This may be Cronwell or Castle While
Windmill Single Yellow - For hybridizing only, not much of a hibiscus.
expedition. As it turned out the extra time in Mauritius proved far more fruitful. Also, Rodney had the time of his life doing beach tours with the Air Force boys, who sort of made a mascot out of him.

As for grandparental responsibility, we are somewhat relieved since the long Indian ocean hop has been completed. Two years ago, cyclone activity in the area just about wrecked Mauritius and held up flights out of the area for 10 days. Flying in Madagascar is virtually at a standstill in December and January.

As for your comments on Versicolor - right now, it would be my guess that it is a very early cross - either man-made or natural, of liliiflorus and the Common Red, with the dark eye - the single form of H. flora plena. I sent you a stick of the latter, and we will test out my theory if and when we get both into flower.

Still feel that January 15 is the date of our return, but if things are not to our liking in Fiji, and the Tahiti flight is not confirmed, it will be earlier. We want to get some clothes tailored in Fiji.

As for Christmas, we think we will celebrate it at Korolevu, about 150 miles from Suva, rather than going direct into Suva on arrival in Fiji. Thus, the Ken Perks and others will not feel obligated to take us in. I guess you know that the airport (jet) in Viti Levu is at Nadi, on the other side of the island from Suva, and we must take a feeder line over. Korolevu is a tourist spot close to Nadi.

As for seed - don't take your time with it - I'll plant it on my return. I'm bringing back some seed, too.

Your letters - they are a God-send, and I do appreciate receiving them. However, I can understand how it may seem trying to out-guess our movements and the mails.

That about does it Joe. I'll leave the rest of the page for tomorrow morning, in case I think of something else. The Cameo Queen goes into Monday mail and should reach you Friday.

Sunday Morning:
Can't think of anything much. No word from folks up Brisbane way. However, definitely gave up the idea of flying up there when I learned that we could not do it on our ticket. Can't see spending several hundred dollars just to meet these nice people personally. I have plenty to do in Fiji. You will have noted in Dun's letter the mention of an old man named Simmonds, who, Dun says, has dabbled with hibiscus for a long time. That's the guy Perks told me about - but he was away from Fiji the last time I was here.

In addition, Rod thinks he would rather spend a few days at Waikiki, where he can surf. He didn't like the shark danger here.

As ever,
Ross

Suva, Fiji
December 26, 1965

Dear Joe:

While we miss the family and our friends this day, I must admit that seldom have I had a more restful Christmas or celebrated the season in such a beautiful setting. We are now at the Grand Pacific Hotel, where we stayed two years ago, but the place has now been completely air conditioned, and the spacious grounds developed into a typical garden, a large pool in the center. As the hotel is located on the shores of the entrance to Suva Bay, we can watch the ships coming in through the reef entrance. And in the distance, the jagged peaks of the Viti Levu Mountains, covered with a multitude of greens, is a dramatic background for the blue waters of the Bay.

As I recall, I wrote you last from Sydney as regards our trip to Hibiscus Park. On Monday, I spent almost all day at Mitchell Library, and still did not find anything of any great importance. I ran through the file of New South Wales Horticultural society for the period 1860-1885, and saw many old nursery catalogues of the period. I learned that Governor Denison was a patron of the society and gave an award each year for the most outstanding plant introduction, but while nurseries listed a dozen or more
hibiscus varieties, denisonii was not among them. Also learned that Baptisti & Son were nurseriesmen near Sydney and introduced Baptistii (now called Hawaiian Flag).

As ever,
Ross

Suva, Fiji
December 27, 1965

Dear Joe:

I did want Rodney to get some time in Bondi Beach, Sydney's famous surfing beach, but it rained both Sunday and Monday. As we were to leave Tuesday, I took him out Monday, hoping it would be sunny. However, there were only a dozen people on the beach - a beach which usually has 2200 people on a normal summer day. He was disappointed, of course, for the surf was too high, and the danger signals up.

Our flight over to Fiji was very smooth. However, as has so often been the case on this trip, we arrived at the airport early, to find that our flight had been delayed -12:00 pm instead of 10:00 am. As one must be at the airport an hour before flying time on international flights, this meant a wait of three hours. However, in this case, Air India bought us a breakfast, and then "hosted" us in a lounge, with free sandwiches and liquor. This was not bad, but they forgot to leave on the announcing system in the room, and we nearly missed the plane!

I called on Ken Parks on Thursday, at his office. His brother-in-law and sister-in-law with their three children arrived in Suva from Sydney the same day we did (by Pan-Am) so they are busy entertaining their relatives. We will get together on Tuesday.

On Friday, we took the so-called "Naselai Village Tour". This is a new, day-long trip that proved very interesting. We were driven about 30 miles up the country from Suva, to a river landing, and there we boarded small boats (outboard motor powered) for a 14-mile down river trip to the ocean. We landed just before the river reached the sea, and walked a short distance to Naselai, which proved to be a beautiful three-mile long beach, equal, I think, in grandeur to the famous Kalapana beach on Hawaii.

I should say that in landing, I had to take off my shoes, roll up my pants, and wade in. The natives carried the women ashore.

At the village, we were welcomed with a kava ceremony. I forgot to say that at the river landing, we were advised to buy a pound of yaqona root as a gift to the village. This is the root from which kava is made. Then a very creditable singing and dancing program was staged for us. Of course, it was the usual tourist deal, but much better done than usual.

My sense of narrative is a bit rough today - I also neglected to say that as we came ashore at Naselai, the native welcoming party hung hibiscus leis around our necks. Three kinds of hibiscus only were used - Kona, Floribunda and one which I thought was Painted Lady. This was the first time I have seen true Floribunda outside of Hawaii or California, although the one called Canary Island is close. I checked up on this one, asking a very nice little Fijian gal to show me the plant. I thought it was close by, but she took me through the village, and along a warm walk through the jungle. For a while, I thought I was being led down the garden path, but then I sensibly concluded that not even a Fijian girl would be that stupid - me with my grey hair and bald head. Finally we ended up at a small clearing, with a Bure (house) and alongside of this were two large plants of true Floribunda. Just to be sure, I took a cutting, and this will be sent tomorrow.

Then I looked over the plants in the village for seed, and found several plants of the one that looked like Painted Lady covered with ripe pods. I gathered about 150 seeds. The more I looked at the flower, the more I began to realize that it might not be Painted Lady, so I took a stick. I was glad I did now - and only wish I had taken more, for on Friday night, when I told Ken we had been at Naselai, he said that he wanted to go out too, as they had a hibiscus only there that he had never seen before. He had seen it pictured on a postcard (enclosed with sticks). I told him I thought it was Painted Lady, but he did not agree. As the postcard describes it better than I can, you will have to await arrival of this.

There are two varieties in this shipment, No. 1 and No. 2 No. 1 is Floribunda and No. 2 (2 pieces) is the one described above. The latter is rather soft wood, and I hope it does not dry out.
Last night, we had a big party at the hotel - dinner party, with dancing. Turkey was served, and while no cranberry sauce was available, we did enjoy ourselves. There were a couple of teen-age girls present, and Rodney proceeded to make use of his charms and had a nice evening. As I write this, in the hotel garden, he is sitting on a bench with one of his "conquests" - he has been with her all day, on tour of the harbor and reef, and later in the pool. After so long with his old grandparents, this is quite a break for him.

Monday:

This is "Boxing Day", also a holiday in all English sphere countries. I cannot give you a full explanation of what it signifies, but I understand that it has something to do with exchanging presents.

We are taking it easy today - everything in town is closed, so I am getting caught up on some expense records, etc. Also helping Ella straighten out some receipts preliminary to going through Customs at Honolulu. This reminds me to advise you of our forward plans.

Our booking for Tahiti did not come through, and we all seem to be quite satisfied that the side trip did not work out. Rod has his girl friends here; Ella did not want to go over anyway.

Accordingly, I've booked out of Nadi next Saturday morning - New Year's Day. As we cross the Date Line and lose a day, we will land in Honolulu Friday night, December 31. Rod is quite intrigued with the fact that he will have two New Years Eves this year!

We will stay in Honolulu until Tuesday, January 4 and fly in on Pam Am, arriving 4:55 pm L A time (Flight No. 821). Rod will miss a few days of school in the new term, but as he has been pretty good about studying (until he picked up a couple of girl friends here), I think he will be OK. Ella is getting homesick for her dogs - and is especially anxious to see her new Betsy. Ross is a bit worried about the Bradbury place; so far, I have not had word from anyone about conditions there during and after the big rain. As you know, my neighbor is suing me over the wash down my canyon, and no doubt the recent rains did some more damage. Also, the big room in the new house floods, and if not taken care of, the bookcase will be damaged. So I'm a bit anxious to get home, too.

I will see Simmonds today, and Perks tomorrow. Meanwhile, disregard what I said about a "shipment" of wood going out tomorrow - I decided not to send this, for the reason: The wood of that "unusual" one (card enclosed with this letter) was quite soft, so I decided to get some more. As the father and mother of one of Rod's girl friends are going up to Naselai tomorrow, I have appointed them assistant collectors. They will bring back a good supply - enough to give Ken Perks a couple of sticks.

I will not ship this, but bag it carefully, and carry it into Honolulu in my overcoat pocket. Then, on Monday, I'll take it down to the Department of Agriculture to have it fumigated, and thus get "legal" entry in L A. The Hawaiian authorities will not know that it is Fiji wood.

I'll leave the rest of this page for my report on the Simmonds' visit.

Tuesday:

While I had a very nice visit with Simmonds, he could not add anything to my present knowledge of the history of hibiscus hybridization in Fiji. He is an entomologist and has been here for 35 years (he is 89). In 1929, he made a trip to Hawaii and while there picked up some Hawaiian varieties. With these, and with locals, he made quite a few crosses - he is still making a few. Some of his seedlings were in bloom, and they were very ordinary - no ruffle or even over-large.

He says Mrs. Hedstrom here also made some crosses, as did the lady up in Taveuni, but his blooms, he says, were superior to theirs.

I'll close this off now, so I can mail it. As it is, you will not get this until a day or so before we get home.

This letter will conclude our correspondence for this trip. I plan to get in a lot of "beach time" in Honolulu. Rodney will spend all of his time surfing - he really is good at it. See you soon.

As ever,
Ross
PART 3

La Mesa, California
April 1, 1980

Dear Reader:

The Third Hibiscus Discovery Expedition left Los Angeles early in October, 1967. The principal objective was to visit Reunion Island (Isle of Bourbon in early horticultural writings), one of the Mascarene group, about 90 miles south of Mauritius. Our base, however, was Mauritius.

We had not expected to make another visit to the South Indian Ocean, but early in 1967 we received a letter from Dr. Vaughn, of whom we had much to say in our letters written during the second "Expedition." He wrote that he was arranging a visit to Reunion for Sir Colville Barclay, an amateur British botanist and his lady. The visit would be under the auspices of the Reunion Department of Agriculture personnel, who would furnish transportation and advice.

Reunion is French, and the reason we hesitated to visit there on our first trip to the Mascarenes was our inability to speak French. Dr. Vaughn had written that Sir Colville was fluent in that language, so we accepted his offer.

So that we would have some time in England before proceeding to South Africa by sea, we left well before the date set for the Reunion trip. I wanted to read all references available at the Royal Horticultural Society Library and the Library of the British Museum of Natural History.

The following letters, written on the third "expedition", close my report on the search for species and old forms of hibiscus known to be the progenitors of modern ornamental hybrid hibiscus. Specifically, the true species were H. storckii, reportedly a native to Fiji, and the Mascarene species, H. liliiflorus and H. fragilis.

We were successful in finding H. liliiflorus, but later research indicates that the plants (or trees) which we found in Pamplemousses Botanic Garden on the island of Mauritius was not H. fragilis, but H. columnaris. As reported in a footnote to our letter from London, South Africa, one of the plants found in the public park at Port Elizabeth in 1967 has proved to be H. fragilis, Cav. Apparently it had been brought to the Garden by an early collector of Mascarene flora.

Some work is still being done on the Mascarene flora by a staff member of Kew Garden, London. This study, together with my own work here in La Mesa and at the Waimea Arboretum in Hawaii, seem to indicate that like the Hawaiian. H. kokio, the native red hibiscus, these seem to be several forms of Mascarene hibiscus closely related to H. liliiflorus. However, these studies have not as yet been published.

As for H. storckii, during the intervening years since the "expeditions", I have searched early botanic literature on the Pacific area quite diligently but so far the only conclusion I have reached is that H. storckii and H. denisonii are one and the same. There is ample circumstantial evidence of this. However, one does not take genetic decisions based on circumstantial evidence.

The Gast-Staniford-LASCA project officially closed in 1966. I continued certain research in my greenhouse. Later, this work continued both in my greenhouse and at Waimea Arboretum when I accepted the responsibility as Research Associate. This has centered on further research on the identification of H. storckii, also the study of certain old forms which we believe may be true species.

Now that Joe Staniford has promised to carry on this work at Waimea during the several months each year that he resides in Hawaii, we should be able to announce some interesting results in the next few years.

Hibiscusly yours,
Ross H. Gast

Los Angeles, California
October 5, 1967

Dear Joe:

I have completed our travel arrangements for our visit to Reunion Island. As usual, we are signed up with American Express, at least as far as Mauritius.

We will fly to England on October 10 and have reservations at the St. James Court Hotel, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.

According to our schedule, we will sail from England on the S. S. "Orangi", one of the Union Castle Lines' smaller ships. It is one class, so we will find it more suitable to our way of life.

After 17 days at sea, with a one-day stop in the Canary Islands, we will de-embark at Durban, South Africa. From there we will fly to Johannesburg and from there to Mauritius. We have reservations at the Le Challand, which is perhaps, the best place to write us.

As ever,

Ross

HIBISCUS AROUND THE WORLD

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PART THREE

October 19, 1967

December 16, 1967

England, South Africa, Mauritius Reunion Island

London, England

Thursday October 19, 1967

Dear Joe:

We've just about completed everything we planned to do here, and are getting ready to shove off for South Africa tomorrow. I did plan to go out to Kew today, but it is raining, and I don't really have anything to do out there.

Fortunately, I found a work on the Flora of Reunion at the British Museum of Natural History, and this gave me the collection sites where Bory St. Vicent found both H. boryanus and H. fragilis. This was written by a Frenchman by the name of de Cordemoy. It was in French, but with the assistance of a librarian, I took a copy of the pertinent information on hibiscus species. However, I found little new on either species at the British Museum of Natural History or the Royal Society Library.

I read Cavanilles again at the latter library, and found that according to this early botanist the other hibiscus pictured in the plate with H. liliiflorus is H. lampas, collected in the Philippines. The text is in French, but as I read it, it is a yellow form of H. rosa-sinensis. I have not seen any reference to H. lampas. To me the Cavanilles plate called H. lampas looks exactly like H. fragilis.

Also read the "Garden" reference on H. cameronii. The plate shows a Versicolor and the text, while calling the form H. cameronii, admits that it is probably erroneously captioned.

I hope you have plans for getting together the old forms which we do not have. Do you still have Walsh? I think there is a plant at Lux (separately located station of the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum). We should try to self this one; I still don't know where the yellows came from.

I checked the Reeves' prints at the British Museum of Natural History Library, and as I expected, most of them were either H. syriacus or Pavonia. There were six H. rosa-sinensis all doubles. Four of them were double orange - not duplicated, but all slightly different in form, and all but one of them without the red eye zone. One was undoubtedly what we call Lambertii, and another was yellow with red eye, on a long stem, almost a duplicate for that yellow with a red eye of mine!
As ever,  
Ross  

New London, South Africa  
November 5, 1967  

Dear Joe:  

We've docked here for a few hours to unload passengers and cargo, the will take off for Durban, arriving tomorrow morning. We've had a rather uneventful trip so far. However, we have enjoyed the voyage - we have a very comfortable cabin and the food is excellent. As for our fellow passengers, well, you know we English are not very social, and besides we enjoy our own company - even after 44 years of marriage.

Hibiscuswise, I saw nothing important until yesterday, at Port Elizabeth, where we spent two days. On the morning of the first day we took a bus tour around the city, and at one park I saw several very old hibiscus plants, one of them a yellow. As yellows are not common in this part of the world, I tried to check it out. But the driver did not give enough time.

So yesterday, Saturday I hired a car and went back. I also took with me the name and address of the Superintendent of Parks, Leslie Prosser, whose name I had in my book, although I had forgotten who gave me the reference.

At this park, I found four old ones, including the yellow - an orange pink with dark eye, and a red, which is no doubt H. liliiflorus, although the red was deeper than the liliiflorus I picked up in Mauritius. All were lily flowered (vase-like) and had foliage much like liliiflorus. The red and the pink had shallow-cut involucre bracts, but the orange and the yellow had deep cut involucre bracts.

It is the pink single which interests me. The leaves are exactly like those shown in the drawings illustrating H. genevii. The pink is a little lighter than Agnes Galt, the eye zone dark red. It could be that I was a bit premature in calling that plant I found at Telfair Garden true genevii - this pink may be the real one.

I took cuttings, and am mailing them tomorrow for Durban, as the Post Office was closed (Saturday afternoon) before I had the material packaged. I'm also sending some wood to Egolt, although only a very small piece of the pink - I should have cut more.

I also took herbarium material and photographs of all four.

In addition, I included a stick of Peachblow, and another of Subviolaceous as they are grown here.

I did not get to see Prosser, as the Park offices were closed. However, I saw one of his men. He said there was no interest in hybrid hibiscus in this area.

As ever,  
Ross  

[Mauritius  
November 12, 1967  

Dear Joe:]
This is Sunday, and our beach has been taken over by people who live in the interior of the island - just as we go down to Balboa, Laguna, etc. And just the day before yesterday we saw the last American Air Force Reserve Squad - they were here in case the Saturn dropped. Rather a coincidence that two years ago, we were here when Gemini was up. Good thing we did not meet the same officers, or we might be up for espionage!

We have not been too active since our arrival on Wednesday. Yesterday I got off a package of wood. This included:

1. Orange single with red-rayed eye. This was sort of an orange Versicolor.
2. Orange single with mother-or-pearl center. I think this is an old Hawaiian, probably Johnson's Glorious #1 or Rainbow.
3. Single Peachblow Durban. This is the only plant of this I have ever seen. It is the same light pink as Peachblow, with dark eye zone. Foliage same as Peachblow.
4. Red Versicolor, Le Challand. I'm not sure that I got this one in 1965. It has a large rayed eye, and is a vivid scarlet. Seeds.

On Thursday, we did not leave the hotel, but on Tuesday, drove up to Curepipe Garden, and found that one of the two trees there had died. Very few blooms on the other. We then went to the Archives in Port Louis, and registered for research, which I may do on my return from Reunion. We also had lunch with the Vaughns, then went to his herbarium, where I saw specimens of H. liliiflorus and H. genevii; the former was represented on several sheets, some of them recent collections. Most of them looked like the Curepipe trees. The genevii was much like the one I found fat Port Elizabeth.

Yesterday, we drove up to Telfair Park to check the plant of which I brought back as genevii. Vaughn said he had collected this, in fact, he had two sheets in his herbarium with this statement, H. genevii, collected at Telfair Park, against old prison wall. Identified by Ross H. Gast, Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. So now I'm an authority on Mauritius species! The trouble is, he picked the wrong plant - the one I felt was genevii was on the other side of the park from the prison wall. The "prison" by the way, has not been occupied since 1850.

Today we go to Vaughns for cocktails, and to meet the man with who we travel to Reunion. Also some local people. I hope the guy is right-one thing in his favor - and in our favor, is that he speaks French - a necessity, we're told, on Reunion.

Will report soon.

As ever,

Ross

By the way, I think that you should address all mail after receipt of this c/o American Express, Johannesburg.

St. Denis, Reunion Island
November 18, 1967

Dear Joe:

We are back in St. Denis, after three days in the mountains, looking for the elusive H. boryanus. We did not find this species or any other hibiscus, but we did find a lot of grief.

We stayed at a house which was once a hotel, at the 5000-foot level at Plain de Cafrie, which is fairly close to the collection site give by both Bury St. Vincent and de Cordemoy for H. boryanus.

Reservations had been made by Dr. Vaughn. Apparently he had stayed there several years ago, when the house was being operated as a hotel. When Dr. Vaughn contacted them, they did not advise him that it was no longer a hotel - apparently the prospect of making a few francs by taking in four guest was too great a temptation to resist.

The Auberce de Volcan, as the place was called, consisted of five rooms about 8 x 10 in size. They had all been occupied by members of the family, and two of them had been vacated to take us in. The beds looked like they had been brought in by the French when they took over Reunion in 1710. Further-more, the linens had not been changed. There was a wash basin with no hot water and a bidet, one of their French bathroom contraptions of questionable use to a 70-year old couple. The toilette was down a dark hall, and there was no bath in the hotel.
We are traveling with Sir Colville Barclay, a baronet and member of a very old English family. His great grandfather had been Governor of Mauritius at one time, and the family still has extensive sugar interest there. He is about 45 years of age, and his wife is somewhat younger. Both try to be nice, but it is apparent that they are not too happy to be in the company of us commoners, and Americans at that.

The proprietor assigned us to our room first, and we apparently had been given the best bed. When the Barclays were assigned their room, Lady Barclay was not pleased and insisted on seeing all of the rooms. When she saw that we had a better room, she demanded that it be given to her and Sir Colville. Rather than quarreling, we gave it to them.

However, it was the food that was the last straw that broke the camel's back. We were served "steak" for lunch, however, it was not until Sir Colville went into the kitchen for some reason that he found that we had been served OLD DOBBIN - horsemeat - and that it was the usual fare here. When Lady Barclay heard this, she threw a tizzy and had to be put to bed.

Sir Colville then had a driver take him to another village a few miles away, where he found quarters for all of us. It was not much better.

We did have one day in the "wilds" there, however. I hired a car and driver and had him drive me up to the Grand Tampon Road as far as possible, then we hiked in some distance until we were blocked by steep ravines. Unfortunately they had had some devastating fires several years back, and the slopes were reforested with black acacia, which has taken over and crowded out older trees and shrubs. The level lands have been planted to sugar cane.

I did not find any hibiscus of any kind, but did see a small white Malva that I could not identify. Barclay, being younger than I am, was able to take a more difficult terrain than we could. Also, he visited an area several miles from Grand Tampon. He said that he did not see any Malvaceae whatsoever.

Because of the hotel accommodations, and the fact that the weather was cold, with dense fog rolling in the early afternoon, we decided to hire a car and driver to take us back to St. Denis.

We spent this morning visiting the local park and looking over the fences of the residences as we walked up to and back from the park. We saw very few hibiscus. Among these were the ubiquitous Versicolor and a H. flora plena rubra, also some H. schizopetalus hybrids.

We also visited the local "Botanic Garden", a very poor excuse for one. We saw every tree and shrub, but nary a hibiscus.

As usual, the Mauritius officials failed us again. In 1965 they allowed us to go to Madagascar and return to Mauritius without a valid visa, and no one advised us that we would have to have one to get back there this time. So I contacted the British Consul - a Frenchman, who operates an importing business. He could not possibly do anything for us for several days, as he was too busy. I protested, stating that we had to fly out the next afternoon or stay over another week. He said that he would try to help us, but it was plain that he had his hand out, and if I had offered him some francs he would have our visas ready in an hour, but I was determined not to pay off.

A few hours later I called at his office again, but he was not in. I told my troubles to his clerk, and after a wait of less than a half-hour, he handed me our visas! Just as I was going out of the door, the Consul came in. I showed him the visas and thanked him for his help. I'll bet that clerk was given a bad time.

Later:

Just as I was about to close this letter, Sir Colville came into the hotel. He had remained in the "wilds" a day longer than we did, and had, with the help of a Department of Agriculture official, checked another site. He was quite excited, for he had found a hibiscus which he was sure was H. boryanus. He took a lot of wood, and as the tree was in bloom and seeding, he also secured a good supply of the latter. His wood also included some leafy branches, and I took the lot up to the roof and photographed them.

But if they were H. boryanus, the H. boryanus is synonymous with H. liliflorus, for Barclay's plant was unmistakably the latter. I will mail both seed and wood to you from Mauritius.

As ever,
Ross

Mauritius
November 24, 1967

Dear Joe:

I had an unusual dream last night and as it was hibiscus-related I must tell you about it.

I was standing in line at the Pearly Gates, waiting my turn to be judged by St. Peter. When I came before him, he asked what I had done during my life on earth.

"I was a 'hibiscusizer'," I replied.

"A'hibiscusizer'?" Pete said, "What is that?"

"I crossed various species and forms of Hibiscus", I told him.

"We don't allow that in Heaven", he said sharply. "Here it is considered forcible rape, and therefore an affront to God."

"Then Heaven must be a wasteland inhabited by deprived people", I said.

Pete pulled a lever, and I dropped through a trap door. Much to my surprise I landed in a beautiful hibiscus garden. There were blooms of every color perfectly formed, ruffled singles, peony flowered doubles, and cup and saucers. All were 12 or more inches in diameter.

"This is Heaven," I said to myself. "Pete must have pulled the wrong lever."

In no time I had my knife out to make cuttings to Air Mail to you. However, the wood was as hard as wrought iron and ruined the edge of the blade. Even the small wood that ordinarily would cut easily was like steel wire.

I then noticed that the plants were full of large, fat seed pods. However, on examining them I found that they were all "foolers" no seed whatsoever.

"This is Hell", I said. "Pete did get the right lever."

I woke up, determined to write to you of my experience, not only because, as I said, it is hibiscus-related, but to warn you to watch your P's and Q's and go to church Sunday, not to the Arboretum assisting in forcible rape of virgin hibiscus.

As ever,
Ross

Johannesburg
December 2, 1967

Dear Joe:

We really enjoyed our week-long visit to Rhodesia. In addition to a few days in Salisbury, we flew to a game park for one night, then on to Victoria Falls where we stayed two days.

On our arrival in Salisbury, Ella called a Yorkshire Terrier owner to whom she had been referred by another "doggie lady" in Durban. The lady had been advised that we might call, so she was all set for us, and during our three days in Salisbury, we had one long round of cocktail parties - they call them "Sundowners" here - dinner and parties. Apparently "Yorkshire Terrier" is a far more potent word than "hibiscus" here in Rhodesia.
Salisbury is a beautiful city, clean wide streets and landscape parking. Although it is 5000 feet in elevation, the climate is more subtropical than ours. Poincianas bloom beautifully, and no place that I have ever visited - not even in Hawaii - have I seen such beautiful frangipani.

In spite of Ella's new-found friends, I did have my "innings". Ronald Jones, Superintendent of Parks, called me and took me through the city and to some parks. He has made excellent use of standards along the streets, just as they have in Nairobi. The only difference is that he is using about 20 hybrids given the City by the late Major Phillips, who did some hybridizing here many years ago. None of them were really worth shipping - we discarded better ones occurring on our project.

Jones "taped" me for his weekly broadcast on Sunday morning, but unfortunately I won't be here.

I don't seem to get much of a kick out of game parks, and I have developed a real dislike of elephants. The reason is that on the way up to Victoria Falls, and return, we landed at several small airports. At least half a dozen times an elephant ran out on the runway, just as we were landing or taking off.

However, Victoria Falls was breath-taking. We walked the entire length of it, along the bank of the Zambesi River, and saw it in all of its grandeur and immensity.

As you probably know, this Zambesi River is the boundary between Rhodesia and Zambia, once called North Rhodesia, but now a separate country under black rule. A 200-yard railroad bridge, as well as a bridge just wide enough for one car crosses the Zambesi River to the hotel. Every day the Chinese advisors, that the Zambia rulers asked to assist them, cross the bridge for their noon meal at the hotel. They seem strangely out of place.

As you know, Rhodesia declared its independence from Great Britain last year, but seems to be doing quite well in spite of the sanctions against her. I predict that the sanctions will actually result in making this little country self-sufficient. They are sure working at it - I found that out when at a cocktail party, I asked for Scotch whiskey. Our host politely advised me that Scotch or any other English liquor is taboo in Rhodesia. I had to settle for South African brandy, which was not all bad.

I will probably not write you any more, because we will be at sea, or in the air most of the time. Furthermore, we will be out of hibiscus country. We expect to be home for Christmas.

As ever,
Ross

Capetown  
December 16, 1967

Dear Joe:

You will be surprised to note the dateline on this letter. As you know, we were booked to fly direct to London by B.O.A.C. from Johannesburg. There is a strike on B.O.A.C. and all other lines are booked up - so many people are going back to England for Christmas Holidays. All of this hassle took three or four days. In desperation, I finally checked the steamship lines, and found that the S.S. Vaal sailed from Durban on the 9th. It was too late to get a plane to Durban in time to board there, so we took a booking to board her at Capetown, but we had to be there by the 12th. When I checked the planes to Capetown, I found that I could not get a booking. I then tried to get a berth on the fast over-night train to Capetown. However, no berths were available, so I booked on the so-called Milk Train, which takes several hours longer, making many stops along the way.

We made it in time to board the Vaal, but our troubles were not ended. Two days out of Capetown, and well up the west coast of Africa, the ship had engine trouble and we had to turn back to Capetown for repairs. So that's why this letter bears such a late date.

The steamship company provided tours around the Cape area free of charge, but we always came back to the ship for meals. As we have seen almost all of the interesting spots in this area, it has been a boring two days.
We won't make it home for Christmas now - just when, depends on plane reservations from London to Los Angeles. If you write, address the letter c/o American Express, Haymarket Street, London. We will arrive in London on December 26, according to a notice on the ship's bulletin board, but I can't be sure of this. We want to stay at the St. James Court Hotel, but I have not cabled for reservations.

As ever,
Ross

Pasadena, California

April 15, 1980

Dear Reader:

Paralleling Ross' lead as usual, the format of the lead-in letter for each of the three Expeditions, is likewise appropriate for CONCLUSION.

At the time of the First Expedition, Ross' and my friendship had become firmly established, still-through all three Expeditions, albeit with twinges of envy because of my remoteness from the exploration action - I was especially privileged to be entrusted with home base operations for the hibiscus aspect of the Gasts' peregrinations.

To expand a little, those home front operations - aside from holding down a full-time job at that point in my life - involved frequent 10-mile jaunts from my home in Pasadena easterly to the Arcadia location of the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum Hibiscus Project. There, to check on Project conditions, pollen dusting on crosses we were hoping to achieve (too frequently dusting everything else in bloom), and propagating Expedition materials as received. Operations also involved periodic trips another 10 miles northeasterly to check glasshouses and test planting area conditions at Ross' Bradbury "ranch"; alternately, 15 miles westerly from Pasadena to check Ross' home glasshouse of that period at his Los Feliz Hills residence.

As parcels of plant material came through, it was off to the Arboretum Hibiscus Project to set seed, root, graft - as soon after arrival as possible in hopes of offsetting any desiccating effect suffered in the handling and shipping of such material for thousands of air miles.

In my "spare" time I upheld my end of the Project-Expedition inter-communications, and it is, of course, Ross' end - his letters to me - that have provided the substance for HIBISCUS AROUND THE WORLD. From my standpoint, the American Hibiscus Society is performing a tremendous service in publishing this volume to provide you readers the thrill of at least vicariously sharing the "triumphs and agonies" of the Gast odysseys.

Anyone fortunate (?) enough to have experienced Ross' handwriting (and I thought a montage of it would make a great inside-cover-lining) will appreciate that, despite the anticipation with which his Expedition letters were awaited, it was no small chore to decipher some of his efforts. And, to add to the handwriting problem, Ross has a tendency, for thought to race ahead of script, thereby eliding letters, words or even whole passages - plus another disconcerting tendency, to subconsciously assume that once HE has seen a flower, plant or whatever, that its characteristics must be universally manifest!

On the other hand, these circumstances were not wholly unfortunate. In fact, they lent to somewhat of a mixed blessing in that they fostered a sort of empathy, wherein literal meaning became sublimated to an almost quasi-astral presence in Hawaii, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, the Mascarenes - wherever.

There was one occasion, however, when any such empathy broke down completely. This was the time when writing from Fiji my cohort casually mentioned - "...the most unusual hibiscus I've ever seen." .. PERIOD! I had no choice but to contain my exasperation not just immediately but for some 2 weeks more before Ross deigned to define what for identification purposes he had labeled "Fiji #1" (later observed in Australia as Lemon Gem). As mentioned in the introduction, it was necessary to do some clarifying enhancement in organizing the letters for publication, and, perhaps because of some of my '63 character observations, the particulars of this episode got edited out. Thus the flower is rather less flamboyantly described in the En Route Tonga (11/17/63) as "... an outstanding variety - creamy white single with heavy raspberry rays extending from the base
almost to the tip”. Anyway, I successfully propagated "Fiji #1" wood, both as grafts and on own-roots. Oddly, contrary to usual experience, the rooted plants bloomed rather profusely - the grafts never.

While Ross' communiques are replete with instances of the frustrations which can come to pass when traveling in foreign climes - the home front was not devoid of bureaucratic inexplicabilities. After Ross finally ran H. cameronii to ground in Brisbane (1/13/64) - and we had successfully grown and observed its unique bloom in the Hibiscus Project greenhouse - one day passing through the main LASCA experimental plant area - Lo and Behold! there were three thriving 1-gallon H. amironii plants. Apparently the plant introduction office had received seed (probably via Brisbane); someone decided to give it a try, and there they were - without anyone ever bothering to notify the primary interest of the Hibiscus Project.

I can't begin to top Ross' tale of the Senhora of Lisbon. (10-21-65) However, there WAS the Saturday after a heavy day's grafting, in a hot glasshouse, clad in old clothes to begin with and considerably more disheveled by late afternoon. At which point I decided to call home, and repaired to a public phone booth at the Arboretum Main Entrance overlooking a part of the Santa Anita Race Track approximately half-a-mile away. After completing my call I stepped out to be accosted by a couple of the local constabulary under suspicion of "post-touting" the horse races in collusion with a bookie operation. Took a "deal" of explaining. The "fuzz" finally accepted my ID. and story - but I'm not sure they really believed me.

I could go on, but I'm supposed to be "concluding" AND I think these samples will afford sufficient idea of how even the stay-at-home shares in plant exploration expeditions.

Like Ross, I too have a "Madame Secretary." As does Ella Gast, my Winnie, after 39 years, tolerates my hibiscus enthusiasm, but she has performed nobly in transcribing raw letters of the Second and Third Expeditions for printer's comprehension. To fully appreciate the magnitude of this labor, I have to explain that (Ross excepted) I am the world's worst scribbler -so that some of my "helpful" clarifications oft served only to confuse further. After 13 years and more since first reading, and since this time around the original script had to be "transformed" into understandable (NOT just sensed) narrative - we really had fun! But are still together.

At the same time though, it did refresh all over again, my recollection of the Gast Hibiscus Expeditions. I trust this volume has afforded you some part of the experience it was for Ross and me.

Hibiscusly,
Joe

____________________________________________________________

GLOSSARY

Persons mentioned in letters but not fully introduced

Dr. Donald Egolf, Cyto-Geneticist National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.

Paul Weissich, Director, Parks & Arboreta, Honolulu, Hawaii

Austin Griffiths, Curator, Herbarium, Los Angeles State & County Arboretum

Dr. William Stewart, Director, Los Angeles State & County Arboretum

Dr. R.E. Vaughn, Curator, Mauritius Herbarium, Reduit, Mauritius

Dr. P.O. Weihe, Director, Sugar Industry Research Institution, Reduit, Mauritius

W.A. Von Stiglitz, Hybridizer, Brisbane, Australia

Gordon Dun, Hibiscus Hybridizer, New Guinea