
MWSHS Newsletter

Spring-Summer 2007

Student Profile:

Ilea Bennett

The pure enjoyment of learning has always been Ilea Bennett's driving passion. And so, at 93 years of age, she enrolled in MWSHS's Master-herbalist program, hoping to further fulfill that inborn need to know, especially concerning the knowledge of how to heal with plants. But, has the M.H. program met her expectations so far?

"The program is structured so that you are eager to learn, but not so large in scope that you feel overwhelmed," she explains, adding: "I was raised in the Steamboat Springs, Colorado area and wildcrafted plants from childhood, so I have a background of years of living daily what the School teaches. Now my lifestyle is given validation through my lessons!"

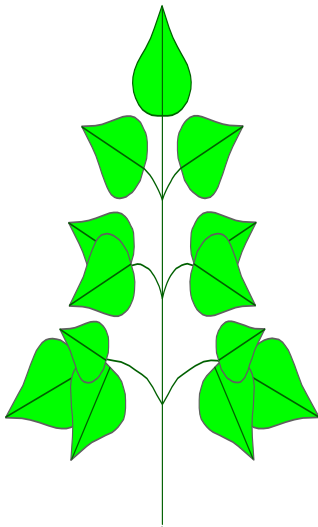
Ilea has an especial interest in herb hydrosols and is pursuing a private project in that area. "My desire," she tells us, "is to share whatever I learn about herbs with others so as to help them to improve their lives!"

For those contemplating enrollment in the Midwest School of Herbal Studies, Ilea offers these words of encouragement: "Anyone considering the MWSHS program will find that it opens up a whole new way of enjoying the real world!"

We might add that Ilea's youthful spirit and sense of wonder has been a great source of encouragement and vitality to us here at MWSHS as well!

Two-Year Deadline for Master-herbalist Program Eliminated!

As of April, 2007, the two-year deadline for an MWSHS student to finish the Master-herbalist program without filing for an extension *has been eliminated*. Any student may now take as long as he or she needs to complete the program. There is no longer any need to file for an extension.



Time for Tea, Time for Health!

Student Marlene McKenzie, profiled in the most recent *Student Newsletter*, writes to us about the following nice experience she had in sharing the benefits of herbal teas with others....

"I had my first talk in town, at the local natural-food store. It was called "Tea for Health and Vitality." I thought it went very well, even though I was a little nervous at first. Once I started talking, though, the nervousness went away and I simply exploded with information! I also provided handouts for the fourteen persons who attended. I discussed the history of tea and mentioned Shen Nung, the great Chinese emperor [discussed in Course One of the Master-herbalist program—*Ed.*]. I talked about *Camelia sinensis*, the tea plant, and how tea is made from that plant. I discussed the different varieties, including black, oolong, green, white, red, chai, and yerba mate. I explained how each variety is made, where in the world it is harvested, and what health benefits it offers. I discussed its phytochemicals, including its flavonoids, carotenoids, amino acids, and alkaloids. I especially highlighted its polyphenol known as epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), sharing what it does in the body, such as serve as an antioxidant and anti-mutagenic and support the body's anti-inflammatory potential. I then related these properties to different potential imbalances in the body. I also talked a lot about the amino acid theanine in tea, explaining how it has a mild, nervine effect in the brain.

After that, I discussed a variety of herbal teas—providing samples of chamomile, nettle, dandelion, and elderberry—and shared some various combinations I would use for particular imbalances. It was so much fun!"

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WORKSHOP CREDIT OPTIONS

Except where noted, all of the below-listed events qualify as Workshop (Course-Eight) credits toward the 2-year Master-Herbalist program. Each hour of *verified* attendance counts toward an equivalent hour of Workshop Category #3 credits (up to the student limit of 20 hours), unless another category is specified or unless one attends a particular workshop at one of these events that is *strictly* in one of these other categories. *MWSHS-sponsored workshops are boxed.*

Workshops, Conferences, Lectures, & Events in Herbal Studies Across North America

July 21-22, 2007. "Northwestern Herb Fest" near **Eugene, OR.** A choice of 25 different lectures, for both beginning and advanced herbal students. For more information, call 541-736-0164, e-mail class@herbaltransitions.com, or see the website at www.herbaltransitions.com.

August 4, 2007. "Wild Plants of Summer," led by Mark Warren of Medicine Bow, Ltd. **Dahlonega, GA.** For more information, call 706-864-5928 or email medbow@alltel.net, or see the website at www.medicinebow.net. *This class counts toward category #2, Wild-plant Walks.*

Sept. 7-9, 2007. "Highlands Native Plant Conference," **Highlands, NC.** For more information, call 828-526-2602 or see the website at www.wcu.edu/hbs/NPCpdf.

Sept 7-9, 2007. "Midwest Wild Harvest Festival," Beaver Creek Reserve, **Falls Creek, WI.** A weekend of wild-food events, including field trips, presentations, and demonstrations. For more info, email sam@foragersharvest.com or call 715-767-5826

Sept. 9, 2007. "Wild-Plant Walk," by MWSHS director Matthew Alfs, at a nature area in the northern suburbs of St. Paul, from 2-5 PM. Cost is \$20. *This class counts toward category #2, Wild-plant Walks. See Registration Form on p. 6 or on the School's website (www.midwestherbalstudies.com), under "Events."*

Sept. 15 & Oct. 6, 2007. "Incredible Edibles & Traditional Medicinals," with Ida Hatter at the Smoky Mountain Field School, **Cherokee, NC.** For more information or to register, call 865-974-0150 or visit the website at www.outreach.utk.edu/smoky. *This class counts toward category #2, Wild-plant Walks.*

Sept. 16, 2007. "Plant Uses," **Frazier Park, CA,** sponsored by Earth Skills. For more information or to register, call 661-245-0318, email jlowery@fraxmtn.com, or see the website at www.earthskills.org.

Sept. 28-30, 2007. "Southeast Women's Herbal Conference," **Asheville NC,** sponsored by New Life Journal. For more information or to register, call 888-929-0777 or see the website at www.redmoonherbs.com.

Oct. 19-21, 2007. "Sacred Plant Medicine," with Stephen Buhner, **Charlottesville, VA.** For more info, or to register, call 434-295-3820, email info@sacredplanttraditions.com, or see the website at www.sacredplanttraditions.com.

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Euell Gibbons

The Man and His Message

by Matthew Alfs

All MWSHS students are familiar with the name of Euell Gibbons, who was discussed in both Course One and Course Two as a pioneer in the nutritional value of wild-plant foods. But, few under the age of 45 actually remember him as a media personality from his heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Even those over the age of 45 may only remember him from a couple of contexts, such as his hobby as a wild-foods forager, his authoring of a book called *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, his TV commercials for a popular breakfast cereal, and his appearances on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*.

However, Euell Theophilus Gibbons (1911-1975) was an educator, survivalist, naturalist, and environmentalist of the first rank and truly one of the most important figures of the late 1960s and early 1970s! Careful historians have associated him with Rachel Carson as one of the harbingers of the ecological renaissance that occurred during this time, because his inspirational and knowledgeable writing and workshops encouraged people to relinquish the previous generation's notion of "conquering nature" and to start *living in harmony with the wilderness*. In short, his work helped spur the "back-to-the-land" movement that occurred from this point onward.

In appreciation of his powerful educational and environmental efforts, Susquehanna University even awarded him an honorary doctorate, while Boston University developed a special collection of his many writings. Today, the Euell Gibbons Environmental Foundation continues the important wilderness educational work that he started.

However, being an ecological hero was far from Euell's mind back in the 1920s when he lived with his parents and younger siblings in central New Mexico. Far from dwelling on the fate of plant Earth back in those days, young Euell was simply intent on trying to keep his mom and sib-

lings from starving! His family had been hit by a trio of calamities—the loss of credit, a terrible drought, and the death of their livestock—and Euell's father had gone off on a desperate mission to find work. A dwindling sack of pinto beans was the only source of food left and Euell's mother eventually wound up sick and weak from malnutrition as a result. Sensing the urgency of the situation, young Euell realized that *he must do something...* and fast!

He decided to undertake a wild-foods-gathering mission, a quest that he realized must not fail! Happily, it didn't: Long hours after beginning his trek into the wilderness, the determined lad returned with a knapsack stuffed with an assortment of wild edibles: Pignolias, wild potatoes, prickly pear, puffball mushrooms, and even a few rabbits! With tears of appreciation, his family welcomed his accumulated bounty as a Godsend. Perhaps it was, for that one-day ensemble provided food for the starving family for almost an entire month! Such timing was perfect, for Euell's father had found a job and was able to cable money back to them just when their cupboards were again running bare. Truly, the wild-foods interest that Euell's mom had imbued in him at a very young age had paid off!

As life moved on, Euell found that he had to employ that knowledge even more effectively, especially when hard times left him a hobo for a period of about five years. During that time, he honed his survival skills to the nth degree. Tough as those days were, he later in life saw this period as the blessing that it certainly was—as a sort of 'apprenticeship to nature.'

Eventually, Euell found work, but never in an avenue that was truly satisfying. This changed when, after obtaining formal education at the University of Hawaii, he became a schoolteacher. In this role, he found that he loved helping children to learn and to be all that they could possibly be in life.

However, Euell longed to be a novelist and he was frustrated when his efforts at publication kept failing. Yet, his second wife, Freda—whom he had met while at the university—encouraged him to follow the first rule of writing: "Write about what you know." She urged, then, that a non-fiction book about wild foods was the way to go. Following this sage advice, Euell struck paydirt with the publication of *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* in 1962, which was published by the David McKay Company and quickly became a best-seller.

Other books soon followed, including *Stalking the Blue-eyed Scallop* (1964), *Stalking the Healthful Herbs* (1966), and the *Beachcomber's Handbook* (1967). But, as the 1970s approached and Euell continued to evaluate his objectives amid his great success, he came to the realization that "great fame brings great responsibility." With that in mind, he began to structure his books and articles more along ecological lines. Here he was happy to find an avid readership for his rage against land "development" and his abhorrence of herbicides and pesticides. *Stalking the Good Life* (1971) and *Stalking the Faraway Places* (1973) powerfully preached his heartfelt land-stewardship ethics, aside from conveying a ton of information about wild foods, including even lab analyses of the nutritional content of the various weeds that Gibbons was increasingly having done at Pennsylvania State University.

Stalking the Wild Places also carried a chapter on Euell's time spent teaching survival skills at the Outward Bound Schools, which institution's powerful and varied wilderness educational activity was so near and dear to his heart. In fact, Gibbons' then-monumental publicity (including even an appearance on Johnny Carson's show, in which he ably traded jibes and witticisms with the seasoned comedian), did much to preserve and enlarge the Outward Bound program. The school also benefited from Gibbons' authoring of a small volume for it entitled *A Wild Way to Eat* (1967).

Gibbons' connection with Outward Bound even attracted the attention of *Life* magazine, which sent journalist Sandi Davis to

personally experience his teaching at the school. Davis found herself enthralled by Gibbons' evident demonstration of his life passion of teaching children—not typical school subjects, as he formerly had done—but that which he believed mattered most in life, communion with nature and harmonious living with it. Eventually, under Euell's instruction, Davis acquired enough confidence to undergo the school's baptism of fire, a 48-hour "solo" on a nearby island! Equipped with only a handful of Gibbons-allowed supplies—a sheet of plastic, a knife, a dozen kitchen matches, a fishline with hook and sinker, some clothes and foul-weather gear, and two tin cans (one as an eating utensil and the other as a makeshift stove)—Davis wrote (in the Sept. 23, 1966 issue of *Life*) that she had weathered the occasion quite well, owing to her instructor's careful—and oft-times humorous—lessons. Like some displaced epicure, she had feasted heartily on periwinkles, steamed mussels, seaweed, grasswort, and sea urchins (although soon after Gibbons had picked her up by boat, she confessed to having rushed into town to satisfy an intense craving for candy!).

Euell's great love of children burned inside him and he seldom missed an opportunity to nurture their inborn sense of wonder. The prolific naturalist John McPhee was a personal friend of Gibbons and, in writing the foreword for the Alan C. Hood reprint of *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, he described Euell's passion in this regard, relating how he would sometimes literally lasso a whole schoolroomful of kids—exhibiting this once-necessary skill from his earlier life as a cowboy—and drag them off to a stream valley to introduce them to the joys of wild-plant foraging and fishing.

Children loved Euell's method of survival fishing: He would tell them that they didn't need a fishing rod, just an old soda bottle and some fishline, and then demonstrate what he meant: His unique method, vividly illustrated and portrayed in a special article written by Gibbons for *National Geographic* (Aug. 1973), was simply to wind fishline around the waist of the empty glass bottle, attach a sinker and a hook baited with a grub, and then swing the

weighted part of the line ever faster above his head. When he felt that the time was right, he would point the base toward the water and the line would unravel toward it with a z-i-n-g! as if ejected from the fanciest of fishing rods! Euell would retrieve the line from his makeshift rod by twisting the bottle crosswise.

To the extreme sadness of those who knew him, Euell Gibbons departed the earthly scene on December 29, 1975, at the age of 64. His last book—and the one that wild-plant foragers generally find the most practical—was completed by his widow and his foraging friend Gordon Tucker and published posthumously in 1979. Entitled *Euell Gibbons' Handbook of Edible Wild Plants*, it was a guide to over 400 edible wild plants of North America, with detailed botanical description and uses. Ironic in view of this comprehensive work, as well as his many previous works and his universally acknowledged expertise in the field of wild foods, enemies of Gibbons' nature-loving ethic

started a rumor that Euell had died from 'eating a bad plant'! Of course, this was not the case: He had fallen victim instead to a circulatory blowout, having for many years been a cigarette smoker and having pushed himself beyond limits to keep up with his countless fans and his many commitments to sponsors. But, when a man heralds wild-foods foraging as "a creative protest against the artificiality of our daily lives," as Euell did, slurs from status-quo worshippers were only to be expected.

Although Euell is no longer among the denizens of planet Earth, many wilderness enthusiasts feel that this beloved teacher looks down on us from that Great Foraging-Ground in the Sky, smiling with his characteristic broad grin and bestowing a blessing to nature lovers everywhere: "Live long... and *eat well!*"

Editor's Note: The above article has been reprinted from an earlier *Student Newsletter* by popular demand.

PRE-REGISTRATION FORM FOR MWSHS WORKSHOP

Student Name:..... Student I.D. #.....
 Workshop Title..... Date(s).....
 Hours.....
 Total Cost Payment Enclosed: (Check).....(M.O.)(C.C)

If paying by Credit Card, you must supply ALL of the following information in order for us to process.

Note: Will clear as "Midwest Herbs & Healing."

Credit Card Number..... Expir. Date.....
 CDC Code (last group of 3- or 4 digits in series of numbers on reverse of card *near signature strip*)
 Digits of Mailing Address to which Credit Card Bill goes to:.....
 Zip Code of same address..... Telephone Number ().....

Send completed form with payment to:
Midwest School of Herbal Studies, P. O. Box 120845, New Brighton MN 55112

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