


# The Central Spine

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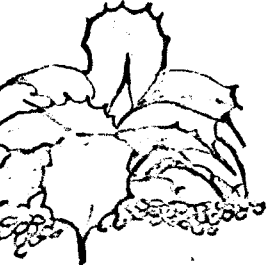
## HUBERT EARLE RETIRES (AN INTERVIEW) by DOTTIE O'ROURKE.



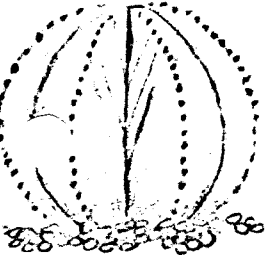
W. Hubert Earle (Hubie to hundreds of friends) retired as Director of the Desert Botanical Garden on October 1 after 19 years in that office. Mr. Earle was born in Winnipeg, Canada in 1906, and moved with his family to Bloomington, Indiana, in 1923. There he finished high school and attended Indiana University majoring in business. He served first as a muleskinner before beginning an apprenticeship cutting and carving limestone at a big oolitic deposit (18 x 35 miles) in Indiana. There he made building stones and facings for many buildings until 1939. In 1933, in Marion, Indiana, he married Lois Porter, his wife until her death in the late sixties. Art, the first of the Earle's two sons, is a naturalist living in California. He is especially interested in birds and flora, and guides wilderness trips. John, the second son, is employed in a printing business and lives in Tempe. Both boys grew up in Arizona and attended Arizona State University, Art going on to Redlands University and University of Humbolt in Arcadia, California. Both sons are married but have no children.



In 1939, Hubie and Lois moved to Gary, Indiana where he opened up a general insurance company. However, he picked up asthma in 1944 and by the Spring of 1945 doctors were giving him only three months to live. So the Earles moved to Arizona, a place called Cactus north of North Mountain and above Paradise Valley. It was a shack with burlap, according to Hubie, but the Arizona air and sunshine did its thing and he was soon able to go out looking for work.



W. Taylor Marshall at the Desert Botanical Garden was looking for an employee and he was pleasantly surprised to discover that Hubert Earle could read Latin. Three years of Latin had been required in the Canadian high school, but Hubie had never used it until he began work at the garden. For three years, there was only Marshall and Earle with very little income until a winter visitor from Paradise Valley donated \$1000, an enormous windfall. Mrs. Webster from New Hampshire died and also left some badly needed money to the garden. It was not until 1950, however, that another employee was added with Hubie being made superintendent in 1953. The Earles moved their trailer from Cactus to the garden property and the two boys grew up among the desert plants. When Mr. Marshall and Hubie used to sit on the porch in the evening, they could see only one light winking at them from a ranch in the valley east of the garden. There were few people in that area in the fifties and early sixties, and Hubie remembers rounding up cattle, coyotes, mountain lions and wild horses in Paradise Valley. In 1948, he cornered a mountain lion and drove it into a tree, but it was gone the next morning.



The garden began to expand with the help of the Cactomaniacs. The visitors building was built in 1960 and the garden started staying open in the summer. The library and herbarium were added to the Archer House, and classes were started in 1959. Among the 14 students in the first class was Mrs. Jack Hays, wife of the Supreme Court justice. Membership when Hubie took over was 319; it is now approximately 1500.

Although Mr. Earle lost his first wife in the late sixties, he was fortunate to find another, Lucille Blessing Smith, Jr. He and Lucy were

married on December 26, 1970. Lucy is a great help and, like Hubie, loves to travel and see the world. Now that he has become Director Emeritus of the Desert Botanical Garden, they will have time to do what they wish with their lives. He will probably lecture, photograph, write, and just take it easy for change. He has certainly earned it with all of his years of service to the Desert Botanical Garden. Just as Mr. Marshall turned the keys over to a capable, hard-working individual, so has Hubie, with an enlarged garden, an enlarged staff, and an enlarged membership. Good luck and many happy years!

#### THE CENTRAL SPINE.

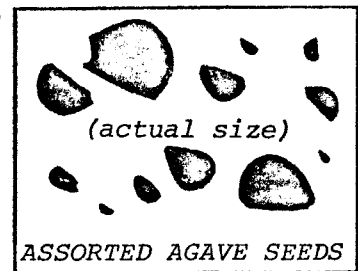
This is the first issue of the Newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society to sport its new name, THE CENTRAL SPINE. The Society has Hubert Earle to thank for coming up with this exciting new name.

#### GROWING AGAVES FROM SEEDS by CHARLES F. MERBS.

Agaves are not the most popular of succulents and it takes a certain kind of personality to wait 25 years or more to see his plant flower, then immediately die. To the true agaveophile, the different species are very exciting, even if not always identifiable. Most agaves are relatively easy to grow although some, such as A. attenuata which is seen so frequently along the California coast, are unable to tolerate Arizona's extremes of heat and cold without assistance. Ninety-nine percent of the agave growers in the Phoenix area seem content to grow only A. americana, but the true agave fan will have 20 or more species and is always searching for new ones. Many agaves produce clones quite readily and some even produce bulbils on the inflorescence (the seeds actually germinate and produce small plants complete with leaves and roots while still attached to the flower stalk). Another but rather drastic way of getting agaves to reproduce is to remove the center of an adult plant. Just as with cacti, this stimulates the plant to produce multiple heads, each of which can then be rooted. All of these methods of reproduction have disadvantages, however. Not all plants produce clones (some of the most beautiful such as A. victoriae-reginae and A. ocahui rarely ever do) and even for those that do, the offsets may be poorly shaped or attached too tightly to allow separation from the parent without injury, or the offset may contain a disease gotten from the parent. Reproduction by means of bulbils gives you many plants in a hurry, but it tends to be a rare event and characteristic of just certain species. A. murpheyi, an Arizona native, regularly produces bulbils.

In many cases the best way to go, and in some cases the only way to reproduce agaves, is to grow them from seed. Agave seeds are flat (usually) and black in color. I have occasionally gotten off-color (brownish) seeds to germinate, but they are usually not worth the effort. Agave seeds vary considerably in size usually reflecting the size of the mature plant. The smallest seeds I have worked with (several species) measured less than 2 mm. in maximum diameter while the largest, from a Mexican giant, A. franzosini, measured more than a centimeter in diameter. As with other plants, the fresher the seeds, the greater the percentage of germination.

My soil mix for agave seedlings is very simple, equal parts of commercial soil mix and sifted (through a regular window screen) crushed granite. I cover the seeds with a depth of soil measuring half the diameter of the seed, but I doubt that such precision is necessary. They should be below the surface, but not very deep. I then set the pot (usually plastic) in a pan of distilled water or rain water until a wet surface indicates that the soil has become thoroughly saturated. After the pot is removed and allowed to drain for several minutes,



I spray the surface with a fungicide (whatever is handy--agaves do not appear to be very susceptible to damping-off) and cover the pot with plastic wrap secured with a rubber band. I then set the pot on a warm windowsill (I do not have artificial lights) where it receives diffused light and wait for nature to take its course. Some seedlings have appeared as early as four days after planting, but six to eight days is more typical. If plants have not made an appearance by the end of two weeks, they probably never will. The seedlings begin with a single leaf, approximately round in cross-section, thicker near the base and tapering to a point at the top. The actual tip is obscured by the empty seed husk perched on the top of the plant. This seed remnant may remain on the plant for several months until it falls off or I get tired of looking at it and remove it. Seedlings vary considerably in size during their first weeks of life, usually reflecting the size of the seeds that produced them. Within a few days of germination, however, even the smallest of the plants will have reached the surface of the plastic wrap if it has not already been removed. The wrap is to keep the soil damp during germination. In the case of agaves, it can be dispensed with right after germination.

Some of the seedlings have a tendency to fall over and I add some coarse sand to the pot to shore them up. After two to four weeks of development, a slit develops near the base of the first leaf and out of it comes the second leaf, this one looking much more like an agave than the first, but still elongated and devoid of marginal spines. The third leaf, when it appears, tends to be wider than the second, and it does contain small marginal spines. By the time the third leaf has made its appearance, the initial leaf has begun to turn yellow and dry out from the tip. It has done its job and it proceeds to disappear. I try to keep the soil fairly moist, but pots of seedlings have dried out completely for several days through my neglect with no apparent damage. The seedlings will let you know if they are receiving too much light or too little light. In the first case, they take on a purplish tinge. In the second, they turn pale. Try not to change their light regimen abruptly; do it in easy stages.

By the time the third leaf arrives, the plants begin to bear some resemblance to their parents, but they still have a long way to go. The worst part is over, however, and the prognosis for continuing development is excellent.

#### C.A.C.S.S. PROFILES - WHITMAN EVANS [C. F. MERBS].

Whitman Evans is seldom able to get to C.A.C.S.S. meetings because of his cactus nursery, but he is seldom out of mind. For many of us it was Whit Evans who introduced us to our first real specimen plants. Buying a plant from the Evans Cactus Garden at 5221 E. Van Buren in Phoenix is a real experience because you get not only the plant but its life history, the nature of the terrain where it was found, the rainfall pattern in that area, etc.

Whit was born in Chetek, Wisconsin, in 1915. His family moved to Phoenix in 1918, taking up residence at 12th and Van Buren at what was then the "end" of the city. His parents moved to Arizona for their health and it worked; his mother lived to age 76 and his father to 85. Whit began collecting cacti when he was nine years old. He had nine local varieties growing around a palm tree in his parent's yard.

Whit says that the Papago Park area including his present location was once a very beautiful area, prettier than Carefree is today, with saguaros as thick as a forest. It is hard to believe that Camelback Mountain is the type locale for the beautiful rainbow cactus, Echinocereus pectinatus var. rigidissimus. Whit's father had a little business on the side, bring saguaros in from the desert for sale. Cacti in those days appeared to be an inexhaustable resource and no one gave a second thought to removing them from the desert. He was a taxidermist by profession, but loved nature and enjoyed getting out into the desert. Whit

remembers many enjoyable moments spent in the country with his father.

Whit's first real collection was a mass of opuntias that nearly drove him out of house and home. He got into the cactus selling business in the early 1930's and quickly discovered that prickly pears did not sell very well. In attempting to diversify his collection, he soon had a lively trade going on with west coast dealers. In 1934, Whit joined the staff of the Arboretum near Superior and worked there for about a year for \$2 a day plus room and board. It was a good life, but the young man missed the night life of the "big city" and he was soon back in Phoenix.

In 1931, Whit made his first collecting trip to Mexico with a cactus trading partner, Dr. Lowry of Laredo, Texas. At that time, Mexico had no paved roads outside of Mexico City and the trip down the east coast was very rough. But the trip was worth the effort as he found himself in a fairyland of exotic cacti, Astrophytum capricorne, a pretty variety of Echinocereus pectinatus with pink spines and large yellow flowers, coryphanthas and mammillarias including M. plumosa. This was also the first time he saw the processing of Euphorbia anti-syphilitica for wax, the subject of a documentary movie shown recently at a C.A.C.S.S. meeting. Whit went back the next year, this time farther south and west, where he found Pelecyphora valdeziana in another fairyland of cacti.

Over the years, Whit gave plants to the Desert Botanical Garden and received plants in return. He also applied his magic touch to rare plants when the garden worried about their survival.

Whit discovered a number of new cacti and one bears his name, Neoevansi, found in the foothills of the Sierra Cubari near Sonoita. He had suggested the name "Striatocereus" and was rather surprised to find his own name on it when the description was published.

The most exciting moments of Whit's life were his many collecting trips to Mexico where he saw all of his beloved exotic cacti at home in their natural habitats. He was especially impressed with the Astrophytum and Ariocarpus genera, and all of the species of these genera are represented in his collection. Whit is also very fond of Echinocactus grusonii, the golden barrel, and his one regret is that he was never able to get to the remote area that this plant calls home. He remembers one plant in a private garden in Mexico that measured six and a half feet in diameter.

At the moment Whit's health is not as good as he would like, but he has nice grandchildren to keep him company and he has the satisfaction of knowing that he was responsible for introducing many people to the joys of raising cacti.

#### CATS AND CACTI by GENEVIEVE OPPEN.

About a half hour before Kathy Corbett was to leave for the field trip to Tucson, her cat got into a fight with another cat. In separating the animals, she received some deep punctures in her hand. She wrapped them up and made the trip, but they became more and more painful as the day progressed. Kathy went to the doctor the next day where two bits of cat teeth were dug out of her wounds and stitches were required for a tendon. By that time her hand was badly swollen. The doctor commented that she was a maniac to withstand such pain just to see cacti. Yes, indeed, a "cactomaniac." Kathy raised quarter horses and is a pilot and paramedic besides being interested in cacti.

#### CACTUS SHOW.

The Thirteenth Annual Cactus Show of the Desert Botanical Garden will be held from February 20 through February 27. It is not too early to begin making plans for the show. The sale that accompanies the show is in need of assistance. Chuck Merbs and Mary Getz, the chairpersons of the sale, would like you to bring in seeds (fresh and properly identified please), plant cuttings and offsets, pots, bags (all sizes) and boxes (especially small ones).