

Mr. Green Thumb

By Marilyn Reeves

I have roughly a dozen potted plants scattered around my apartment. Mostly philodendron, which are the children and grandchildren of the original, now nearly forty years old, that I refer to as "Mama." None of my plants are particularly large or flashy, although I have one growing out of a pot that hangs on my living room wall that I am training to climb the metal grid above the partition between that room and my kitchen. I have a pretty shamrock sitting on my coffee table, and a stickery asparagus fern in front of my bedroom window. Many of my plants have been with me for at least thirty years, but I have a couple of newer ones that were given to me by G.T., my neighbor down the hall – a pretty begonia with white-spotted, ruffly leaves and one that I call an 'elephant ear' that sits in front of my patio door.

G.T. (short for Mr. Green Thumb, and not his real name), moved about six years ago into the corner apartment of our building, two doors down from me. He brought with him some furniture, his clothes, his computer and other personal affects, and his house plants ... of which there were quite a few.

While I'm happy with my little philodendrons, his philodendrons are HUGE. They don't sit in little pots, they are nested in VATS, and their tendrils of heart-shaped leaves have been tacked up to cover half his ceiling. But that's not all. He has a couple of rows of shelves that take up the back half of his living room next to the lanai that are literally covered in plants of every size, type and description. Interspersed between the enormous plants that look like banana trees with their huge, fan-shaped leaves, are a few smaller ones to which he devotes the same degree of husbandry.

Now that his children and grandchildren are grown, G.T. spends at least an hour a day to the care and coddling of all those plants. He stirs the soil. He gently wipes down the leaves. He turns each one in increments, so that all sides get equal exposure to the sun. He measures the fertilizer and the water and keeps a journal noting how much each plant should receive. And when a plant begin to strain against its current confinement, he carefully nestles it into a larger pot with fresh soil. And the result of all this tender loving care is that his place is overflowing with healthy, happy, *beautiful* house plants. It's a virtual jungle in there!

But even as I write this, it is with great trepidation that I must tell you that I have suddenly become involved in caring for all those plants, for G.T. has gone off on a three-week vacation, entrusting me to keep them all alive and thriving until he returns. All seventy-five of them. I just hope that I can do an adequate job, because, unlike Mr. Green Thumb, I don't have a green thumb.