

# ROCKS, MORE ROCKS, AND A FEW CACTI

Clive Henderson hailed from the state of 10,000 lakes, Minnesota, that is. By all known accounts, he led a normal, middle-class life as a bachelor. What possessed him to move to an isolated cabin in the desert remains a mystery. He never really confided in anyone in his decision.

Clive's cabin sat at the bottom of some rocky cliffs, so his backyard was all rock and his front yard all sand. He carried a strong belief that we should do everything we can to preserve our natural resources. How much that played into his move, again, we don't know. Some have debated the classification of rocks and sand as natural resources, but however you classify them, Clive had plenty to conserve.

After discussing the rules of time-sharing with the rattlesnakes and scorpions, Clive had time to focus on landscaping the area around his cabin. Looking at the plants growing in the area near his cabin, he concluded that his choices ran from cactus to more cactus. So, with his front yard elegantly

landscaped with a few cacti, he moved on to the backyard.

After studying the ground in his backyard, Clive concluded that his choices for growing plants ran in the range of nothing to practically nothing. Not one to give up easily, he inserted the flash drive into his computer that contained the plant encyclopedia that he had built from internet research. He found several plants that would grow on rock, or at least in the crevices of rock. Trying to find suppliers would have to wait until he got a satellite dish installed.

Exploring the cliffs and rocky hills behind his cabin became his next 'to do'. He began collecting little samples of the many shapes, textures, and colors of rocks. Oddly, the rocks struck his horticultural fancy. He started to think of all the things he could do with rock gardening. Looking at all the photos of plants in his plant encyclopedia, he envisioned creating pieces of art depicting plants built from rock. With a little shaping work using a grinding tool, he found he could create some pretty good likenesses of leaves, flowers, and fruit. The wide palette of colors and textures from his rock collection added to his creative inspiration.

After completing the rock landscape in his backyard, Clive decided to build some rock models to sell. With his pickup truck and trailer fully loaded with his creations, he made the long trip to the farmer's market of the nearest large city. With attractive pricing, Clive managed to sell everything he had that first day.

Buoyed with confidence, Clive continued creating likenesses of plants and trees from rock. He added a line of pots to his inventory.

Clive Henderson's Rocks, Inc. shone as the perfect example of making do with what you have. It was a lonely life, though. Rocks offer little in the way of conversation. Whenever he made it into the farmer's market with his creations, it seemed as though people only wanted to talk about his rock products. When he got back home, he had his co-inhabitants, the rattlesnakes and scorpions, but they weren't exactly the warm and fuzzy types. He did eventually buy a dog for companionship, who he naturally named "Rocky".

After a while, he found himself talking to the cacti in his front yard. His success in the rock business left him little time to care for his cacti, but they were largely an independent lot. One day when he walked outside to have one of his "cactus"

conversations, he noticed what appeared to be a root sucker emerging from the base of a big prickly pear. As he got closer, he saw that the pup was bright purple with white variegation. Fascinated by this apparent mutation, he separated it from the mother plant and potted it up. After several months, several more purple and white pads grew on the pup.

Feeling like a proud papa, he took the pup with him on his next sales trip. Using it as a table decoration, he had numerous people offer to buy it. Clive just couldn't part with his baby, and it remained a table decoration. Later in the afternoon, a man came up to the table and closely examined the purple and white prickly pear. He identified himself as a professor of horticulture at the state university. After hearing the plant's story, the professor offered to help Clive get a patent for the mutated plant. Eventually the patent went through and *Opuntia ficus-indica* 'Rocky Road' gained worldwide attention. He even built a statue model of it using amethyst that he had in plentiful supply from his mountain.

Back in Minnesota, Clive's old buddies started wondering how their old friend was doing out in the lonely desert. On a crisp autumn morning

while out in a boat on a misty, cool lake waiting for the fish to bite, Jess Harper started the first of many rumors about Clive. His fellow anglers then saw it as an opportunity to add their own tales about Clive. It is an unwritten rule that spreading rumors and telling tall tales is quite permissible while fishing. Sorting out truth from the fiction of fishing stories can be challenging to an outsider. To fishermen, they are often one and the same.

At the end of the day, Clive's old buddies came to the unanimous conclusion that Clive simply had rocks in his head. In some ways, they could be right, but perhaps they were just incapable of grasping the vision that Clive had. The elderly gentleman who ran the fish camp on Lake Winachi brought an old saying to the table when trying to understand the man— "There are none so blind as those who will not see."