



DOG DAYS

By Dr. Frank S. Rossi
Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture
Cornell University

As Tony gazed over the hill on the 12th, he noticed Nicholas, his former employee and new assistant, yelling orders to a staff member on the mobile radio. "No, the clubhouse lawn gets mowed at 3 inches, not a half inch!"

Nicholas arrived where Tony was parked and proclaimed, "Those darn turf students, it seems like if it's not in a book they can't think of how to do something!"

"I remember when you were one of those kids, you now say 'can't think,'" Tony reminded Nicholas. "Matter of fact, I was chatting with Bruce the other day, and he told me about the time you lost your cool with one of the members at Glimmer Glass CC."

"Which time was that?" Nicholas inquired with a sarcastic tone.

"The time when you were told to get ahead of the golfers to mow fairways with the LF-100 and decided to ignore Bruce's directions and started right on #1" Tony recounted. "Then when the 9-holers came out, and one of their golf balls hit your machine. You picked up the ball and threw it in the woods. The member approached you, began to yell, and you told her that you had the right of way and if she didn't like it, she could play somewhere else."

"Oh, that time," Nicholas recalled sheepishly. "Bruce said he'd never tell that one to anybody."

Tony continued. "He mentioned it because I was saying that you've been on edge, yelling at everyone in sight these days, and the staff is getting ready for a mutiny."

You could feel the tension level begin to subside as Nicholas began to sink deeper into himself as a harsh reality was being revealed to him. "I don't know," he muttered, "but I think it is the heat in August that does it to me. Ever since I was a kid I hated these weeks from late July through late August—you know, the Dog Days."

"Granny told me once that the Dog Days date back to the ancient Romans who named the period between July and August 'dies caninula', because the dog star Sirius rises and sets with the sun during this time," Tony lectured. "They thought that the combined effect of the star and the sun is what made it so oppressively warm and humid."

"You mean I'm affected by a star?" Nicholas wondered.

"You might be, but either way, you better cool your jets and get a grip of yourself, man. What does

Angela think of this behavior?" Tony began to pry.

"Not much. Each year she takes the kids for three weeks to her mother's place on the lake," Nicholas admitted. "I really miss them, but I act like such a nut-case that it's better for everyone that we do our own thing."

"You know Nicholas, you need to keep things in their proper perspective," Tony explained in a parenting tone. "We get so caught up in our attention to the golf course that we lose site of what really matters, like being there for our families. A few



years ago, when we got hit with a bad case of summer patch and our two worst greens began fail; I was real tense. I tried what I could, but it seemed that nothing was working. One day I was having my morning coffee in the back room of the pro-shop and overheard some conversation between an assistant pro and a member of my green committee. I became so enraged at the backstabbing that all I remember hearing was "if Tony knew what he was doing, we wouldn't be having these problems."

Nicholas noticed that Tony was actually reliving this experience and could see the veins beginning to protrude from Tony's neck. These were not times to interrupt, so Nicholas remained engaged.

Tony continued. "I went to the shop and after I threw out three letters of resignation, I put together a proposal for rebuilding those greens that have been a maintenance nightmare for the last 10 years. Then I left, went home and spent the day at a tea party with my daughter, Sophia, in her treehouse. That night Clelia and I had dinner at the Moroccan place in town, sat on the floor, ate

with our fingers, went home, and well, you know the rest."

Nicholas was amazed that Tony could just walk away from the golf course on a day when, *for his job*, he most likely needed to be seen. "What happened to the proposal?" asked Nicholas.

"They decided to spend \$3.5 million on the clubhouse that year", Tony responded matter of factly, "and they felt that \$75,000 to 100,000 for greens reconstruction was not worth it".

Nicholas continued to investigate this situation. "Was that the year Mrs. Woodley was the green's chair? Did you get angry and blow up at the board meeting when it was turned down?"

"Yes, it was Mrs. Woodley who was chair and no, I did not blow up because she said I was a talented enough superintendent to be able to do what needed to be done short-term to keep the greens playable." Tony continued, "And one tough year out of 17 was a record any business person would be proud of. Besides, I've learned to make those greens into a daily testimonial to my talents."

Tony began to grin. "Plus, the best part of the story was that the assistant pro and the member that were backstabbing me were arrested for embezzling money from the club. The club got the money back, and Mrs. Woodley saw to it that after my most difficult year I received a 10% raise."

"Don't you think it is a strange set of priorities that golfers think nothing of dropping a few mil into a clubhouse," Nicholas philosophized, "but won't put \$100,000 into the reason people come near the clubhouse?"

"I used to, but now I understand." Tony explained, "Like when I had to leave that day and be with my family, that was my priority. To them the clubhouse is their priority, and to you, young man, that beautiful wife and children should be yours. So dog days or not, get your butt outta here. Go home, spend time with the kids then bring them over to spend the night with Clelia and me. Take Angela to dinner, eat with your fingers, skinny dip in the lake and look at the stars and remember that Sirius will be here for you tomorrow." 🍷



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