

# A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

## Climbing up the Ladder

With a title like that, what do you think this week's story will be about? Perhaps you are thinking "It's probably another story about David's printmaking; how his skills are increasing ..." Or you may guess that it has something to do with Japanese language ability, or something else that I am learning to do, and making slow steady progress. Well, if so, then you would be mistaken. Today's story is about ... climbing up a ladder!

In previous stories, I have written about my 'natural air conditioner' - the greenery that covers much of my house during the summer months. A yabugarashii plant grows every year to cover the south face of the building, and a wistaria covers almost the entire east face.

Keeping these plants under control hasn't been too much of a problem. The bush-killer grows into an extremely dense mat of vegetation by late summer, but when the weather changes it dies off and I pull it down and clean it up. It doesn't cause any long-term problems.

But the wistaria! This isn't an 'annual' plant, but a permanent fixture. It just keeps getting larger and more dense as the years go by. Where one year there may be a delicate light green tendril, the next year will see this replaced by a thick woody trunk. The leaves fall off every autumn, but the plant itself just keeps growing and growing.

The first year that it grew on the house, it made a nice summer shelter over my kitchen window. A few tendrils tried to poke their way into the house, but they were easy to clip off. No problem.

The next year it had reached high enough to make a very pleasant covering for my second floor balcony railing. This blocked the very early summer sunrise from waking me up too soon each morning, but still allowed plenty of light into the room. No problem.

The following year it reached even higher, and formed a screen right around the balcony itself. This had some slight negative effects, in that I could no longer see out of that window, but the balcony itself became a very pleasant - and cool - small 'room', in which I could sit and enjoy the feeling of being inside a kind of tree house. No problem.

But this plant just doesn't know when to stop. It has now climbed even higher, and has entwined itself in the guttering around the edge of the roof. And - in the event that has now caused me to take action - it has tangled itself in some of the wires and cables that come into the house. It can't reach the electric power line yet, so there is no immediate danger, but it has wrapped around the wire carrying my internet connection. Big problem!

So I borrowed a ladder from a neighbour, got out my shears, and prepared to start trimming. I placed the ladder securely against the side of the house, and started climbing. But do you know what happened next? I only got about half-way up before I could go no further ... it seemed to be so high in the air that I was too scared to continue! This guy - who used to throw himself out of airplanes for fun back in his twenties - just couldn't get up to the top of this ladder, but had to stop when only about three meters from the ground.

Is this what happens to us when we get 'old' ... we get easily frightened by things? Or is it that we ... finally ... get smart!

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