



One of my house plants is in full and glorious flower now. *Exotica*, the marvelous book on house plants refers to it as *Rhoeo discolor*, seed catalogues list it as Moses-In-A-Boat, but my mother called it Three-Men-In-A-Boat. Call it what you like or call it nothing at all, it is a handsome, old-fashioned house plant with large, strap-shaped leaves which are glossy-green above and a rich purple below. Several (usually more than three) small, white flowers develop within boat-shaped bracts, hence the common names. Belonging to the pineapple family, these plants will survive (but not with vigor) fairly long periods of abuse and neglect, recovering quickly after, for example, you have returned from your vacation and resume your T.L.C. (tender, loving care).

I have several Three-Men-In-A-Boat plants. They are cuttings of cuttings of cuttings given to me by my mother almost 30 years ago. She had received a plant of *Rhoeo discolor* in the 1940s as a birthday gift from her aunt Angie, who had bought a plant many years before that from a commercial source. In their turn, cuttings of my plants have gone to Indiana to grace the homes of my siblings there and to homes of friends and relatives in several cities and towns across the land.

I know the "genealogy" of most of my house plants—for example my *Pedalanthus* (Devil's Back Bone), Chinese Evergreen, and Joseph's Coat of Many Colors—just as my parents and their neighbors, friends and relatives knew which varieties of their Tiger Lilies, Day Lilies, Peonies, Irises, Tulips, Raspberries, Strawberries, Rhubarb, Quince, Apple and Pear trees, etc., had come to them through purchase, gifts, or exchange.

Following the example set by Vorsila Bohrer, I had a section in my Ethnobotany course called "Plants in the Company of Man." Although the emphasis was on the evolutionary changes of plants in the company of man, surely the close relationship one can have with individual plants in and around one's dwelling is one—albeit very small, very personal, and very satisfying—aspect of ethnobotany.

—W.V.