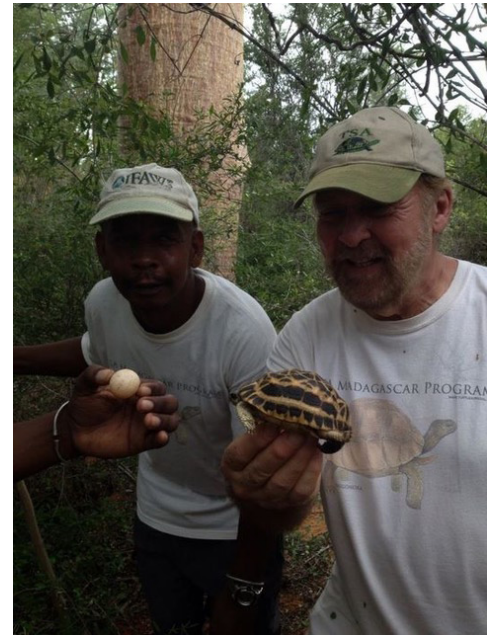


A TURTLE CHANGED MY LIFE

By Robert Krause



As a young child, I was always enamored with turtles ever since that first day I saw the stacks of little green turtles in an aquarium at the Woolworths dime store in the six corners shopping district not far from our home. As a four-year-old, I was at the mercy of a plastic turtle bowl with a palm tree and an orange metal can of Hartz Mountain dried flies labeled as turtle food. Those combined with the well-intentioned but misguided instructions from a teenage store employee and a mother who wanted to reward her son for helping carry shopping bags began a lifelong passion for keeping turtles and studying their behavior. Who was to know that this experience would eventually amass an extensive collection of many different species of turtles learning their behaviors and animal husbandry requirements?



That passion carried through my school years, into and out of the military, and then into the computer industry, where in 1967, I worked as a programmer for Greyhound Corporation in downtown Chicago. One evening as I was running a long program, I came across an ad in the Wall Street Journal about acquiring a franchise from Docktors Pet Center. After pursuing it and learning about the phenomenal growth of the industry, I decided to go in a different direction and open my own pet center. After 4 years of working for various pet retailers, I opened Noah's Ark Pet Center in 1971, billed as the world's largest pet center (9,270 sq. ft.). In 10 years, it became a chain of 23 retail pet centers throughout the Midwest. During that time, I started a wholesale pet product company, NAPCO, and eventually started importing exclusive high-end pet products from Europe and Asia in another company NAPCO International. In 1985, after purchasing Pets International Ltd. with their Super Pet brand, I merged the 2 companies, and from 1985 until 2005, I built a manufacturing company with over 200 employees concentrating on new product development and focusing exclusively on small animal products for hamsters, rabbits, ferrets, and all other related little furry guys. I never thought I'd sell my company because of the love I had for it, but in 2005 Central Garden & Pet made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

Throughout my entire pet industry career, I always surrounded myself with turtles in one form or another, from collections in my various offices and home to initiating a tortoise breeding business in Arizona in addition to establishing an endangered tortoise breeding program in a custom-built facility in the Midwest.



After departing from the pet industry, I found my true direction by concentrating on turtle and tortoise conservation. Today we are working with and supporting several organizations on protecting environments around the world as well as captive breeding. Another initiative we are working on is keeping common turtles common. My wife, Denise, and I developed a painted turtle conservation plan where over the past 12 years, we have been successful at head-starting and releasing over 3,000 hatchlings in various wetlands, which, otherwise, over 90% would never have survived. All of this was a result of that little green turtle.

I've just finished the manuscript of my memoir entitled: "TURTLING" (Following my passion) which will be launched on October 1, 2023. It is an enjoyable, humorous, and serious true story in novel form of my life and how my turtle passion took me on an unbelievable journey. It touches on every aspect of my career, touching on so many friends and business partners along with the turtle conservationists of the world.

Addendum by Gary Bagnall

I have known Bob for over 40+ years. We met for the first time when I was in my 20s and had a live reptile import/export company. My travels took me to a pet trade show in Chicago, and when traveling, I always visited the pet stores in the area to check out the animals. As luck would have it, I wandered into Noah's Ark Pet Center, which Bob owned at the time. The store was large and well organized, with many animals, including a great tropical fish department. But it was not the birds, small animals, or tropical fish that got my attention. No, it was a spectacular 1932 original Jewel aquarium with dolphin corners, shells for lights, and a magnificent seahorse stand that it rested on that floored me on the spot! Next stop, who owns this aquarium, and I must meet him. Enter Bob Krause, a talented businessman, and big animal lover who I needed to convince that he no longer needed this aquarium as it belonged in the museum I would build sometime in the future. So, after meeting Bob and giving him my best, "you need to sell me this aquarium," I got the big no way, not in this lifetime. A wise man once told me, you got the no, so go find the yes. I did not give up. I made it my life's mission to see Bob every time I went to Chicago on business or if I saw him at any of the other 3 pet trade shows around the country. Bob, knowing that I was a little crazy for antique aquariums, would always tell me, it's yours, Gary, it's all crated up and ready to ship. Of course, I knew this wasn't true, but in fact a harmless little game we played for about 30 years until one day Bob sold his manufacturing business (Pets International) to a larger publicly traded pet corporation. I was in Chicago and Bob invited me to visit Pets International for a tour. After I arrived, I saw several vintage aquarium piston pumps in Bob's office that I told him he must mail to me immediately (he did!) and on the tour, he showed me the injection molding machines they used to manufacture a good portion of their pet product lines. I was impressed. While walking around the giant "Costco-size" warehouse, Bob points to a large wooden crate and says, "your aquarium is in there". I immediately thought this joke would go on forever and finished the tour, had lunch with Bob, and was on my way.



Several weeks later, a large crate shows up at our shop and the shipping department tells me it is addressed to me. I walk out into the warehouse to have a look and see that it was shipped from Pets International. Could it be? When things like this happen in your life you have to take the Gandhi approach and just “chill”, say a little prayer, then wait a few days to open such a crate in case of major disappointment. A few days later, we opened the crate and there in living bronze color was the most spectacular aquarium I have ever seen. A Jewel, 6-sided, bronze-plated aquarium with a seahorse stand, dolphin uprights, and bronze metal clamshells for lights. Jewel only made 6 or fewer of these aquariums in the early 1930s and mostly for commercial or wealthy industrial patrons.

This aquarium was a major restoration project, but we were up to the task. I guess 30 years of back-and-forth “kidding” finally paid off. Thank you, Bob!

But it doesn't end there. Bob never asked me for any money for this beautiful, spectacular, and rare aquarium. But a few years before Bob sold his company, I was away on business in Japan visiting our Japanese customer when low and behold, Bob Krause was also in Japan at the same time.

We decided to have dinner one night in Tokyo and I remember the weather was very cold and rainy that night. After dinner, Bob wanted to check out a store across a busy street in Tokyo, and he started running across the street, in front of cars that were stopped because of traffic. In the farthest lane, the traffic was empty, and Bob made a run for it. I saw a car coming straight for him, and I yelled at the top of my lungs, “Bob LOOK OUT!” The driver of the car must have heard me as he slowed slightly and tapped Bob in which I saw him go up on the car's hood and then stumble off. Bob was O.K. but shaken up.

So, there you have it. I saved Bob's life in Tokyo that night, so I think that is fair payment for the Jewel Aquarium! :O) Bob let's have lunch next time you are in town.

