

When I was a kid, I had a hobby. It was a hobby that a number of other kids had. Maybe you were one of them. But I dare say no one was as serious and fervent a hobbyist as I was when it came to this particular pastime.



Grant Sanders

YACK on: Fish Bowl

My hobby: I grew Sea Monkeys.

You remember Sea Monkey, don't you? Those were those cute and adorable little creatures — brine shrimp, I think I later learned they were called, which means they were not actually monkeys, but some kind of crustacean. There were ads for them in every single comic book published from 1957 through the late 70s. They came in little foil packets and you could

grow them in their own fish bowl. They were not hard to grow. You just had to give them the right conditions and a little food and they would thrive.

I must admit, I was a little anal about my Sea Monkey colony growth management practices. I took lots of notes, jotted into those old back and white composition note books. My goal was to create the perfect little sea monkey colony. One that approached self-sustainability. Which is not as easy as you might think.

Early on in my Sea Monkey experiments, I had a wonderful little colony going. They had all adopted this little rock inside the tank as their home. Boy did those sea monkeys love that rock. For three, four, maybe five generations they lived on that rock, and they cherished it. Sometimes other Sea Monkeys would come and visit the rock and the colony that lived there played host and showed them a good time. It was great. But one day, some of the rock-dwelling Sea Monkeys started to build and build and build. They built big homes of the visiting Sea Monkeys and they built little homes in the middle of the rock for more little worker Sea Monkeys. After a while it got to be a little crazy. They covered the whole rock with houses until there was no room left for more little creatures. They fouled the water around them and turned the whole fish bowl murky with their waste. Suddenly, the rock was not such a great place to live and some of the original Sea Monkey families moved away. Making room for the builder monkeys to tear down their houses and build two or three in their place. There was only one thing I could do at that point.

I flushed them. Bloosh! Glug, glug, glug. And I started all over again.

In the next colony, I placed the rock back in the tank and began the colony the same way I had before. But this time, I added a special packet of Conservation Sea Monkeys. You could special-order them from the Sea Monkey company. The conservation monkeys competed for open space on the rock with the builder monkeys. They protected and guarded wide-open spaces on half of the rock's interior, and a few other spots while the builder monkeys scrambled to build their little Sea Monkey McMansions around the outside edges of the rock. This seemed to be working quite well. But then, as the available space on the rock became scarcer and scarcer, the original sea monkey colonists found they could no longer afford to live on the rock because the law of supply and demand meant most of the rock was now priced well outside their reach. I felt bad for them.

Flush!

The next colony was started much the same way, but this time I sent away to the Sea Monkey company and got a special packet of Planner Monkeys. These planner monkeys were incredibly expensive mostly because they stuck around and planned for five years each. I did everything that I was supposed to do in the little manual that came with the Planner Monkeys, but for some reason, they refused to plan for ways to help the original colonies create an sustainable environment in which to live and decided, instead, to help out the builder monkeys. Some of them even sold the builder monkeys big parcels of land. I wanted them to do a complete analysis of what growth was costing their little rock. To sit down and crunch the numbers and figure out the formulaic cost of adding extra Sea Monkey bedrooms to the colony. But they refused. Instead they spent all of their time building roundabouts. And aligning streets. And paving perfectly good dirt roads.

In the end I had to hire a special Sea Monkey consultant to crunch the numbers and write a complete report, which I presented to the colony. But the report, which was thick and contained all kinds of really great facts and figures and pointed to a clear conclusion, was largely ignored by the monkeys in charge of the colony.

So, I flushed them, too. Whoosh! That felt good.

The next colony was going along great but had reached a critical juncture in its development and it found it had to continually raise taxes to support itself. I could see the writing on the wall for this colony. So I wrote away to the Sea Monkey company for some philanthropic monkeys and added them to the mix. They were more than happy to pick up where the local poor monkeys left off and use their wealth to improve the little rock colony without the need for taxes. They bought a dilapidated movie theater and protected the shoreline and even tried to create little in-rock transportation hub. And some of the local monkeys were very happy. Others were kind of wary of the philanthropic monkeys and they poo-pooed the gifts, saying they were tainted and poorly planned, which they were. The philanthropic monkeys threw a lot of cash around, but their aim was not always so good. There was rancor and nasty

discourse amongst all of the monkeys because no one was really planning for the future. (I never could get those Planning Monkeys to work...) And I could tell it wasn't going to end well. Original monkey families kept moving away from the Rock.

So I flushed them, too.

It was around that time that I was beginning to mature and notice other thing in the world besides Sea Monkeys. Like girls. So my little Sea Monkey hobby fell by the wayside. I forgot what happened to my little tank and packets of food and notebooks full of charts and graphs and colony schemes, until recently when I was digging through some old boxes and I found them. Maybe my kids will be more successful in their colony planning than me. But if not, it's no big deal.

They can always just flush away their mistakes, after all. Right? ■

YACK on.

Grant Sanders is the host of YACK, The Nantucket Online Community at yackon.com and he collected over 6,000 comic books as a child. His views are his alone and do not necessarily reflect the editorial stance of The Nantucket Independent. Or his wife.

Hey, you old dog!



Happy Birthday!

From the great, big Nantucket family
that knows and loves you.

You deserve the best, big Peat!