

SHELL SHOCKED

A Hometown Sanibel Hero Returns

By Art Stevens

The home town hero returned recently to the scene of his greatest achievement. It was just a few years ago that one of our local Sanibel geckos was chosen in a national talent contest to be the Geico gecko.

At the time he was an obscure, unknown gecko lolling around in the backyard of a Sanibel home. But when it became known that the world famous insurance company, Geico, was auditioning for a new international symbol of its car insurance policies, the word got out to geckos throughout the country.

Little Larry Gecko had no ambitions at the time. He was perfectly satisfied growing up in Sanibel and doing what all other geckos did: eat insects, frolic on the screens of pool cages and occasionally show up in your living room. Life for little Larry was serene and he was ready to take up his father's occupation – eating, sleeping and staying away from frogs.

But then word got out that Geico was auditioning for a gecko that would star in most of its television commercials. The thinking behind that decision was that geckos demonstrate what insurance policies reflect the most: reliability, quirkiness and confidence building. Geico turned the task of auditioning for geckos over to its ad agency.

Florida is well known for its geckos. They are small, friendly and indeed very bright. But not a single gecko had been found that actually talks. Until Larry.

Hundreds of geckos were auditioned from throughout Florida but none were able to speak any lines. Then one day, the ad agency people stopped off in Sanibel and looked at hundreds of geckos. None had the talent or on air style and personality that they believed they needed to persuade the Geico people that their idea of producing a talking gecko was feasible.

One evening the ad agency people stopped off at Doc Ford's and sat at the bar trying to figure out their next steps. They had a few drinks and at first thought that they were seeing things in their inebriated state. Sitting near them at the bar were a sea turtle, an egret and a gecko. Now nothing people see at Doc Ford's is in any way surprising. But the New York ad agency people didn't know that.

They heard voices from their right and when they turned to look they saw the sea turtle, egret and gecko carrying on a conversation. Apparently no one else at Doc Ford's that day paid any attention to this unlikely threesome. Stranger things have happened at Doc Ford's. But the ad agency people were blown away. The three creatures were having a conversation about Alex Rodriguez and how soon he would hit his 700th home run.

The ad people paid no attention to the sea turtle and egret but looked at the gecko with bulging eyes. They turned to little Larry and asked him if he had ever appeared in a

commercial. Larry said he hadn't and in fact had never thought about a career in show business. He lied, of course. The sea turtle and egret rolled their eyes.

The ad agency people asked Larry if he could put on a British accent and Larry did so. Later on Larry told the ad people that he had often sat on the window sill of the Sanibel home he was living at and watched PBS Masterpiece Theater episodes. He had said that his favorite actress was Judi Dench.

His British accent was so perfect that Larry was offered the job on the spot. He was told that the search for the new Geico gecko was over and he would become a major TV star and would be seen by millions of people.

The sea turtle and egret asked if there were any roles for them as well. The ad agency people paid no attention to them. They immediately placed a contract in front of Larry and asked him to sign it. Larry recognized the opportunity that was enfolding and decided that now was the time to make his dreams come true. He signed the contract with his tail. From the day he was hatched he believed he was destined to become a world famous gecko. The rest is history. Larry has been the reigning Geico gecko for some years now and has become almost as well known as Angelina Jolie.

Larry visited Sanibel recently and stopped off at his old hangout –Doc Ford's. He was welcomed as a home town hero and was even treated to free insects there. The Sanibel City Council gave him the key to the city and announced that a new holiday would take place in Sanibel each year – Geico Larry Day.

In fact, Larry had a reunion with his friends the sea turtle and egret for whom he managed to get major roles in upcoming Pixar animated movies. Larry never forgot his roots. He now provides Geico car insurance for all of Sanibel.
