

## **An Interview with an Alligator**

By Art Stevens

He preferred to lie on the floor rather than sit in a chair. He permitted me to interview him under the proviso that no photographs would be taken or the mask covering his face removed.

He was fearful that he would be recognized and his cover blown, but I assured him anonymity and confidentiality. Only then did my interview with the alligator begin.

He had approached me through an intermediary to tell his side of the story. He was representing the entire population of alligators on Sanibel-Captiva but feared retaliation from his fellow alligators for violating their code of silence. But he wished to share with us humans what life was really like for alligators because of what he felt to be inaccurate and slanderous articles on alligators in the Islander.

He was mostly calm during our conversation but occasionally nibbled on the legs of chairs during nervous outbursts. He had come to lay bare his soul and uphold the honor and dignity of alligators everywhere.

What follows is an Islander exclusive – an interview with an alligator.

Q. What prompted you to break the centuries' old code of silence among alligators and elect to talk to the media?

A. There has been so much distortion of what we alligators are like that I felt compelled to set the record straight. We have been portrayed as being violent, evil, ugly and vicious. The fact is that, contrary to how the Islander portrays alligators, we are a gentle, caring and loving species. We are forced to hide and remain secretive because your newspaper has maligned us.

Q. Why are you wearing a mask?

A. Again, contrary to what you humans think, all alligators do not look alike. While my brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles for that matter, have similar characteristics, each of us has a totally distinctive appearance. For example, it might surprise you to learn that I personally am considered one of the more attractive alligator males on the island. I am told I have a winning smile. I wear a mask to avoid the wrath of my people.

- Q. The biggest gripe we humans have against alligators is that you seem to appear from out of nowhere and startle us suddenly. Some of you have been known to turn up in our swimming pools? How do you respond to that?
- A. If you had a choice between lolling around in a swimming pool and trying to breathe in that disgusting swamp in Ding Darling, where would YOU go?
- Q. Let's try to debunk some of the myths about alligators. It is said that you can move as fast as forty miles an hour. Is that true?
- A. You'd move that fast too if you couldn't scratch that itch under your stomach.
- Q. What about your cavernous mouth, your menacing ways and your questionable diet?
- A. This is all part of the malicious alligator joke syndrome that has infected the humans of Sanibel. Believe me, I've seen some visitors down here with mouths just as big as ours. And speaking of diets, at least alligators don't eat tofu. And have you ever heard of alligators buying shoes and bags made out of humans? Talk about menacing. I saw my uncle recently on the feet of one your City Council members. I say it's time to stop the alligator jokes and focus humor where it really belongs – on your local officials.
- Q. Do you have any parting words for Islander readers?
- A. Yes. We alligators are anxious to improve our image among you humans. We're planning to conduct a peaceful demonstration on Periwinkle in the near future. Thousands of alligators will march peacefully carrying placards calling for an end to injustices to alligators. Our signs will say "Make love, not shoes."
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