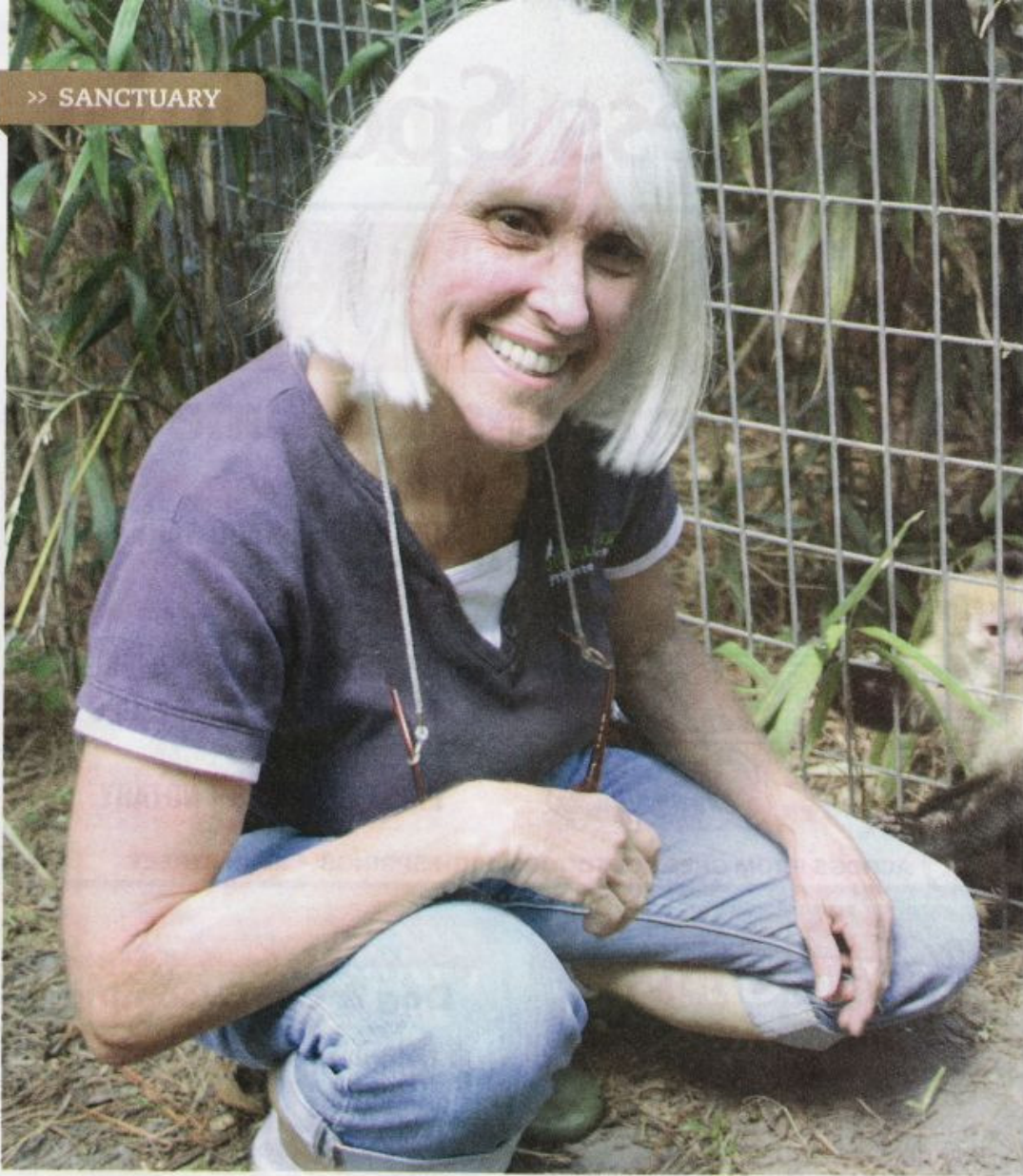


>> SANCTUARY



Monkey Tales

Kari Bagnall's Crusade to End
Keeping Primates as Pets



PHOTO BY TARA MESSAGEE-STANLEY

Kari Bagnall poses with just two white-throated capuchin monkeys. There are more than 100 monkeys at the sanctuary.

Originally from Las Vegas, Bagnall said her first experience with monkeys happened through an ex-boyfriend. She said he bought a female capuchin named Samantha, and then realized he could not handle her and wanted to get rid of her. Bagnall said she could not let that happen so she "got rid of the boyfriend and kept the monkey."

To provide what she thought would be the best home for Samantha, Bagnall said she submersed herself in "monkey culture." But no matter how hard she tried, she said she knew Samantha needed something more, a companion possibly.

"In my ignorance, I bought another monkey, Charlotte [Samantha's sister], and thought all was right for the world," she said.

But everything was not all right. She quickly learned that monkeys are very destructive and do not make good pets.

"They just shouldn't be pets," she said. "I don't care if you grow a tail and swing from trees, you are not a good companion for a monkey."

At the time, Bagnall was living in Las Vegas with her two monkeys. She heard that the breeder of her monkeys was having an auction to sell the rest, in particular the parents of Sam and Charlotte.

Bagnall said she attended the auction and was horrified when she saw the breeder steal a baby monkey from its mother so the baby could be sold.

"It was horrible," she said. "The baby screaming and the mother screaming, it was shocking to say the least."

After witnessing a baby being stolen from its mother, Bagnall said she decided to buy all of the breeder's monkeys, about six, and start advocating for them.

"I was a sanctuary before I knew I even was," Bagnall said.

Because the climate in Las Vegas was not good for monkeys, Bagnall started looking for other places to go. Her top choice was South or Central America because of their tropical climates, but then she thought about Florida.

While hurricanes were of concern, she figured if she could find a town in the middle of the state then hurricanes would probably not be a likely occurrence. Gainesville caught her eye, and it has been the home of Jungle Friends for about 12 years.

Situated on 12 acres, Jungle Friends is home to more than 100 monkeys — from marmosets to spider monkeys, from diabetic to cancerous monkeys, to Charlotte and Samantha.

All of the monkeys are kept in large enclosures with trees and other vegetation to simulate their natural habitat. All of the male monkeys have had vasectomies so no breeding occurs at the facility.

BY TARA MESSAGEE-STANLEY

On the outskirts of Gainesville is a place where the wounded and regretted come to call home. Many of them were stolen from their mothers and sold to owners who would keep them as pets until they did not want them anymore, while others were used as science experiments and would otherwise be dead without the care and compassion of one local woman.

Jungle Friends is a non-profit organization that was started by Kari Bagnall to provide a home for unwanted and over-worked monkeys who had no other place to go.



PHOTO BY TARA MASSAGEE-STANLEY

A brown capuchin is but one of 120 monkeys at the sanctuary.

Many of the monkeys Bagnall cares for were used either in experiments or given to her by their previous owners. Many were going to be euthanized.

"I get calls almost daily from people or labs," she said.

She said a lot of people give up their monkeys because they start biting.

One monkey that Bagnall had recently acquired is Chucky. She said his owners had had him for years and realized he needed more than just human interaction. They also realized Chucky would outlive them, so they decided to give him to Jungle Friends.

Many of the monkeys were used in experiments or abandoned by their previous owners.

When people drop off their monkeys to Jungle Friends, Bagnall said she asks them to stay for a few days and visit while the monkey becomes acclimated to its new environment. This way the "monkey knows this place is safe," she said.

"[For] a lot of people, it's like out of sight out of mind," she said. "Most people want them gone."

Volunteer and monkey donor Wilma Clevenger decided to not only visit her monkey but to permanently uproot herself from her home in Tennessee and move to Gainesville to be closer to him.

Clevenger donated her monkey, Jak, to the sanctuary after watching a documentary that included Jungle Friends. She thought he would be happier around his own species.

It "didn't matter how much I loved him, I knew he would never really be happy with me," she said. "He would prefer to be with other monkeys."

Now, as a volunteer, Clevenger is able to see Jak on a daily basis.

"I think Jungle Friends is one of the awesomest places on earth," she said.

One reason Jungle Friends has been able to keep its operation going is through volunteers such as Clevenger. Bagnall said there are volunteers from the University of Florida at the sanctuary about every weekend.

There are also interns who travel for hundreds of miles to be at the sanctuary. Bagnall said there are interns from Germany, Scotland and England.

The average cost to keep the Jungle Friends' doors open is \$25,000 per month, Bagnall said. The electric bill alone runs \$5,000 to \$7,000 a month and is sometimes more in the winter because of the extra

cost of running heat lamps to keep the monkeys warm.

"That's more than the food," she said.

If it were not for private donations, the sanctuary would not be able to continue. Bagnall said there are very few private foundations that grant money to fund monkey sanctuaries and she therefore relies heavily on outside sponsors and donors.

Luckily, about three or four years ago, Bagnall received a \$100,000 grant, enough to pay off the mortgage on the property and leave one less expense that she would have to worry about each month.

She said the donation came through a friend of her boyfriend's family. The friend sits on the board of directors for a foundation that usually only gifts money to the arts, and dog and cat rescues. But Bagnall said the friend "fell in love with a spider monkey" at the sanctuary and that was enough to award the sanctuary the grant.

Now that the mortgage is paid, Bagnall said she is looking to expand the sanctuary to take in even more monkeys. But, the problem with expansion is that it costs money. She already has \$20,000 to put toward the down payment on a piece of land adjacent to the sanctuary, a grant the sanctuary won from the Chase Community Giving Award. There were 500,000 charities in the running for the award and Jungle Friends placed in the top 200, she said.

It is going to take more than one grant or donation to buy the property because "the bare bones minimum" the sanctuary would need is \$250,000, she said. That would not only buy the property but also leave a little bit of money to build enclosures, install fencing and

buy food for the animals.

Another competition that Bagnall said she is hoping to win is the Pepsi Refresh grant. The competition took place in October, and will gift \$250,000 to a needy organization. The official word has not yet been given as to what organization won the competition.

In order to put an end to the buying and selling of monkeys as pets, Bagnall gives numerous presentations on why monkeys are wild animals and the reasons they

do not make good pets.

She said she does not bring monkeys to her presentations anymore because she realized she was setting a bad example.

"Because all they say is, 'I want a monkey,'" she said.

Jungle Friends is not open to the public and they do not have tours. But, if a person or group sponsors a monkey at the sanctuary, they are then allowed to plan a day to meet their sponsored monkey.

Because monkeys are still being bought and sold as pets, Bagnall said she is always looking for someone able to take her place in the future when she is no longer capable. But, she admitted, "It's not for everyone."

She said she feels this is her service and does not believe a person can be truly happy unless they are serving others.

"I didn't choose it," she said. "It chose me."

She said she also hopes legislation is passed that will put an end to the buying and



PHOTOS BY TARA MASSAGEE-STANLEY

selling of monkeys.

"I hope to be out of the monkey business" in the next 10 years, she said. ■

For more information, visit www.junglefriends.org.