

The Lizard King Book: Mike Van Nostrand Interview

Mike Van Nostrand discusses The Lizard King book.

By Stephanie Starr

REPTILES: What made you decide to participate in The Lizard King and to be interviewed by Bryan Christy about your past as a reptile smuggler?

Mike Van Nostrand: I have a big mouth. It has gotten me in trouble all my life (laughs). He seemed like a nice guy. Originally it was going to be an article about reptiles in Playboy magazine, and then it got elaborated.

R: What's your opinion of the book? Do you feel it was accurate? Do you feel you were portrayed fairly?

MVN: Yeah, he did a good job. I read the book, and I looked back and reminisced about the crazy times. I was young at the time — remember, I was 25 or 26 back then — and I was making a good living and having a lot of fun doing it. I don't mean the smuggling part, just doing business in general.

It was a very exciting time. Things were new and up-and-coming in the reptile business. Everything was selling. I was meeting new people and old in the business. It kind of takes hold of you. Things tend to get clouded, and you start doing things you shouldn't, laughing about doing it and then justifying it with any reason possible. But in the end it shouldn't have been done, and it has cost me a lot, not just money but stress and my freedom, as well.

R: What did you learn from all these experiences?

MVN: I learned to be more diplomatic in dealing with people and not just fly off the handle. I try to be a little more humble in life and not so, as Mark Bell would say, "abrasive."

The government can put a lot of pressure on you when they are after you, and it teaches you a whole new way of looking at things. You have to remember that when you are running a business, your actions affect the people working with you and also your family and friends. So, when doing things as I had done back then, I should have thought more carefully about the stress and difficulties I put on my family and employees. Those are the people who count on me for their livelihood.

For that reason, I now tend to think a lot before I act. Also, I learned a lot in prison from other inmates. I think I have changed for the better. I'm glad it was only for five months; I was lucky.

R: How has your life changed since the book came out?

MVN: It hasn't really changed. Maybe family and friends might come up to me and say something, but no one else really has. I hope everyone enjoyed the book.

One aspect that has changed is that I spend a lot more time with my kids. To me, in the end, that is really what matters: family. You could have the best business and all the money in the world, but if you don't have anyone to share your life with, then you're missing out.

R: If there was one thing you would like people to know about you, what would that be? Does it matter whether people like you?

MVN: People perceive me the way they perceive me. People either like me, or they don't. There doesn't seem to be any middle ground.

It doesn't matter to me if people don't like me. Usually once people get to know me personally, they grow to like me. The person at work is not the same as the person I am in my personal life.

R: What are your plans for the future?

MVN: Spend a lot of time with my kids.

[Brian Christy Interview>>](#)