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ACA NEWS



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State of the American Cichlid

Association: Getting Ready for 2027

The number 1 responsibility of the BOT is fiduciary! This is true of all nonprofit boards as the organization is considered a business.

This board has been relentless in laying down a solid foundation for the ACA. We are saving and storing all invoices, BOT minutes and votes, as well as creating SOPs for how committees and officers should operate. Whatever the outcome of the coming election, next year's BOT will be in a much better place to start 2027.

After one of my previous columns, someone commented on my endorsements of both Kapil Mandrekar and David Fraguglia in the upcoming election. There are a total of five (5) vacant seats to be filled in the election. I have found both Kapil and David to be easy to work with, cooperative, and fully committed to the betterment of the ACA. While I indeed appointed both of them, I first asked the BOT and other trusted ACA members who they thought would be a good choice. I was surprised when David was mentioned by everyone I spoke with regarding the first vacancy. Among other reasons mentioned, he also ran in the last election where we had more candidates than open seats. Kapil was also mentioned and again his name predominated when the 2nd seat became vacant. In addition, both David and Kapil received full support via the vote by the BOT to fill each vacancy. While I am absolutely certain that there are other great candidates deserving of a spot on the BOT, I also feel that both David and Kapil have earned the opportunity of a full term to really demonstrate what they can do for the ACA.

I think it is appropriate to comment on another issue that has plagued the ACA BOT this year. While this board has dealt with huge challenges with regard to the treasurer, a new website, new membership chair, loss of the CRC relationship and the lack of documentation, we have also come under intense scrutiny and public harassment by a small number of disgruntled people. You would think that the above issues would be enough for any organization to deal with. Actually, each of these issues were huge problems without having all of them at the same time. Sadly, despite the best efforts by this BOT to put the ACA first and to deal with each challenge as it deserved, several emotional and negative emails were sent to our membership. It is understandable that, upon receiving one of these emails, you might have been concerned and had questions. Please know that this BOT has accepted all of the challenges thrown our way. Nobody likes change and when so much occurs so quickly, it is bound to raise questions and increase scrutiny. What I would hope and request moving forward is that we can stop the personal attacks

and work together to make the ACA better. If you trust what you are seeing, that we have a new website, lower membership cost, and are creating documentation to build a better ACA for the future, support our efforts. Ask questions. Volunteer! The ACA needs hard working and positive people to see the future this BOT is working to build. If you have real questions and doubts, run for the BOT. Send in your nomination.

Sad News: I saw a longtime friend at the last ACA convention, Jim Herman. He was in good spirits and seemed fine. Sadly, he passed away shortly after the convention. He was truly a nice person who always had nice things to say about everyone. He seemed to be at every ACA convention I attended. Jim was a longtime member of the COAST club in Southern California, and an excellent speaker for tropical fish clubs. He will be missed.

We also recently lost the last remaining ACA founder in Richard (Dick) Stratton. He and Guy Jordan founded the ACA in 1965 in San Diego. They were quickly joined by Paul Loiselle. In those early days, the ACA functioned via the USPS by writing letters to each other, experts, and researchers. You can read more about Dick Stratton and the founding of the ACA in a reprint of an earlier Buntbarsche Bulletin article by Alan DeAngelo. Back issues of BB are available on our website in the members section of the website. In addition, it is my understanding that a tribute will be found in the upcoming Buntbarsche Bulletin. Dick was a tremendously nice person and had a huge passion for life, including a love of dogs, scuba diving and cichlids. I'm happy he lived a long and full life allowing him to see his creation grow into the strong, national and international organization that it is today.

We are pleased to announce that the ACA has funded 6 research grants. The names and details will be released in the next newsletter.

Remember to live for today. When is someday? It's not today. Today you can take immediate action to build a better ACA. Submit your nomination to run for the BOT today.

Remembering Dick Stratton

by Dr. Alan DeAngelo

I first met Dick Stratton through the pages of TFH Magazine. If you didn't know, he was the Mail Call Editor for years, providing help and explanations to budding aquarists everywhere. But it was his creation of the ACA that really brought him to

the forefront. In 2015, when the ACA was trying to get all of the early editions of BB together to be digitized, I contacted him for the first time. While I have a near complete of collection of all printed BB's, I did not have them all. Or so I thought.

While thinking of who might have a complete collection, Dick Stratton came to mind. I found him on FB and shot him a message. He responded quickly and enthusiastically. He told me that had given away his collection of BB's years ago.

Dick was now focusing on his dog books, he was an authority on the American Pit Bull Terrier and was a beloved member of that community. He wrote numerous books on those dogs as well as many books on cichlids and the aquarium hobby. A very prolific writer in all regards.

Texts flew back and forth for a while and we became friends. We found that we agreed on most things, even politics, and, of course, cichlids. In my texts to him, I would also send him a few jokes and off the wall memes and pictures. He enjoyed them. It seems that I was the only guy that showed him "goofy" stuff.

I kept him abreast of things going on with the ACA and he appreciated being back in the loop again. He also began to once again pay attention to the ACA and planned on meeting me at the Louisville Triple Crown Convention. He gave a talk at the Triple Crown and apparently got ahold of a few photos of me and roasted me. If anyone has a video of Richard's talk, please send it to me. I would cherish it.

If I have any final words to say about Richard Stratton, it would be that he made huge contributions to the aquarium hobby and to the world of cichlids in general. I counted him as a dear friend and will sorely miss him. Rest In Peace, Richard. We will meet again some day in the big fish room in the sky.

A Few Minutes with Dick Stratton

by Dr. Alan DeAngelo - reprinted from the Buntbarsche Bulletin

If you have been a member of the ACA over the last few years, you have probably read *Adventures in Cichlidom*, a series of articles I wrote chronicling my early endeavors and forays into the cichlid world. You learned that it was all Mom's fault. She always kept a few fancy goldfish in a one-gallon bowl and my fascination took off from there. I bought my first tank at age six and, as they say, it was all downhill from there.

But what about other ACA members? How did they begin in the hobby? Why did they stay in it and what were their experiences? Let's find out.

Richard Stratton may not be familiar to some of you new members but to guys like me, as I celebrate my 53rd year in the ACA, his name is permanently etched into my brain. After I stepped down from being the ACA Chair, Richard and I began to correspond a bit and I have enjoyed his emails ever since. Even though I have been an ACA'er for a long time, we never met in person until Richard attended the Triple Crown Convention in Louisville, KY. We have now become "Buntbarsche Buddies" as they used to say. So, let's spend a few minutes with a fishguy that I'm proud to call my friend, Richard Stratton, and get you introduced, too.

AD: Richard, you have been a mainstay in the aquarium hobby for quite a few years, to say the least. How did you get started in the hobby and what was the spark that lit the fire? Just how involved did you get?

RS: I was recruited into the hobby by a community tank in my neighbor's house. It was beautiful, and I had just moved to San Diego and had fallen in love with the ocean and taken up scuba diving. I started learning a little about the fish in the ocean. The community tank was only 17 gallons, but those were big tanks in those days. It was a high tank with a burping clam shell that emphasized the depth of the tank. My neighbor was delighted that I took an interest, and I started learning about the fish in the tank, too. This was 1959, and I turned 28 later that year, so I was something of a latecomer to the hobby.

I soon had a tank of my own, and I joined the San Diego Tropical Fish Society, and I was highly active in it, eager to learn. Before long, I was president of the organization. It was a great club that still exists, and it had a wonderful library with some books and various publications, and I devoured them all. In those days, there were three magazines, but there weren't many books. I soon got my own copy of the Innes book, and I still consider that one of the great aquarium books of all time. The club has managed to stay active all these years, through thick and thin.

AD: In your heyday, how many aquaria did you have? And what type of cichlids did you keep? I know, from reading your recent article in *Cichlid News*, that you kept one of the first *Parachromis dovii* in the country. It sounds like you were on the cutting-edge of cichlid keeping at that time.

RS: A guy that helped me out a lot was Bill Bussing, and his student Paul Loiselle also was of great help to me, as I was getting so excited about cichlids that I wanted to be an ichthyologist, but I couldn't change careers at that stage of the game. (I'd just been made a vice principal.)

My fish room was my garage. My wife wrote a poem for the local club's magazine about how two cars stayed outside to rust so that I could have my fish room. I'm not sure how many tanks I had, but they were nearly all 50-gallon size. A lot of them

were wooden ones that I'd made myself, using fiberglass resin to waterproof the aquarium. I did eventually put together a 250-gallon tank, but it was too late to try to keep my *dovii*. I was diving buddies with Dave Powell, the Curator of Fishes at Sea World at the time, and he eventually got my specimen. I had gotten three of them from Bussing, and all three turned out to be males. I had given one to Guy Jordan, and he made him famous as his pet fish. (AD: Pablo, Guy Jordan's *P. dovii*, was featured in an early issue of *BB*. Read *BB* 40 to learn who Pablo was named after.) I was interested in the species that Bussing introduced via Gene Wolfsheimer from Costa Rica, (AD: see *BB* 313 to learn more about Gene Wolfsheimer.) as it was very exciting to get new species in the hobby.

Guy Jordan had a vast correspondence, and he had his finger on the pulse of what was happening across the country, but he never kept any of the cichlids from the Great Lakes of Africa. I got Loiselle's *Melanochromis auratus* when he left for Africa – and they were the ultimate in exotic species at that time. I kept some of the Malawi cichlids, I tended to prefer the ones from Lake Tanganyika, but I did like the ones from Malawi. You weren't at my talk when I mentioned that Herb Axelrod told me that Lake Malawi was his favorite diving area, and he had been all over the world.

I kept nearly everything, including small cichlids, too, but I tended to focus on Central America and Lake Tanganyika.

AD: How did the ACA begin? Were you and a couple of guys sitting around eating pizza one night and say "Hey, let's start an organization devoted to cichlids?" Who were those first members planning things out?

RS: I'm not sure, but I believe that the beginning of the ACA was in 1965. So, I was a good six years into the hobby, and I had learned a lot because of my eagerness to read and talk about aquarium fishes. By this time, I had gotten to know Guy Jordan, as members pointed me toward him as a cichlid maven. I'll never forget the first time I saw his 50-gallon tank. It was dramatic for me because tanks that size were nearly non-existent in that time. That was because of the quality of the sealant of those days. You can't believe how bad it was when compared with modern tanks! We were always worried about leaks, and a large tank like Guy's was a real challenge for the sealant. Second, it had fishes in it I had never seen before. He had a Chocolate Cichlid the size of an Oscar, as well as Dempseys, Jewels, Firemouths, and several convicts (then called congos), not to mention several Juruparis and a pleco. The tank was definitely overcrowded, but Guy made daily partial water changes. That was unthinkable in those days, as old aquarium water was highly valued. (That was because of the nitrogen cycle and the buildup of beneficial bacteria, but we didn't know about it in those ignorant days.)

Guy and I became good friends, and I talked with him almost daily. Guy was legally blind, but he'd made it through college, and he performed several instruments in a commercial band. He was quite a source of information, as he corresponded with fish people across the country, including with at least one of the editors of a fish magazine. In the meantime, I had begun a correspondence of my own with some of the scientists who were studying cichlids. I had a steady correspondence with Al Klee, one of the stalwarts in the aquarium hobby, a prolific writer, and co-founder of the American Killifish Association. It turned out that he was very much a cichlid man, too, and we were always researching something together, and we co-wrote a few articles.

Killies were not seen much in aquaria, but their devotees tended to be quite scholarly people, and the AKA is still one of the premier organizations in the hobby. Little did I ever believe that I would found an organization that would challenge its supremacy! However, one of the AKA people was Colonel Jorgen Scheel, a man who made trips to Africa to collect Killies, and he wrote numerous articles about them, as well as a book. He had instituted a very prestigious newsletter that went only to the most scholarly of Killie fanciers, including scientists. Al Klee had told me that he was going to start the same thing regarding cichlids, and that excited me greatly!

Unfortunately, he decided to start his own aquarium publication when *Aquarium Journal* folded. It was unfortunate to me because it meant that he wouldn't be doing the cichlid thing. That got me to think desperate things, like starting a cichlid club of some sort. One of the reasons for such a club was to get different cichlids. New species tended to arrive, and people would breed them to where they were a glut on the market – and then, they disappeared from the scene.

In any case, I wrote to several scientists, asking for six self-addressed envelopes. That's all that the dues were. I also got Helen Simkatis to put a notice in *The Aquarium* magazine. Surprisingly, I got enough that it was quite a chore to stuff all the envelopes when I put together a newsletter. My young wife used to help me stuff them after our children were in bed. There were local hobbyists, too, that got the letter, but they had to come to my house to get it. One of the exceptions was Guy. Because of his eyesight, he didn't drive, so I always took one up to him. Initially, that's all he did, but he was later to take over the whole shebang.

AD: After Guy Jordan took over the ACA duties, you must've had a lot of free time on your hands. Did you get more involved in the organized hobby or did you spend your time elsewhere? People may not know that you are an authority on Pit Bulls and have written several books on them. You have also written a book on cichlids. How did all of this come about?

RS: Actually, I got Guy to take over the ACA when I was made a principal in a large school, and that meant I'd be spending longer hours on site, and I wasn't sure how much free time I would have. A strange series of events led to my writing a book about Pit Bulls, which were but little known at the time of the publication of my book. I knew about Pit Bulls because when my father worked for the Border Patrol way back in the early '40s and we lived in Ajo, Arizona. I should mention that the Border Patrol had considerable prestige in that time. The chief was a legendary character named Carson Marrow. He'd been a sheriff before he took command of the Border Patrol of Wyatt Earp-like fame; hence, his fame. Chicken fighting was legal in many states then, and he had a stable of those and a few Pit Bulls. I don't know if he matched them, but he certainly knew about them. My first love was Collies from reading the Albert Payson Terhune books, in which the Collies were heroic animals and supreme fighters. When my Collie was set upon several times by a local bully German Shepherd, the chief lent me a small brindle Pit Bull that was less than half the size of the bully dog. (No, he didn't kill the bully when he jumped him, but he cured him of his bullying ways.) That got me interested in that breed peripherally, but my first love was still Collies because I had read those Terhune books so much that I wanted to be a Collie when I grew up!

I eventually owned some Pit Bulls, and I learned something about the breed. There was so little information about it, and there hadn't been a book published featuring it since 1947, so I submitted a couple of chapters to Axelrod in 1975. He called me at home about it, and that was back in the days when serious aquarium hobbyists didn't care for him, but his magazines and books were nonetheless successful, and he was fairly well known, having appeared on *What's My Line* on television and having an article done on him by several magazines, including *Sports Illustrated*.

Anyway, my book was published, and it eventually began outselling all the other books, so that led to others. Sadly, I think they led to popularizing the breed globally, and I had never intended that, as I always thought the dogs should go only to responsible owners because of their danger to other animals, not to people, and their appeal is too often to the other kind. Anyway, it led to a worldwide fame for me among owners of that breed. Because of that, my Facebook page looks like a kennel. I'm human enough to like that people like my books, but I'm still a cichlid man. And it sometimes is an embarrassment to me that the cichlid people see all of that.

I write things almost automatically because my enthusiasm sort of spills over. Hence, I wrote a few cichlid books for TFH. They were small books, though, as my knowledge and experience never equaled that of Dr Paul V. Loiselle, Dr Wayne

Leibel, Ad Koning's, or Rusty Wessel. But I got to be close friends with Professor George W. Barlow. I would consider him the ultimate authority, so I learned a lot from him, and it was a cruel blow to hear from his daughter Bicka about his sudden and untimely death, just four days before we were to meet at an ACA Convention.

I'm sure I've left out people that know a lot more about cichlids than me, and I can't think of them all, but I would be loath to neglect Juan Miguel Artigas Azas. He came later, but he is most assuredly a wunderkind, and he's been all over the world studying cichlids.

AD: Wow, you were very involved with TFH and the publishing world. What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishments both aquaristically and in the realm of cichlids specifically?

RS: Well, that one's easy because it would be founding the ACA. It was just supposed to be a little correspondence club, as I never dreamed that it could rival the American Killifish Association. All I did was to start sending out the letters. It really grew under Guy's stewardship, but there have been many people that helped it grow and to stay intact. I remember Ross Socolof commenting to me once how amazing it was that people that were already renowned in their professions put in so much work for the club. Except for chairing the Jordan Fund, I never did any work after the first year or so. There were so many stalwarts in the organization – too many to name – but Paul Loiselle has been a constant in support of the group. Bob Goldstein wrote the first American-based book on the family, and he named me as the one who started the organization, as he had quoted from one of the *Buntbarsche Bulletins* (maybe before that's what they were called.). I remember he had attended one of the conventions, and he was surprised I wasn't there. I have attended very few, but I always enjoyed them. Interestingly, Guy never attended a single one, but he kept in contact with nearly everyone in the hobby by writing and by tapesponding. I like everything the organization has become, and I can't help being a little proud about having something to do with its existence.

AD: The title of the interview is "A Few Minutes With ..." so as we come to a close, are there any parting thoughts that you would like to convey to our readers?

RS: At my age, we tend to look back on our lives with certain regrets. I have very few, but I think that cichlids were great teachers for me, as they led me to other things in biology – including keeping marine tanks. Part of that was from my scuba experiences, but nearly all the close relatives of cichlids are marine fish species, from the surf perch off the coast of Southern California to pomacentrids and wrasses. Coral fishes are quite beautiful and are interesting in their own way – but nothing tops cichlids! Except for the cotton tail, *Acanthochromis polyacanthus*, no marine

fish cares for its young like cichlids, although there are some mouthbrooding species.

I wish I had done more with cichlids. I was invited on several of Ross Socolof's famous exploratory and collecting trips. (He knew Central America like the back of his hand and of freshwater areas that were as clear as the best coral locales that abounded in cichlids.) I also missed trips to the Great Lakes of Africa. I did go to the Yucatan and Costa Rica several times, in which I was able to view cichlids in the wild, but it wasn't the same where I had fellow enthusiasts to snorkel or even scuba dive with. Instead of doing that, I made ocean scuba trips all over the world, and the reason was that I could take my wife with me, as they were tourist trips with certain luxuries that she could appreciate.

I also wish now that I had built the large fish house that I contemplated. I was worried about my long-term health, but that was over 30 years ago, and I'm still feeling good enough to take care of such a facility – especially if I had put in a central filter and automatic water changers!

But I kept my share of cichlids, and I got a lot out of them, including the association of the good people that study and keep them, from hobbyists to scientists. As old as I am, I'm still capable of learning and wonder – and cichlids never disappoint.

AD: And there you have it, a few minutes with Richard Stratton, Founder of the ACA and so much more. Richard, as always, it has been a pleasure.



July 21-25, 2027

Mark your calendars now for July of 2027 in Milwaukee, WI!

Preparations for The Great Lakes Fish Convention (ACA, AGA & ALA's combined convention) are well underway. Andy Hudson has things incredibly well organized. The website will go live to take registrations on Oct. 1, 2026. We will be sending out an announcement with the URL at that time. There are a variety of activities, 11 talks and killer swag to commemorate the event. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in a "Poker Run" game. Each participant will get to choose a playing card when they attend a talk. At the banquet the person with the best hand will win a prize. The poker decks are going to be a "must have" memento for the event and will be available for sale on the website. The t-shirt comes in two colors this year - smoke grey and teal. The teal shirts are more fitted so order a size up if you want a looser fit. Teal shirts will only be available for pre-orders and will not be sold at the convention.

All of the speakers have been selected and include: Gary Bagnall, Johnaton Butkus, Charles Clapsaddle, Chantz Cramer, Peter George, Rebecca Goldring, Gerald Griffin, Michael Köck, Lee Newman, Michael Pauers and the ALA Grad Student Poster Sessions.

There is a fun-filled schedule coming together including:

- the above mentioned biotope aquascaping contest (hosted by the AGA)
- an IBC betta show
- the ACA cichlid show
- the ALA livebearers show
- the KICK room for the kids
- a bowling & pizza party
- a collecting trip and barbecue
- a tour of the Miller Brewery
- a tour of Lambeaue Field & Advanced Aquarium Systems

(A really nice video about the store can be found here: https://youtu.be/TgcOOtJuWDw?si=0hn_JlHyEdvLDPt3)

- a Saturday swap meet
- the Saturday night banquet
- the ACA Friday night auction
- the hospitality room
- and, back by popular demand, the Sunday auction!



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for their support of the convention.





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