

In Honor of Peter C.H. Pritchard

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TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, E-mail: RhodinCRF@aol.com.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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In Honor of Peter C.H. Pritchard¹

ANDERS G.J. RHODIN

From the beginning, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.

From Britain to America, from the cold to the warmth,
you left your home country for Florida's shores,
the first book you published, *Living Turtles of the World*,
promoted your knowledge—your passions unfurled.

Sharing your knowledge with students and colleagues
among them, myself, inspired by your guidance,
mentored and guided by a colleague, a friend,
the diversity of turtles I began to comprehend.

From your home in Oviedo, your work flourished widely,
the *Encyclopedia of Turtles*, and saving Kemp's Ridley,
writing and traveling, popularizing and promoting—
Alligator Snappers, Leatherbacks, Galápagos tortoises—
and Rafetus softshells, their tragic decline describing.

Your museum and *Chelonian Research Institute* created,
and named Florida's Man of the Year, honor abounded,
then the Behler Award, further lauded in your sphere,
in resounding acclamation by your chelonian peers.

But the passage of time unfolds, unrelenting, unforgiving,
impacting our age, and our years ever mounting;
but time is our friend, not our foe—
each day is a gift, not a woe—
may our time and days continue to grow.

Now, as always, the images flow,
of your passion for turtles, your desire to know,
delving and digging, defining, discovering,
describing the details—and turtles promoting.

Thank you, Peter—Mr. Turtle—my friend,
for all you have done and all you have been—
a mentor, a colleague, a guide—
and always—a friend.

Editorial Comment. — I wrote this poem to honor my longtime friend and close colleague, Peter Pritchard, on the occasion of the Special Session dedicated to him and his Chelonian Research Institute organized by Chuck Schaffer and Rick Hudson at the 14th Annual TSA/TFTSG Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles in New Orleans, Louisiana, on 2 August 2016. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the session to read the poem myself, as I was temporarily hospitalized by a serious medical event that occurred the day before—reminding myself and all of us how fragile life and health can be, and how important it is to fully value every day and the opportunities each of us have to pursue our dreams and aspirations and to continually strive to make a difference and to leave a mark on the world around us. Peter devoted his life to turtles and their conservation, and I always looked up to him as a role model and mentor. My trip with him to the Galápagos in 1982 (especially our visit to Pinzón to see *Chelonoidis duncanensis* in the wild) inspired me to gradually shift from my earlier focus on turtle taxonomy to becoming increasingly focused on matters of turtle conservation. I owe him a huge debt of gratitude for inspiring me, as he has also inspired countless others. For myself and many others, he was always “Mr. Turtle” — the acknowledged leading turtle authority and role model we aspired to emulate. I would like to think this poem captures some of that sentiment and that it honors his life and accomplishments in some small but meaningful way.

¹ Composed 24 July 2016.

Read by our close mutual friend Russell A. Mittermeier on my behalf at the Special Session honoring Peter Pritchard at the 14th Annual TSA/TFTSG Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, 2 August 2016.