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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



TO RUDLOE EVEN A TOADFISH HAS CHARM

Jack Rudloe, 38, who writes of the plight of sea turtles in Florida in this issue (page 60), began his career as a naturalist at the age of five, catching turtles in a muddy pond in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Later the family moved to Florida's panhandle, "to get me into some wild areas," as Rudloe puts it. He was 15 by then, and soon was starring in high school science fairs with projects on sensitive plants—species that exhibit animal-like movements. At 18 he wrote an article on the phenomenon, his first to be printed, which appeared in Scientific American.

Today, 20 years and four books later, Rudloe and his wife, Anne, 33, a marine biologist who took most of the photographs accompanying this week's story, run the Gulf Specimen Co., Inc. Rudloe started the highly respected firm in 1964 in Panacea, Fla., to collect what were then commercially unprofitable forms of marine life for sale to aquariums, colleges and scientists. Their sea squirts and sand dollars are currently much in demand for cancer research, but the biggest sellers are sea urchins, used in embryology. Rudloe is certain that some of his urchins have been sent to outer space, even to the moon, "to see what impact weightlessness and radiation have on cell division."

"At 18 I wanted to be a scientist," Rudloe recalls, "but I never learned

how to take tests." He quit Florida State in disgust after only three months and spent the next year selling horseshoe and fiddler crabs to college science labs in Florida from the trunk of his car. Gulf Specimen was, as he puts it, "a box of stationery then." By 1967 he had created a national market for a wide variety of living specimens, and he had it pretty much to himself, being the only man around with the hang of shipping such items as live octopuses. In 1968 he published his first book, The Sea Brings Forth, an autobiography, and in 1971 he wrote a second, The Erotic Ocean, a Handbook for Beachcombers. "With a title like that," he says, "you don't need the book." It sold some 20,000 copies, still his best sales figure.

In 1973, Rudloe married Anne, the demand for his catches was increasing, and he should have been content, but bulldozers had begun pumping silt onto the tidal flats near their home in Panacea, killing sea life, and the state was trying to revoke his license to collect specimens, challenging his "fitness." It seems Rudloe had demonstrated a lack of it by calling attention to the destruction of Florida's wetlands. But as developments proliferated, he says, "They were so embarrassed that they turned around and commended me publically for protecting the environment."

Rudloe has published two more books, The Living Dock at Panacea and Time of the Turtle, and is at work on another, dealing with shrimping and marijuana smuggling. Among his articles have been three for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED. He and Anne have also created the Panacea Institute, a taxexempt foundation for teaching children about marine life, which has the use of 15 acres of cypress swamp owned by Rudloe. "I always wanted a swamp of my own," Rudloe says. Anne is director of the institute. The Rudloes' first child, a son, was born last August. Raising their eyes from the milieu they normally contemplate, they named him Sky.

They D. Howlest