



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V.'s "The Chances of the World Changing" Asks What It Costs One Man to Save Endangered Species, Tuesday, July 17 on PBS

How Richard Ogust Ended Up With 1,200 Turtles in a Manhattan Apartment
Is Only the Beginning of a Story That Brings Man — and Turtles —
To Perilous Edge

"With poetic, luminous images, 'Chances' is not just about turtles . . . it's a meditation on time, mortality..." — Maclean's

The story seen in the national press went like this: A decade earlier, a writer eating in a Chinese restaurant in Manhattan spotted a diamondback terrapin turtle in a tank, about to be chopped up for soup. The horrified writer, Richard Ogust, stopped the execution, bought the turtle for 20 bucks and installed her in a tank at home, naming her "The Empress." And that started him on a quest to save the world's endangered turtles, to which he devoted ever more of his time and resources. When the national and international media found him, Ogust was portrayed as a somewhat eccentric figure sharing a Manhattan penthouse with 1,200 turtles, including several species extinct in the wild. It became an "only in New York" moment in the entertainment firmament.

But the new documentary **The Chances of the World Changing** dives well beneath the media's quirky account, revealing a complex story that remained largely untold. In fact, the filmmakers discovered that the writer-turned-conservationist's journey was just beginning.

Eric Daniel Metzgar and Nell Carden Grey's **The Chances of the World Changing** premieres on **Tuesday, July 17, 2007** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 20th anniversary season of public television's groundbreaking P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

How could Ogust continue to devote his life to such an all-consuming project? What were the rewards — and costs — of maintaining his "ark"? What motivates such a latter-day Noah in the first place? The man the filmmakers found was different from the one portrayed in the press.

Dedicated to a cause most would applaud but few would choose to share, Ogust may have fit someone's definition of an eccentric. But his work was anything but quirky; he was deeply engaged in the serious and grueling labor of modern

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conservation. The evidence of the ongoing slaughter of millions of endangered turtles for unregulated Asian food markets had led him to acquire the largest genetic population of several of the world's most critically endangered species.

Though often eclipsed by more prominent endangered species in the public's eye, turtles are considered "keystone species," whose steep worldwide population decline heralds greater environmental dangers. Responding to this extraordinary crisis with extraordinary commitment, Ogust had joined the ranks of those other driven conservationists who are creating "assurance colonies" of species disappearing in the wild. But even as his collection was achieving prominence in conservation and herpetology circles, Ogust was reaching the point where he could no longer care for such a large group of animals himself. He decided to help create the country's largest nonprofit institute focused on the breeding and safeguarding of freshwater turtles and tortoises, in the hopes of broadening the public awareness of the crisis.

While trying to get the institute up and running, a series of setbacks threaten the viability of Ogust's project. He is forced out of his New York apartment, and the promise of land where the institute was to be built is revoked.

His efforts find him living in a tent beside the New Jersey warehouse where he is temporarily housing his creatures as he searches for a permanent home. One land deal after another falls through, and Ogust visibly suffers the stresses of rejection and abandonment. Like other visionaries who have rushed into the breach of a social or environmental emergency, Ogust finds applause easier to come by than financial and material support.

Ogust had hoped to preserve his turtles as a collection, a unique resource for scientists and conservationists, but after his plans for the institute suffered such serious setbacks, it became apparent that he could no longer care for the animals single-handedly. In an unfortunate denouement, Ogust decides he must break up the collection to save the turtles. His painstakingly assembled menagerie is given away to interested preservationists on the East Coast and in the Midwest, with whom Ogust's work will no doubt continue to bear fruit. But it's a dispiriting outcome for such a fine, bold effort.

The Chances of the World Changing is a haunting, visually poetic two-year account of Ogust's attempts to save his turtles and restore his own material and emotional stability. The film begins with a passionate man who has exhausted himself as well as his financial resources, whose former career as a writer resides in the limbo of a storage bin, and whose personal life is almost nonexistent. It ends with Ogust trying to understand his decade-and-a-half experience of an alternative existence as he tries to reconnect with his pre-turtle existence. He is left unable to shake the chilling sense of animal species silently slipping into oblivion, and all that goes with them, nor the sheer physical presence and beauty of the animals that had once shared his every hour.

"A film about extinction is really a study of its opposing force: survival," says director Metzgar of the two years he and co-producer Nell Carden Grey spent with Ogust. "When one is fraught with immeasurable responsibility, an excess of strength, not gloom, powers the day. And that strength, again and again, in the face of all obstacles, is what we filmed. Each day hovered on the next, and from an urgent story emerged a grand narrative."

The Chances of the World Changing is a co-production of Merigold Moving Pictures, LLC and Pigeon Post Pictures LLC.

About the filmmakers:

Eric Daniel Metzger Director/Co-producer

Eric Daniel Metzgar owns and operates Merigold Moving Pictures, LLC, a film production company based in Brooklyn, N.Y. **The Chances of the World Changing** is his first documentary feature film.

He is currently producing two new projects while continuing his freelance work as a cinematographer and writer.

Nell Carden Grey

Co-producer

Nell Carden Grey works under the banner of Pigeon Post Pictures LLC. She produced and shot additional photography for **The Chances of the World Changing**. She is now working on a series of video art installations. She lives in Seattle.

Credits:

Director/Co-producer: Eric Daniel Metzgar
Co-producer: Nell Carden Grey
Cinematographer/Editor: Eric Daniel Metzgar
Original Music: Eric Liebman
Featuring the song "Live Old" by Faun Fables

Running Time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- BENDFILM, 2006 – *Best Cinematography and Conservation Award*
- Maine International Film Festival, 2006 – *Joan Phillips-Sandy Award*
- International Wildlife Film Festival, 2006 – *Merit Awards for Story and Dedication to a Cause*
- Independent Spirit Awards, 2007 – Nominee, *Axiom Truer Than Fiction Award*
- SXSW Film Festival, 2007, Austin
- Adelaide Film Festival, 2007, Adelaide, Australia
- Wild & Scenic Film Festival, 2007
- Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, 2006, Toronto
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, 2006, Durham, N.C.
- Seattle International Film Festival, 2006
- San Francisco Documentary Festival, 2006
- Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 2006, United Kingdom
- Museum of Television and Radio DocFest, 2006, New York
- Margaret Meade Film & Video Festival, 2006, New York
- True/False Film Festival, 2006, Columbia, Mo.
- Nantucket Film Festival, 2006
- Atlanta Film Festival, 2006
- DOCNZ, International Documentary Film Festival New Zealand, 2006
- American Conservation Film Festival, 2006
- Bioneers Moving Image Festival, 2006
- Planet Focus International Environmental Film & Video Festival, 2006
- Global Peace Film Festival, 2006



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 20th season on PBS in 2007, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses *Talking Back*, where viewers can comment on P.O.V. programs, engage in dialogue and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site and P.O.V. archives, including special sites from previous broadcasts, form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these original materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences. P.O.V. works closely with local PBS stations to partner with museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* expands these efforts by working with youth-service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.