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Raven Hill Discovery Center, incorporated in 1991,
is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.

Open year-round on weekends – noon to 4pm Saturdays and 2pm to 4pm Sundays.
Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, hours expand to include weekdays from
10am to 4pm. The Center is also open other times, including holidays, by appointment.

MISSION: to provide a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong
learning for all ages by connecting science, history and the arts.

WHERE SCIENCE HISTORY AND ART CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends

From: Cheri

Date: October 21, 2023

Re: Chihuahuas and Great Danes

The animals are always a favorite part of Raven Hill. It is one of the first things that people want to see. We begin our talk about the animals that reside at Raven Hill by telling visitors that all our animals are orphans. They are animals that people buy and then don't want anymore. The animals get to be too big, messy, expensive to feed or mainly, no one wants to take care of them anymore. So, they come to live here. We do not keep any Michigan animals. It is against the law to keep native Michigan animals in captivity as pets. Most states and countries protect their animals now. The animals in pet stores are captive bred from the descendants of animals brought to this country before there were any laws against bringing them here.

We also do not have any venomous snakes. I would not want to hold one nor would I want anyone to hold one **and** there is no such thing as a poisonous snake. Snakes are venomous, not poisonous. You can hold a rattlesnake and it doesn't give you a "poison ivy, itchy rash." You can eat rattlesnake meat, if it is fresh, and it does not give you food poisoning, but don't let that rattlesnake bite you and inject venom with its fangs.

Finally, we talk about the size of animals. Just as dogs come in different sizes, so do other animals. According to Wikipedia, "a Great Dane is one of the largest dog breeds. Originating in Germany, the Great Dane is descended from hunting dogs used in the Middle Ages to hunt bear, wild boar, and deer...A Chihuahua is a

breed of dog from the Mexican state of Chihuahua and is among the smallest of all dog breeds. They are usually kept as companion or show animals."



Terra the box turtle on the right side of the photo is over 26 years old, while Sheldon the African sulcata tortoise on the left is only 7 years old. It's like comparing Chihuahuas and Great Danes!

Raven Hill's turtles are an example of this "Great Dane" – "Chihuahua" phenomenon. Our largest turtles are the youngest and the smallest one is the oldest! The two largest are both less than ten years old and could live to be one hundred. They are African spurred tortoises and are the third largest tortoise in the world growing to about three foot long. People buy them as hatchlings when they are only about two inches in diameter. At that size, they look cute in an aquarium habitat, but by two years old, they are no longer cute, and no one wants them anymore. Sometimes, Raven Hill is home to 4 or 5 spurred tortoises. At the other end of the scale, the smallest turtle is our oldest. Terra is a box turtle and is over a quarter of a century old.

Pythons also come on different sizes. Leroy, our oldest snake is a royal python and has been with us for over 27 years. Buddha, a reticulated python, lived here from 1994 to 2003. It died when it was 11 years old. Its 20-foot-long skin hangs on the wall, along with a 22-foot anaconda skin, also only half grown. The reticulated python is the largest of the pythons and could have grown to be about forty-four foot long. Pythons and boa constrictors are the most primitive of our snakes. They appeared as the dinosaurs became extinct and are different from other snakes in that they still have a hip bone and their hind legs, each with a single claw at the end. Their legs are kept tucked up under their skin, much as you would pull a sweatshirt down over your legs to keep them warm. The legs and claws are only used in the breeding process, although I remember Buddha using them at various times for traction on the smooth wooden floors here at Raven Hill.



Think about the size and age difference between Leroy hanging out around this young man's neck and Buddha's skin—the bottom one of the three hanging on the wall. Here's another great example of a "Chihuahua" python and a "Great Dane" python!



Above is a close-up photo of Leroy and friend with Buddha's skin hanging on the wall above them!

We only have one size of bearded dragon, but in their native Australia, there are some species that are over five foot long and others that are only about 4 or 5 inches long. The bearded dragons you see in pet stores are mostly medium sized and are the great, great, great grandchildren of bearded dragons brought back years ago. Either the larger and smaller ones were not brought back, or no one successfully bred them and sold them to the pet stores.

Come see our "Chihuahua" – "Great Dane" menagerie for yourself one of these days. You can choose to hold a few of the animals or just look at them! If you would like to help feed the turtles, bring kale, lettuce, broccoli, corn on the cob or apples to share with them. If you want to see a snake eat, bring a live mouse from the pet store, but call 231.536.3369 first to set a date and time. *Cheri*



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