

## I'M GUMBY, DAMMIT

Gumby is back, he's in Lane County and he's green. The clay animation character was always green in color, but after more than a decade of quiet living outside Cottage Grove, Gumby's only authorized impersonator — Michael West when he's not in his Gumby suit — wants to bring Gumby back out and embrace the environmental movement.

West, who published a book of tales of his 10 years in a Gumby suit, *I'm Gumby, Dammit!* on Amazon.com this July, says he has visions of a cross-country trip in his Gumby persona via convertible, preferably an eco-friendly car to bring Gumby's green message to the nation if he can find sponsorship and a green group to work with.

Why a convertible? West says the Gumby suit can get rather uncomfortably warm. On a recent trip to *EW*'s offices on a 90-degree day, West was so warm in his blocky Gumby attire, he chose to mime rather than speak. He returned later, in his human clothes, for an interview.

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- Michael West

West says the idea to "become" Gumby originally came to him while he was in a tree, as a mime. He created the costume and hit the streets of Los Angeles, thinking, "Well if they sue me, they sue me." Later he met Art Clokey, Gumby and Pokey's creator, and rather than sue, Clokey gave him a 10-year international license to be Gumby. They met at a Gumby exhibit at a library, and West says Clokey later told him that when they met, Clokey saw a greenish glow around West, even though he was not in his Gumby suit at the time.

Clokey was himself environmentally sensitive. According to Gumbyworld.com, "The Fantastic Farmer" episode from 1956 portrayed chemicals getting out of control on a farm, and Clokey himself ate natural and organic foods long before it was popular.

West says his time in the 1980s and early '90s as Gumby was filled with exploits from being kidnapped to playing practical jokes, and that Clokey appreciated the way West's Gumby persona drew attention back to the '50s-era icon. West says he inspired Eddie Murphy's popular *Saturday Night Live* take on Gumby, and West thinks he's ready to take the Gumby suit out of retirement — though this time maybe with some fans and ice packs installed. He says of his years as Gumby: "If I came to a door, I went through it. You just feel alive. You feel like the suit is you."

Gumby appeals to everyone, West says, pointing out that that even the Marines have taken on "Semper Gumby" (always flexible) as a play on Semper Fidelis (always faithful), the Marine motto. He says in the Gumby suit "you can accomplish more with people; people are disarmed, like a child."

West can be contacted at pitchpenny@aol.com for more information on *I'm Gumby, Dammit!* and on his environmental goals with Gumby. — Camilla Mortensen

MICHAEL WEST  
AS GUMBY



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