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## Clam craving led to find of rare quahog pearl

The deep-purple gem, about the size of a pea, was found by a Portsmouth couple during the big snowstorm earlier this month.

**BY STEVE PEOPLES**

**Journal Staff Writer**

PORTSMOUTH -- Barbara Krensavage attributes the purple pearl discovery to her obsession with clams casino. It was a stormy Friday afternoon, earlier in the month, when the latest craving hit. "I don't even like clams that much, but when I get this craving for clams casino, there's no stopping it," said the Portsmouth mother of two. "I had had them the night before -- but they made me feel so good, I went all the way out in the blizzard, with the trees falling down, to get more clams."

She returned from a Newport seafood restaurant with about four dozen quahogs. Her husband, Thaddeus "Ted" Krensavage, an anesthesiologist at Morton Hospital & Medical Center, in Taunton, was in the midst of shucking the shellfish when he came across what looked like a rotten clam.

"If it was an oyster, I would have thought about looking for a pearl," he said, "but I've never heard of something like that coming from a clam. I thought it was diseased or something." He was ready to throw it away when Barbara walked in.

On closer examination, they found a perfectly round, brilliant-purple pearl, about the size of a large pea. After a few clicks on the computer, they realized they had stumbled across a natural treasure. "We're finding out there's only a handful on earth," Barbara said. "We were excited, biting it and everything."

Ted said he's been trying to track down jewelry experts to determine the pearl's value, but the gem is so rare, it's been difficult. "If it's worth \$10,000, we'll probably keep it, it'll be a family treasure," he said. "But if it's worth more than a quarter million, we might put it up for auction."

THE VALUE of the Krensavages' purple pearl -- and dozens of other such gems that have surfaced across the country in recent years -- is tied directly to the fate of the Alan Golash brooch. Alan Golash is a Newport antique dealer whose partner bought a \$14 brooch five years ago -- in a Bristol antique shop -- that may be worth up to \$1 million.

The piece features two purple quahog pearls, one of which is the largest known specimen of the rare gem anywhere in the world, according to Antoinette Matlins, of Woodstock, Vt., author of *The Pearl Book: the Definitive Buying Guide*.

"I keep hoping somebody is going to call with something similar, or comparable to, the Alan Golash brooch," Matlins said in a telephone interview yesterday, "but so far, nothing comes close."

"But [the others] are rare and definitely valuable. How valuable is the big question mark. Until Alan's is sold, or goes on the auction block -- that will more or less set the parameters." Without seeing the Krensavages' specimen, Matlins estimated it might be valued in the thousands of dollars, though that number could shoot up after the sale of the Golash piece.

"You might sell something now for \$20,000 or \$25,000, which seems like a huge amount for a single pearl," she said, "but then somebody might turn around and bid \$1 million for the Alan Golash pearl. Then, the person who sold it for \$20,000 or \$25,000 would be kicking themselves."

The Golash brooch -- which includes a purple pearl roughly twice as large as the Krensavage pearl -- is one of the featured items in the American Museum of Natural History's international pearl exhibit, now in Japan. The exhibition will move to Australia for much of 2006, and then to the Persian Gulf and London in 2007.

It is unclear when Golash and his anonymous partner would have the brooch removed from the exhibition to be sold at auction. Matlins said "they would be out of their minds not to leave it in the exhibition in the Persian Gulf," where it would attract the attention of "billionaire oil sheiks," increasing the ultimate selling price.

THE PURPLE PEARL'S value is driven by its rarity. Some experts estimate that only 1 in 100,000 quahog clams contains a pearl, and 1 in 20 of those pearls is of gem quality. That puts the odds on the Krensavages' find at 1 in 2 million. And though it is undeniably unique, the quahog's purple pearl doesn't meet the scientific definition of a pearl.

By definition, Matlins said, a pearl must come from a bivalve mollusk -- such as an oyster or mussel, which usually produce white pearls. Such pearls are now generally manmade -- called cultured pearls. Worldwide oil production in the early 20th century created water pollution that rendered natural pearls virtually extinct.

Matlins said that, after Golash's story was publicized (including a segment on The Oprah Winfrey Show), she received dozens of calls from people across the country claiming to have purple pearls. Most were of inferior quality, she said, though some were valuable. But she said she suspects many more people possess the gems, and simply don't realize their worth.

"Here we have what is truly one of the rarest, most beautiful, and most precious of American gems, which is one of the best kept secrets in America," Matlins said. "And it's something that people only now are beginning to learn about, understand, and seek."

In the Krensavage household, at least, Ted and Barbara will pay close attention next time they make clams casino. "We found this in a live clam," Barbara said yesterday, gazing at the deep-purple pearl, temporarily set in a gold ring. "We can authenticate and date this organic gemstone. We even kept the shell."

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**The Pearl Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: The Definitive Buying Guide** (6" x 9", 232 pp. with over 250+ color & b/w illustrations and photos, Quality Paperback, ISBN 0-943763-35-5, \$19.95) is available from retail bookstores, amazon.com, and directly from GemStone Press, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091. Tel. (802) 457-4000, Fax (802) 457-4004, [www.gemstonepress.com](http://www.gemstonepress.com). For credit card orders, call (800) 962-4544. Add \$3.95 shipping and handling for the first book, \$2.00 for each additional book.