## Pets

## Did your Tamagotchi die of neglect in the late '90s? Now's your chance to take another shot

By DAVID PIERSON

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Before fads such as the fidget spinner and Furby, when the world was just getting acquainted with the Backstreet Boys and clamoring to watch "Titanic" in movie theaters, there was the Tamagotchi.

The Japanese digital pet on a keychain was a sensation, racking up sales of 82 million units since its release in 1997. It was a precursor to mobile gaming, a pocket-sized electronic device that taught legions of children to feed a pixelated critter and pick up after its business.

It was also controversial, as fads tend to be, having been blamed for being too morbid (the pet died if you didn't feed it) and its screen too addictive (you had to tend to it every 15 minutes). If they only knew.

The company behind the gizmo recently announced plans to rerelease the Tamagotchi in the United States to mark the toy's 20th anniversary (the device had remained available in Japan). Buyers can begin pre-ordering the toy online before it is made available in stores nationwide Nov. 5

Bandai America Inc., a subsidiary of the Tokyo-based Bandai Namco Holdings Inc., hopes children of the iPhone generation will embrace the retro gadget while also banking on '90s nostalgia to drive sales.

Like clockwork, the decade that gave us grunge, Tommy Hilfiger jeans and the Game Boy is cool again. It's perhaps why Nintendo has quickly sold out of its relaunched retro consoles and pop star Katy Perry dangled a white Tamagotchi from her Prada gown at last year's Met Gala.

So confident in the gadget's appeal was Bandai America, the El Segundo company best known for making Power Rangers toys, that it didn't even conduct market research or focus groups before deciding to re-release the toy, an executive said.

"For many Generation X kids, the Tamagotchi device can be considered America's first and favorite digital pet," said Tara Badie, marketing director for Bandai America. "The enduring power of Tamagotchi is its clear expression that nurturing and love never goes out of style."

The return of the Tamagotchi comes at a time when toymakers have looked to the past for inspiration. Nintendo miniaturized its classic NES and SNES consoles to great applause. My Little Pony has enjoyed a



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Inside the El Segundo headquarters of Bandai America, a variety of a 20th anniversary edition of the Tamagotchi, "the original virtual reality pet."

massive resurgence. And even Teddy Ruxpin, the wide-eyed bear from the 1980s that will either delight or terrify you depending on where you stand on animatronics, has made a comeback.

"Nostalgia works in the toy industry," said Juli Lennett, a toy industry analyst for NDP Group. "Just look at Barbie and Hot Wheels. They appeal to kids the same way they did 30 years ago."

To be fair, the aforementioned comebacks have been tweaked for today's audience — and they haven't always been as successful as their earlier iterations.

Nintendo's retro consoles come with a slew of preloaded games — but counts adults as a big market, not just youngsters. The newest Barbies smash tired gender roles, but they haven't reversed

declining revenues at Mattel.

There's only one major change between the original Tamagotchi and its reboot: the new one is 20

percent smaller.

The suggested retail price of \$14.99 remains about the same as when it was first introduced (the equivalent price of the original today would be closer to \$23 if adjusted for inflation)

adjusted for inflation).

The egg-shaped toy comes in the same six original styles and

colors. The gameplay features the same colorless blob that hatches, requires feeding and cleanup—chores that, if not undertaken, are penalized by death.

"The creature isn't particularly cute, but it is demanding," a highly skeptical Patricia Ward Biederman wrote in a column for the Los Angeles Times in 1997. "What it lacks in charm, it makes up for by beeping needfully every few minutes. It wants to be fed. It wants to be played with. It needs light. It needs medicine. It even produces digital dung that has to be cleaned up."

But fans say therein lies the fun. Nurture is one of a handful of play patterns that transcends generations that the toy industry has traditionally directed at girls. When a nurturing toy appeals to both genders, as the Tamagotchi did, it usually signals a hit, and then imitators. For the Tamagotchi, rivals included the Giga Pet and the Nano Pet.

"The Tamagotchi took kids into a different world. They were in that screen taking care of that pet. It wasn't the keychain or the color of the toy they cared about. It was the fact they could take it anywhere and it would still provide a form of escape," said toy inventor and toy historian Tim

Walsh, who could have just as well been describing the role the \$46 billion mobile game industry plays today.

Mr. Walsh was specializing in board games at a toy company called Patch, now called Play Monster, when the Tamagotchi

"I remember panic among the traditional game makers at the time," Mr. Walsh said. "We thought electronic games would wipe us out. But we realized the two would always co-exist."

Indeed, the threat of technology has often been overstated in the industry. Board games aren't going away. And one need only look at the pandemonium surrounding fidget spinners to remain bullish on simple baubles. Other hot toys of the moment, such as L.O.L. Surprise dolls, also demonstrate that not everything

requires a computer chip.
Still, Mr. Walsh wonders if
children today, raised on apps and
touch screens, will be wowed by a

"It would kind of be like getting kids to watch movies from the 1970s, which are edited so much slower," he said. "But I've been wrong before. The hardest thing in this business is trying to predict the fickleness of kids."

# It was like playing a dental video game



CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRE

Now that he is retired, Dr. William Lannan is spending more time on his sailboat, a Melges 24, which has its name changed every year, "depending on some amusing event." Its moniker this year is Alternative Facts.

#### **SMILE**

Continued from Page A6

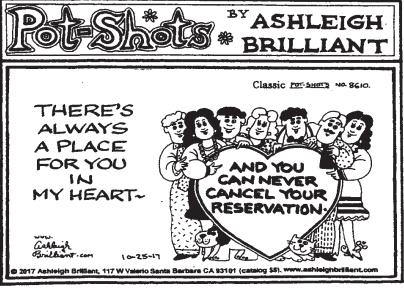
but survived. He blew off part of his face, which I helped restore," said Dr. Lannan, who is considered a pioneer in the field of microscopic dentistry and was one of the few people in the world using 3-D enhanced vision microscope technology in patient care.

"I watched what I was doing on a monitor. It was like playing a dental video game, and the best part was that I could do it while sitting, preventing back problems, which are common in this profession," he said.

Dr. Lannan noted that there have been many advances during the more than four decades he was a dentist.

"One of the major ones is that people have learned to take better care of themselves. Many have stopped smoking, which guarantees tooth loss. It's very unusual to have patients who smoke now. When I started, most of them did. There was an ashtray in the reception room. The first thing I did was throw it away."

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The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors is accepting applications for a position on the RETIREMENT BOARD OF THE SANTA BARBARA COUNTY EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM.

Applications for this position are available online at www.countyofsb.org, at the Office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors located in the County Administration Building, Fourth Floor, 105 East Anapamu Street, Room 407, Santa Barbara, at the Fifth District Supervisors Office at the Joseph Centeno Betteravia Government Administration Building, 511 East Lakeside Parkway in Santa Maria or by calling the Clerk of the Board Office at (805) 568-2240. Deadline for

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the submission of applications to the Clerk of the Board Office is Friday, November 17, 2017.

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## SB trainer guides dog to title

Santa Barbara dog trainer Nathan Woods led Tippy, a 4year-old border collie, to win the prestigious Utility Dog Excellent title at a recent American Kennel Club show at Cal State Channel

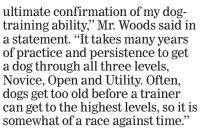
Islands in Camarillo. Tippy is owned by Santa Barbara residents Scott and Julia

Utility Dog Excellent (UDX) is one of the highest obedience titles given. In 2015, only 186 dogs earned UDX titles out of nearly 131,000 entries in AKC obedience

trials.

To earn the UDX, a dog and handler must first earn Companion Dog, Companion Dog Excellent and Utility Dog titles. Then they must earn qualifying scores in both the Open B and Utility B classes in 10 trials on the same day.

"I view the accomplishment of AKC Obedience titles as the



Tippy is his first UDX recipient.
He has worked with the border

collie since he was 10 weeks old. Tippy is working on his next

goal: the Obedience Master title.
"He's definitely one of the most
motivated dogs I've ever worked
with," Mr. Woods said.

"Everyone is capable of greatness," he added. "It's the same for dogs."

For more information, contact
Mr. Woods at 452-2817 or nw@nath
anwoodsdogtrainer.com, or go to
www.nathanwoodsdogtrainer.com.

— Dave Mason



COURTESY NATHAN WOODS

"He's definitely one of the most motivated dogs I've ever worked with," Santa Barbara dog trainer Nathan Woods says of Tippy, a border collie who recently won the prestigious Utility Dog Excellent title.



### PET OF THE WEEK

Diego loves being a couch potato.
The very relaxed, miniature pinscher/
Chihuahua mix is awaiting adoption at Dog
Adoption & Welfare Group in Goleta.

DAWG said the 8-year-old dog would love someone who would let him chill but keep him on a good diet. He's very sociable with other dogs.

To meet Diego, stop at DAWG, 5480 Overpass

To meet Diego, stop at DAWG, 5480 Overpass Road, Goleta. The shelter is open noon to 5 p.m.

Thursdays through Mondays.
All dogs are spayed/neutere

All dogs are spayed/neutered and have all current shots, a microchip and flea and tick protection. Those who adopt a dog can consult with a DAWG trainer.

For more information, call DAWG at 681-0561 or go to www.sbdawg.org.

— Dave Mason