

A Visit with Arthur Jones

by John Turner

Jim Flanagan is one helluva salesman. Jim is the National Sales Manager for MedX. I had never flown before, yet he convinced me to fly to Florida just two weeks after the tragedy of September 11th to meet Arthur Jones. We had been talking about MedX and Nautilus when he guaranteed me an audience with Arthur if I made the trip down. An offer I couldn't refuse. Accompanying me was Ev Mio, my brother-in-law, a stalwart Nautilus devotee and Arthur Jones disciple second to none.

Jim had made arrangements for us to stay at the Sheraton, in Maitland. After booking in, we met Jim in the lobby. You couldn't miss him; he's about 6'5" and 250 lbs. He welcomed us and we went to Sammy Sneads Tavern for dinner where he regaled us with Arthur Jones stories, each one more outrageous than the last. He picked up the check... he's too damn big to argue with.

Saturday morning we were introduced to Jim Shirley, who knows Arthur. He warned us, "*You guys are fresh meat! Watch what you say in front of Arthur!*" He was just kidding, but it was not very confidence building. We drove to Gainesville to see what Jim Flanagan feels may be the best gym in the world, the Gainesville Health and Fitness Center. It runs 24/7, has a staff of 300, covers 78,000 square feet and wants for nothing in the way of equipment. Jim introduced us to the owner, Joe Cirulli, who gave us the tour. Joe is a pilot and told us about a time he flew down to visit Arthur.

"I tried to contact Arthur a few times over the frequency he uses but didn't get a response." Joe said.

"I looked out my window and flying off my wingtip was a fighter! Arthur had bought a fighter!" Joe shook his head in amazement.

"He must like me, 'cause he didn't shoot me down!"

Arthur lives with his wife, Inge, in central Florida. As we approached their front door I read the doormat, "*One nice lady, one miserable old grouch.*" Upon entry, I noticed six or seven MedX machines in a room to my left. Gracing the wall in the living room beside a map of the United States was a photo of Arthur's three jets. Jim introduced us and Inge placed a chair opposite Arthur for me to sit; Ev sat on Arthur's right.

Arthur peered over the top of his glasses and said, "*That's bullshit.*"

My mind raced – not a good beginning. Behind me I heard the TV. It was a show on the Bermuda Triangle.

"Inge," Arthur said, "*bring me my log books.*"

Inge dutifully got up and disappeared into a back room. She returned and handed Arthur a log book. Arthur thumbed through it until he found what he wanted and handed it to me. It covered his travels in 1965 when he had flown through the Bermuda Triangle dozens of times.

"Arthur," I began, "*I'd like to ask you a few questions.*"

"You can ask me anything you like," he said. "*And if I don't know the answer I'll tell you some interesting lies.*"

"Is it true you read your father's entire medical library by the age of ten?"

"Yes"

"Is it true you built a working machine gun at age twelve?"

"Yes."

"Is it true someone tried to kill you with an axe?"

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Arthur smiled. "Yes," he said, *"but he didn't know that I had a cross-cut saw. A magnificent weapon."*

"Is it true you have six bullet holes in you?"

"Yes," he said. He crooked his finger towards me indicating that I come over to him. I got up and went over.

"Give me your finger." he said. I extended my index finger. He grabbed it and placed it on his right shin. I could clearly feel a round dimple on the bone. I sat back down.

I had read that Arthur built a submarine. "Arthur," I asked, *"What lake is the sub in?"*

His head tilted back slightly, and he chuckled softly at the memory.

"It submerged beautifully but it didn't come up worth a shit!" He turned and said to Ev, *"You could say it was fifty percent efficient!"*

"Arthur," I said, *"I remember the first time I spoke with you. It was in the mid-1970s. I asked you why you insisted on keeping your head back while performing leg extensions. By way of explanation, you had me standing on one leg like a Flamingo."*

Arthur jumped right in. *"Do you know why Flamingoes stand on one leg?"* I didn't answer. *"Because they'd fall on their ass if they lifted it up."*

"Tell us about Herbert Prechtel." I asked.

"Herbert was one of the most intelligent men I've ever known." he said. *"He's in an insane asylum now."*

Jim Flangan asked, *"Arthur, how did you meet Herbert?"*

"I picked him up hitchhiking.", Arthur said. *"He knew me from my television show. He wanted a job. I didn't really have a need for anyone at the time. I contacted his parents and he went to work for me. One day I heard a noise upstairs, BUMP. BUMP. BUMP. I went upstairs and asked Herbert what the hell was going on. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor. He said he was trying to levitate. I said, 'Herbert, that's impossible. It's against the laws of physics.' He said that he was going to levitate and bet me \$10,000 that he would do it. I told him, 'Herbert, you've got the take-offs down but your landings need a little work!' I never did get that \$10,000."*

Inge told Arthur that this was the first time I'd flown.

"You've never flown before?"

"No," I said, *"Ev has but this was my first time. I didn't like it. I know you have to get up enough speed to achieve lift, but when we left the ground I thought we were losing air speed and were going to stall."*

"You're right," Arthur said, *"in flight you have no way to tell your speed other than your instruments."*

"And the landing was hard." I said. *"I remember reading where you said anything in excess of a three inch vertical drop and an airplane will begin breaking up."*

Arthur held up four fingers. "Four," he said. *"You have to remember the plane is not dropping straight down, it is also travelling forward."*

I told him that after the attacks on September 11th, I thought I would never fly.

"Afghanistan," Arthur said, *"should be turned into a glass desert."* Pure Jones.

I told Arthur that we flew down on Air Transat, the airline whose plane ran out of fuel over the Atlantic and glided to a safe landing in the Azores. It was an A330, and it set what is believed to be a record distance for gliding a large jet.

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"Why did they run out of fuel?", he asked.

"They learned that the pilot diverted fuel to a leaking engine." I said.

"This has happened before. Ever hear of the Gimli Glider? When Canada went to the metric system in 1983, they made a mistake fueling a plane trying to convert gallons to litres. It ran out of fuel in the middle of nowhere over Manitoba. Fortunately, they found a small airfield in a town named Gimli and glided in.

"Personally," I said, "I didn't mind converting to metric - that Winter I never knew how cold I was!" Arthur laughed.

"Inge," Arthur said, "bring me a coffee." Inge asked us if we wanted coffee or orange juice.

Ev and I both asked for orange juice.

I looked over at Jim Flanagan, to see how I was doing; he kept a poker face. Jim Shirley stood by the front door, listening intently.

Arthur fished for a Pall Mall, lit it and sat back. Inge returned with the coffee and juice. I sipped my orange juice and glanced around. In a wall unit on my left I saw recordings of Verdi.

"Who's the opera buff?" I asked.

"Inge.", Arthur said.

"Do you remember Mark Forest?", I asked. Arthur searched his memory but couldn't place the name.

"His real name is Lou Degni. He followed Reeves to Italy and made several films. He's a voice coach in LA now and performed in operas in Europe - a tenor."

"Arthur," Ev said, "I'd like to ask you about the Duo-Squat."

"Go ahead."

"I've lengthened the akinetic bar on my Squat machine in order to get an increase in my range of motion. Have I changed the function of the machine?"

"You should be able to get a full range of motion without lengthening the akinetic bar depending on the sled adjustment." Arthur said.

"I have the sled adjusted so that my knees come into contact with my chest in the start position," Ev responded, "but I found I couldn't fully extend my leg. With a longer bar, I can get full extension."

Arthur mulled that over. "You haven't altered the function of the machine," he said, "but full development of the quadriceps requires a leg extension. If you skin a man's leg, you'll notice that the medialis only comes into play during the last twelve degrees." We mulled that over. When were we ever going to skin a man's leg?

Ev and I both own Nautilus Lower Back Machines. "Arthur," I said, "you wrote that while everyone may not want the results produced by the Squat machine, everyone needs the results available from the Lower Back Machine."

"I was wrong," Arthur stated, "it doesn't work the lower back." Arthur told of a man who had his back strength tested and used both Nautilus and Cybex Low Back Machines in an effort to strengthen his back, was retested with no resultant change in his initial tested back strength. He went on to explain that unless the plevis is fixed, unable to move, the gluteal group is the prime mover in back extension. I had debated this with Arthur in previous phone calls. In the early 1970s he had written about the unbelievable lower back development of the Russian weightlifters. I told him the Russians couldn't be accused of violating the patent of a machine that had not yet been invented. How do you explain people who display a high degree of development in their erector spinae muscles? People who've trained without having their pelvis anchored. It must be an indirect effect. The muscles of the lumbar spine can not be exempt from indirect effect.

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“Perhaps.” he allowed.

“Inge,” Arthur said, “bring me the 57 to 1 tape.” Inge started to get up from her chair.

“That’s okay Arthur,” I said, “We’ve seen it.” What was I thinking? I’d just missed the opportunity to listen to the master hold forth about a physical phenomenon that was caught on tape. The video shows the positive and negative strength of a subject performing leg extensions on a machine developed by Lester Organ, MD. The subject was none other than Jim Flanagan. Jim doesn’t appear on camera, but he can be heard on the sound track, grunting, moaning and groaning. Pushed to the limit by Arthur, Jim reduced his positive strength to zero while his negative strength increased!

I asked him about it later. Jim laughed and said, “It sounds like a porno tape.”

“How did Arthur get you to work so hard?”

“If Arthur asks you to do something, you do it.”

I produced a small binder that I’d brought with me and handed it to Arthur. On the first page was a quote, “I think it is most important to discover as quickly as possible in your physical culture career not how much exercise is necessary, but how little!” Arthur has referred to this several times but couldn’t remember the author. The author was Harry Paschall... the date was 1950.

Arthur said, “I now believe you get better results training only twice a week.”

“But Arthur,” I protested, “I haven’t read anything that invalidates what you wrote in Nautilus Bulletin #1 supporting training three times a week. You said if weeks didn’t exist, then it might be necessary to invent them.”

Inge laughed. She had probably typed those words thirty-one years ago. Arthur leafed through the pages and stopped at a picture of Bill Pearl.

“That’s the earliest mention I can find of steroids.”, I said. It appeared in a Weider publication in May 1963.

“Bill tells people he first learned about steroids from me,” Arthur said, “Not true. He called me and asked me what I knew about them. I told him I didn’t know anything about them.” He turned a page and came across a picture of Maurice Jones, the Canadian version of John Grimek.

“That picture was taken in the 1930s,” I said, “did you ever meet him?”

Arthur studied the picture and read the caption. “No, I didn’t.”

Grimek and Jones were good at the stiff-legged deadlift. Grimek was capable of touching both elbows to the floor from a standing position without bending his knees. Maurice Jones did fifteen reps with four hundred pounds, standing on a block, each rep touching his knuckles to his toes.

The next two pages were ads from Weider magazines. The first, from November 1976, showed Arnold curling on a Nautilus Plate Loading Biceps Machine. They had airbrushed a barbell plate into the photo to make it look like he was doing barbell curls. The second, from December 1976, was the same photograph but the Nautilus cam had been airbrushed out. I pointed this out to Arthur. He ignited another Pall Mall and turned the page. Arthur doesn’t treat paranoia.

We talked about woodpeckers, yes – woodpeckers, Doug Hepburn, Weider, Gideon Ariel, Pavo Komi, isokinetics, Alvin Roy and Arthur’s Army buddy, Woodrow Marriott. Now it was time to go.

I said, “Arthur, I’ve described you as an amalgam of Howard Hughes, Vince Lombardi and Indiana Jones. No family member, friend, teacher or coach has made the impact on my life you have. Thank you. I think the greatest tribute I’ve heard anyone pay you comes from Dr. Robert Kudlak. Here’s a guy who has been through medical school, associates with physicians and academics, yet credits you for teaching him how to think.” Ev came forward.

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“Thank you Arthur,” he said, tapping himself on the temple, *“thanks for helping me develop this.”* We shook hands, thanked Inge for her hospitality and walked out to the car. I was numb. It had been an honor to inhale that man’s secondhand smoke!

We drove back to Jim Flanagan’s house. Jim has a world class home gym. He put me through a workout, of five exercises in fifteen minutes. A humbling experience. We went back to Sammy Sneads for dinner. This time we beat him to the check. We thanked Jim for the opportunity to meet Arthur and said our farewells. The next day we flew back to Toronto. It could be my imagination, but the landing felt smoother.

Thinking back, I now have an even greater appreciation for the two brothers who owned a bicycle shop in the early 1900s, who elevated transportation to the highest degree. The Wright Brothers? No, Fred and August Duesenberg, makers of fine automobiles - the safest way to travel.

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