

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“Life is what happens while you are planning something else.”

Anon.

In December of 1955 I purchased a book in a drugstore in Slidell, Louisiana, that changed my life; almost everything that followed was at least an indirect result of that book, although the book itself contained not a word of truth. The book was called River of Eyes, and was later published under the title Crocodile Fever; it was, supposedly, the true account of the experiences of a man named Brian Dempster. When I read that book I immediately realized that it was not true, but I also knew that it would produce results that would be of great concern to me.

Hunting alligators for their hides has been going on for more than a century in the southern part of this country, primarily in Louisiana and Florida, and literally millions of alligator hides were sold within a period of only a few years around the turn of the century; by 1955 such hide hunting was still going on, but in the meantime the number of alligators had been greatly reduced. In some states, alligators were being protected, and a few people were trying without much success to breed them in captivity. Nearly forty years later, more than thirty alligator-breeding farms were being operated in Florida, providing thousands of hides and tons of meat every year. And, yes, alligator meat is good to eat; is served in many restaurants throughout Florida.

In South America a few years ago, primarily in Columbia, millions of caimans were being killed for their hides every year; a caiman being a close relative of the alligator. For a period of several years, hundreds-of-thousands of baby caimans were shipped to this country every year from Columbia; babies that were sold to the pet market as ‘baby alligators.’ In 1957, in a period of about three months, I exported more than 80,000 baby caimans to this country from Barranquilla, Columbia; and I was only one of several people who were exporting them in such numbers from that one city. In Columbia, we paid an average of about four cents apiece for these babies, resold them wholesale to pet shops in this country at a price of from fifty to seventy-five cents and they sold them for whatever the traffic would bear. Today, if you can find one, such a baby will cost you about \$75.00.

In Australia, and in the Far East, people have been hunting crocodiles for their hides for a period of many years; a friend of mine who now operates a crocodile farm on Green Island, off the coast of Cairns, Australia, George Craig, spent several years hunting crocodiles in the interior of New Guinea. He personally killed more than 27,000 crocodiles during that period. Later, he started feeling sorry for the crocodiles, stopped killing them for their hides and started capturing large adult crocodiles in order to establish a breeding farm for them.

The most successful crocodile breeding farm in the world is located in Bangkok, Thailand, and now has by far the largest collection of crocodiles in the world, producing tens-of-thousands of hides every year, as well as tons of meat.

So the market in alligator, caiman and crocodile hides was certainly not new when I read that book in 1955; but, in Africa, crocodiles had seldom been killed for their hides, and there was nothing in the way of a large-scale trade in such hides. So, by that point in history, Africa was the only place on the planet where crocodiles still remained in large numbers, literally in their millions. But having seen what had already happened elsewhere, I clearly understood what would quickly happen in Africa: within a matter of a very few years, the crocodiles in Africa would be effectively wiped out. And they were.

The principle character of that book, Brian Dempster, was from South Africa; but, as they say, he was a ‘city bloke,’ had never been in the bush. Had probably never seen a crocodile in his life, certainly knew absolutely nothing about them. But he was apparently a good story teller, and when he turned up in London, dead broke, the mere fact that he was from Africa apparently convinced most people that he was the greatest outdoorsman since Tarzan. For a period of several months he managed to keep from starving to death by hanging around pubs and telling lies in return for beer and something to eat. Then he ran into an author who liked his stories, took him to live in his apartment, and supported him long enough to write an account of his supposed adventures. Stories that became the book I read in 1955.

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Among other outright lies contained in the book is a careful account of a crocodile building its nest, an account that was lifted almost word for word from an earlier book about alligators; which is interesting, since African crocodiles do not build nests for their eggs; instead, they dig a hole in the sand and bury the eggs, leaving no sign on the surface that the eggs are there. Later, when the eggs are ready to hatch, the mother crocodile digs the babies out of the sand and carries them to the water in her mouth. The only way you can locate such eggs is to look for the mother crocodile, since she will guard the spot until the eggs are ready to hatch.

Alligators do build nests above the ground, exactly as described in the book.

Another lie concerned a long-accepted, but totally false, belief regarding a crocodile's jaws; according to this myth, a crocodile opens its mouth by raising the upper jaw; while, in fact, a crocodile's mouth works exactly the same way as the jaws of all other animals, the upper jaw is an extension of the spine and the mouth is opened by moving the lower jaw.

The largest crocodile known in modern times is now alive in captivity in an alligator farm in Saint Augustine, Florida; it is 17 feet, six and one quarter inches long. And while many claims have been published regarding much larger crocodiles, there is absolutely nothing in the way of evidence to support these claims. World record sizes for animals are decided by the Boone and Crockett Club; and they will consider no evidence apart from the animal's skull. The second largest crocodile known in modern times came out of the South Pacific in 1820, and the skull of that animal is now in the British Museum in London; it was 17 feet and 2 inches long.

In the current issue of the Guinness Book of World Records, mention of a crocodile in the farm in Bangkok is made along with the claim that it is twenty feet long; well, in fact, that animal is less than sixteen feet long. I have seen it from a distance of a few feet, in broad daylight, out of the water on dry land, and I can estimate the length of a crocodile to within an inch or two at a glance.

But, in his book, Dempster tells about killing a twenty-foot crocodile; then, he said . . . "One of my native helpers and I dragged it up a 45 degree incline so that the 'big ones' would not drag it back into the water and eat it." Sure. Well, be informed, a fifteen foot, two and one quarter inch crocodile that I captured later in Africa measured nine feet and three inches around the belly and weighed 2,306 pounds. A twenty foot crocodile, if such existed (which they do not), would weigh about 5,000 pounds unless it was starving to death. We could not get enough people around the big croc that I later caught in order to lift it, had to drag it with the use of several oxen; yet Dempster claims to have dragged a croc of more than twice that weight up a steep bank with the help of only one native.

And just why would people lie about the size of an animal? Damned if I know, but they do. And such lies are not limited to hunters or story tellers; the scientists are just as bad. In the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, in Boston, they have a crocodile skull on display that they claim measured thirty-three feet in length; in fact, it was about sixteen feet long. But, at least, these people are consistent, everything they say is wrong; while continuing to lie about the skull on display, down in the basement of the same building, sitting on top of an old refrigerator, covered with dust and ignored, they have the skull of an American alligator that is a legitimate world record, the animal would have measured fifteen feet and five inches, about a foot longer than any other alligator ever accurately reported.

In this book, Dempster claimed that he made a fortune selling crocodile hides; which raises an interesting question: if he made so much money from hides, then why was he starving in London a year or so later?

In fact, at the time his adventures supposedly occurred, Dempster would not have been able to find a buyer for his hides if he did have them. But, following his book, that situation quickly changed.

Having read that book, and it was a best seller for a few years, practically everybody in Africa who could get their hands on a gun rushed into the bush in order to get rich killing crocodiles; then, when the hides started to come in by their thousands, a market for them did develop.

So I knew what was about to happen; and I was concerned, because it had been a long-standing desire of mine to capture large crocodiles and bring them back to this country, something that had then never been done. It was then generally considered to be impossible to capture big crocodiles alive; the only large crocodiles then in captivity anywhere

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in the world had been raised in captivity. Since most of the rest of the world had already been shot out by hide hunters, I believed that the only place that I might still be able to find them was in Africa. But I had to do it quick, or it would be too late.

And, you might ask . . . “Just who in the Hell apart from me would have any slightest interest in large crocodiles?” Well, not millions of people, certainly, but a surprising number nevertheless; at that time there were several hundred privately-owned animal exhibits in this country, as well as a hundred or more major zoos, and all of these were at least potential customers for large crocodiles; in fact, as it turned out, I later had very little trouble selling almost all of the big crocodiles that I brought back. Sold several for more than \$3,000.00 each and one for \$4,000.00, and that was a lot of money in 1957.

The biggest problem that I had in selling these big crocs was a result of the lies about size that I mentioned earlier; when somebody had been exhibiting a ten foot alligator for years, while telling the public that it was fifteen feet long, having repeated this lie so often that they had started to believe it themselves, when I tried to sell them a fifteen foot croc over the phone, they would usually say something like . . . “Oh, yes, I’m interested in a big croc, but I want a really big one, I already have a fifteen footer.” So, with only two exceptions, my future customers had to actually see them before they would buy; which meant I had to bring potential customers to Louisiana so they could actually see them, until they saw them they simply could not believe how big they really were.

I sold four of these crocs to the California Alligator Farm in the greater Los Angeles area, six to an exhibit in South Dakota, one each to two exhibits in Florida, one to the zoo in Monroe, Louisiana, and one each to several other exhibits; while keeping the largest and most valuable ones for my own exhibit. Thirty-seven years later, most of those crocs that I sold are alive and still being exhibited.

How long do they live? Nobody knows for sure, but I would not be surprised to learn that they can live for more than 150 years. Shortly after the Civil War, an alligator farm was opened in Hot Springs, Arkansas, as a tourist attraction; later, in 1906, the year of the big quake in San Francisco, one of the partners loaded half of the alligators onto a train and shipped them to Los Angeles and established the California Alligator Farm. Then almost starved to death for more than forty years. But, after the Second World War, the land on which the farm was located suddenly became quite valuable; the only problem then being just what to do with the alligators.

So they rented a piece of land across from Knott’s Berry Farm, in Buena Park, California, and moved the alligators there; and things changed in a dramatic fashion, tourists came in their tens-of-thousands, an overflow from Knott’s Berry Farm, the sky opened and money came down by the buckets. Having almost starved for years, they suddenly found themselves getting very rich.

But by the time they understood the actual value of their new location, the owner of the rented property also understood the potential; so they were never able to buy the land. Then, in 1984, their final lease having expired, they were forced out of business. So the problem of what to do with the alligators (and crocodiles and other animals) arose again.

They called me on the phone and offered to give me all of their animals if I would come there and pick them up; so I did, I took one of my large Boeing 707 cargo airliners, flew it to California, loaded all of their stock on board, returned to my farm north of Ocala, Florida, and put all of these animals into pens we built for that purpose. Among the animals brought to Florida were several of the large crocs that I sold them nearly thirty years earlier.

Also included were several hundred alligators that had been shipped to Los Angeles from Arkansas seventy-eight years earlier. But the most interesting point is this: during that period of seventy-eight years in California, those alligators neither grew nor bred; when brought to Florida the largest ones were less than nine feet in length. But nine years later, when moved again, we discovered that several of these alligators had grown to a length in excess of eleven feet; and they had started to breed for the first time in more than three-quarters of a century. So just how old were they? The answer being: seventy-eight years in California, plus their age when shipped to California, plus a period of ten years since they were moved here, a total of at least a century. And they are still alive, still growing, and still breeding.

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An alligator farm that was established in Saint Augustine, Florida, more than a century ago is still in business, and while little if anything in the way of accurate record keeping was conducted there until very recently it is very probable that they still have alligators that were there when the farm was established.

The largest crocodile known in modern times (mentioned earlier) is at least sixty years old, judging by his size when he was captured and the length of time he has been in captivity since then, and yet he still shows characteristics that clearly indicate that he is still a relatively 'young' crocodile. Like people, crocodiles change as they get older; an 'old' crocodile displays characteristics that cannot be missed once you are familiar with them. Gomic (the crocodile's name) is still a young animal at an age of at least sixty; and he is still growing, has added four and one quarter inches to his length since brought from Australia nine years ago. While gaining several hundred pounds in weight during that same period.

But, again, I'm getting ahead of myself. In 1956 I had a dream, and I knew it was then or never, but I did not have the money required to act upon that dream. And, in any case, just how much would such a trip cost? I didn't have a clue; because I did not even know where I would have to go in Africa in order to find big crocodiles in great numbers, did not know just how many crocodiles I would be able to capture, did not know how I would have to ship them. The last point being the most critical: just how do you estimate the costs required to ship an unknown number of animals of an unknown size from an unknown shipping point to a known destination?

The first problem being the required money; part of which I obtained by taking advantage of something that I learned from previous experience: it is much easier to get people to agree to something if what you are asking for does not have to be provided until later. So I called an old customer, a man named Earl Brockelsby who operated a very successful reptile exhibit in Rapid City, South Dakota; a man who had been trying with no success to purchase large crocodiles for several years.

We agreed upon the following terms: I would provide a year of my time, and \$4,000.00; Earl would provide \$6,000.00 plus whatever sum of money would be required to ship the crocodiles back to this country; a total that was impossible to even estimate in advance. As I learned later, the only reason Earl agreed to that last provision was because he did not believe I would be successful; he thought I would fail, but was willing to gamble \$6,000.00 on the off chance that I might at least manage to get a few crocs. Previously, he had sent thousands of dollars to people who promised to ship him big crocs; people he never heard from again after he sent the money.

I told him in advance that I planned to bring back at least one-hundred big crocs, but he simply did not believe me. Well, in fact, I caught 189 crocs in excess of eleven feet in length; which was the smallest size that I intended to bring back. I believed that I could sell fifty of these crocs for a total of about \$75,000.00 in return for an estimated cost of not more than \$30,000.00; which would have provided a profit of \$45,000.00 and still leave me with half of the crocs.

When I first suggested this trip to Earl I told him that I could not start until about six months later; that delay being required in order for me to raise the \$4,000.00 that I had to put up, and in order to give Earl a chance to think things over. I did not believe that he would back out when the time came, and I was right about that.

So, in the late Summer of 1956, I left for Africa. My luggage consisted of the clothes I was wearing, money, my passport, and a spare shirt and pair of socks in a small hand bag. I took nothing else because I did not know where I was going or what I would require when I got there; figured that I could buy whatever was needed after I found out what my requirements would actually be. Learn to travel light; as a friend of mine used to say . . . "the only thing you need to take with you is the four Ps, su pistola, su pesos, su passaporte, y su puta." Your pistol, your money, your passport, and your pussy. But all I had was two of those requirements, my money and my passport.

Having done as much as I could to research the situation in advance, my first destination was Leopoldville, in what was then the Belgian Congo; I had read an English copy of their game laws, which said, concerning crocodiles . . . "Crocodiles are considered vermin, and, as such, are subject to destruction by any person, at any time, by any method, without the need for any kind of a permit." So I was initially dumb enough, having read their laws, to believe that I would have no trouble with their game department. Sure.

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Weeks later, having been given the run around by everybody in the Game Department, I finally went to the director and read him the part of the law that concerned crocodiles; whereupon, he said . . . “Yes, I know what the law says, I wrote it; but it does not say that you can capture them.” Which pissed me off more than somewhat at the time, but which mattered not at all later; because, in fact, by the time I reached the Congo, most of the crocodiles had already been killed for their hides. I spent one entire night on a river looking for crocodiles with a bright light and saw only one three-foot crocodile; two or three years earlier, in the same place, I would have seen hundreds of crocodiles.

So now what? Where should I go from there? I did not know. Then things suddenly changed as a result of a casual conversation conducted in the lobby of the hotel where I was staying. An American reporter from Time magazine asked me what I was doing in Africa, and I told him. Then he told me that he had just come from a place where he saw hundreds of big crocodiles, the Eastern Caprivi Strip. He gave me the name of a pilot who had flown him over the Caprivi Strip, Andy Rybecki, and also told me that Andy’s wife worked for the phone company in Livingston, Northern Rhodesia.

The long-distance phones being somewhat less than might be desired in Africa at that time, it took me nearly three days to get Andy on the phone; and then the connection was so bad that I could barely understand him. But he confirmed what the reporter had told me, so I set out for Livingston, Northern Rhodesia.

Upon arriving in Livingston, I hired Andy to fly me out over the Caprivi Strip so I could judge the crocodile population for myself; a totally illegal flight, since the Caprivi Strip was a territory in dispute and it was impossible to get a permit to even visit the place. There were, at that time, only four Europeans and no natives living in the Caprivi Strip. The Europeans were the magistrate, a man named A. B. C. Collanbrander, a storekeeper and his wife, and a priest; all of whom lived in a little settlement with a dirt landing strip.

And the crocodiles were there, in their thousands; so then I had to talk Andy into an even more dangerous flight, had to get him to fly me to see the magistrate, a flight that might well get him arrested and certainly could cost him his pilot’s license since such flights were strictly prohibited. So we flew to Katima Mulilo to see the magistrate, and we did not get arrested; although it appeared to be touch and go for a while, and we did get the short version of the riot act.

The only reason that Andy agreed to the second flight was because I had offered him a job; told him my plans and explained the potential profit, and asked him to join me. Initially, he accepted my offer; but later, when I actually got started, he changed his mind. Many years later, in another part of Africa, I ran into Andy again, and told him just what a mistake he had made by not joining me.

While that crocodile trip did produce a profit, although not as much profit as I anticipated, it led directly to other things that produced profits running into the millions; got me started in the film business, and eventually led to the invention of Nautilus Exercise Machines. So one never knows, does one?

When I told the magistrate my intentions, he told me that I would have to apply for a permit at the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria, the capital of the Republic of South Africa; and also told me that he did not believe that such a permit would be issued. But it was issued.

Was issued by the government because they did not believe me; they thought that my plan to capture crocodiles was a ‘cover story’ designed to hide my true intentions. Believed that I had sneaked into the Caprivi Strip and discovered either an unsuspected gold mine or diamond mine, and by giving me a permit they would be able to spy on me and learn what I was really up to. Prior to my application to capture crocodiles, more than a thousand South African citizens had already applied for a permit to shoot crocodiles in the Caprivi Strip, and all of the applications had been refused. So sometimes things turn out better when people don’t believe you.

In Pretoria, I was unaware of the fact that the magistrate had already sent them a message detailing his suspicions in regard to my real intentions; which message probably helped me get the permit.

About a week later I was back in Livingston, permit in my pocket; still without help or equipment of any kind. So what do you do in such a situation? Talk to the local people, find out who might be available in the way of hired help and where needed supplies can be purchased.

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Within a matter of a few days I had met and hired an illiterate German boy, Trevor Schultz, who had been poaching crocodiles without much success for a few months on the Zambezi river. For \$100.00 a week I hired him, twenty natives who worked for him, a large truck, a jeep, a tent, a boat and two outboard motors, and two guns, plus the use of his uncle's dairy farm outside Livingston as a place to keep the crocodiles after they were captured. So off we went to the Caprivi Strip.

Seven months later, I shipped forty-three tons of live crocodiles from Livingston by rail to the port of Beira in Mozambique, and from there by ship to New Orleans. If Earl had lived up to his agreement in full, I could have shipped the hundred crocodiles that I had intended to. But the problems with Earl came later.

The distance from Livingston to the place we established as a base camp in the Caprivi Strip was 110 miles; the first 48 miles over a dirt trail through the bush to a place called Mambova, a small native village consisting of a native store and a few huts; from Mambova we continued by water, first through a short canal and then up the Zambezi river for a total distance of fifty miles by water; then, from our landing spot, it required a cross-country walk of twelve miles to reach the bank of the lake where we planned to start hunting crocodiles. If this trip was started before dawn, you could usually reach your destination by midnight; an average speed of about four miles an hour. Eventually, we were able to ship the jeep to the landing spot on the river and afterwards could drive the twelve miles from there to our camp rather than walking; but that came a couple of months later, and the first few trips crosscountry were made on foot.

Before the jeep became available in the Caprivi Strip, supplies had to be carried to our camp on our backs; and believe me, a twelve mile hike through the bush with more than a hundred pounds on your back, with a temperature above 100 degrees, was more than enough to get your attention. When I first arrived in Livingston, I weighed 198 pounds in hard, muscular condition; seven months later, when I left, I weighed 118, had lost eighty pounds. Which was not particularly surprising considering the conditions; during that period I caught malaria three times, worked an average of at least twenty hours a day, seven days a week, and ate damned near nothing. We seldom had time to either eat or sleep.

People who are not interested in the outdoors will probably not understand what I am about to say, but active hunters will understand. Many people have shared a common fantasy, have daydreamed about a visit to primitive Africa before the coming of white men, to a place where the animals have never seen a man before, a place where the animals still exist in their uncounted thousands. In 1956 and 1957 I lived out that daydream, visited a part of Africa where no man had ever set foot before; and I did it with nobody to say me nay, with nobody looking over my shoulder to tell me what I could or could not do. In the Caprivi, we could do anything we were big enough to do; and we did; by comparison to the things that we did in the Caprivi Strip, the first trip to the moon would look like a few kids camping out in their back yard. Nobody got killed, but that was a matter of pure blind luck more than anything else; and one man was injured so badly that it was almost a miracle that he survived.

Shortly after our camp in the Caprivi Strip was established, I was approached in Livingston by a man named Sinclair; he told me that a young man named Bob Renyard would like to go to work for me, but was afraid to ask me. So I told him to have Bob come see me, and he did.

When I talked to Bob I clearly told him that I could not pay him, then or later, that he would get very little in the way of food or sleep and would have to work like a galley slave, and that he stood a pretty good chance of being seriously injured or killed. How could he refuse such an offer? What I did not even suspect at the time was the following: in order to accept my offer, Bob had to give up his car and his house, both of which he had been paying off for several years, had to break up with the girl that he planned to marry because she thought he was crazy to go to work for me under such conditions, and had to give up a promised partnership in the business where he was employed.

Several years later, on a return filming trip to that part of Africa with a friend of mine who was a State Senator in Louisiana, Bill Carpenter, I called Bob and he came to see us at the old colonial hotel overlooking Victoria Falls, a hotel built many years ago for a visit by Queen Victoria. Carpenter was well aware of the conditions under which Bob had worked for me several years earlier, and Bob told us that he had patched things up with his girl, married her and had one child, that he finally managed to get the business partnership and that he had another car and a house; although it had taken him several years to get back to where he was before he started working for me in 1956.

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As a casual question, Carpenter asked Bob . . . “Would you do it again?”

Bob misunderstood the question, thought it was an offer to do it again, and immediately replied . . . “Tonight.”

Whereupon, Carpenter said . . . “But I don’t understand; what about your wife? What about your kid? What about your job and your house and your car?”

And Bob said . . . “No disrespect, Senator; but fuck my wife, fuck my kid, fuck my business, fuck my car and fuck my house.”

To which Carpenter responded . . . “But I still don’t understand.”

And Bob said . . . “Again, no disrespect, Senator, but you can’t understand. You weren’t there.”

On that same trip Carpenter and I visited a large store owned by an Indian woman in order to try to borrow a couple of hundred elephant tusks that I wanted to use in an opening scene for a feature film; I wanted to show a seemingly endless line of native bearers carrying tusks along the rim of a canyon with Victoria Falls in the background. Filmed in Cinemascope, it was a spectacular opening scene that ran behind the titles.

If I had ever met the Indian woman who owned the store I did not then remember her, but she knew who I was. When we walked into the front door of the store she screamed, ran up to me and threw her arms around me as if I was her long lost son. Carpenter was surprised by such a display, and he asked her . . . “Do you know Mr. Jones?”

She gave him a look that clearly showed that she considered him to be an idiot, and said . . . “Of course I know Mr. Jones. In Africa, Mr. Jones is a very famous man.”

A few weeks before I shipped the crocodiles from Livingston, the local paper devoted the entire front page of an issue to an account of what we were doing in the Caprivi Strip, together with about a dozen photographs. So while I got to know very few people in Livingston, they certainly all knew who I was. In any case, she loaned us the tusks I required and refused payment of any kind.

When I hired Bob Renyard I gave him clear directions about how to locate our camp in the Caprivi, and a few days later he came walking up to our camp a few minutes before dark; just as we were about to start out in a boat for that night’s hunting. So I told him . . . “Throw your stuff down over by the tent and hop in the boat.”

About two minutes later, less than a hundred yards from our camp, we went around a corner in the lake and there were three crocodiles out on the bank; two of these crocs immediately dived into the water and disappeared, but the third one hesitated, first started to run farther up on the bank, changed his mind, turned around and came straight for the boat, and then right into the boat with us. So I screamed at Bob . . . “Don’t just stand there, you fool, jump on him.” And he did.

A minute or so later, he looked up at me and said . . . “Two minutes ago I had never seen a croc in my life, and here I am sitting on one.”

During the following several months, Bob clearly demonstrated the fact that he was one of the best men I ever met; in every respect. I should have brought him back to this country with me; and later regretted that I did not.

Trevor, the German boy, turned out to be a horse of an entirely different color; avoided work of any kind if he possibly could, spent as much time as he could manage in town telling people lies about his adventures in the Caprivi, and generally stirring up trouble of one kind or another. On a scale of ten, Trevor was a minus five, while Bob was a plus forty. This in spite of the fact that by the standards of the time and place Trevor was being highly paid, while Bob was paid nothing.

Some can, some can’t; some will, some won’t; people are not equal.

Before the start of that trip to Africa, it occurred to me that there might be an opportunity for some spectacular filming; but then having almost no experience with photography of any kind, and none with motion-picture equipment, I made a deal with a guy who worked for the Louisiana State Game and Fish Department, a man who claimed to be very

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experienced with cinematography. I agreed to pay for all of the required equipment, the film and all other expenses; then, in return for his services, he would get half of any money produced by our combined efforts in Africa. Since I did not know exactly where I would be located in Africa, we agreed that he would join me as soon as I was able to find the right place.

So, once located in the Caprivi, I sent him a cable telling him to join me immediately; I had been warned by several people that the rainy season would probably start within a few weeks and that I would have to get out of the Caprivi as soon as the rains started because the whole area would be under water within a day or two after the rains started. As it happened, the rains were about two months late that year, so we had several more weeks than I expected; when the rains did finally come, the Zambezi rose 23 feet in the first 24 hours.

Then the excuses started; first he was delayed by Thanksgiving, then delayed by Christmas, then by New Year's, and in the meantime I thought I was quickly running out of time, and knew that major filming opportunities were being missed. So I sent him another cable telling him to forget it; went to a Drug Store in Livingston, bought a 16 mm Bolex motion-picture camera, two lenses, a tripod, light meter, and 4,000 feet of film. The total investment in equipment being about \$800.00. An expense that I really could not afford, but one I figured was justified under the circumstances, given the filming opportunities.

Along with the camera I was given a 12-page 'how to make movies' booklet; which I read very carefully. Among other suggestions this booklet said to always use a tripod and to avoid panning; so there were no hand-held scenes and no pans in the resulting film. Given my total lack of previous experience, at that point I did not believe that the film I shot would have any commercial value; so I filmed as much as possible of the rest of the trip only in order to provide myself with a personal record of the experiences. And, guess what? I sold the film to network television and it was shown several times on the then-new ABC Television Network during the next few years.

While that first film sale did not make me rich, it did more than cover all of my related expenses, gave me a small profit above my costs; and, of much greater importance, it provided enormous publicity for my animal exhibit. And it got me started in the film business; which then occupied my time for the next several years, eventually caused me to move to Africa, and finally led to the invention of Nautilus machines. Which, eventually, brought me to where I am today, with one of the most important medical developments of the Twentieth Century, MedX equipment.

As they say . . . "just one damned thing after another."

The only method that I had ever used for catching alligators consisted of blinding them with a bright light, at night, and then noosing them from a boat. If an alligator has never been approached in this manner before, you can approach them to within a foot or two and then slip a steel noose over their head; so we started out in the Caprivi using this same method, and it worked like a charm the first night; we caught as many crocodiles as we could load and haul back to camp. But crocodiles appear to be much smarter than alligators; that system did not work nearly as well on the second night, and by the third night did not work at all; as soon as a croc saw a light after that they dived and were never seen on the surface again. So, back to the drawing board.

We tried pit traps, a deep hole covered with reeds and grass and baited with a piece of meat; these worked fairly well but required a Hell of a lot of work to dig such a big hole, and then it was damned near impossible to get a big croc out of a deep hole without destroying the trap. We built one walk-in trap, a large box with a sliding door on one end; a door that would drop and trap the croc inside the box when he tried to take the bait. Such traps had to be built in town, at relatively great expense, then hauled out to the lake where we were hunting, so we tried only one of these. Besides, the one such trap that we did try did not work very well.

But, in the end, we found a type of very simple trap that worked like a charm; this consisted of a snare, made from steel cable, a shallow trench dug from the water for a few feet into the bank, and a piece of heavy wood that was buried as an anchor for the snare. Two men working together could set fifty or more such traps in a day, and that night you would catch more crocodiles than you knew what to do with. Using these traps, you can clean out a large lake, capture hundreds of crocodiles, within a matter of a few weeks.

"...And God Laughs"

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There were then herds of thousands of lechwe, a type of antelope, as well as many other types of animals in the Caprivi Strip, everything from leopards to elephants. We had permission to shoot any reasonable number of animals that we required for feeding our native workers and as bait for the crocodile traps, so meat was never a problem. And, in addition to animals, the lake was literally alive with fish; one of the biggest dangers we encountered when hunting at night was a result of fish leaping into the air in an attempt to catch bugs that were illuminated by our head lights. Being hit in the face by a large fish when moving over the water at about twenty-five miles an hour is a memorable experience. So many fish jumped into the boat that we would have to stop every twenty minutes or so and throw them out.

In addition to all of the meat and fish that they could eat, our native helpers were given a quart of so-called mealy meal every day; this being the staple food for most Africans, ground up corn meal that they use to make a form of bread. While I continued to steadily lose weight during the period spent in the Caprivi, it appeared that our native helpers each gained about thirty or forty pounds during the same period. Their salary at that time averaged about ten cents a day; was usually a pound a month (\$2.80 U.S.). So the twenty native helpers that we employed cost us a total of about sixty dollars a month.

The primary reason that the crocodiles were shot out so fast, after hide hunting started in Africa, was the fact that large numbers of natives were available at low wages; so a man could shoot a hundred or more crocodiles in a single night, and the native helpers could skin them during the day while the hunter was asleep. In Australia, where there was no native labor, the white hunters had to skin their own crocodiles so could not shoot them so fast; a situation that also tended to protect the largest crocodiles in Australia because they were too heavy for two men to load into a boat, and also required too much time to skin. Thus while tens-of-thousands of smaller crocodiles were killed in Australia, the largest ones were usually ignored. If I had known then what I know now, I would have gone to Australia to hunt crocodiles rather than Africa; the Australian crocs are larger, can be found in places that are much easier to reach, and still survive even to this day in relatively large numbers; but by the time I was aware of those facts it was too late, crocodiles had been put on the protected list of animals in Australia, are still protected in spite of the fact that several people a year are killed by crocodiles in Australia.

While I was in the Caprivi, a total of twenty-three people were killed by crocodiles in nearby areas, and there were probably quite a few others that were never reported, people who simply disappeared. About a hundred miles away, an incident occurred that is all but impossible to believe: a white man drove a Landrover out to a lake, set his fishing line and went to sleep leaning up against a small tree; but when he awoke a crocodile had him by the foot and was dragging him towards the water, so he started beating it on the head with his fists in an attempt to get it loose from his foot, whereupon the croc released his foot but then seized him by both hands, and bit both hands off. Finally loose from the crocodile but missing both hands and with a badly bitten foot, he made it back to his vehicle; but how do you start a car with no hands?

But just when he decided he was dead a native came along pushing a bicycle with two flat tires, a native who could drive a Landrover; then, less than an hour later, they reached a small, dirt landing strip where a light plane landed with the mail only once a week, and just as they arrived in the Landrover, the airplane was making its once-a-week landing; less than an hour later he was in a hospital, and the following day was able to give an interview to a newspaper reporter. How lucky can you be?

In another nearby area three men from Oklahoma were hunting lions and were filming their exploits with an 8 mm motion-picture camera; in the opening of one long scene that I later saw on television several times, three lions were stretched out on the ground while one man walked into the scene and raised his rifle; the lions got up and started to walk away and the man with the rifle fired, hitting one of the lions, but only wounding it. The lion immediately turned and charged the man with the gun, knocked him down and was killing him when a second man entered the scene; the second man pushed the end of his rifle barrel against the lion and literally blew it off of his friend. Then, when the man who had been mauled by the lion got back on his feet, he immediately looked straight into the camera and said . . . "And if you didn't get pictures of that, you're a dead son-of-a-bitch." While the film was silent, you could clearly read his lips.

Working with animals, particularly wild animals, has little or nothing to do with their capabilities; what they can do is meaningless, you must learn what they will do. Animals, including people, function primarily as a result of their

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emotions, and their emotions are results of their instincts. If you understand the instincts you can anticipate the actions. Trying to handle a horse, based on its capabilities, would require caging it like a lion. As mentioned earlier, when I went to the Caprivi it was generally considered, by the 'experts,' to be impossible to capture an adult crocodile; and, if a crocodile acted within the bounds of its capabilities, that would probably be true, because they are big, very strong and fast almost beyond belief. Yet, in fact, a man weighing less than ten percent as much as a large crocodile can rather easily capture it while using only his bare hands and a couple of very simple tools.

I have heard for years that a terrified horse trapped in a burning barn can be calmed and led to safety if it is blindfolded; never having tried it, I cannot testify to the accuracy of that belief, but it is true with a crocodile. Once blindfolded, a crocodile will instantly relax and can then be handled as if it was dead.

So the only tools required for capturing crocodiles, once you get close enough to use them, are a wet gunny sack and a fairly small rope; a sack to cover his eyes and a rope to tie the mouth closed. But, having blindfolded the croc and tied his mouth closed, then you must treat him as if he was dead; when preparing to lift a crocodile, if you approach him fearfully and hesitantly, he will react violently, swinging both the head and tail at a speed that must be seen to be believed. But if, instead, you show no hesitation, simply grab him firmly and start to lift, he will not move.

Most people believe that a croc's tail is his most dangerous weapon, but very few people have ever been seriously hurt by the tail; because the tail is too wide to deliver a really dangerous blow. But even with his mouth tied shut so that he cannot bite, a crocodile's head remains a very dangerous weapon; by far the most serious injury involved in the Caprivi trip was a result of a blow by a crocodile's head.

One of our biggest problems in the Caprivi was what to do with the crocodiles after we captured them; where to keep them until time to move them into town. At first we tried staking them out and leaving them in the shallow water along the shore of the lake; we rigged a harness out of heavy rope that was tied around the crocodile's body behind the front legs, and then tied one end of a heavy rope to the harness and the other end to a log buried on the bank. Thus tied, they could not escape; but this did not solve our problem, because crocodiles are cannibalistic and we quickly learned that other crocodiles would quickly kill and eat the ones we had staked out in the lake.

Which meant that we had to build an enclosure of some kind to hold the captured crocs; the problem here being the fact that there were no trees in that part of the Caprivi Strip, the closest trees being more than twenty miles away, so we had nothing with which to build a fence around the enclosure. So I decided to build a roofless building out of concrete blocks; which, as things turned out, was not one of my better ideas.

Since the shore of the lake consisted primarily of wide sand banks, it appeared that all we required was cement and a mold for making concrete blocks. So I purchased several tons of cement and the block-making molds in Livingston, loaded everything in a large truck and hauled it to Mambova; at which point we had to continue by water. During the first such attempt we overloaded the boat, sunk it in the river, and lost everything.

But apart from the boat we were using for personal transportation on the river, there was a large barge that made weekly trips up and down the river transporting native laborers for the gold mines in South Africa. This barge was operated by a man named Ken Momson, and he agreed to haul our cement and block molds to the landing spot where we left the river. So far so good, but then we had to move everything a distance of twelve miles overland to our camp. We also shipped the jeep upriver on the barge, and that helped some; but the country was so rough that the jeep could not carry or drag a very heavy load, so something else was required. This problem was eventually solved by hiring a native and a team of about thirty large oxen, but since there were no native villages in the Caprivi this meant that they had to come from a village located about forty miles away in another country.

Then, when the oxen finally arrived at our camp, we constructed a very large sledge for the purpose of dragging our cargo cross-country, using the oxen for pulling power. This worked, but it was pitifully slow; the trip from the river to our camp sometimes required two days.

When the oxen were being harnessed to the sledge in preparation for the start of the first trip, the native in charge wasted about four hours in his attempts to get the oxen hooked up in what he assured us was the proper order. He insisted that the team consisted of both leaders and followers, and that they would not pull if they were hooked up in the

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wrong sequence. Well, maybe, but after he had rearranged them about ten times, I finally told him . . . “This time, when you get them hooked up, if they won’t pull, then I am going to shoot the ox in the leading position; and that will get the attention of the others and then they will pull.”

My knowledge of the native’s language was then still very limited, so he may not even have understood what I said; but the oxen apparently did, because they finally decided to start pulling.

The oxen, and the man in charge of them, were hired by the day, so he was trying to drag the job out as long as possible. After that first bad start neither man nor oxen worked very fast but they did work steadily. So, eventually, the cement and block molds arrived at our camp and we started manufacturing concrete blocks, by the hundreds.

A mixture of cement and sand from the sand banks along the lake was used to make the blocks, and the resulting blocks were beautiful; but our problem still had not been solved, because it turned out that the sand was far too fine for block-making purposes. The resulting blocks had no structural integrity, you could crumble them with your fingers; the first big croc enclosed in a structure made from such blocks would have destroyed it in a matter of seconds. So, in the end, we used the blocks to build a small house, using a large tarp for a roof; then, if we were very careful, so as not to stick a fist through the wall, we could use the house to live in.

Which brought us directly back to square one, we still had no way to hold the crocs after they were captured. Finally, after a seemingly endless nightmare of work that dragged out over a period of several weeks, we decided to try something else. Having no trees in the immediate area, we hired natives from about forty miles away to bring us trees, dragging them overland behind teams of oxen. These small trees, which the natives called ‘sticks,’ were about five or six inches in diameter, about fifteen feet long and fairly straight. Hundreds were required, and we paid the natives about twenty-five cents for each one, delivered to our camp.

Then we dug a narrow but fairly deep trench in a rough circle, stuck the largest ends of the trees down into this trench, filled in the trench around the buried ends of the trees with dirt, and then tied the trees together with rope above ground. The result being a strong fence about twelve feet high that surrounded a circular area of ground inside the fence. Next we had to dig a large but fairly shallow pond to hold water inside the fence. Finally, using more cement and sand we made a very poor concrete mixture that we used to pave the bottom and sides of the pool so that it would hold water. The sand was far too fine for the purpose of making strong concrete blocks, but it was at least usable for paving the pool.

Water to fill the pond had to be hauled by hand from the lake in buckets, and since the pond required many thousands of gallons of water this was another long job. But, at long last, our holding enclosure for the crocodiles was ready.

In the meantime, I had hired workers to build a similar, but much larger, enclosure on a dairy farm located just outside Livingston; this second enclosure being required to hold the crocodiles near town until they were ready to be shipped. The enclosure near town was constructed with much stronger concrete-block walls and was designed in such a manner that it could easily be converted to a barn by the addition of a roof after the crocodiles were shipped.

Some years later, upon viewing one of my films about the problems encountered in the animal business, capturing and transporting wild animals in great numbers, a man remarked to me that . . . “It looks like the history of transportation.” The initial part of the crocodile expedition looked a lot like the history of construction, under almost impossible conditions.

Simultaneously with all of this, I was having steel tanks constructed in Livingston; tanks that would be required to hold the crocodiles enroute by rail and ship back to this country. The largest of these tanks, each one built to a size that would fit a particular crocodile, was twelve feet long, two feet deep and four feet wide, and the largest crocodile that we captured fit into it like a glove, with his tail curled around on one end, filled it from top to bottom and from side to side; such a tight fit being required in order to prevent the crocodiles from being injured by being slammed around inside the tank while being moved. While being transported, a large cage for an animal is neither required nor desirable; look at a horse trailer, it is just wide enough to enclose the horse.

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But what about the animal's comfort? Well, be informed, crocodiles spend a large part of their time jammed into underground tunnels that are so narrow that they can barely squeeze themselves into them. Remember the animal's instincts. To a wild animal, a large enclosure represents a threat rather than a comfort; they feel safer jammed into a much smaller enclosure.

Properly shipping snakes requires using a box that is so small that the snake literally fills it up; any space provided in excess of the minimum requirement will cause problems. Yet Federal Law requires that a cage for a snake must have one side that is at least fifty percent longer than the length of the snake; the idea being, of course, that the snake wants or needs this extra space; when, in fact, they are far more comfortable in a much smaller cage. Captive snakes held in large enclosures die like flies, because they are constantly terrified, can never feel safe.

Like all other bureaucrats, the supposed 'experts' in various Game and Fish Departments seldom have any real knowledge about what they are trying to do; if they would leave the few experienced people who really know what they are doing alone the treatment of wild animals would be far more humane than it is at the present.

I have usually been successful when I was able to ignore the supposed 'experts' and their 'laws,' but every time I have been forced to abide by their rules I have failed. The biggest advantage that we had in the Caprivi was the fact that we had nobody trying to direct our operations; given such direction, we would have failed.

The most serious accident that occurred during the Caprivi operation happened inside the holding enclosure near our camp. Once captured, the crocs were untied and released into the pool inside the fence; the area inside the fence being about two-thirds water and one-third land. Upon being released inside the enclosure, the crocs would immediately dive into the pool in an attempt to hide. The water in the pool was about two feet deep so was deep enough to cover all but the largest of the crocs; and after a few days in the bright sunshine, the water in the pool looked like split-pea soup, was dark green from algae, which made it impossible to see the crocs once they were in the water. Which was fine, because we did not need to see them in the pool and they felt much safer when they believed they were hidden.

But, then, when it came time to recapture them out of the holding pool in order to move them overland to the river for transportation to Livingston, the fact that we could not see the crocs in the water made this part of the procedure more difficult and far more dangerous. We had to wade out into the water above our knees in a pool full of large crocodiles, poke around with a pole in an attempt to get a croc to rear up with his head above the water so that we could catch him with a noose.

A relative of Bob Renyard's visited our camp in the Caprivi on a day when we were catching crocs out of the holding pool, and during the operation he was perched atop the fence around the pool and filmed what happened with an 8 mm motion-picture camera. In that film we appeared to be some of the most brutal people in history; which was a misleading impression, because none of us apart from the man who was filming it actually saw what happened. A fourteen foot, seven inch crocodile, weighing about a ton, suddenly arched his back, reared up so that his head was more than five feet above the bottom of the pool, and then swung his head in an arc to one side at a blinding speed; the whole thing occurred within a fraction of a second, much too fast for any sort of reaction.

The side of the croc's head, his mouth was untied but he did not open his mouth, struck one of the Native Policemen that was working with us in the side of his head; the result being that he was lifted up out of the water and flung ashore, twisting end over end as he moved through the air. His body landed about fifteen feet from the spot where he was hit. And when he landed he appeared to be dead, did not move. The side of his lower skull was pushed in, both jaws were broken in several places, and all of his teeth were knocked out; but he survived.

Because of the overall confusion, water splashing, people screaming, crocodiles roaring, nobody even noticed what happened; so we initially ignored him, because we did not realize what had happened. Thus, in the film, it appeared that we did not care what happened to him.

Once we did become aware of what had occurred, of course, we moved him to a hospital in Livingston as quickly as possible; but even with our best efforts, it took about twenty hours to get him into a hospital.

Frankly, when I first saw what he looked like after being hit by the croc, I did not believe that he would survive.

"...And God Laughs"

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The man who was injured was the oldest of two Native Policemen who had been assigned to work with us; they had no authority of any kind, could not tell us what to do or not to do, but were there, I suspect, primarily for the purpose of spying on us. The man who was injured was both lazy and cowardly, but the younger Native Policeman was a very good man in all respects, smart, hard working, almost fearless and totally reliable. This younger Policeman almost certainly saved my life, and did so at great risk to himself.

Three of us, Trevor, the youngest Native Policeman and I were in a boat, just having loaded a large crocodile. I was in the front of the boat, about two feet away from the croc's head, and was trying to film the operation. I changed the roll of film in the camera, under a dark cloth, while Trevor was tying the croc's mouth, and when I finished changing film I commented something to the effect that Trevor had tied the croc's mouth very quickly, and asked him if he was sure that it was tied properly. And, of course, he assured me that it was tied properly; but it wasn't.

Suddenly, without warning, the croc started swinging his head back and forth from side to side, thereby removing the rope that was supposedly holding his mouth closed and the sack that was covering his eyes. He was loose, and he could see, and I was directly in front of him. Then he stood up and started towards me, and I had no place to go apart from jumping off the front of the boat into the water; then being clearly aware that several other crocs were watching us from a distance of only a few feet. If I stayed where I was he would get me within a matter of seconds, but if I jumped into the water there was a pretty good chance that one of the other crocs would get me. I couldn't stay and I couldn't go.

But then, with no slightest hesitation, and with me screaming at him not to do it, the Native Policeman literally ran up the croc's back, threw himself flat on top of the croc, and shoved his thumbs into the croc's eyes.

It worked, the croc instantly relaxed and dropped back flat on his belly. Somewhat later, I had some rather strong words with Trevor, offered to kick his ass all over the Caprivi Strip, and did give him one rather brief demonstration along those lines; but, at the time, the only thing that I was thinking about was the fact that my camera would be ruined if I jumped into the lake.

Sudden movement on the part of a crocodile after its eyes have been covered is unusual, seldom happens; but it did happen that time. Had it not been for the Native Policeman, the best things that could have happened would have been the destruction of my camera and the escape of the croc; while the worst thing would have been my death or serious injury.

While it is widely believed that South African Whites usually treat the Blacks in brutal fashions, I would like to mention that I have never seen such treatment; one of the requirements for my permit to hunt in the Caprivi Strip, a permit issued by the Department of Native Affairs of the South African Government, was that we treat all natives with respect and total integrity; and we did. While the wages paid to the natives were very low, they were established by the government and were not subject to our discretion; but in all other respects the natives were treated in exactly the same way that we treated other white people.

All of the native workers were given a relatively large bonus at the end of the operation, something that was neither expected nor required; and the two Native Policemen were given quite a bit extra, over and above all of the injured man's medical expenses. I was still very short of money, so these bonus payments were not lavish; but in that place at that time they nevertheless represented substantial income for the people involved.

Once we discovered the best method for capturing crocodiles, we still had to figure out just how to safely transport them into town. Given their enormous weight, they were very difficult to move; and in spite of their size and strength, crocodiles are very delicate animals in some respects, can be easily killed if they are not handled very carefully. You must not drag a crocodile by his head; doing so will usually break his neck, an injury that might not become obvious until a few weeks later. And they cannot stand much in the way of an impact force when on their belly; bouncing them up and down in the back of a truck moving over a rough road will kill them every time, such bouncing apparently tears them apart internally. But again, such fatal injuries do not show up until much later.

Each of the crocodiles that we captured was carefully measured (and later weighed), and each one was assigned a number so that we could tell them apart; then they were marked in a manner that made identification foolproof.

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Such individual identification of the crocodiles later made me aware of a very serious problem with Trevor: every single one of the crocodiles that he transported by truck from Mambova to Livingston, without supervision, later died, while only one of the crocs that I transported died, and this one was crushed by a larger one. He literally killed them by driving much too fast on a very rough trail.

Once recaptured out of the holding pool at our camp, the crocs were retied, loaded onto a large sledge, and dragged crosscountry a distance of twelve miles by teams of oxen. Upon arrival at the river, they had to be loaded on to a large barge for transportation downriver to Mambova; then they had to be hauled a distance of forty-eight miles into Livingston on the back of a large truck, unloaded from the truck and turned loose again in the large enclosure that I had built on the dairy farm near town. The portion of the trip on the truck was in some respects the most critical part of the operation, because the trail through the bush was very rough; so we had to drive very slowly, with frequent stops in order to ease over bumps in the trail in order to avoid bouncing the crocodiles, bouncing that would be fatal for them.

Twice, I made the terrible mistake of letting Trevor drive the truck into town without supervision, and he obviously ignored my careful instructions about driving slowly and easing over bumps; all of which cautions, in his opinion, being unnecessary.

I was sitting inside a booth in an icecream parlor in Livingston one day when Trevor came in together with two local girls that he was trying to impress; they went into the booth next to mine but did not see me. Then I sat there for about an hour while Trevor recounted his adventures in the Caprivi in great detail, without a single word of truth apart from his statement that he had driven a truckload of crocodiles from Mambova to Livingston in less than two hours. If true, and it probably was, that clearly explained why all of the crocs that he hauled by himself later died.

Properly performed, transportation of the crocs from our holding pen in the Caprivi to the enclosure near Livingston was a nightmare of work; a round trip from our camp to Livingston with a load of crocs, and a return to camp, required about three days and nights of nonstop effort, literally seventy-two hours without rest. And with very little in the way of something to eat during that period.

So, in the end, catching the crocs proved to be relatively easy, but moving them into town was anything but easy; and having done that we still had one very serious problem remaining. Adult reptiles, removed from the wild into captivity, will seldom eat, will literally starve themselves to death regardless of what they are offered in the way of things to eat.

Apparently, in captivity, they are too terrified to eat, or perhaps do not choose to live in captivity; but, whatever the cause, this presents a very serious problem.

And, just as I had expected, once moved to the enclosure near town, the crocs refused to eat, would not touch the meat that we put into the pen. Fortunately, crocodiles, if in reasonable condition at the start, can survive without anything to eat for a period of several months; but, to remain alive in captivity for prolonged periods, you must eventually get them to start eating.

What follows cannot really be described properly, would have to be seen to be believed: after several weeks of continued starvation on the part of the crocs, I was starting to get a bit desperate, so a desperate solution was obviously required. But just how desperate can you get? The holding pen near Livingston was about 100 feet long and 50 feet wide, surrounded by tall concrete-block walls. About two-thirds of the interior was a deep pool filled with water, and about a third of the total area was a dry-land section.

Located inside the pen, growing out of the ground in the dry area, was a large tree which had branches hanging out over the water that provided shade for a large part of the entire internal area. Shade being required because reptiles can easily be killed by the rays of the sun if exposed to them for long periods without shade. Yes, I know, crocodiles spend part of their time stretched out on a sandbank in direct sunlight; but when their body temperature rises too high they return to the water to cool off. Because of their mass and its relationship to their surface area, large crocodiles can stay in direct sunlight for rather long periods, they neither gain nor lose heat very rapidly; but small crocs heat up very rapidly and may move in and out of the water a hundred times during the day.

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In the Caprivi Strip, the temperature in direct sunlight was well above 100 degrees, while the water temperature remained at about 80 degrees. A body temperature much above 100 degrees will kill a crocodile, and a temperature below 59 degrees will kill them, so you must be able to control a croc's temperature. Crocodiles, like most reptiles, do not produce body heat, remain at the temperature of their environment.

Alligators, unlike crocodiles, can survive in a relatively cold environment, can live for rather long periods under the ice of a frozen lake so long as the lake does not freeze to the bottom; which is why alligators are found in places where it gets quite cold, and why crocodiles are not found in such places. While it is true that crocs are found in places where the air temperature drops below freezing, their survival in such conditions is possible only because they remain in the water and never come out on cold days; large bodies of water retain a fairly high temperature even when the air temperature is below freezing.

So the large tree inside the enclosure near Livingston was required in order to help control the temperature, but this tree also produced another result that proved very helpful; partly as a result of the shade provided by the tree, the interior of the enclosure was as dark as the Devil's heart at night, you literally could not see your hand in front of your face without a light.

So, in an effort to get the crocs to start feeding, we decided to 'fool them,' to convince them that at least one croc was eating. In absolute darkness we led a donkey into the pen, knocked him in the head with an ax and then chopped him up into rather large pieces; without speaking or making any other noises that might alert the crocs to our presence. Perhaps they could smell us, but we couldn't do anything about that. We hoped that the noises produced by killing and chopping up the donkey would sound like a large croc making a kill, and that this would influence all of the crocs to get in on it; after all, if one croc was eating, why shouldn't they also get something to eat?

Then having chopped up the donkey, we took pieces of it and waded out into the water, waving the chunks of meat and bone back and forth in the water in front of us; literally attempting to get the crocs to take food from our hands. And it worked; somewhat hesitantly at first, but later with much greater confidence, the crocs started coming up and grabbing the pieces of donkey out of our hands and eating them. This whole procedure was repeated a week later, but within four weeks you could walk into the pen with a piece of meat in your hand and the crocs would come rushing up out of the water onto the bank and grab the meat out of your hand. We filmed and photographed all of this after the crocs started feeding during the daytime, and the results were some of the most spectacular films of animals ever produced.

And it was damned spectacular for us while we were doing it, too; believe me, when a crocodile weighing about a ton comes exploding up out of the water right in your face and grabs a piece of meat out of your hand it damned sure gets your attention.

Much later, after the crocs were moved to my exhibit in Louisiana, they almost appeared to be tame; when I walked into the pen with meat in my hand they would rush at me from three sides and end up so close that I was then standing inside a three-quarter circle of crocs, only a couple of feet away from the crocs; but having gotten that close they would then stop, and would not move until I offered food to one of them. There was no fighting over food, they appeared to be perfectly willing to await their turn.

Once the crocs started to feed during daylight hours, the word rapidly spread throughout the area; afterwards, we always had at least several hundred people there watching every time we fed the crocs, it was a very spectacular show. Ken Momson, the guy who operated the barge up and down the Zambezi river, took part in this feeding three or four times; then, having gotten over his initial doubts, he started to show off a bit for the benefit of the audience. One day, while holding one end of a piece of meat while a crocodile was holding the other end, Ken's hand being only a few inches away from the croc's mouth, he started playing with the croc; started trying to jerk the meat out of the croc's mouth. Which was dangerous as Hell, the croc easily could have grabbed him by the hand; but did not, instead started jerking back until he finally pulled the meat out of Ken's hand.

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Such playing with animals should never happen and will frequently result in a disaster; while it is sometimes possible to do things with animals that appear to be insanely reckless but are actually quite safe, playing with wild animals is never safe. Petting a coiled rattlesnake on the top of his head appears to be almost insanely dangerous, but is actually quite safe if you know what you are doing; I have done it thousands of times and have never been bitten as a result.

Actually, the safest way to handle poisonous snakes is with your bare hands; any sort of tool that you use apart from a so-called 'snake hook' that is used to lift the snake's body will simply add to the danger rather than reducing it.

Remember: you must deal with animals on a basis of what they will do rather than upon a basis of what they can do. Given a bit of experience, it quickly becomes obvious just what an animal will do in response to a given situation; patterns of behavior that are seldom changed.

Near the end of the operation in the Caprivi, I was running very short of money; so I did what I had to do in order to survive, started poaching small crocodiles and selling their hides in Livingston. This was not allowed by my permit, but I believed I could get away with it, and I did.

Shortly after the operation in the Caprivi started, Collanbrander was replaced as magistrate by a man named Martin Vercuail. Martin was not an outdoorsman in any sense of the word, and had problems with both drinking and gambling; he loved to play poker but was a very poor player and a bad loser; so I was forced to use another strategy in order to deal with this problem: I started cheating during our poker games; cheating in an attempt to make Martin win somebody else's money; not mine, because I could not stand to lose much if any money; so I tried to assure that he would win money from the priest and storekeeper who usually played with us.

But this seldom worked very well, because Martin was such a poor player, and heavy drinker, that he would throw away a winning hand given to him by my cheating and then bet heavily while holding a worthless hand. There is only so much you can accomplish even when you cheat, you cannot stack the entire deck in plain sight of the other players; but you can rather easily stack the top twenty or so cards, and while that will not always assure a winner it does greatly increase the odds in their favor so that on balance they will come out a winner by the end of the game.

I did at least manage to keep him from losing, which was a far better outcome than would have resulted if he had been left to his own devices. And, no, I have never been a professional card shark, have not played a single game of poker in thirty-seven years.

Having other strong doubts in regard to Martin, I also felt that I had to do something in the direction of protecting myself; so I invited him to our camp and then made films of him hunting animals in a manner that was both highly illegal and unsportsmanlike, shooting animals from a moving vehicle. Of course, we almost always hunted in that way because we did not have enough time to stalk animals on foot in the accepted manner, we were after meat, were not interested in sport; but we did not film such hunting and there was nobody to see us doing it.

On a return trip to Africa about six months after the crocs were landed in New Orleans, I visited Martin for a few days in Katima Mulilo and while there he asked me to kill some Elands that he wanted to use for making biltong (dried meat) for the Prime Minister of South Africa. I had just purchased my first .44 magnum revolver, a very powerful handgun, and wanted to try it on big game, so I accepted his offer and the powerful pistol proved to be capable of killing even very large animals. Years later, in another part of Africa, I killed two adult elephants with such a pistol.

During that return visit to the Caprivi, Martin also tried to talk me into carrying out a rather large-scale elephant slaughter program; the game department had decided that there were too many elephants in the Caprivi and wanted to reduce the number of elephants by 500, in order, they said . . . "To reduce the numbers to a reasonable level."

So I conducted an aerial survey and counted the elephants then in the Caprivi; whereupon, I was able to guarantee Martin that killing 500 elephants would solve the problem. I told him . . . "Killing 500 elephants will solve the current elephant overpopulation problem entirely; because there are now less than 400 elephants inside the country, so we will have to poach more than a hundred across the border in another country in order to reach the desired number of kills."

"...And God Laughs"

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As usual, the game department did not know what they were doing. The elephant killing operation never took place, although tens-of-thousands of elephants have since been killed in other parts of Africa in similar operations.

When I left the Caprivi after that second trip, I went to the Belgian Congo with Ken Momson and a young friend from Louisiana on a trip that involved elephant hunting, crocodile hunting, gorilla hunting and filming; but that is a story that I will return to later.

Once the crocodiles in the pen in Livingston started eating they did not appear to know when to stop; within a very short period I had purchased every donkey in that part of Africa, every sick horse or cow that I could find, and there was never quite enough for the crocs.

For a brief period we poached antelopes in the Caprivi and sneaked them into town to feed the crocs, but that was a very dangerous thing to do; if we got caught we would be in serious trouble. Moving such animals across an international border, dead or alive, requires a permit that is almost impossible to obtain.

Finally, I was reduced to buying food intended for people from the local 'cold stores,' in Livingston; on one particular Sunday I bought 2,448 pounds of beef from the local source, but that provided food for only sixteen crocs in the pen. Those sixteen ate an average of 153 pounds each, leaving nothing for the other crocs who were a bit slower about coming up to feed. Then, a couple of days later, the crocs that did eat were so swollen up with internal gas that they could not sink, floated with a large part of their backs above the surface of the water.

During the entire Caprivi operation we moved back and forth freely across several international borders with nothing in the way of either customs or immigration procedures. Which is not something that I would suggest at the moment; overall, things have changed so much in Africa since 1956 that it no longer appears to be the same place. What we did in the Caprivi would almost certainly be impossible to duplicate anywhere in Africa today, or anywhere else outside of Africa. Such opportunities usually come only once, if at all. The trick is to recognize an opportunity when it arises and strike while the iron is hot; but having done it once, do not then be dumb enough to believe that you can go back and repeat it.

Having been very successful on several trips to Africa, one of the biggest mistakes of my life occurred when I moved to Africa in 1966, convinced that another enormous opportunity awaited me; but, again, that is another story that will come later.

On the last day before we departed our camp in the Caprivi for the final trip to town, having by then captured all but one of the large crocs in that lake, we decided to play a bit; rigged up the top of a large wooden box so that we could tow it behind a fast boat, with a rope to hang on to. Standing on top of the box lid, hanging on to the rope, being pulled over the water at a high rate of speed, appeared to be very difficult but in fact was easy to do; within a matter of a few minutes we were able to make some rather spectacular moves without falling off. Most of our native workers tried it, and only one fell off.

Then, that night, the one remaining large croc still loose in the lake came ashore into our camp and was caught in a noose trap; he was probably attracted by all the splashing about during the previous day and came into the camp in an attempt to catch somebody for food. Instead, we caught him, number 189.

On one of our earlier trips into town with a large load of crocodiles, upon arrival at Mambova, where we had to switch from water to land transportation, I looked out over a sea of black faces and saw two white faces; so I told them . . . "You two guys look like you have strong backs and weak minds so come up here and give us some help lifting these crocs." And they did.

One of these young men, Graham Hall, was only eighteen years old, while the other one was about twenty-five years old and was named Sutherland (I never saw the second one again after the following day and have forgotten his first name); but, in fact, rather than appearing to have strong backs these two young men appeared to be starving, had decided to become crocodile poachers, managed to get a 1936 Ford car that was broken down by the time I met them that first night in Mambova, a rifle, a few rounds of ammunition and almost nothing in the way of money. When I met

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them in Mambova they had been sleeping on the dirt floor of the native store for a couple of weeks and were on the point of starvation. Pictures taken of them as we unloaded the crocs near Livingston showed that the largest parts of their arms were their wrists, they looked like skeletons.

So I took them into town, fed them, and ended up hiring the younger one. On the way into town a very large croc moved and managed to get on top of a smaller croc and crushed him to death; the croc that was killed was twelve feet and seven inches long and weighed about 900 pounds. So when I discovered that this croc was dead I hired the two white boys from Mambova to skin him for me as a trophy. Crocodile skins stretch when removed from the body; laid out alongside the skinned corpse the hide was fourteen feet and six inches long, nearly two feet longer than the croc's true length, and this resulted in spite of no attempt to stretch the hide.

Snake skins also stretch; the hide of a five foot rattlesnake will usually be at least seven feet long; which explains a lot of the stories about giant snakes. A forty percent stretch for a snake skin is usual and a fifty percent stretch is not rare. Have never tried it, but would not be surprised to discover that the hide of a six foot man would be at least seven feet long. I have the skins of several rattlesnakes that are almost a full ten feet in length, but the live snakes were less than seven feet long.

Since everything must come to an end, the day finally arrived when we were ready to start catching the crocs out of the pen on the dairy farm and loading them into the individual steel tanks for shipment. By that point we were very well experienced in handling big crocs, so the catching and 'tanking' went quickly and without a hitch. Then the tanks were loaded onto trucks and hauled to the train station for shipment by rail to the port of Beira in Mozambique, on the east coast of Africa, a distance of about a thousand miles from Livingston, where they would be loaded aboard an American ship for the trip to New Orleans.

Apart from one brief hitch with an American Consul in Salisbury, where we went on a Sunday (not a normal working day but the only day that fitted our schedule; or, rather, the train's schedule) the trip from Livingston went without problems until we were only a day or so away from the first port of call in this country, Mobile, Alabama. Up to that point the trip had been fine, but then at the last minute the weather turned very cold; so cold that the crocodiles would all have been killed if we had not been able to provide heat for them. So for thirty-six hours straight we worked without pause in order to keep the crocodiles warm enough; pumping raw steam into the water on one end of the croc's tanks and monitoring the temperature of the water on the other end of the tanks. After a couple of days of very cold weather, the temperature came back up to a safe level for awhile; but then, when we arrived in New Orleans, it turned cold again. So, for a period of several days after the crocs were moved into their enclosure at my exhibit east of New Orleans, we had to build big fires in order to heat water that we then pumped into the croc pool. These cold snaps occurred very late in the spring, were not expected; the shipping schedule had been arranged with very careful consideration of the temperatures that we would encounter enroute, but things seldom turn out as expected.

The only fly in the ointment during the trip by rail and ship, apart from the problems with the cold near the end of the trip, was a situation created by my financial partner on the Caprivi trip, Earl; he was supposed to pay for the ship freight before the crocs arrived in New Orleans, but did not do so. Instead, told the shipping company that he had sent the money to me in Africa, which was an outright lie. Nevertheless, a cable to that effect was sent to the Captain of the ship while we were still enroute, and that produced a bit of coolness on the part of the Captain until we got to New Orleans and got the matter straightened out.

When I reached new Orleans, and was able to get Earl on the phone, he did not repeat the lie about sending the money to Africa; instead tried to convince me that he was broke and unable to pay the shipping costs, then told me that one of his relatives was enroute to New Orleans and might agree to loan us the money for the ship freight if I was willing to agree to certain conditions that he would impose.

All of which was nothing short of an outright attempt on Earl's part to cheat me on the deal; so I told him to go to Hell, that I could raise the money for the ship freight if forced to, but that if I did he could kiss his part of the crocodiles good-bye.

"...And God Laughs"

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So the relative arrived, tried to impose no conditions, and paid for the ship freight without hesitation; then, later, while watching some of the African films in my house in Slidell, Louisiana, a notebook slipped out of Earl's relative's pocket and was left in his chair; a notebook clearly indicating that he didn't have a cent, had been supported by Earl for years.

I had previously tried to get Earl to agree that the cost of the steel tanks was part of the transportation costs and thus should be provided by him; but he refused to agree with this and I was thus forced to ship less than half of the planned number of crocodiles.

A few other problems arose at the last minute before we departed from Livingston when Trevor and some of his relatives presented me with bills that were far in excess of what we had agreed to; among other things, one of Trevor's cousins seemed to feel that it was my duty to buy a new engine for his car, in spite of the fact that it had never been used by me or for any of my purposes.

But, I guess they thought I was a rich American, so what the Hell, soak it to him while you have the chance. Carried a few words farther, that situation might have degenerated into a knife fight; but in the end he backed down. A few years later, the older of the two young white boys we met in Mambova wrote and published a book called 'Crocodile Trader,' wrote the book while he was in jail; a book that was totally false, which mentioned neither Bob Renyard nor Trevor Schultz, and had absolutely nothing in common with what actually occurred in the Caprivi.

The man who write that book never visited the Caprivi Strip in his life, but in his book he was presented as one of the leading characters throughout the operation. I was presented as a man who spent a large part of my time cleaning my spectacles, although in fact I never wore glasses until about twenty years later. He also had a lot to say about me waving a pistol and hands full of hundred-dollar bills around; in fact I had no pistol and no hundred-dollar bills.

Apart from that book, quite a bit has been published about me over the years; and all of it was just as accurate as that book: that is to say, totally false. In later chapters I will have quite a bit to say about the media, very little of it good.

One of the biggest mistakes I made in the Caprivi had nothing to do with big crocs; was, instead, concerned with baby crocs. In addition to the hundred big crocs that I hoped to bring back to this country, I also intended to bring several thousand new hatched, baby crocodiles; and, had I known then what I know now, I could have.

During the month of December, 1956, we collected the eggs from seven crocodile nests, a total of about four-hundred eggs, put them in boxes of sand in the camp and waited for them to hatch. At that time, and during the preceding two months, we could have collected the eggs from at least a hundred nests, a total of more than five thousand eggs; but we didn't, because I did not believe that doing so was necessary; I believed that we could just wait until they hatched naturally and then scoop them up by the thousands. But it didn't happen that way.

At that time nobody realized that the mother croc has to dig the babies up when they are ready to hatch; they cannot get out of the underground nest without the mother's help. But by the time the eggs buried in the nests were ready to hatch, we had already caught all of the female crocs and they were no longer there to dig their babies out of the sand; and not realizing that this was required, we were too dumb to dig them up ourselves. The result being that thousands of baby crocs died under the sand because of my ignorance.

NO MORE CROCODILE SHOOTING

Mr. Jones, after December 31, will be the only person entitled to hunt crocodiles in Northern Rhodesia as none of the present licenses for hunters who shoot crocodiles (he catches them) will be renewed after the end of this year.

This decision has been taken by the Northern Rhodesia Government following a preliminary report by Dr. H. Cott, professor of zoology at Cambridge, who was invited by Government to study the effect of the extermination of crocodiles on the fish population of the territory's rivers and lakes.

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For indications are that . . . contrary to popular belief . . . those ugly reptiles are not just “vermin” to be exterminated. It seems that on balance the crocodile is very useful in maintaining a balance of nature favorable to man because adult crocodiles feed mainly on catfish which are the worst enemies of our bream.

If these preliminary findings are verified by Prof. Cott’s studies next year, that may be the end of all crocodile hunting for good . . . in Northern Rhodesia at least.

So much for scientific opinions: as it happened, the crocodiles in the Caprivi Strip refused to eat fish of any kind, in spite of Dr. Cott’s stated opinion. Nine years later, more than a thousand miles away, in another part of Africa, we found the same thing to be true. The crocodiles living in a river on the northern end of Lake Saint Lucia, in Natal, were almost starving in spite of the fact that the river was literally alive with catfish. Some crocodiles do eat fish, but some do not.

I am in favor of protection for the remaining crocodiles in Africa, but they are now being protected for the wrong reason.