

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“Never be so arrogant that you fail to give people the benefit of the doubt: no matter how stupid they appear to be, they will invariably surprise you by doing something even dumber than you expected.”

Anon.

Many people believe that genius and madness are closely related, and maybe they are.

In the early fall of 1959, I returned to Slidell, Louisiana, from a ten-week, round-the-world filming trip for the television series *Wild Cargo*; had filmed in Australia, Singapore, Thailand, India and several countries in Africa. The trip had been made possible by the then recent introduction of commercial video-tape machines, which allowed me to transfer filmed episodes of the series to video tapes that would permit the series to continue on a weekly basis while I was away. Prior to the start of the trip ten episodes were transferred to tape, so that when I arrived back in Slidell I had only seven days to edit the film for the next show; film that I had mailed home from various points throughout the trip so that it could be processed and ready for me to edit as soon as I got back.

When I left on that trip my business was running very smoothly, income from the animal and reptile exhibit was not great but it was at least profitable, but the major source of income was a compound located in Iquitos, Peru, that was providing weekly shipments of tropical animals, birds and reptiles for sale to pet shops, exhibits and zoos and this was a very profitable business at the time.

So, as I started on that trip, I believed that I had no cause for concern. Sure. During the trip, the few messages that reached me by cable reassured me that everything at home was fine. My junior partner, Ray Olive, was left in charge while I was away, and was perfectly capable of running the business; if he was so inclined. But, as they say . . . “When the cat is away, the mice will play.” When I got back, everything was utterly fucked up; the exhibit was continuing more or less as before, but there had been no shipments from Peru in more than a month, and the animals that I had shipped back from my trip were sitting around in cages, unsold.

Pete Sargent, a man that I had sent to Peru just before I left on my trip, who was supposed to be there for the purpose of making films about that operation, had apparently looked around, seen the enormous opportunities, and decided to take over; upon my return, I had a twenty-five page, single-spaced, legal-length typed letter from him waiting for me. Telling me, in great detail, exactly what I would be required to do if I wished to continue the business: among other demands, I would be forced to put him in overall charge, would have to establish other compounds immediately in both Africa and the Far East, purchase several more large transport aircraft for the purpose of hauling animals from all over the world back to Slidell, and would have to totally ‘divorce ownership from management;’ that is, I would be required to pay for all of this, but he would be in charge.

Among other ‘improvements’ to the compound that Sargent bragged about in his letter to me was the fact that he had paid for, with my money, the construction of the largest billboard in the world; a huge sign built on the bank of the Amazon river, overlooking and facing the river; a sign that informed local Indians coming into town in small boats that we would purchase wild animals, something that every Indian within two-hundred miles already knew, and in an area where less than one percent of the people could read.

In places like South American, you make little or no attempt to capture wild animals yourself, because the local Indians can provide them in great numbers at a price far below anything you could manage by your own efforts in that direction; you could not work for less than a dollar a day, but that was a fortune to the local Indians. At that time, we were paying an average of eighty cents for a squirrel monkey, and were exporting about 1,100 of these every week to this country, together with several hundred other animals, birds and reptiles of a wide variety. The business was almost a printing press for money, and Sargent obviously saw this very clearly.

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After paying all the expenses involved, purchase price of the animal from local Indians, prorated costs of the collecting compound in Iquitos, transport to this country by air, import duties and related expenses, the total landed cost of a squirrel monkey was usually about \$2.75; while we were selling them, wholesale, for \$6.00 each, and retail for \$15.00. Thus we were producing a gross profit of a minimum of \$3,575.00 a week on squirrel monkeys alone, plus additional profits from the sale of the other animals included in each shipment. Which, to me at least, was a lot of money in 1959. Then, over and above the income from the animal business, I was making a profit from the sale of the television shows that I was producing at a rate of at least one episode a week.

Or, at least, that was the situation when I departed on the ten-week filming trip. Ray Olive, the man in charge in Slidell, had been spending money, my money since he did not have a cent invested in the business, like it was going out of style; went off on a week-long orgy, at my expense, as soon as I was out of sight, purchased a new, very expensive house, again with my money, and in the meantime was not minding the store.

When I realized just what had happened while I was away, I was tempted to kill Ray Olive; in any sane society I would have been required to kill him; and I did everything I could think of to goad him into an attack on me that would have made it possible to kill him in self defense; I sat him down in his car, laid a loaded pistol down on the seat beside him, and then read him the riot act in such an insulting manner that no self-respecting man would have been willing to sit there and listen to it; I wanted him to reach for the gun, but he did not.

Just how insulting can you get? Well, among other things, I made him tell me, in great detail and in front of several witnesses, about his sexual experiences with his mother; which may or may not have ever occurred, although in light of things I learned later I strongly suspect did occur; but, true or false, he told me all about it.

When that failed to work as planned, I did the next best thing: I took everything he had away from him, his house, his car, his wife and even most of his clothes; when I kicked him out he was forced to leave on foot, with only the clothes he was wearing at the time. Not surprising given the circumstances of his departure, I heard nothing more about or from him for many years; then, in the 1970s, a friend of mine in Miami called to tell me that Ray Olive was there visiting him and wanted to know if I would be willing to talk to him on the phone. So, what the Hell, forgive and forget, right? I talked to him on the phone, even agreed that he could stop by for a visit without the risk of getting killed; and, believe it or not, I even rehired him a few years later as a truck driver. After which he worked for me in that capacity until he died.

Given his history with me, why would I agree to rehire him under any circumstances? I don't really know why; maybe I felt sorry for him; or it might have been a bit more in the way of revenge, because by the time I did rehire him I was very successfully operating Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries, Inc., a multi-hundred-million-dollar business that was revolutionizing the rapidly-growing fitness and exercise industries. Was listed, in 1984, at the bottom of the Forbes 400 list of the wealthiest people in America, with an estimated net worth (their estimate, not mine) of \$125,000,000.00.

But my net worth when I returned from that filming trip in 1959 was something less than zero, largely thanks to Ray Olive. The losses produced while I was out of touch ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, in a period of only ten weeks. Easy come, easy go. But, in fact, it had not come easy, very little in my life ever did; instead, I had worked like a dog for years in order to reach the position I was in when I left on that filming trip, and Ray Olive, with help from Pete Sargent, threw it all away in a period of only a few weeks.

And that was the worst thing that ever happened to me, right? Wrong; that was only one of a long series of disasters that I have been involved in both before and after 1959; I have usually been fairly successful at making money, but have never shown much in the way of an ability to hang on to it afterwards. As they say . . . "A fool and his money are soon parted."

Having kicked Ray Olive out on his ass, I had to get to work in a desperate effort to salvage at least something; the most pressing consideration being the editing of a film that was scheduled to go on the air only a week later, and that was no easy job. I had mailed back tens of thousands of feet of exposed film, all of the scenes required to produce more than a dozen half-hour episodes for the television series, and the first thing I had to do was look at all of this footage and

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sort it out into various categories because, if not, I might make the mistake of using a scene in one film that should have been used in another film. Just viewing this film as it was projected for the first time required more than twenty-four hours, nonstop, around the clock; then I had to go through all of it again in order to break it up into the parts required for the planned television shows, but this second viewing was performed on an editing machine and did not require as much time as projecting the film did since the editing machine could be operated faster than a film projector. Nevertheless, this took another twelve hours of nonstop work. So a total of thirty-six hours of work was required before I could even start to edit the first film.

All of which I had to do personally, naturally; with assistance provided by an eighteen-year-old German boy named Herbert Prechtel, who served nonstop for several straight days, day and night without sleep, as a 'gofer,' go for some cigarettes, go for something to eat, hand me that roll of film, and so on.

Having worked around the clock, with almost nothing in the way of sleep or anything to eat, for a week, the first film was ready about an hour before it was scheduled to go on the air in New Orleans, but we still had to drive a distance of thirty-five miles to the studio. Herbert went to the studio with me in my car, but we could not arouse him when we reached the studio; he stayed asleep in the back seat of my car for more than twenty-four hours.

I had never met Herbert before I returned from the filming trip, found him hanging around the animal compound when I returned to Slidell; then hired him to help me work on the film because he was the only person immediately available. He knew, of course, less than nothing about film production; but that knowledge on his part was not required for my purposes. Herbert had run away from his home in Pennsylvania looking for a job in the animal business, had been watching my shows on television and came to Slidell hoping to get a job with me. But, at the time, he said nothing about any of that, simply did what he was told to do and kept his mouth shut. So, after that first week, and after several days of almost nonstop sleep, on his part, I paid him off and sent him on his way since I had nothing else for him to do at the moment.

Heard nothing else from or about him until the following spring, then got a letter from him telling me that he wanted a job; in his letter he said that he had decided that the reason I had not offered him a permanent job was the fact that he had not finished highschool, so when he left me he returned home, finished highschool, and was then ready for a permanent job.

In fact, I actually knew nothing about him, might not have recognized him if I had run into him on the street because I had been so busy during the time that he worked for me that I really never even looked at him. But, as it happened, when his letter arrived I did need somebody; so I called him at his parent's house, talked to both him and his father, offered him a job and sent him a bus ticket and a few dollars.

By that point, things were somewhat better, not good yet but better; the compound in Peru had been lost but both the exhibit and film production still continued. If I could keep jumping around the clock I could at least keep one nostril above the water, was not quite out on my ass in the street.

Then, a few days later, when Herbert arrived back in Slidell, he walked from the bus station to my house with one small suitcase in his hand, came up to the entrance to my kitchen, opened the door and started to come in. I was seated at the kitchen table, facing the door, when he arrived, and as he started to step into the kitchen I said . . . "Stop." I was stunned, I really would not have recognized him if I had met him on the street, he looked like a complete idiot; his nose was smeared all over his face, his mouth was twisted out of shape from the long practice of 'mouth breathing' that was forced on him by the fact that he could not breath through his nose, and his ears looked like a gorilla's ears, or would have if they had been the same size, which they were not.

So I said to myself . . . "My God, who, or what, have I hired? I doubt if this kid can tie his shoes."

It would have been difficult for my first impression to have been worse; but I was wrong, Herbert was nothing short of an outright genius, perhaps the most intelligent person I have ever met, but also one of the most troublesome since he was also crazy.

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Six months later, in return for a salary of fifty dollars a week, a place to stay and something to eat, Herbert was single-handedly performing several thousand dollars worth of work a week. He was not only brilliant but was both willing and able to work an average of about twenty hours a day, seven days a week for months. Prior to his arrival, a Film lab in New Orleans, Pan American Films, had been performing several critical services for each of my weekly films, at an average cost of \$1,780.00 per week, an expense that I really could not then afford but could not do without. But eventually, my financial state forced me to start doing that work myself, with Herbert's assistance; then, within a period of only a few weeks, Herbert proved to be capable of performing all of the work by himself, with no help from me or anybody else. A job that required an average of 178 hours of work a week by the lab in New Orleans, then took him less than a day, and he did the job better.

But that film work did not constitute all of his activities; in addition, he was cleaning cages and feeding animals in the exhibit, performing most of the cleaning work required in my house, minding my children when I was away, running errands and doing anything else I asked him to do; while going to college in New Orleans full time, which required a seventy-mile round trip five days a week. He was the first person I ever met, and one of the very few that I ever met, who could keep up with me.

Herbert and I worked so hard, and so steadily, during that period that the owners of Pan American Films used to threaten their employees with a week-long 'vacation' at what they called the 'Jones rest camp.'

Then, in the summer of 1960, a man from Mobile, Alabama, released a feature film called Macumba Love, which may well have been the worst film ever made, a film that cost less than \$80,000.00 at a time when the average cost for a feature film was about a million dollars, a film that was produced in Brazil in order to avoid the film-unions in this country. But, when that film was shown in Detroit, Michigan, directly across the street from a theatre that was showing a very successful film, Ben Hur, Macumba Love grossed \$32,000.00 during its first week while Ben Hur grossed \$15,000.00. When my agent in New Orleans, Brandon Chase, heard about this, he immediately suggested that I should produce a similar film, and we reached an agreement to that effect. I was supposed to pay all costs up to a certain point, and Brandon would then pay all expenses beyond that point, then we would share equally in all resulting income. A contract to that effect was drawn up and signed; but, being the dumb ass that I was, I failed to take note of the fact that all of my costs would come first, that Brandon would not have to put up a cent until all of the actual filming was finished. Added to my previous work load, the production of this feature film pushed us well into overdrive, but the film was completed; so then it was time for Brandon to put up some money.

Which he never did; instead, he claimed he was broke, and asked me if I could at least pay for the first part of his obligations; and I really had no choice under the circumstances, because if I could not, or would not, put up more money than my entire investment up to that point would be lost. Sure, I could have sued him, and probably would have won after having made a lot of lawyers rich, but I had never sued anybody in my life; and, in any case, as they say, you cannot get blood out of a turnip.

So, in the end, I paid for everything, and never saw a cent in return; after the film was finished, Brandon used it as collateral for the purpose of borrowing a large sum of money, which he never repaid; the final result being that the film was never released, it is probably sitting in a lab somewhere thirty-four years later.

If it had been released, it might not have done as well as Macumba Love, although it was a Hell of a lot better than that film, but it would at least have produced something in the way of income.

About four years later, in Hollywood, Brandon pulled off another scam; at the time, a major studio was about to release a film called Harlow, but Brandon released another film, also called Harlow, a week before the scheduled release of the film from the big studio, and could get away with it due to the fact that you cannot copyright the title to a film; the studio that produced the other Harlow had already spent enormous sums of money advertising their film, and Brandon hoped to mislead the public into believing that his film was the one they had been reading about.

Brandon's film was not even shot on film, was video taped in black and white and then transferred to film for release to theatres, the result being a very grainy print that looked a lot like films shot shortly after the turn of the century.

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Nobody ever heard of any of the actors in Brandon's film, before or since, and the entire film was produced in less than a week; it was nearly as bad as Macumba Love. And, of course, as I learned later, none of the people who worked in or on Brandon's film were ever paid; the man in overall charge of that production, Bob Glenn, later worked for me so I eventually heard the entire story.

But, at least, never having gone far in school, I was finally beginning to get something in the way of an education: the school of hard knocks.

While all of this was going on, Herbert was going out with a girl named Bea; and one night Bea led Herbert up to me by the hand and said . . . "Arthur, do you think it would be all right if Herbert and I did what married people do? You know what I mean."

And, yes, I knew exactly what she meant, so I told her . . . "Look, you should not be coming to me with this; what you do is between you and Herbert, and is none of my business, so I will not even discuss the matter with you."

But Herbert still would not fuck her, although she almost raped him; would not fuck her because he still worshipped at the altar of her supposed virginity. Would not touch her until they were married; an experience that utterly destroyed Herbert, literally overnight. Because, on the first night of their honeymoon, Bea told Herbert all about her previous sexual experiences, in great detail, down to and including a description of her stepfather's prick, a man she had been fucking since she was eleven years old. Herbert never recovered from that shock, within a week was vomiting blood from bleeding ulcers brought on by his wife's revelations; but then he was caught on the horns of a dilemma, did not want to keep her but did not want to get rid of her either.

For my part, I made the terrible mistake of permitting Herbert to tell me all about it; which then put me in a position of knowing all about his terrible secret, which turned me from his best friend into a threat. He was desperately afraid that I would tell somebody else about it, which of course I never did. But, nevertheless, within a few weeks he started going up to mutual friends and saying things like . . . "Did Arthur tell you that my wife has been fucking her stepfather since she was eleven years old? Well, if he did, he is a damned liar." Which, of course, spread the story all over town; then, having spread the story himself, Herbert blamed it on me.

From being by far the best man who ever worked for me, Herbert suddenly turned into one of the worst. And Bea, for her part, proved to be one of the dumbest people I ever heard of: a lawyer came around to my house one day, where Bea was then staying with Herbert, and she was the only person home; so she invited him into my house, and then spent several hours with him carefully going over all of my books and records, the lawyer being there for the sole purpose of trying to determine whether or not I had enough money to make it profitable for him to file a phony law suit against me. And he told Bea why he was there.

Then, that night, when she told me about it, I asked her just why in the Hell she had permitted the lawyer to go over my records. And she replied . . . "Well, he asked me, and he would have thought I was awful dumb if I did not know those things, so I told him."

To which statement I replied . . . "Bea, he doesn't think you are dumb, he knows you are dumb."

Herbert and I, to the extent that we were still communicating at all, which wasn't much at that point, had reached an agreement that Bea would never be permitted to travel with us on any filming trips, and this agreement was carefully explained to her. Yet, somewhat later, she asked me if she could go to Brazil with me on an upcoming trip in one of my airplanes in order to visit Herbert, who was in Brazil at the time. So I told Bea . . . "No, Bea, you cannot go to Brazil, not now and not later, you cannot ever go on any of our trips."

Yet, a few minutes later, she was on the phone talking to her mother, and I heard her say . . . "Guess what, Mama, Arthur is going to take me to Brazil tomorrow to see Herbert." Perhaps her ears were still working, but her brain obviously was not.

But, in fact, I may not have been much smarter than Bea was at that point, because I was stupid enough to leave Herbert in Brazil; and doing so cost me literally millions of dollars.

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At that time, the tropical fish business in this country was enormous, for a period of a few years the gross sales of tropical fish exceeded the gross sales of all products, supplies and services in the field of photography. I had been buying millions of tropical fish from a Chinese man named Louis Chung who operated his business on Atkinson Field, near Georgetown, British Guyana, in northern South America. I was paying him ten cents each for very small fish called Cardinal Tetras, and was picking up a load of approximately a half million of these fish every two weeks, bringing them to this country and reselling them at a higher price.

But I was clearly aware that Chung was not the actual source of these fish, knew that he was buying them from somebody else, and suspected that he was buying them at a much lower price. So I made several trips all over northern and central South America looking for the source of these fish, and eventually I found it. A German man named Willie Schwartz was living in Manaus, Brazil, on the Amazon river, and he was the source of the fish; although the fish did not come from where he had his holding pools, actually came from a place 1,800 miles farther up the Amazon. In the area where the fish were found, they were in effect the local minnows, were there in their trillions, so numerous that Schwartz could capture several million of them in a period of a few hours. Having captured them, he then transported them back down river to his holding pools in Manaus in tanks built into a large boat. Such a trip up and back down the river took him about two weeks, but he could bring back several million fish each time he made the trip.

His only problem was the fact that he had no way to ship them from Manaus; because, although there was an airport in Manaus, there were no airlines operating out of there that could haul his fish. A thirty-year-old flying boat made a trip up the river and back every week, but stopped each flight in Belem, a city at the mouth of the Amazon, and there was no airline operating out of there that could haul fish to this country. So the only way he could get his fish out was to find someone who could pick them up in a private plane in Manaus. When I arrived on the scene, the only person picking up fish from Schwartz was a man named Fred Coshu, who owned Paramount Aquarium in Vero Beach, Florida; so Coshu had a monopoly on these fish, imported only a few million of them in order to keep the price high. The fish I had been buying from Chung came from Schwartz, were traded by Coshu for other fish that Chung could obtain locally.

When I first met Schwartz I pretended that I had no interest in fish, instead asked him to supply me with monkeys and snakes; but he said . . . "Fuck the monkeys, fuck the snakes; take some of my fish." So, eventually, with apparently great reluctance on my part, I let him talk me in to taking some of his fish. He made me an offer I could not refuse: told me to come there with the plastic sacks and cardboard boxes required to transport the fish, and that he would 'give me' half a million Cardinal tetras, and I would not have to pay him a cent at the time. Then, he said, come back and I will give you a second load, and a third load, still without payment; then, he said, when you come for the fourth load you can pay me for the first load, at a price of three cents each.

Each load, based on my previous buying price from Chung, would have been worth \$50,000.00, and would bring more than that in this country; and I could easily haul one load a week, at a cost of less than two thousand dollars a trip, since I was flying my own airplane and gasoline was almost free at that time throughout most of Latin America, usually cost anywhere between a low of nine cents a gallon and a high of sixteen cents a gallon. The deal Schwartz offered me was almost literally a gold mine, a license to steal.

So why didn't I go around Schwartz and get the fish from where they actually came from, which I could have done at almost no cost? For several reasons: one, because I don't do business that way; two, because I did not have the required boat and tanks; three, because I did not have the holding pools for millions of fish; four, because I could not have exported the fish even if I did manage to get them. In order to operate a private airplane into and out of Brazil, for the purpose of exporting anything, you had to have a permit from the Brazilian Government, and such permits were all but impossible to obtain. But, guess what? The Brazilian woman that Schwartz was married to was the sister of the man who issued such permits, so Schwartz, and only Schwartz, could get the required permits.

I could not pick up a load of his fish while I was there on the trip that led me to Schwartz, because I already had a load waiting for me in Georgetown, and because it would take a few days to get the permit; so I had to leave Manaus empty. But Herbert wanted to stay there until I came back a week or so later for the first load of fish, and I was dumb enough to agree to let him stay.

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But I did not agree to let him stay without a clear understanding in regard to what he should, and should not, do while I was gone: I told him to avoid Schwartz like the plague, because, as I said above, Herbert was obviously crazy, and I could not be certain about just what he might say to Schwartz.

I told him . . . “Herbert, if you are in the restaurant, and if Schwartz comes in, run to the nearest window and jump out.”

The restaurant being on the third floor of the building, Herbert then said . . . “But if I jump out the window, I’ll get killed.”

To which I replied . . . “Exactly, that’s the idea, it will be much better for you to get killed than for you to come in contact with Schwartz.” Then I added . . . “If you are out walking in the street, at night, and you see a dim figure moving in the far distance, immediately start running as fast as you can towards the east; continue running until you reach the coast, it’s only about a thousand miles, and when you reach the coast simply follow it until you finally get back to Slidell, which should take you only a few years. Because Schwartz is alive, and thus there is at least a possibility that any moving figure you see might be him.”

I’m joking, right? Wrong; what I actually said at the time went on at rather great length, with several other hypothetical situations being clearly spelled out. All of which instructions were delivered in a manner that I hoped would leave no remaining doubts in Herbert’s mind; if he still had a mind at that point, which I doubt.

All of which, of course, was wasted; because Herbert was on board the boat with Schwartz, practically sitting on his lap, almost before I was out of town, on the way upriver to get another load of fish. The permit required for the first fish trip was supposed to reach me by airmail within a period of no more than ten days, but a month later I had heard nothing from either Schwartz or Herbert in spite of several cables sent by me in an attempt to find out just what was happening.

Then I did get word from Herbert: a brief cable telling me that he was starving, had been kicked out of his hotel and had no place to stay, with nothing being said about Schwartz. Which was surprising, to say the least, because I had left him with enough money to live on for at least a year; yet, a month later, he was dead broke, desperate.

Why? Because, in his infinite wisdom, Herbert had invested every cent that he had in stuffed birds, which he planned to resell in this country at a huge profit; this being his plan in spite of the fact that it was illegal to import such stuffed birds into this country, a problem he was obviously unaware of when he made that investment.

Thirty-odd years later, I still don’t know just what Herbert told Schwartz; but, whatever it was, it was enough to blow the deal. I could have made a net profit of at least \$40,000.00 from every load of fish from Schwartz, and could have imported at least fifty loads a year, for an annual net profit in excess of two million dollars.

So I brought Herbert back to Louisiana, but that was certainly not the end of my problems with him; as they say, anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

For example: if your boss was dumb enough to leave you in charge on an animal exhibit for a period of only one day, so that he could sleep in a bit for the first time in about twenty years, and if you had been told repeatedly that there was a good reason to have two separate enclosures for alligators, one for large alligators and one for small ones; this being required because the large ones would eat the small ones if you put both in the same pen; then what would you do if a man arrived with a large, wild, freshly captured alligator? Would you put it in the pen with the other large ‘gators, where he belonged, or would you, instead, put it in the pen with the small ‘gators?

Guess what Herbert did?

Now, if it was your intention to put a large ‘gator into the wrong pen, for whatever reason or without reason, would you put it into the wrong pen by using the door in the concrete wall around the pen, which door was in plain sight directly in front of you, which door was very easy to open and was put there for the purpose of providing easy entrance to the pen, or would you, instead, put the large ‘gator into the wrong pen by climbing the wall immediately next to the gate while holding a large, wild alligator in your arms?

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Guess what Herbert did?

Finally, if it was your intention to put a large, wild alligator into the wrong pen, while climbing the wall immediately next to a perfectly usable gate, while holding him in your arms, would you untie the 'gator's mouth before putting him into the wrong pen or afterwards?

Guess what Herbert did?

At about eight O'clock my phone rang, it was Herbert's wife, Bea . . . "Make him stop, for God's sake make him stop, he's killing Herbert."

So I said . . . "Make who stop?"

And she said . . . "The alligator, it's killing Herbert; make him stop."

So I told her . . . "All right, Bea, calm down; just put the alligator on the phone and I'll tell him to stop." I was eight miles away; so I dressed as quickly as possible, jumped in my car and roared off in the direction of the exhibit. About halfway there, I passed Herbert coming in the opposite direction, turned around, ran him down and then led him to the office of a local doctor who was a good friend of mine; he provided me with medical care at wholesale rates, charged only a dollar a stitch for sewing people back together. But on this occasion he stopped counting stitches after eighty, probably assumed I could not pay for the actual number required, which ran into the hundreds; the alligator had really given Herbert a very thorough going over.

That was neither the first nor the last time that Herbert was chewed up by an animal, but it was the worst example of such injuries. Herbert repeatedly made the terrible mistake of hesitating; when working with wild animals you must not hesitate, doing so will get you hurt every time, and may get you killed. Similar rules should be applied during violent confrontations with people; if you pull your gun, use it, you should be pulling the trigger as the gun starts to come out of the holster; always strike the first blow, by surprise if possible, and then don't stand there like a dunce after landing the first blow, keep hitting him until he can't move, then kick him for a while. Being hesitant about using our true level of force is the primary factor responsible for the utterly fucked up condition of this country at the moment, to say nothing about the equally fucked up situation throughout the rest of the world. Most of the problems in the world today can be solved only with the unhesitating use of superior force; turn the other cheek if you are dumb enough to do so, but the next time someone runs at you with an ax you can reach for your Bible if so inclined but I will be reaching for my pistol. Then we will see who survives, and who does not.

I may not be very smart, but I have managed at least to survive in many situations where other people did not. I did not get all of the bullet holes I now have in my carcass by attending Sunday school, but the people who put them there are all dead.

On one occasion we had to pry a giant monitor lizard's jaws off of Herbert's thumb with a crow bar; another time a Tyra, a giant South American Weasel, one of the most savage animals in the world, chewed his arm into mush from his wrist almost up to his shoulder.

After a few years with me, Herbert looked like he had been assembled from spare parts, with a rather poor job of stitching these parts together. I have my own share of scars from injuries produced by animals, or people, literally hundreds of such scars, but my scars resulted from handling at least five hundred times as many animals as Herbert ever did, and yet his scars are worse than mine.

But, again, enough is enough, already; so, eventually I had to run him off. Did not then see or hear from him again for many years; but later did the same thing I did with Ray Olive, rehired him; which, naturally, created even more fuck ups, so I do not seem to be able to learn much from my mistakes either.

"...And God Laughs"

The Arthur Jones Collection

What is he doing now? I don't know all the details, but the last time I heard he had attached himself to some Oriental guru up north somewhere and was trying to learn how to levitate. Just before he left the last time, about ten years ago, he was staying for a while in my former wife's house in Lake Helen, Florida; I was sitting in the kitchen there one day and heard a series of loud thumps, investigated and found Herbert out on the porch, seated in the Lotus position and leaping into the air.

When I asked him just what the Hell he thought he was doing, he told me that he was practicing levitation. So I then said . . . "Well, you seem to have the takeoffs down pretty good, but your ability to hover leaves a bit to be desired, and those landings are going to fuck up your knees."

So then he bet me ten thousand dollars that levitation would be demonstrated in public, and accepted by everyone, within less than five years; ten years later I still haven't been paid.