

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“If you associate with a man because of his father’s money, you will more than earn every cent that you get.”

Anon.

Bill Binnings was the adopted son of a very wealthy man in New Orleans and I first encountered him, in the late 1950’s, because of my association with Pan American Films, the lab that processed my film and performed other services in connection with the television series I was producing, Wild Cargo. These films were not, in the usual sense of the term, ‘animal films,’ were, instead, films about people working with animals. Many of these films could not be shown on television in this country now, because some of them were very violent, and because very few would now be considered ‘politically correct.’

Each of these films had a total running time of twenty-five minutes and twenty seconds, the remaining four minutes and forty seconds required to fill a half-hour time slot on the air being gaps left in the film for commercials. Three minutes of running time was devoted to the opening, closing credits, and a promotion for the next program in the series, which left only twenty-two minutes and twenty seconds for the actual film. In theory, that was supposed to be divided into two segments of film that ran for exactly ten minutes each, leaving two minutes and twenty seconds for introductions to the filmed segments; introductions that were filmed in a studio at Pan American Films in New Orleans.

The introductions to the films were filmed at night, because that was the only time that the required people were available since everybody else involved was employed full time during the day; the sound man we were using was employed by a local television station located a few blocks away from Pan America Films, and the three cameramen that were required worked in various places in New Orleans, and sometimes one of these cameramen would be Bill Binnings. Apart from these four technicians and myself, the only other person needed was a local television newsman who served as the host for these programs.

A very simple set consisting of two folding chairs situated in front of a backdrop provided by a large cargo net from a ship was all the props that were required. This set could be made ready in about five minutes, and then removed after we were finished with the filming of the introductions. The host and I would sit in these chairs and he would ask me a question about the film segment that was to follow; my answer to his question was supposed to provide the lead in to the upcoming film.

But that was the theory. In practice, things were much different; because, when we filmed these introduction portions of the programs, we seldom even knew the subject of the film that was to follow. The films themselves were being shot all over the world, and our schedule was so tight that I was almost always off in some remote spot filming. So the introductions to the films had to be produced well in advance of the scheduled air date; when I returned to New Orleans from a filming trip, I normally had only a few days available for finishing the first of the films shot on that trip. In one instance, I returned to New Orleans with the unprocessed film for the next several episodes of the series on a Monday morning, and the first of these films had to be delivered to New York on the following Friday, only four days later. So we had a lot to do, and very little time in which to do it.

Having flown one of my airplanes all night, in order to reach New Orleans from South America on Monday morning, I then worked nonstop until late the following Thursday night, and then the finished film was hand carried to New York by a friend of mine who was a captain working for an airline. Things like Federal Express or overnight mail did not then exist, so if quick delivery of something was required you had to make your own arrangements.

In his own mind, Bill Binnings was many things, an actor, a film producer and director, a cameraman, a pilot, a gunfighter, a police officer and a long list of other things; but, in fact, the reality was somewhat different: he was the most cowardly man I have ever met, one of the most incompetent people I ever met, and very close to the top of the list of the dumbest people I ever met. So, naturally, when he saw what we were doing, he was attracted like a male dog to a bitch in heat.

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Although he had a wife and several children living in a small town about fifty miles from New Orleans, Bill spent almost all of his time in New Orleans chasing girls; with absolutely nothing in the way of results from his nonstop efforts in that direction. Bill reminded me of the old joke about the man who spent a month and several thousand dollars in a whorehouse and then remarked, as he was leaving . . . “You know, if I had another thousand dollars and a few more days, I believe I could fuck that girl.”

Our weekly shows had one of the highest ratings in the history of television, so we were getting a lot of publicity; everybody within the television viewing area around New Orleans knew who I was and what I was doing, and Bill wanted desperately to get in on this publicity, believing that it would improve his chances with the girls.

A couple of years earlier, in an attempt to attract girls, Bill invested several hundred thousand dollars of his adoptive father’s money in order to establish a film studio in the French Quarter section of New Orleans; built and equipped the studio, then sat back with his feet on his desk and waited for the girls to come flocking in looking for a chance to be in films. But things did not turn out quite the way he expected: the girls stayed away by the millions, and the only film he ever produced was a one minute commercial for local television, and that effort left a great deal to be desired.

In an attempt to attract advertising revenue, the local television stations offered to produce one minute commercials for a flat cost of fifty dollars; shot on film, these commercials probably cost the stations about three hundred dollars to produce, but they expected to more than make up for these losses by selling advertising time. So, after sitting on his ass for about a year, waiting for the girls that never came, Bill decided to break into that market, offered to produce commercials for fifty dollars in competition with the television stations.

If he had managed to attract such business, he would have lost at least two-hundred and fifty dollars on every commercial that he produced, and he of course had no air time to sell in order to make up for these losses; but even that would have looked like a success when compared to his other attempts to establish himself in some sort of business; over the years, Bill had started about ten different businesses and lost his ass, or his father’s ass, in each of these attempts.

Among other things he tried to be a private detective, then later started a crop dusting company, and then ran through a long list of other things in his attempts to establish himself in some sort of business; and, finally, he ended up with the film studio in New Orleans. When he offered to produce commercials for fifty dollars each, he got only one customer, my agent in New Orleans, Brandon Chase.

When they started filming in Bill’s studio, Brandon told Bill that the exposure he was using was wrong, but Bill assured him that he knew what he was doing and told him to mind his own business; but he should have listened to Brandon, because the resulting film was so overexposed that there was no image on the film, which really did not matter because the sound recorder Bill was using failed to work. The result being a film without picture or sound. Then Bill got pissed off at Brandon because Brandon refused to pay him for the utterly worthless commercial.

If the cost of his studio and equipment is considered, together with the costs of running the studio, that commercial probably cost Bill about a half a million dollars. But the studio did, at least, keep him occupied for a couple of years; perhaps Bill’s adoptive father was hoping it would keep Bill out of trouble even if it served no other purpose.

To say that people were ‘using’ Bill during that period, and thus using his adoptive father, would be a gross understatement, every con man who came through town ripped him off; among other things, a guy talked Bill into putting up all of the money required to produce a feature film, a film shot entirely on a large sail boat with a crew of young girls. Bill, of course, believed that he would get the girls; but, in fact, the only thing he got was the job of polishing the brass fittings on the boat, and the film was so bad that it could never be released.

Later, when Bill was serving as one of the three cameramen that were required for filming the studio portions of my television shows, his duties consisted of pushing the START button on the camera he was assigned to and later pushing the STOP button; beyond that, he was utterly hopeless. We used three cameras for filming these parts of the shows, and I quickly learned that I could leave nothing to chance, had to do practically everything myself. If I let somebody else load film into a camera, or focus a camera, or frame the scene covered by a particular camera, or set the

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exposure, there would always be a fuck up of some sort: the film would be out of focus, or it would be either underexposed or overexposed, or the framing of the scene would be wrong, or the film would jam in the camera. The solution to this situation was simple: all three cameras were mounted on heavy tripods and then screwed down onto the head of the tripod so that the camera could not be moved during the filming, I loaded the film into each camera, framed the scenes I wanted, focused the lenses and set the required exposure.

But even that was not enough: because the cameras that we were using frequently had a problem with their film magazines, the camera would start running but the take-up motor on the film magazine might not start; the result being that the film would jam and we would be forced to stop and start over. So after the three cameramen pushed their START buttons, I had to check in order to make sure that the film magazines were also working properly.

I could have trained a monkey to perform Bill's part of these filming operations, and the results would probably have been better. The sound man we were using was not much better; one night, after we had finished filming the studio portions for twelve episodes of the series, he told us that the sound was no good, so several thousand feet of film and all of our work was wasted. I was finally able to arrange things so that no problems would arise with the actual filming, but I could not be in two places at one time so could not supervise the sound man, was entirely at his mercy. Why he waited until we were finished before telling us that the sound was no good I will never know. I was tempted to kick his ass all over the studio, but did not since no other sound man was available to us.

Although these studio portions of the shows were supposed to provide introductions to the following films shot in the field, in fact we never knew just what the subject of the film would be, since it had not been shot yet, so we could never say anything specific in regard to the film that was to follow. The result being that these introductions seldom had anything to do with the film that followed; I could not even mention the location of the film, since it might be almost anywhere. Thus, of course, there was no script. So, in practice, I would first make damned sure that the film magazines on all three cameras were working properly, then rush over to my chair, sit down, attach my microphone, and then turn to face the host of the show; whereupon he would ask me what he was supposed to say first, and I would say something like . . . "Ask me my opinion of the American Consular services overseas." And he would, and then I would deliver a ten-minute tirade expressing my opinions of such people; opinions that were never favorable and were usually highly insulting. Opinions established as a result of my experiences with such people all over the world.

These introductions were supposed to run for only about a minute, but when we filmed them we dragged them out to about ten or eleven minutes, because we then did not know how long the following film would be and we had to have enough to fill up all of the allotted time; as part of one episode we used an introduction that ran for more than eight minutes for a following film that ran for only three minutes.

In a very real sense, the result was one of the first utterly spontaneous talk shows on television, and by far the frankest; I could not say things like 'shit' or 'fuck' but apart from a short list of words that I could not use there were few restrictions on what I could, and did, say.

Not often, perhaps, but sometimes you should pay attention to the stated opinions of other people; my failure to do so later cost me a lot of money. Thousands of people told me, in person or in letters, that they liked my shows very much, and most of them said that they liked the studio portions best of all; but I did not believe them. They were telling me what they wanted to see and hear, and I was too stupid to pay attention.

Because I knew that the long introductions were forced upon me by circumstances, were not supposed to run so long; I believed that the shows would be greatly improved if the introductions were held down to about a minute, so that the following film would run longer.

But I was wrong: during the production of a following series of shows, Capture, I had more money and more time, not a lot of either time or money, but more than I had while producing the Wild Cargo series, and this made it possible to reduce the introductions to a running time of only about a minute. Which, in my mind, represented a great improvement in the shows; but the viewing public did not agree with me, they liked the earlier shows much better.

The ratings for the Wild Cargo series were so high that we were able to pre-sell the next series to every major television market in the country without even having a 'pilot' film to show them in advance; all we had to do was to call

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a station manager on the phone and tell him that we were going to make another series of shows, and the sale could be made over the phone. Our previous 'track record' was so good that they all wanted anything else we produced; but the ratings for that next series were much worse; I had removed the most important parts of the shows in a misguided attempt to improve the shows.

At the time I was producing these television shows, the average cost for a half-hour-long situation comedy that was produced in Hollywood was about \$80,000.00; assuming that there were no more than four actors and the show was produced entirely in a studio and without more than one set, and then only if there were no scenes filmed 'on location,' that is, outside of a studio.

In stark contrast, the budget for my films was only \$6,000.00 per episode, less than ten percent of the cost of a half-hour show produced in Hollywood. And my shows were filmed all over the world, and thus required heavy expenses for transportation and living expenses on location. This was possible only because I used my own airplanes for all transportation, because we were not involved with any unions, because our filming crews were much smaller than usual, because these people were paid very little by Hollywood standards, because we lived 'rough,' and because we worked from long before dawn until well after dark, seven days a week.

One of the most successful Hollywood producers at that time was a man named Ivan Tors, who, in the mid-1960s, was producing shows somewhat like mine; one series that he produced was called Daktari, concerning the adventures of a veterinarian working with wild animals in Africa, and his budget for that series was \$250,000.00 per episode, and he was losing money on every episode; hoped to regain these losses and eventually make a profit from later sales to the syndicated market.

At that same time, there was a very popular series on television called Get Smart, and one of their frequently used punch lines was . . . "Would you believe?"

Thus, following a meeting with Ivan Tors at his home outside Los Angeles, while his brother was taking me back to town in a car, when Ivan's brother asked me what my weekly budget was, I hesitated; because I knew he would not believe me if I told him the truth, and I did not want him to stop the car, jump out into the street and challenge me to a fist fight for having attempted to insult his intelligence, which might well have been his response if I told him the truth. But, at the same time, I did not want to lie to him, so I hesitated for a moment or two, and then said . . . "Would you believe \$18,000.00 per episode?" Which was three times our actual budget.

He looked at me for a few seconds, and then said . . . "No, I would not believe it." Ivan's company could not have produced my films for much if anything less than \$100,000.00 per episode, more that sixteen times our costs.

But the disparity between what people in Hollywood believed, and what we were actually doing, worked to my advantage; thus, later, when they made offers to buy my films at a price that they believed was far below my production costs, I could accept such offers while still making a big profit; they thought they were cheating me and that I was losing my ass when in fact I was making a big profit.

Next to the waste in government, the waste in Hollywood is probably worse than anywhere else; for the same reason that such waste is produced in Washington, D.C., because most of the people in Hollywood simply do not know what they are doing. To say nothing about the crooked film deals and the outright theft that is involved in most film productions. Only about ten percent of the feature films that are produced are ever shown to the public, and most that are released lose money. Then why do they make these films? Because the people producing these films get their money 'up front,' they get rich even if the film is never distributed; they talk a bunch of relatively wealthy but dumb people into putting up most or all of the money, people like a dentist from Chicago who believes that in return for his investment he will get a chance to associate with a bunch of starlets and get some young pussy.

In practice, they seldom see any kind of a return, no money and no pussy. But such people are out there, in the tens of thousands, seemingly looking for somebody to come along and milk them like a cow.

When the television series Capture was completed, I immediately signed a contract for another series, Call of the Wild, at an even higher budget, \$9,100.00 per episode; which should have produced a big profit for me even if the

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series was never released, but instead led directly to a major disaster, a disaster created largely by Bill Binnings. A disaster that got some people killed, and cost me millions of dollars.

Having sent two people on ahead to Africa by ship with most of our heavy equipment, six of us departed from Geneva, Switzerland, in a new airplane loaned to me by Piper Aircraft Company at no cost to me in return for publicity that they would get in my films. A bit of 'payola.'

While I was producing these films I got all kinds of things free, boats, motors, airplanes, guns and a long list of other things; all I had to do was ask for them, and sometimes things arrived that I had not asked for, I was given so many outboard motors for boats that I gave most of them away to friends.

Perhaps the most destructive debate in the history of the world is the ongoing controversy in regard to the relative merits of heredity versus environment; in effect, which factor has the greatest influence on your later development, genetics or experience? At the moment, and for most of the last fifty years, it has been politically correct to state that people develop largely as a result of their experience, and that genetics is relatively unimportant. Bullshit; look around you, it does not take much observation to see the real facts. Certainly experience plays a roll, but it is relatively unimportant compared to the contributions from genetics. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Bill Binnings is the perfect example of this relationship.

Oh, so I am a racist, right? Wrong, I am a realist. At a young age, I was one of the first liberals to come down the pike, but sixty-odd years of frequently brutal experience has taught me that the liberals usually have their heads shoved so far up their assholes that they cannot see the light; and they apparently never learn from experience. I wish that the liberals were right, but have seen nothing that ever supported their opinions, while being provided with thousands of things that clearly prove that they are wrong.

Having previously produced twenty-three television programs and one feature film in Africa, I did not want to return to Africa for more filming; I believed that I had already done everything of any value that could be done in Africa, and that a return trip would produce nothing apart from a repetition of some of my earlier films. But I was outvoted, because some of the investors insisted that at least thirteen out of a planned thirty-nine episodes had to be filmed in Africa. So off we went.

And since things had changed in Africa since my earlier trips, I also knew that the only sane choices for filming locations were South Africa or Southern Rhodesia, the only parts of Africa still controlled by whites. Trying to work anywhere in black Africa gave you a choice falling somewhere between insanity and suicide. I had been directly involved, in Kenya, in what the newspapers called the Mau Mau uprisings, but which the whites in Kenya called The Emergency, so I was clearly aware of the situation in black Africa. In 1959, in Kenya, I produced a film about the use of dogs for the purpose of hunting men, and a very watered-down version of this film was used as an episode in the Wild Cargo series; while the uncensored version was used as a training film for the Louisiana State Police for several years. Neither version of that film could be used on television today; while it was perfectly true, it would not now be politically correct.

I had previously been in both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, on several trips to both countries, but did not believe that much in the way of filming opportunities existed in either country; again, I was wrong, the filming opportunities in those two countries were almost infinite. Or would have been, if the people in charge of those countries had been sane. Which proves, I suppose, that I was also insane: after all, who but the insane, after a bit of experience, would expect anything in the way of sanity?

None of our filming trips were ever planned, we had nothing in the way of a script; instead, we just headed out into the boonies looking for targets of opportunity, did the most outrageous things we could think of and filmed the results; one important difference being the fact that we actually did all of the things that we showed on film, nothing was ever faked. In stark contrast, practically everything else shown on television about animals today is staged, uses either tame animals or at least animals that are filmed in a controlled environment.

About 1960, Walt Disney released a film called Jungle Cat, a film which was, according to Disney's claims, 'filmed in the jungle, where it happened, as it happened.'

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When he first went to work for me, Herbert Prechtel frequently said things like . . . “Well, that’s not the way Disney does it.”

But, later, halfway through *Jungle Cat*, Herbert started crying and then got up and left the theatre, having realized that the whole damned thing had been staged. His God, Disney, had crashed in flames. Later, in Brazil, Herbert and I both learned that *Jungle Cat* was actually filmed inside a compound built within the city limits of Manaus, Brazil, using animals supplied by Willie Schwartz, the fish dealer mentioned earlier. During the filming of *Jungle Cat*, it was strictly forbidden to take any pictures of the compound, but Schwartz had in fact taken hundreds of such pictures and showed them to us.

Since most animals are captured at night, and since filming such captures at night is very difficult, if not always impossible, we would capture animals at night, then release them the next day and recapture them under circumstances where the capture could be filmed; which did not make the work less dangerous; quite the contrary, by the time you release them the next day they are very pissed off and far more dangerous.

Large animals, things like rhinos and elephants, can be captured and filmed during the day, but it is usually impossible to do so with smaller animals.

When we left Geneva, enroute to South Africa, in the fall of 1965, we had sent telegrams ahead to every country that we would have to fly over on the trip; which advance notice was required by all of these countries; but they were supposed to send a reply giving you permission for such a flight, and not one of them did. So, eventually, after sitting around on our asses waiting for such replies, first in Geneva and later in Cairo, Egypt, I finally said . . . “Fuck it, let’s go without permission.” And we did.

The airplane we were flying had a cruising speed of only two-hundred miles per hour, and our real destination was about seven thousand miles away, so the trip took several days. And I said our ‘real’ destination, which was Durban, South Africa; but that was not our ‘stated’ destination, because the black African countries would not permit flights over their territory that were enroute to South Africa. Thus, near the end of the trip, we filed a flight plan with a stated destination of Lusaka, Zambia, in black Africa, but then flew off in another direction and landed in white Africa; there was no radar and I knew that they could not track us enroute. So I guess the authorities in Lusaka are still awaiting our arrival nearly thirty years later. But this also meant that we could not later return to Europe by the same route; instead, had to take a longer route that followed the west coast of Africa and avoided any countries that we had flown over on our trip south.

The first part of our trip took us south directly up the course of the Nile river and the first night was spent sleeping in huts alongside a small landing strip that was being guarded by hundreds of black troops armed with machineguns. They did not give us any trouble, but they did not give us much in the way of feelings of confidence either.

The next stop, Juba, could be approached safely only in one manner; only the town and the airport were under control of government troops and the area surrounding the town was controlled by rebels conducting a war that was ongoing then and is still ongoing now nearly thirty years later. In order to avoid being shot down by the rebels, you had to arrive directly over the airport at an altitude of at least 10,000 feet and then circle down to the airport in a tight spiral that would hopefully keep you out of range of the rebels’ guns. During this descent, Bill Binnings asked me . . . “Why are all those people on the ground flashing lights at us?”

So I told him . . . “Those are flash bulbs, they are taking our picture.” In fact, of course, they were shooting at us and the flashing lights that he noticed were the muzzle flashes from their guns.

In Juba, one of the officials offered me two-hundred cows in exchange for my daughter, Joyce; if I had known then what I know now, I would have accepted his offer, and it would have been a bargain on my part even if I never got the cows. But that’s another story for later.

While most people do not seem to even be aware of it, one of our most important senses is our sense of smell; a few days earlier, while approaching the northern coast of Africa, at night, when I first saw the lights of Alexandria I turned to the passengers and said . . . “Well, there is the coast of Africa.” And, almost instantly, the airplane was filled

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with an almost overpowering odor, the odor of fear; I not only recognized it for what it was but knew who it was, and could literally read his mind. It was Bill Binnings, and his thoughts were . . . “My God, what am I doing here with this lunatic, he’s going to get me killed. I’ll probably end up with some nigger running a spear up my ass or being eaten by a lion or a crocodile.”

The odor, once recognized, is so obvious that you instantly know not only what it is but who it is, and usually also know just what they are so afraid of. And do not scoff at mind reading, you do it almost every day of your life even if you never become aware that you are doing so. Why do you instantly hate some people the first time you meet them, even though you know absolutely nothing about them?

Facial expressions, posture, so-called ‘body English’ are also factors that contribute to such mind reading, but by far the most important factor is odor. I can smell, and recognize, the odor of even a very small amount of human blood, and then go directly to the person who is producing that odor and pick them out of a large crowd. A woman does not have to tell me that she is having her period, I am clearly aware of it as soon as I come within fifty yards of her.

But that incident off the coast of Africa that night was by far the most dramatic example of such odors that I have ever encountered, it almost seemed like somebody had taken a flit gun filled with a liquid with that odor and sprayed it into my face.

But, then, Bill Binnings was one of the most extreme examples of just about everything bad that I can think of. So why was he with us on that trip? His father’s money, of course; what else? Every cent of which eventually cost me at least a hundred dollars. And cost some people their lives.

And Bill was with us in spite of the fact that I had already had more than my fair share of problems with him: in addition to using him as one of the cameramen while filming the studio portions of the Wild Cargo series, I had also used him as an actor in two feature films, and if you could find something that he was not afraid to do, which was damned difficult since he was scared to death of almost everything, he was not a bad actor.

During the production of one of these features, filmed in Louisiana and Florida, in which he played the part of a private detective searching for a kidnapped girl in the swamps, in one scene he was supposed to shoot a poisonous snake, a cottonmouth moccasin, through the head with his pistol, from a distance of about three feet. But with the cameras rolling, he fired a total of eighteen shots and missed the snake every time; by which point I was getting a bit pissed, so I suddenly whipped my pistol out and fired one quick shot without even aiming and hit the snake directly between the eyes. This was not a matter of showing off on my part; we had two cameras running during the filming of this scene, one camera giving us a ‘wide shot’ that covered the whole scene and another camera that provided a tight ‘close up’ that showed only the snake’s head, so with proper editing I could easily make it appear that Bill hit the snake on his first shot. But, of course, this fiasco on Bill’s part did make him look very bad in front of the crew.

Then, in an attempt to help him save face, I said . . . “That was really not your fault, Bill; you had two problems with that shot; one, it was a very small target, and two, you were too close to the target and at such a close range the gun does not shoot where you are aiming, the sights are zeroed in for a target farther away. So you would have done fine if you had a larger target at a greater distance.”

And under my breath I said to myself . . . “Yeah, like an elephant at a distance of four feet.”

In another scene Bill was supposed to shoot a large limb off a tree with a sub-machinegun, and again we had two cameras running, a wide shot and a close up of the tree limb as the bullets hit it, and again he missed; so I took the gun and shot the limb in two with a brief burst for the benefit of the close-up camera. We were using a weapon from the Second World War known as a Grease Gun because it looked a lot like the tool used for lubricating a car, was a very crude looking gun but was in fact the best weapon of its type that was produced during the war. Having fired many thousands of rounds from such guns I was literally an artist with it in those days. The bullets were large, .45 caliber, and relatively slow moving, so you could actually see the bullets going through the air, and while these were not tracer bullets they served the same purpose; if you failed to hit the target you could see where the bullets were going and this allowed you to correct your aim.

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Such full-automatic weapons are illegal without a special permit, which I did not have, but I did have a commission on the Louisiana State Police so I borrowed the gun from the Chief of Police in Slidell; at the time, surplus ammunition from the war was still available in great quantities and was very cheap.

Working on another feature film with Bill in South America, it was damned near impossible to find anything that he was not afraid to even try, and there are only so many times that you can show the supposed hero of the film standing on the sidelines and watching while somebody else does something; if he is the hero, then why isn't he doing it? In that film we were capturing wild animals in the jungles of South America, dangerous wild animals including a large adult jaguar and Bill remained in a constant state of paralyzed terror. In one sequence we wanted to show people chasing large caimans, a type of crocodilian, through shallow water and capturing them by jumping on the back of the caiman while it was moving through the shallow water like a fast motorboat and then wrestling the caiman until it could be subdued and tied up. No way was Bill going to be a part of that, but I had to get him into the sequence somehow.

So we had him stand off to one side, watching and supposedly directing the actions of several other people who actually were capturing the animals. Then in an attempt to make it appear that Bill was actually involved, I talked him into letting a man walk up to him with a large caiman that was tied up in such a manner that it was perfectly harmless and hand it to him; all Bill had to do was take the caiman in his arms, turn away from the camera and step out of the scene. But Bill had been standing in shallow water for about half an hour before we were ready to hand him the caiman, and his feet had sunk deeply into the mud without his awareness; so, when the other guy handed him the caiman, he tried to turn, discovered that he could not pull his feet out of the mud quickly enough, then fell down and damned near drowned in about a foot of water. If the film had been a slapstick comedy, it would have been a perfect scene.

In that same film we used some flying scenes that were spectacular almost beyond belief: I flew a medium bomber, a B 25, through a deep, narrow canyon where the air currents were so violent that the copilot and I were tossed around in the cockpit like a pair of dice being shaken in a cup. All of this was filmed from inside the airplane looking out to the front through the windshield, looking down on the plane from the rim of the canyon above, looking up from the bottom of the canyon, and in one case from a railroad bridge as the airplane approached through the narrow canyon and then flew underneath the bridge. When you see an airplane coming towards you in a film, you naturally expect it to pull up and pass above you; but in this case the airplane came towards the camera and then passed below it. The bridge did not show in the scene so it was a truly spectacular scene.

When we were setting up our cameras on the bridge in preparation for filming this scene, a man who was posted there as a guard for the bridge walked up to us and asked us just what the Hell we thought we were doing. When I told him, he pointed down into the canyon beneath the bridge and said . . . "The last guy that tried that got killed." And when I looked down at the floor of the canyon I saw the remains of a crashed airplane.

Bill did none of the actual flying of course, but we could film close-up scenes of him getting into the airplane and sitting in the cockpit and thereby leave the impression with the audience that he was the pilot. Which is a very common practice in Hollywood; very few actors perform their own stunts, use stand-ins for that purpose.

We also hired a young Airforce cadet from Laredo, Texas, who had built a Gyrocopter and agreed to fly it for filming purposes, an agreement that almost cost him his life; he crashed the Gyrocopter twice and we were lucky enough to capture both crashes on film. The Gyrocopter is a very small, very dangerous, one-man machine; it is not a helicopter, instead uses a free-wheeling rotor that provides lift by rotating as a result of forward motion produced by a pusher-type propeller located directly behind the pilot's seat. Thus it cannot hover and cannot take off vertically, in order to fly must constantly move forward. I have piloted damned near anything else that will fly, but I would never put my ass in a Gyrocopter. And neither would Bill Binnings; so we were in agreement about at least something.

But we could, and we did, film Bill getting into the Gyrocopter; and then, in the actual flying scenes, wearing a flight suit, a helmet and large goggles, the pilot could not be distinguished from Bill.

But I still needed something more, wanted scenes of Bill that made it appear that he actually was the pilot. So we rented a large, flat bedded truck, bolted a fifty-five-gallon gas drum down on the bed of the truck, at the rear of the bed and on one corner of the bed, and then bolted the Gyrocopter to the top of the gas drum. Then, with the camera bolted

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down onto a tripod that was bolted down to the front of the truck bed, and with the camera located slightly below the level of the Gyrocopter, the result on film made it appear that Bill actually was flying the Gyrocopter; forward movement was provided by driving the truck down a long paved airport runway, and clouds in the sky above the airport created a perfect illusion of flying.

When seated in the Gyrocopter Bill's head was about twelve feet above the runway, and I had a Hell of a time trying to convince him that what we were doing was perfectly safe, which it was. But, then, when the truck starting moving and filming started, the expression on Bill's face made it obvious that he was terrified; so after about ten attempts which produced no usable film, but which did eventually give Bill at least enough confidence to control the expression on his face we were able to get the scene I was after. In this scene Bill removed his goggles so that it would be obvious that it was him in the Gyrocopter.

But by the time we finally did get the scene I was after, I was very pissed off; so I decided to amuse myself and the crew at Bill's expense. Having arranged things with the two other crew members that were involved, I told Bill that we had to get only one more take. I was standing on the bed of the truck, directly in front of Bill, next to the camera, and the other two men were both in the cab of the truck. Everything worked exactly as I had planned it: once the truck started moving I turned around and started talking to the men in the truck's cab, whereupon the man in the right seat of the truck leaned out of his window in order to answer me, but immediately had a look of stark terror on his face, starting shouting and pointing towards Bill. I then turned back to look at Bill, looked horrified, and immediately jumped off of the moving truck and ran off to one side of the runway, then threw myself flat on the ground on my face and covered my head with my arms. Simultaneously, the two men in the cab jumped out and raced off in opposite directions. Leaving Bill alone on the truck, belted down to a Gyrocopter which apparently was about to explode; he could not see what was happening behind him, where the engine was located, and assumed that the engine was burning. Before jumping out of the cab the driver shifted into neutral and shut off the truck's engine, so that the truck would continue moving but would then coast to a stop after about a hundred yards.

The only mistake I made was a failure to keep the camera running; Bill believed that I was still filming but in fact the camera was not running. It would have been a classic scene.

Later, when Bill finally woke up to the fact that it was a practical joke, he eventually laughed about it himself; but I don't believe that he really thought it was very funny. Perhaps I should not pull such stunts, but I have never suffered fools gladly.

While filming in the canyon in West Texas, scenes that were supposed to have been filmed in South America, the pilot of the Gyrocopter crashed while attempting to take off from the top of a mesa, a small flat-topped mountain, and the rudder of the Gyrocopter was destroyed in the crash. So we spent most of the following night repairing the Gyrocopter on the airport in a nearby town, Del Rio, Texas, and then hauled the Gyrocopter back to the filming location on the back of a truck.

But before we dared try to fly it again in and out of the canyon, we first had to test it under much safer conditions in order to be sure that we had repaired it properly. So we took it to a nearby highway that would serve as a very long runway so that the pilot could take off and then fly above the highway at a very low altitude, then if anything went wrong he could land safely on the highway. But just as we were about to start the first test flight a police car drove up and stopped, with a deputy sheriff driving and with a Texas Ranger as a passenger. They got out of their car and asked us what we were doing.

But during the following conversation the Texas Ranger kept looking at Bill, and finally said . . . "I think I know that guy, I believe I arrested him one time. His name is Binnings, isn't it? Some old fat bag robbed the owner of a motel just outside of town, and then left on foot, and Binnings came along in a car and picked her up and took her to another motel. When we broke in on them both of them were stark naked and the old bag was holding a rubber that was about a foot long, and I'm damned if I know what he was going to do with that because his weenie was about as big as my little finger. So I arrested both of them; but when I checked with the police in Louisiana they told me that Binnings was alright, so I let him go. But I'm damned if I know why he wanted to fuck an old bag like that, I'd rather fuck my dog. I think I'll go over and speak to him, I'm sure he will remember me."

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And the expression on Bill's face made it obvious that he did remember him.

Then, instead of trying to give us a hard time, the police helped us; used their car to follow the Gyrocopter as it was flown along above the highway at a very low altitude. That section of the highway was not flat, instead had a series of low hills that turned the highway into something like a roller coaster. And when a truck driver coming in the opposite direction would reach the top of a hill only to find himself face to face with an oncoming Gyrocopter the expression on the face of the driver would be interesting, to say the least; when that occurred, as it did several times, the pilot would zoom up to a slightly higher altitude and pass over the top of the truck. But it always scared the shit out of the truck drivers; and since we were following only a few feet behind the Gyrocopter in the police car, we could see the expressions on the faces of the truck drivers.

So, yes, I had already experienced a long list of problems with Bill at the start of the African trip; but, one way or another, had always been able to make it appear that Bill was actually involved in what we were filming. But these previous problems later looked like blessings when compared to the situations that Bill created in Africa.

With me on that same trip I had several other people besides Bill; my eighteen-year-old daughter, Joyce, a girl that came to live with me after a total separation of more than seventeen years, and after she had utterly destroyed everybody that she came in contact with, literally driving them crazy in the process; Herbert Prechtel, mentioned in earlier chapters, a man who was a genius, but was also crazy, and a man that would also prove to be the source of many problems on that trip; George Bergin, an amateur pilot who would do literally anything, was afraid of nothing; Donald Spence, a half-Indian from Mississippi who was one of the best outdoorsmen that I ever knew, and was an outstanding shot with a pistol, a rifle or a bow and arrow, and who was also utterly fearless. Six of us traveled by plane from Geneva to Durban, South Africa, and two other people met us there after a trip by ship with all of our heavier pieces of equipment.

One of the people on the ship did not stay, immediately returned to this country after delivering the heavy equipment, but one man did stay, one of the ugliest men in history, Jerry Young. Jerry had a club foot, was a hunch back and was so ugly in the face that he had to be seen to be believed; his most redeeming features were his teeth, which were widely spaced, stuck out in front of his face and were bright green in color. Also, he smelled like he had been dead for at least a week in hot weather, and no amount of scrubbing would reduce his body odor. But he was also utterly fearless, one of the bravest men I ever met, and in spite of the fact that his hands shook like leaves in a wind storm he was one of the best pistol shots that I ever met.

Jerry was the adopted son of a fairly wealthy man somewhere up north, and when his adoptive father died he inherited quite a large sum of money, immediately went to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and then lived in a whorehouse until all of his inheritance was exhausted. When he went to work for me he did not have a cent left.

All he wanted was a chance to earn enough money to allow him to return to the whorehouse; and all I wanted from him was a chance to use him in my films because of his appearance. Herbert was also very ugly, and together with Jerry I was provided with a pair of characters that had to be seen to be believed.

In one of the Capture shows, I filmed a sequence that we called the 'snake sacking,' and it was so funny that I almost broke my back from laughing while I was filming it; had to go over and sit down on a rock and hold my back with both hands while I was laughing so hard that I was crying. In this sequence Jerry entered the scene from one side, holding an empty pillow case in both hands, while Herbert entered from the other side with a writhing mass of snakes that looked a lot like Medusa's head piece. Herbert was holding these snakes in both hands with no attempt to restrain their heads; these were harmless snakes, giant tropical whip snakes, but they are very savage when handled and bite like Hell, are not poisonous but produce bites that bleed freely due to the fact that their saliva contains a chemical that stops blood from clotting, so that even a tiny scratch from their teeth will initially appear to be a major wound as a result of the free bleeding.

The idea was for Herbert to try to shove this ball of snakes down inside the pillow case being held by Jerry, which appeared to be an impossible undertaking because of the size of the ball of snakes and the relatively small opening on one end of the pillow case. The result being that the snakes were biting them in the face, in the ass, on their arms and hands, and that they were both bleeding like stuck pigs.

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I sent a copy of that film to Piper Corporation because the sequence that followed immediately after the snake sacking bit concerned a flight down inside an active volcano, flying around and around below the rim of the volcano, a distance of only a few feet away from the lava that was rising up in the center of the volcano. We filmed this from inside the plane looking out through the windshield, from the rim of the volcano looking down on the plane and from another plane flying above the volcano; it was a very spectacular flying sequence; and since I had used a plane that the Piper Corporation had given me in return for publicity in my films, I wanted them to see this sequence.

But, a few days after I sent them the film, and when I phoned to ask them how they liked the volcano flying sequence, they said . . . “What volcano flying sequence? We looked at the film but we didn’t see anything like that.” What happened was this: they had been laughing so hard at the end of the snake sacking sequence that the volcano flying scenes came and went without them even noticing them, during that time they were literally rolling around on the floor laughing like a bunch of idiots. The snake sacking sequence was one of the funniest things that I have ever seen.

A lot of the things that we filmed in those days were nothing short of being brutal, things that could not be used on television today, so we tried to soften the overall impression by inserting as much comedy as possible; and it should be clearly understood that most comedy involves brutality, people like to laugh at somebody else’s fuck up; remember the Three Stooges and dozens of other comedians, including Charlie Chaplin.

Given the seemingly endless list of my fuck ups, perhaps I should have been a comedian, but I have usually been far more inclined to cry than I have to laugh.

Herbert was one of the funniest natural comedians that I have ever seen, as a result of both his appearance and his actions; he would not have needed a script, you could have followed him around and filmed what happened and the results, as comedy, would have been outstanding. I sent him up a tree after a large male wildcat, with a pillow case and his bare hands, and filmed what happened. When he finally climbed down out of the tree, with the wildcat inside the pillow case, he had almost nothing remaining in the way of either clothes or skin; but, on film, it was a riot.

Just as Herbert reached the ground after that escapade, I turned to another man, asked him what time it was, and when he told me the time I said . . . “I hope that guy gets here soon with the gorilla, if he doesn’t get here soon it will be too late to film today.”

Whereupon Herbert said . . . “Gorilla, what gorilla? I’m not going up a tree after a gorilla.” There was no gorilla enroute, of course, it was a joke; but if a gorilla had arrived, Herbert would have gone up a tree after it with his bare hands if I had asked him to.

In South America we came upon an enormous anaconda snake in the act of swallowing a tapir, an animal that looks a lot like a small rhino, and without hesitation Herbert went into the mudhole with a snake that outweighed him by at least fifty pounds, and finally managed to shove it into a large sack. The anaconda vomited up the tapir as soon as Herbert entered the shallow water and then turned on him; for a while I had serious doubts about just which one of them would end up in the sack.

Afterwards, somebody snapped a still picture of Herbert, from the rear; he was practically naked, was covered with mud and bits of vegetation, and was obviously exhausted almost to the point of death.

Later, I showed that picture, a transparent slide in color, to a man employed by Pan American Films, a man who knew Herbert very well; he held the slide up to a light table in order to see it clearly and then laughed. Then I told him . . . “If you think that’s funny, turn the slide over and look at the expression on Herbert’s face.” And he did. Like I have said before, most people are not very smart.

We also sent Herbert up a tree in South America after a mountain lion, again with his bare hands; but in this case he had to go up the tree about twenty times, because the lion kept jumping off the limb he was on and racing off in an attempt to escape, but invariably ended up in a big mud hole. So we would have to run him down, recapture him in the mud hole, drag him onto dry land and then give him a bath to get rid of the mud that he would be covered with each time he attempted this escape. Then before we could put him back up on the limb of the tree so that we could start filming

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again, we had to dry him off; it would have looked mighty damned strange in the film if the lion suddenly changed from being dry to being wet. But we had nothing in the way of towels to use for drying the lion, so we had to use our clothes for that purpose; by the time that sequence had been filmed, every member of the crew was practically stark naked, both men and women. And the girl I was living with at the time, Eliza Steffee, was stark naked. But, you have to do what you have to do.

Everything we filmed with Herbert was funny, and he hated it, he did not see himself as a comedian; wanted desperately to come across as being somewhere between Tarzan and Superman. Instead, usually looked a lot like the short but classic film Bambi meets Godzilla. Wherein Bambi ends up by being stomped as flat as a pancake.

But he had guts, his balls appeared to be about as big as bowling balls; he would attempt literally anything, always fucked it up when trying to handle animals, usually got hurt, but was perfectly willing to go back for more of the same thing within a day or two.

We were filming in a half-round pit directly behind the entrance building at the exhibit in Slidell one day, and a tegu lizard ran up inside Herbert's pants leg and ended up with his head touching Herbert's balls; such lizards are mean as Hell and this one could easily have bitten Herbert's balls off, and he knew it; so he shed both his pants and shorts in less than a second, that being the only time he did not hesitate, and was then standing there in plain sight of at least fifty people, stark naked from the waist down.

Kit Beecher, another employee of mine at the time, snatched up a Polaroid camera and got a good picture of him standing there half naked; after which Herbert threatened to kill him if he would not hand over the picture, which Kit refused to do. Instead, told Herbert that he was going to have it published on the front page of the local paper. Whereupon Herbert told him . . . "If you do, I'll kill you."

Kit then took the picture to the editor of the paper, and arranged to have Herbert's seminude picture blown up to a very large size and then printed on the front page of only one copy of the local paper. Under this picture, the text said . . . "The slightly em bare assed gent shown above is Herbert Prechtel."

So, the following Friday evening, the day on which the weekly paper was distributed, I suggested that several of us, including Herbert, go from my house to a nearby restaurant to get something to eat. And we had somebody waiting in the restaurant with the only copy of the paper with Herbert's picture, a man who removed all of the copies of the paper that were actually being distributed from the paper rack that faced the entrance to the restaurant, and replaced them with the one 'special' copy of the paper.

Thus, when Herbert walked into the restaurant, the first thing he saw was his nude picture staring him in the face; and since that was the only copy of the paper on the rack, he assumed that all of the other copies had been purchased, and that people all over town were laughing about him. Then he really did try to kill Kit; but we managed to pull him off of Kit before any major damage was done.

Later, after Kit moved to Monroe, Louisiana, in the northern part of the state, his wife, Mildred, who I had been screwing for several years, showed up at my house in Slidell one day, looking for me; but only Herbert was at home at the time, so she ended up in bed with Herbert, with both of them stark naked and with Herbert on top of her, inside a locked bedroom. But he did not screw her, apparently wanted her to ask him to do it; because, finally, she said . . . "Well, Herbert, if you want to fuck me, go right ahead, and even if I don't enjoy it that isn't important." Whereupon he got up and left the room.

Another time, in Merida, Yucatan, I arranged for a beautiful young girl to spend the night with Herbert, and sent them off to a motel in a taxi driven by a man that I had known for several years. Later, seeing the taxi parked in the town square, I walked over to talk to the driver and found the girl sitting in the back seat by herself. When I asked her where Herbert was, she pointed across the street towards a news stand.

Herbert was standing at a magazine rack with a roll of American magazines under one arm, while looking for more. So I asked him just what the Hell he thought he was doing. And he said . . . "Well, the girl doesn't speak English, and I don't speak Spanish, so I wanted to have something to do after we got to the room."

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I snatched the magazines out from under his arm, threw them down, dragged him back to the taxi and threw him into the back seat with the girl, and told the driver, in Spanish . . . “Take this silly son of a bitch back to the room, lock him and the girl inside, and don’t go back until tomorrow morning.”

On that African trip, with my daughter Joyce, Herbert and Bill, I had my hands more than full; clearly understood that all three were very difficult, but was still stupid enough to believe that I could handle them. Sure. Have been rather quick to offer advise throughout my life, but seldom followed my own rules; and every time I failed to do so, I got kicked in the balls, or worse.

But, in spite of these people, we eventually reached Durban, South Africa, picked up all of our equipment that came in by ship, rented a Landrover, and checked into the Park View Hotel. Having no slightest idea at the time as to just what I should do next.