

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“Don’t get mad, get even.”

Dan Baldwin

In the fall of 1950 I opened an animal and reptile exhibit near Moss Point, Mississippi, but did not intend to remain there more than a few months at most; I wanted to start importing snakes and other types of wildlife from Mexico in large quantities, but needed both money and assistance. A problem that has haunted me throughout most of my life was the fact that I could not be in two places at the same time; in this case I could not be in Mexico getting animals and in this country selling them at the same time.

Then one day a young man gave me a price list that he had been sent in the mail by a company called the Tarpon Zoo, in Tarpon Springs, Florida, operated by a young man named Mike Tsalickis and an older woman named Trudy Jerkins. When I read that price list I immediately realized that these people did not know what they were doing; because the selling prices for their snakes were actually lower than most dealers were paying their hunters for snakes. This had happened because Mike Tsalickis wrote Ross Allen, the largest snake dealer then in Florida, and requested a price list; but somebody misunderstood Mike’s request and sent him a list of prices that they were paying their hunters rather than their retail price list. They undoubtedly thought that Mike was a new hunter who wanted to sell them snakes, when, in fact, he planned to compete with them.

So, in an attempt to compete, he offered to sell snakes at a price that was below Ross Allen’s buying price, which Mike thought was a retail price.

One of the deepest freezes in the history of this country hit almost all of the southeastern part of the country, where I was staying the temperature dropped by 102 degrees within ten hours; it was 80 degrees at four in the afternoon and 22 below zero by two the following morning. The citrus trees were killed throughout the Rio Grande valley, thousands of cattle were frozen to death as far south as the Everglades in Florida, and all but one of my snakes were killed by the extreme cold.

I went to bed in a motel room with only a sheet covering me, but when I woke up as a result of the cold I found that I had to break out a window in order to get out of the room; it had rained shortly before the temperature dropped below freezing and my door was covered with so much ice that it was impossible for me to open it. All power was off throughout most of the state, water mains had burst from freezing and the place was brought to a halt.

Maburn Miller, an older brother of Bo’s, was preparing to take two snake exhibits on the road in partnership with his cousin Franco Richards, and had called me a couple of days earlier wanting to know where he could buy some snakes; so when the phones starting working again I called him, told him I also needed snakes and suggested that we take a trip together to southern Florida to buy some, going in his car with me driving. He agreed, I caught a bus to Pensacola, Florida, where he was staying, and we left immediately enroute to Tarpon Springs.

But when we got there we could not locate the Tarpon Zoo, finally went to the police station and learned where it was, and also get the address of one of the owners, Trudy Jerkins. We went first to look at the zoo, and found that it consisted of almost nothing; no driveway, one small and very crude concrete-block building, a few small and empty snake pits and one small wire cage with two spider monkeys in it.

Next we went to Trudy’s house, a small concrete-block house located in the woods about a mile outside of town; we woke Trudy up, it then being about two in the morning, and she told us that she had nothing to sell us. But added that Mike was about three-hundred miles south of there skinning cattle that had been killed by the freeze, and that if we went by to see him he could probably get us at least a few snakes from the area where he was working. Gave us a phone number where we could reach him at night and we departed. Then called Mike about three hours later and made arrangements to meet him later that day.

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Mike was a very thin, very dark man in his early twenties and was a Greek like most of the people in Tarpon Springs. He did manage to find a few rattlesnakes for us but was much more interested in a proposition that he made me: the game department had seized a number of alligators from him, but he could get them back if he could 'prove' by a phony receipt from a state where it was legal to sell alligators that they did not come from Florida. Since selling alligators was legal in Mississippi he offered to give me a ten-foot alligator in return for the phony receipt he needed.

I gave him the receipt, but forty-three years later still have not gotten the promised alligator. At that time Mike's principal business was smuggling alligator hides; he picked them up from poachers all over the state and hauled them to a tannery in Tarpon Springs. He had been arrested at least a hundred times but always beat the rap because the people who arrested him never had a warrant to search his truck; so he would be out of jail within a matter of hours and they would then have to give him the hides back because they had been seized illegally. The game officials hated him, naturally.

A few months earlier I had also learned that a man named Ralph Demers, in Miami, was importing some snakes and other animals from South America, and I had his address; so we left for Miami. Ralph and his wife Margaret were running his business from their house, and were keeping their animals in a wooden building that had been a military barracks during the war, a barracks located on the old military airport that was about a mile south of the civilian airport.

We bought quite a few snakes and some very large iguana lizards from Ralph and Maburn was badly bitten on the hand by a big iguana, a terrible injury to several of his fingers that hurt him so much that he vomited from pain.

We had three large iguanas in one gunny sack and Maburn opened the sack to look at them; whereupon one grabbed him by the hand, and then he started swinging the sack, which weighed about fifty pounds, around in the air over his head, trying to get his hand away from the iguana's mouth and with the iguana hanging on to the sack with its claws. He was damned lucky not to have lost several fingers.

During our drive south Maburn told me a story that I did not believe; told me that so-called chicken snakes will eat the phony glass eggs that farmers sometimes put in a hen's nest to encourage her to lay real eggs. I gave him about a two hour lecture on the subject, giving him about fifty reasons why his story was impossible.

But I was wrong again: a few months later a man brought in a chicken snake with an obvious bump in its body, a bump that I assumed was a freshly swallowed egg. But the size of the bump never got any smaller, as it would have done if it was a real egg. And, guess what? It was a glass egg.

From Miami we headed north for Silver Springs, to visit Ross Allen, but he could sell us only a few snakes so we ended our trip back in Pensacola with far fewer snakes than we needed. We divided the snakes up and I took my half of them and went back to Moss Point; but something kept nagging at my mind, it appeared to me that we had fewer snakes than we should have had when we got back to Pensacola. So I told Maburn on the phone to carefully search his car, that I believed that a snake might have escaped and was loose in the car. And, sure enough, when he looked under the front seat there was a large rattlesnake; coiled up in a position from which it could easily have bitten the driver in the lower leg.

That was neither the first nor the last time such a thing happened to me; snakes are very good at escaping, and appear to have a lot more sense than most people give them credit for, sometimes do things that are downright clever. And they never do anything that is stupid.

In addition to its normal eyes, a rattlesnake has another set of eyes that are called 'pits' that are sensitive to infra red light waves, so they can see anything that is warmer than they are even in total darkness. They use these heat-sensitive eyes even during daylight, apparently trusting them more than they do their normal eyes. Because of these extra eyes rattlesnakes belong to a group of snakes called Pit Vipers. Some nonpoisonous snakes, including both boa constrictors and pythons, have similar heat-sensitive eyes.

Shortly after I got back to Moss Point I called Mike again and asked him to meet me in Tarpon Springs; I told him that I wanted to talk to both him and Trudy about a proposition I had in mind. He had several things I needed, a truck,

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a place to keep snakes and a desire to be in the snake business. And I had an almost infinite source of snakes in Colima, and could teach him how to sell them in this country.

We would not need very much money to get started; I calculated that we could make a trip in his truck to Colima, Mexico, and back to Tarpon Springs for a total of only \$1,500.00, including the cost of buying a truck load of snakes in Colima, and while buying quite a few enormous rattlesnakes from one of my hunters in southern Texas. The snakes in Colima were so cheap that they were almost free; but would sell quickly in this country for at least \$2.00 per pound. The start of the carnival season would coincide with our return from Mexico and I believed I could sell the whole load within only a few days, with a profit of at least \$10,000.00 from one such trip.

I went to Tarpon Springs and the three of us worked out the details of a deal while sitting in Mike's truck at a drive-in restaurant at night. Trudy had been employed as a cashier in a Publix food store for more than fourteen years, and was then earning less than forty dollars a week. We agreed to use Mike's truck and agreed that he would be paid compensation at a rate of two cents a mile that we used it for our business, and that Mike could continue to use it for smuggling alligator hides.

The business was to be divided half to me and twenty-five percent to each of the two others. We would also use their very small zoo but they would not be compensated for that.

The only fly in the ointment was the fact that they did not have their half of the required \$1,500.00. Ended up having to borrow it from a loan shark, and even he was very hesitant about loaning it to them, tried to get me to sign the loan agreement along with them.

We built but did not assemble enough snake boxes to fill the truck when the boxes were assembled and filled with snakes, and were on our way to Mexico within a few days, stopping only for fuel or food and with Mike and I switching back and forth as the driver. On the Texas side of the border we bought several hundred pounds of very large rattlesnakes from one of my hunters, assembled enough boxes to hold all of them and crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico, getting tourist visas at the border.

Mike had been in the army briefly but apart from that had never been anywhere outside of Florida, and in many respects he was very naive. Unlike most men I had known he never discussed women or told dirty jokes; I did not believe that he was queer but he was a bit strange. He was not very big or strong but proved to be a hard worker, ate almost nothing except candy bars and cookies and required very little sleep. I have never had a sweet tooth so did not share his meals.

None of the roads in Mexico were very good but we had no serious problems in that regard until we were within forty miles of Colima; the first thousand-plus miles below the border took us less than a twenty-four-hour day, but that last forty miles into Colima was a nightmare, took the better part of two days and nights, a lot of which time was spent changing blown-out tires. I had tried to tell Mike about that stretch of the trip but don't think he really believed me until he went over it himself; it was probably the worst stretch of road in the world that it was possible to drive over, just barely possible.

The streets of Colima were all paved with large cobblestones and were very rough at all times and slick as Hell when wet from rain; some of the streets were so narrow that it was impossible to turn a truck at many of the intersections where streets crossed, and that made it difficult to find your way around town.

The only hotel in Colima looked like it was built in the early 1500s, and probably was, and many of the buildings had been badly damaged when the volcano erupted sometime around 1900 and had never been repaired. Finding a place where you dared eat the food was nearly impossible and then you had to be very selective about what you ate; we hauled our own drinking water because I knew that the local water would probably kill us. Mike refused to eat any of the local food and survived on candy bars that he took with us from the States. He was fluent in both English and Greek but could not speak a word of Spanish; my Spanish was not yet fluent but was good enough to get us by with no problems in communication.

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There were then four people in the snake business in Colima, three men and one woman, and I had met all of them on my first trip to Colima nearly a year earlier. One of these dealers was an old man named Jesus Figeroa, who looked like he was at least eighty years old but was probably younger, another was a much younger man named Jesus Garcia who was in his forties, the third man was also in his forties and was named Martine, while the woman was about fifty and was named Sofia; all of these people hated each other and were fiercely competitive, constantly plotting against one another.

I did not expect any of the dealers to have much, if anything, in the way of livestock awaiting us when we arrived, and was right about that; but I knew that there were thousands of peasants and native Indians living in the area who were very experienced snake hunters, and that the snakes would start coming in to the dealers very quickly when the word spread that a buyer was in town.

The closest town to Colima was Manzanilla, a port city located on the coast about forty miles away over a fairly good road, and there was an airport in Manzanilla although the airlines did not fly into there at the time. The only other way into or out of Manzanilla was by ship on the Pacific Ocean. Manzanilla was several hundred miles almost directly west of Acapulco, but there was no road between the two cities.

Figeroa had maintained meticulous records of all the snakes that he had bought from hunters over a period of nearly fifty years; he weighed each snake individually and made an entry in a ledger that listed the exact weight of each snake that he ever bought. These weights were listed in kilos and since very few of the snakes there reached a weight of ten or more kilos it was very easy to find a record of a snake of unusual size. A quick glance at a page in the ledger would tell you instantly if any of the snakes listed there weighed ten or more kilos, so you could look through the weights of many thousands of snakes within a relatively short time looking for unusually large ones.

Looking through the ledger I came across an entry dated about thirty years earlier that listed a boa weighing 36 kilos, which would have been more than 79.2 pounds; if true, that is by far the largest boa I ever heard of, one that probably would have been between thirteen and fourteen feet long. Having tested it myself, I knew that the dealer's scale was accurate, and I could think of no logical reason for him to make a phony entry in the ledger, so I tend to believe it.

In general, the farther south you go, up to a point, in Latin America the larger the boa constrictors become; most of the boas in that part of Mexico were not very big, an average adult being somewhere between five and seven feet long; but they were very heavy bodied for their length and were mean as Hell, not poisonous but capable of delivering a very savage bite, and more than willing to do so. Thus they were not popular with people who wanted a snake as a pet; but they were very popular with carnival snake show operators because they put on a good show, hissing loudly and striking wildly at anything that came close to them.

A thousand miles or so farther south, and quite a way to the east, in Barranquilla, Colombia, the boas were usually a lot larger; most boas there were at least eight feet long and some reached a length of ten feet. These Colombian boas were also much easier to handle, not bad about biting; and their colors were far more attractive than those of the Mexican boas.

But the largest of the boas were found about eleven hundred miles south of Barranquilla, along the Amazon River. The largest one I ever saw, out of tens of thousands that I saw, was exactly twelve feet, two and one quarter inches long and weighed 25 kilos, 55 pounds. The second largest was exactly twelve feet long and weighed just under fifty pounds. But snakes of that size were rare even along the Amazon. These were the so-called Red-tailed boas, and were the favorite among snake show operators and exotic dancers. Quite a few women used such snakes as part of their performances in night clubs, but usually put transparent tape over both the snakes mouth and its asshole, so that the snake could neither bite nor shit all over them during the performance. Even big boas, that were relatively calm, did not live very long when being handled in that manner; so exotic dancers usually had to buy a new snake about six or eight times a year. And they were not cheap; we charged \$100.00 for a ten footer and \$250.00 for a twelve footer. The dancers all wanted the largest boas they could buy, but some of the smaller of these women had difficulty handling a twelve-foot boa because of its weight; and, without exception that I ever encountered, all of these women wanted to fuck you as partial payment when buying a boa, and some of them were very attractive so it was at least a tempting

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offer. One exotic dancer that I saw in Oklahoma City in 1950 was named Lily Christene but called herself the Cat Girl, and she was beautiful almost beyond belief; but was a health nut and refused to be operated on when her appendix ruptured, so died shortly after I saw her. Which was a real waste.

I never had anything to do with her but I put on an act with rattlesnakes in the same night club where she was the featured dancer, my act being an attempt to gain publicity for an upcoming Rattlesnake Roundup, and I saw her looking at me with obvious interest; I had to leave for another appearance elsewhere immediately after my act, so did not get a chance to approach her but believe I would have been successful if given the chance to try.

Unfortunately, I never saw her again, and then she died about a year later. She was so beautiful that it made you hurt all over just to look at her, was strikingly beautiful in the face and had a body that had to be seen to be believed; she was undoubtedly one of the first women bodybuilders that I ever saw but she damned sure did not look like a man, nor did she look like some of the current women bodybuilders.

Most of the women in Colima were not at all attractive, tended to be short and relatively heavy and all of them obviously had a high percentage of American Indian blood. There are many different races of Indians in Mexico but none of them produce women that are attractive by the standards of beauty in this country. But the men did not seem to mind and pumped out children by the dozens; a woman who gave birth to less than a dozen children during her life was unusual, and a few produced thirty or more, stayed almost continuously pregnant from an age of about fourteen until into their late forties, or older. Apart from the little girls, who wore only panties until they were about six years old, all of the children ran around stark naked at all times. Women seldom wore shoes and the men wore very crude sandals that they made for themselves by using part of the tread from an automobile tire together with a couple of leather straps.

The newest car in Colima at that time was nearly twenty years old and most were a lot older, but cars of any kind or age were unusual. There were quite a few large trucks, some of which had been converted into very crude busses; and these busses would be crammed solid with people, chickens, pigs, goats and sometimes even cattle. Bus accidents that killed a hundred or more people were fairly common because of the simply terrible mountain roads throughout a large part of Mexico. The drivers of these busses always had so many religious symbols on the windshield that it was almost impossible to see out in front, and they had only one speed, as fast as the truck would go.

There were only twenty-five million people in Mexico in 1950, but by 1990 the population had quadrupled if you count the people who came to this country, legally or illegally. By 1990 there were as many people in Mexico City alone as there had been in the entire country forty years earlier.

I liked and admired most of the people that I got to know in Mexico, they had nothing in common with the usual stereotype of Mexicans that exists in this country; they were smart, very hard working and usually honest. They had to work like Hell constantly just to stay alive and most men worked at least twelve hours a day, for which day's work they earned about a dollar equivalent in pesos. Boys started work before the age of five and usually dropped out of school by about ten. Girls were usually married by fourteen and divorce was unthinkable. Mexicans are probably the best mechanics in the world, were forced to become good mechanics because they could not buy spare parts for anything, had to make such parts for themselves. And the Mexican pilots that I got to know were among the best in the world.

Having any slightest contact with a girl from a 'good' family was simply impossible, these girls were never permitted to be alone with a man until after they were married. The closest that such girls ever came to contact with boys was during a promenade that was held once a week. The girls linked arms and walked around and around in one direction around the town square; while the boys walked in the opposite direction.

And that system permitted only very brief eye contact between boys and girls, and not a word was ever spoken by either girls or boys. And this was done only in a brightly lighted square and under direct observation by a bunch of older women who sat on benches around the outside of the square and watched the girls like hawks.

If a girl from a good family was even accused of having been in any sort of contact with a boy without supervision from an older woman she would be immediately thrown out into the street for having disgraced the family; this occurred frequently all over Mexico, and such girls then had only two choices: they could become the mistress of an older man

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or go to work in a whorehouse, and if they did become a man's mistress this usually did not last long, so almost all of them eventually ended up in whorehouses.

Many of the Mexican whorehouses at that time were very fancy, with nice rooms and other accommodations and usually provided a choice from at least a hundred girls; not all of whom were attractive, but a few were downright beautiful by anybody's standards. A 'quickie' cost five dollars, and you could have a girl for the entire night for twenty dollars. Most of the girls were very clean and there was almost no venereal disease, and the girls were tested at least once a week by Mexican doctors.

But I had a system later that I liked a lot better than visiting the whorehouses: I knew a man in the city of Veracruz who owned several taxis, and he was aware of just about everything that happened in town. When a girl was thrown out into the streets he would almost always be aware of it within a matter of hours; would try to locate these girls, and was usually successful in such attempts, and then would take her to live in a house owned by one of his relatives, where she would be treated like a daughter of the family until I arrived on the scene. He held these girls for me; and for quite a while my schedule took me through that city about once a week, and after my arrangement with him was made he always had two or more such girls awaiting my arrival. All of these girls were very young, many were attractive and some were simply beautiful, and almost all of them were virgins until I got around to changing that. Many of these girls believed that they had been fucked before, but had not, believed it because they literally did not know what fucking consisted of; had been falsely accused by their fathers and thrown out into the streets for no real reason.

A few days after we reached Colima two guys from Oklahoma showed up in a truck, a man named Carson Burroughs and another man named Ward; they had learned about the snakes in Colima from a farmer who lived near Tulsa and went to Colima with me in 1950, went because he had a large truck that I needed for that first trip and because he liked snakes. But since we wanted to buy everything that was caught while we were there we did not like this competition, believed it would reduce the number of snakes that we would get and might cause the prices to go up.

I had heard rumors about another place more than a thousand miles away, in the lower part of the state of Veracruz where different types of snakes could be bought; a place that also had a lot of monkeys and other wild animals. So I suggested that Carson Burroughs and I should go and check this other location out for ourselves, taking his truck for the trip; my idea being to get him out of town for a while and leave his partner stranded on foot in Colima, which I believed would make it possible for Mike to buy almost everything that came into town from hunters during the period that I would be gone.

So back over the volcano we went, finally reached the main highway that ran from Guadalajara to Mexico City, turned east and continued through the highest mountains in Mexico until we reached the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in the city of Veracruz, turned right and went south; but the road south of Veracruz ended after we crossed the Bay of Alvarado on a ferry boat, and beyond that point there was no road, just a very rough trail through the jungle. But eventually, after a very difficult trip through the jungle, fording rivers along the way since there were no bridges, we reached the tiny village of San Juan Evangelista. Located a man there whose principal business was selling the skins of jaguars, which were very numerous in that area, and he was able to get us a few snakes and by far the largest iguanas that I had ever seen, some being seven feet long.

While wandering around on the wrong trail, lost, because we had no maps of the area, we saw two Mexican boys walking along the trail carrying two small crocodiles that they had just captured, and we bought them. Practically every house in all of the villages along the way had at least one wild animal of some kind as a pet, and all of these were perfectly tame so were ideal for our purposes; we bought several tame monkeys, and some other wild animals of a wide variety. So the trip was not a failure. Later that year I established a compound in the village of San Juan Evangelista and got a lot of both jaguars and ocelots from there, together with hundreds of spider monkeys and many other types of wild animals; a few snakes, but not many, the most common type of snake there being the so-called Fer de Lance, or lance headed viper, a very dangerous poisonous snake that kills more people in Latin America than all of the other types of snakes combined. These snakes reach a length of more than eight feet but are relatively slender, and have fangs that are so long that they are almost unbelievable. A bite from such a snake is usually fatal for an adult within a matter of

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only a few hours. Within an hour or so after a bite the victim starts bleeding out through his skin over his entire body. They are much more poisonous than rattlesnakes, are one of the most poisonous snakes in the world; will not attack you but are very quick to defend themselves.

The boa constrictors in that area were usually larger than the ones from Colima and were a different color, more attractive than the Colima boas. But there did not seem to be many of them there. Nobody that I ever met in Mexico offered me drugs of any kind, but most of the men I met tried to get me to take them pistols from this country.

I always carried a pistol myself, of course, but being a foreigner I had to keep it concealed, which was not easy to do since it was very hot and I did not wear much in the way of clothes. Over quite a span of time I made many trips to Mexico, but became involved in a violent situation only once, when I was forced to kill a man in northern Mexico in self defense. I had stopped in a small cafe to buy Coca Colas to drink, and a Hawaiian man named Francis Nihoa was with me; he was a very large and very dark man who weighed more than three-hundred pounds. A Mexican man in the cafe spoke to Francis in Spanish, which Francis did not understand, and when Francis replied in English, telling him that he did not speak Spanish, the Mexican man instantly switched to English and started cursing us violently.

So I told Francis that we should get to Hell out of there, and we did; but the Mexican then followed our car in a large truck that was faster than our car and repeatedly tried to ram us and force us off the road over a high cliff; had he been able to do so we would have been killed. I finally managed to get a short distance ahead of him, stopped the car, got out in the road and shot him directly between the eyes through the windshield of his truck. His truck crashed into a bluff away from the drop off on one side, so we set it on fire and pushed it over the cliff and then continued on our way. The cliff was so high and the surrounding country so rough that his body may never have been found.

Afterwards, Francis never mentioned it to me again. I shot him with a rifle that I had borrowed from a friend of mine in Laredo, Texas, so I removed the barrel from the rifle, threw it away, and bought a new barrel for the gun, just in case, I did not want to take a chance that the bullet might be traced back to me as a result of the rifeling marks on it; but a new barrel removed any possibility of that ever happening.

As John Peters said . . . "I don't mind killing them, it's filling out all of the forms later that I don't like."

By the time that Carson Burroughs and I got back to Colima Mike had been able to buy a lot of snakes and quite a few other reptiles, while Ward had been far less successful, so my plan had worked; then within a few days Mike and I were ready to start back to Florida. But then heavily loaded, the trip back out over the volcano was much more difficult, and Mike had to spend most of the trip up the side of the volcano walking behind the truck and blocking the rear wheels with large rocks to keep the truck from rolling backwards down the steep grade every time the truck stalled out. Which occurred every few feet all the way up the volcano. And the trip down the other side was even more dangerous because it was very difficult to keep the truck from running away down the slope. The brakes were useless for that purpose and I had to drive down while using the lowest possible gear that the truck had, thus providing braking from the engine.

We arrived back in Tarpon Springs after a trip of just over three weeks duration, and got there just in time for another cold snap which would have killed all of our reptiles if we had been unable to get them inside a warm building.

Mike did not know what to do, and when I suggested putting all of the reptiles inside the small office building he objected, because he thought the iguanas would shit all over the inside of the building; so I told him . . . "Look, Mike, these reptiles are worth at least twenty times as much as that building, and we can clean all of the iguana shit up with a hose after the weather warms up; all of the furniture in that building is not worth much if anything more than about twenty dollars, and we can put it outside because the cold won't hurt it."

So we did just that, and the weather returned to normal within a few days, which permitted us to move the reptiles back outside. In the meantime I was on the phone almost continuously and managed to sell the entire load at very good prices in about ten days. The previous year Mike and Trudy had sold only \$3,000.00 worth of snakes, with little or nothing in the way of profit; so they were stunned by the speed of my sales and by the prices I could charge. I got a total of more than \$15,000.00 for that first load, which was more than I had expected, and much more money than either Mike or Trudy had ever seen before.

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Then I was anxious to get back to Mexico for another load of reptiles; so Mike and I drove to Miami in his truck and I introduced him to Ralph Demers, the man who was importing South American snakes in large numbers but did not know how to sell them, or what to charge for them; he was practically stealing these snakes in South America and paid literally nothing in the way of air freight to transport them to Miami because a friend of his was making round trips from Miami to South America every week and always made the return trip empty. So he could, and did, sell us his snakes very cheaply.

Mike picked up a load of snakes from Ralph and hauled them back to Tarpon Springs while I returned to Mexico by commercial airline, the trips by truck were so hard that I wanted to try shipping the snakes to Florida by air. To reach Mexico by air at that time required an overnight stay in Havana, Cuba, which I did not mind since there were many beautiful girls there, readily available girls. Then the next day I flew from Havana to Merida, Yucatan, a place I wanted to investigate as a potential location for getting wild animals; and, later that year, I established a compound in Merida. By that point I had three compounds in Mexico, one in Colima, one in Veracruz and one in Merida.

But shipping animals from two of my compounds by air proved to be very difficult to do, since those locations could not be reached by air; I would always have to find a large truck that I could rent to take me into and out of Colima and the compound in Veracruz, but the trips were so hard on a truck that the owners would never agree to a second trip. So I always had to find another truck for each trip. And the owners of these trucks were seldom very happy about what happened to the trucks on these trips.

I probably ruined about a dozen trucks that year, but fortunately was not required to pay for them; some of the owners simply pushed them off of a cliff after such a trip and collected the insurance. Insurance that I had to pay for, of course, but that was very cheap. But I did run through several insurance companies that year, they did not seem anxious for much of my business.

So, finally, I called Mike on the phone and told him to buy a new, large truck with the largest tires he could find and have somebody drive it to the border between Mexico and Texas to meet me there; somebody who would then go with me to the compound in Colima and the one in Veracruz, and then haul the load back to Tarpon Springs. So about ten days later the truck reached Brownsville, Texas, but instead of unusually large tires had very small tires, which created a nightmare later.

The man who brought the truck was named Johnny Stephens; he was in his late twenties, tall but very thin, weighed about 120 pounds. And he was violently sick throughout the entire trip in Mexico; driving through the middle of Mexico City in broad daylight he stuck his bare ass out of the window of the truck and shit out into the air, and by that point he did not care how many people saw him do it; when he was not shitting he was vomiting. By the end of that trip his back had been rubbed so hard by the constant bouncing of the truck that you could see the bones of his spine; the skin and other soft tissue had been worn away over a large area on his back. He was not a happy camper, did not seem to like Mexico.

I was never able to find anybody who would agree to make more than one trip to Mexico with me, and a few quit and returned home by air; simply refused to continue when they realized what they had gotten themselves into.