

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“Life is not, as they say, ‘just one damned thing after another;’ it is, instead, ‘the same damned things over and over again.’”

W. C. Fields

A typical filming trip to South America? I don't know, since no two trips had much in common apart from the fact that we always had problems of one kind or another.

Shortly after Roy Hurst returned from a long filming and hunting trip to Africa with me in the early 1960s, he left and went to work for an American Missionary in Brazil; but the missionary had a beautiful young daughter and one thing rather naturally lead to another. When the missionary finally woke up to the fact that Roy was fucking his young daughter he fired him, and Roy then returned to this country. But he stayed in contact with the girl without her father's knowledge by sending letters to a third party, and eventually decided to go back to Brazil in order to spirit the girl away, bring her to this country and marry her. His only problem being that he was dead broke.

So he came to me for help; offered to work for me during an upcoming filming trip to South America if I would leave him in South America after the filming was completed. He had always done a good job for me in Africa, so I agreed to his terms, and a few weeks later we departed for South America in one of my small airplanes; four of us, apart from myself, Roy Hurst, Eliza Steffee and Jimbo Miller started the trip, our first destination being British Honduras. But shortly after we reached British Honduras I fired Jimbo Miller and sent him home, for reasons covered in another chapter, so that left only three of us for the remainder of a long trip.

The airplane I was flying on that trip was a Cherokee 235, a four-place, single-engine plane that was given to me free by Piper Corporation in return for advertising benefits that they would get from my use of their plane in my films. It had a cruising speed of just a bit above 150 miles an hour, had an endurance of about eight hours of nonstop flight at a very high altitude or six hours at a much lower altitude and thus had a maximum range that varied from 900 to about 1,100 miles; which meant that our route had to be very carefully considered because of our limited nonstop range. Running out of fuel over the ocean or the South American jungles can spoil your whole day.

The maximum legal takeoff weight for that airplane was 2,900 pounds, but in fact the airplane would fly with a much heavier load than was legal; and we usually exceeded the legal weight by at least 1,000 pounds. On one later trip to South America, taking two identical planes on that trip, when we landed on the island of Aruba for fuel we were still so heavy even though we had already burned off nearly 500 pounds of fuel that we appeared to be making a four point landing; that is, all three wheels were shoved up so high by our weight that it appeared that the tail was also dragging the ground, and the man in the control tower noticed this.

Then, a few minutes later, while we were eating in a restaurant on the airport, a man came up to my table and introduced himself as the Director of the local Department of Civil Aeronautics, and then said that it appeared that our airplanes were grossly overloaded. Which they were; but I could not admit it.

So I told him . . . “Well, let's see: the airplane has an empty weight of 1410 pounds and a legal takeoff weight of 2,900 pounds, so that leaves us 1,490 pounds for fuel, oil, passengers and baggage. Full fuel weights 504 pounds, full oil weighs 24 pounds, I weigh 185 pounds, she weighs 110 and he weighs 160, so that gives us a total of 2,393 pounds. When we subtract that from our legal takeoff weight of 2,900 pounds, that means we can still legally carry 507 pounds of baggage. Now do you really believe that the three of us have more than 500 pounds of baggage between us?”

All of which was true, but in fact we had more than 1,500 pounds of baggage on board that one plane, which meant that we were still more than 500 pounds above our legal weight even when we landed with very little fuel left. He looked at my figures, and then said . . . “Thank you; have a nice trip.” Turned and walked away.

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When flying one of my B 25 medium bombers we never had any problems with weight; with a normal crew and all of their equipment and full fuel, 974 gallons of fuel, and full oil, 75 gallons of oil, we could still carry more than 10,000 pounds of cargo legally, even though we were limited to a gross takeoff weight of 34,000 pounds. During the war, B 25s were flown at a weight of 46,500 pounds routinely, 12,500 pounds heavier than our maximum legal weight, and were operated out of very small and rough fields even at that heavy weight. Our only problem with the bombers was lack of room; the plane would be stuffed as full as a Christmas turkey long before we reached our maximum legal weight. It might have been possible to overload the bombers with solid gold bars, or lead, but since we never hauled either gold or lead that was not a problem.

The bombers had about the same nonstop endurance as the Cherokee 235, but were much faster so had a much longer range that was easily capable of covering any of the required legs of our South American trips. The longest leg was usually Miami to San Juan, Puerto Rico, and that took only about four and a half hours in a bomber so we still had at least three hours of remaining fuel on board when we landed if we left Miami with full tanks. But the same trip in the Cherokee 235 would have been a calculated risk; you might make it and you might not.

After I fired Jimbo Miller in British Honduras we hired a fast boat to take us on a rather long trip, by sea, to the southern part of the country, to a river where I had been told we could catch some crocodiles; the hired boat was fast, but the ocean was very rough and the constant pounding caused by hitting the waves produced a very uncomfortable trip. Then, when we reached the river we were looking for, we found, and I caught, only one small crocodile about three feet long. By that point there were few crocodiles left anywhere in Latin America, since millions of them had been killed for their skins. The skin of an average sized crocodile would then bring the hunter about thirty dollars, and that was about all he could earn from a month of hard labor working twelve-hour days; so if a hunter could at least average more than one crocodile a month he would come out ahead by hunting rather than working; and, a few years earlier, a hunter could kill more crocodiles in a single night than he could possibly skin the next day; so the attraction for hunting crocodiles was very strong, and that effectively wiped out the crocodiles in Latin America very quickly. There were still millions of caimans left, but their hides were worth almost nothing so they were seldom bothered.

Our black host and guide in British Honduras took us to visit an American Indian reservation so that we could film the Indians and their work and festivities, and we stopped off to buy some Coca Colas from a small store operated by an Indian; but the store was almost empty of stock for sale, and you could have cleaned out the entire store for less than five dollars. It then occurred to me that if he turned over his entire stock every day he would still be almost starving to death, but I doubt if he turned over his stock even once a month; he must have been surviving on air and water.

People in this country who believe they are poor might change their minds if they could see how most of the people in Latin America, Africa and Asia live.

From British Honduras we continued on to Barranquilla, Colombia, with one stop for fuel enroute. Then we hired a man and his Jeep to take us into a very backward part of the country; but when we were loading the Jeep for the trip the driver insisted upon taking two very long and heavy planks with us, but would offer no explanation apart from . . . "You'll see."

For quite a long distance during the trip in the Jeep, the road consisted of a narrow dirt trail on top of a dike that separated two very large bodies of water; the trail was only about twelve feet wide so we would have had a very serious problem if we met another vehicle going in the opposite direction, but fortunately we were the only vehicle using the trail. And the need for the two heavy planks soon became obvious: because the dike was not continuous, every couple of hundred yards or so there was a wide gap in the dike; which gaps, I suppose, were supposed to allow the water to flow freely from one body of water on our left to the other on our right, which made you wonder about just what purpose the dike was supposed to serve.

The two planks were nothing more nor less than a portable bridge which allowed us to drive from one side of a gap in the dike to the other side; without those two planks, driving over that trail would have been impossible. But loading and unloading the two heavy planks repeatedly slowed us down almost to a snail's pace, and it took us an entire day to cover less than a hundred miles. Fortunately, I had hired the Jeep and driver by the mile rather than by the day.

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We spent the first night sleeping on the bare floor of a small wooden building with wide cracks between all of the boards that it had been built with; which provided a feast for the mosquitoes but a miserable night for us. But at least it was a cheap place to stay, cost me less than a dollar for all four of us.

The following day we were lucky enough to locate several local hunters and were able to film several interesting sequences; I had the small crocodile from British Honduras with me and wanted to film Eliza showing it to several young peasant children, and while she was holding it the Jeep driver suddenly reached out his hand intending to touch the crocodile on its head, but instead the croc grabbed his finger and damned near bit it off. All of which I was lucky enough to get on film in a fairly tight close-up scene that left nothing to the imagination; which pleased me no end, but did not appear to make the driver very happy.

Small children and their reactions to wild animals are almost always very interesting, so we took every opportunity to film such situations.

Having spent several very productive days, and an equal number of miserable nights, in the area, we then returned to Barranquilla, spent one night in a very comfortable hotel there and then departed early the next morning for our next scheduled stop, Mitu, Colombia. Bogota, the Capitol of Colombia, is 8,400 feet above sea level, but a relatively short distance to the east of Bogota the escarpment drops off abruptly and the land to the east of the mountains is not far above sea level and almost perfectly flat for hundreds of miles, and almost unpopulated with no roads or even trails, no villages or farms, with almost nothing apart from seemingly endless vistas of open country.

The only village in a vast area of land is Mitu, and it consists of almost nothing. The only way in or out is by air, and everything apart from water has to be flown in from Barranquilla at relatively great expense. But upon departing from Barranquilla enroute to Mitu we first had to climb over the high mountains that lay between Barranquilla and Mitu; and since the plane was greatly overloaded by all of our equipment, guns, ammunition, cameras, heavy tripods, film, batteries for the cameras, food, drinking water, clothing and a long list of other things including the small crocodile, a few snakes and a tame young jaguarandi that I bought in the market in Barranquilla, we spent the first two hours of the trip steadily climbing in order to stay above the rising ground beneath us; our rate of climb was so slow because of our heavy weight, and the ground was rising so rapidly, that I was forced to fly in circles several times in order to get high enough to pass above the ground directly ahead of us.

Meaningful maps of the interior of South America did not exist at that time, and once you passed beyond the mountains and came out above the so-called Llanos, the land east of the mountains, there was nothing in the way of a check point to confirm your position; all you could do was head in what you believed to be the right direction and hope for the best. Mitu did have a so-called NDB, or nondirectional beacon, that you were supposed to be able to use to locate the airfield there; but the guy in charge of the field never turned it on until he heard an airplane approaching, so it was in fact utterly useless for navigational purposes.

But we found the small dirt landing strip at Mitu in spite of no maps or navigational aids, and the guy in charge of the field turned on the NDB beacon when we were less than a quarter of a mile from touchdown.

When we parked the airplane and got out I saw another plane parked near the small open-sided, thatch-roofed hut that served as an administration building, a plane that at first I could not identify since I had never seen one like it before; but upon talking to the pilot of the other airplane I learned that it was a B 18 medium bomber that had been converted for hauling logs out of the jungle. The B 18 was the military bomber version of the Douglas DC 2, the immediate predecessor of the famous DC 3, or Goony Bird as we called it during the war, or the Dakota as the British called it, or Puff the Magic Dragon as they called it during the Vietnamese War. The DC 3 was first used by major airlines in 1935 and hundreds of them are still in use worldwide by small airlines nearly sixty years later; the DC 2 was introduced about 1932, and the bomber version, the B 18, was introduced shortly afterwards but was obsolete even before we entered the Second World War. That one sitting on the landing strip in Mitu was probably the only one still in use anywhere in the world, and it was never seen again after that day.

Twenty-three days later a lone survivor of a crash of the B 18, an Indian who had been riding in the tail section of the plane and thus survived the crash, came walking out of the surrounding bush; and when they asked him where the

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plane was, he said . . . “Twenty-three days in that direction.” And then pointed towards the southeast. I doubt if anybody ever bothered to even look for it, but if so it is even more unlikely that it was ever found. Fortunately, I got some film of it sitting on the landing strip and taking off.

Until a few days earlier, there had been a total of two cars in Mitu; but when we got there the total number was zero, the only two cars in the village had a head-on collision at an intersection and both were destroyed three or four days before we arrived.

Because everything had to be flown in from Barranquilla, things were very expensive in Mitu compared to prices elsewhere in Colombia; in Barranquilla fuel for the plane cost only nine cents a gallon, but in Mitu I had to pay a dollar a gallon for it. So we did not stay long.

Our next stop was in Leticia, Colombia, on the Amazon river, at the southern tip of the country, a place where my erstwhile partner in the Tarpon zoo, Mike Tsalickis, was then operating an animal-collecting compound.

I knew that there were no facilities of any kind on the airport in Leticia, apart from a gasoline truck, so I buzzed the town at a low altitude in the hope that somebody would have sense enough to send a taxi to the airport to pick us up. After I landed I noticed a Lockheed Loadstar that I recognized parked near the small hut that served as the terminal building; it belonged to Fred Coshu, a German man who owned the largest tropical fish business in the world at that time, Paramount Aquarium of Vero Beach, Florida. And I knew that it was being flown by a man named Nicholas, a man everybody called Nick.

Then, about five minutes later, a taxi arrived carrying three men apart from the driver; Nick had seen me when I buzzed the town and had driven out in the taxi in an effort to provide any required assistance, bringing with him two men who were along for the trip, two big customers who were important to his boss.

When he recognized me, Nick said . . . “Jesus Christ, I should have known it was you; nobody else would be stupid enough to fly over this country with only one fan.”

Whereupon I said . . . “Sure, you have two fans on that misnamed bastard you are flying; but just how far do you think it will go if one of them quits turning? Maybe a mile if you are high enough when it quits, and if you are lucky as Hell. And since you have two fans you have at least twice as much chance of one of them quitting as I do.”

Then he said . . . “Damned, Jones, shut up, these guys with me are important customers, and they don’t know that. I don’t want to scare the shit out of them.”

The fact that an airplane has two engines does not mean that it is safer than one with only one engine; the opposite is generally true, because many twin engined planes will do nothing apart from coming rapidly down if either engine fails, and having two instead of one engine they are more likely to have an engine failure. It would appear that they would be twice as likely to lose an engine; but in fact actual odds, for some unknown reason, are more like four to one in favor of the single engined plane and against the twin engined plane. Yet many major insurance companies, apparently unaware of the actual odds, will not permit a person with a big policy to ride in a single engine plane. Perhaps they don’t understand their own statistics.

Secondly: while the plane Nick was flying was called a Loadstar, implying that it could carry a heavy load, the true situation was exactly the opposite; if you filled up the fuel tanks, with no cargo or passengers on board, you were overweight by the weight of the copilot, assuming that the pilot was not too heavy. It was, perhaps, the worst cargo-carrying airplane in the world; which is why you could buy them for a song, and sing it yourself, and which is why Fred Coshu bought it in the first place, because while he was a millionaire many times over he was also one of the worst cheapskates I ever met. The only way Nick could get Coshu to buy a new tire for the plane was to purposefully destroy one of the tires already on it.

Coshu had a source of tropical fish in Belem, Brazil, a business operated by a man named Cobby Cruz, and Coshu was always very slow about paying Cruz for the fish that Nick picked up; when Nick was ready to leave for a trip to get fish from Cruz, he would give Nick three envelopes, marked A, B, and C. Each envelope had a check for Cruz, and Coshu would tell Nick . . . “If Cruz is glad to see you, give him only envelope A (which had a small check), but it

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he is a bit hesitant then give him envelope B (which had a larger check), but if he is pissed off then give him envelope C (which had a check big enough to cover everything that Coshu owed Cruz at the time), but don't give him envelope C unless he refuses to let you pick up any more fish until the past account is paid in full."

Nick told me about that, but added . . . "Fuck Coshu, I'm not going to play his games; I don't know why he keeps trying, because I always give Cruz envelope C."

But Nick had a bit more than simple honesty in mind when dealing with Cruz; because Cruz had six beautiful young daughters who varied from thirteen to nineteen years old, and every one of them were World class beauties. And Nick was not the only one who had noticed the Cruz sisters; but it never did me any good because Cruz watched them like a hawk, and I doubt if Nick ever had any better luck with them than I did.

Some years earlier, when I was shipping animals and reptiles out of Inquitos, Peru, Coshu tried to fuck me around for the simple reason that he enjoyed causing people trouble, even if doing so cost him money and gained him nothing. He had leased a C 46 cargo plane from a small cargo airline operating out of Miami for a total of ten charter flights from Inquitos back to Miami, and since he never had more than half of an airplane load of fish he would haul cargo for other people from Inquitos to Miami at a rate of twenty-five cents a pound.

The man who owned the plane, Everett Jones, had only southbound cargo out of Miami and would otherwise have been forced to fly back to Miami empty, so he was willing to lease the northbound portion of each trip to Coshu at a very low price, because anything he got was better than nothing.

But as I was preparing to start loading my cargo onto the airplane for the last of the ten flights that Coshu had contracted for with Everett Jones, the pilot came up to me and said that he could not haul my cargo; because Coshu had sent him a telegram telling him not to. So I told the pilot not to attempt to leave without my cargo, that if he did I would shoot holes in both of his main tires; I told him . . . "You may not haul my cargo, but if not then you are not going to haul anybody's cargo unless you can get out of here without any tires, and I will keep shooting holes in them every time you replace them, if you can find any tires here to replace them with, which I doubt. So you better get in touch with Fred Coshu and get this straightened out immediately, because you damned sure are not leaving until you do."

He believed me, and even though he was unable to get Coshu on the radio or get a reply to an urgent cable, he took me and the cargo in spite of Coshu's orders to the contrary. Then, when we arrived in Miami, there was Coshu with a smirk on his face; but he was not quite so amused a few minutes later, because I took Everett Jones aside as soon as I got there and asked him to name a price for his plane, and when he said \$190,000.00 I wrote him a check in full on the spot and we drew up and signed the sales agreement, together with a joint venture agreement concerning future southbound cargo.

Then I went back outside in order to have a brief conversation with Coshu. I told him . . . "All right, you arrogant son of a bitch, the fun and games are over, and now the shoe is on the other foot; I just bought the fucking airplane from Everett Jones, so in the future when you want to ship something north out of Inquitos you will be paying me rather than the other way around, and the freight rate just went up, in the future it will cost you fifty cents a pound rather than twenty-five cents. Take it or leave it, but cash up front, no checks and no credit, if you do take it.

"And while we are on the subject of what will happen in the future I believe you might want to also consider what might happen in the future: you have several hundred open fish pools scattered over a couple of hundred acres on your fish farm near Vero Beach, holding millions of dollars worth of fish at any given moment. Think about just how much it would cost you if somebody flew over your fish farm with a crop duster and dumped a load of insecticide into your pools; you would not only lose all of the fish but would never again be able to use any of those pools, because DDT lasts almost forever.

"So, if you think I'm joking, asshole, roll the fucking dice; but the stakes are your ass. I don't like your kind of jokes worth a shit; but now we both may get a chance to see just how much you like mine."

What did he say? Nothing; what could he say? Besides, I suspect that he did not really want me to kick his ass up and down the runway like a dog; which I would have been more than happy to do.

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Would I have dropped DDT on his fish pools? Does a bear shit in the woods? You have to do what you have to do. But he could have gotten you arrested, couldn't he? How? Nobody else heard what I told him, and I could tell by the way that he was dressed that he was not wearing a wire, a tape recorder. I could easily have DDT bombed his fish pools at night and been clear out of the state before anybody even suspected what had happened; had it been necessary to do so I would have used one of my B 25s and would have spread about 10,000 pounds of DDT over the entire fish farm; could have made a round-trip from Picayune, Mississippi, to Vero Beach and then back home without ever having to stop anywhere enroute and with no flight plan, so it would have been utterly impossible for anybody to ever prove that I had even been away from home at the time.

Coshu was an arrogant, very mean bastard, but he was not utterly stupid; he clearly understood the possibilities without me giving him any road maps in regard to my plans for his future happiness. Besides, it usually scares them worse when they don't know exactly what you plan to do; but they must believe that you will do it, and on that score he had no doubts.

Shortly after we reached the hotel and checked into the last two rooms available, an attractive young female tourist showed up looking for a room; but none were available anywhere in town, so I moved into Roy's room so that the girl could stay in a room with Eliza. Then, later that evening, while we were all eating, the jaguarondi that I bought in Barranquilla destroyed most of the girl's clothes along with quite a few of Eliza's clothes; cats do like to destroy things, regardless of how tame they are.

During the next few days we filmed a large variety of animals and reptiles in the area and also visited and filmed several very primitive Indian villages a few miles down the Amazon river. Inside a large hut in one of these villages, hanging from the ceiling of the hut, were several smoke-dried howler monkeys that the Indians had preserved for a later feast; Eliza tried very hard to get me to buy one of them for her, said it would make a very attractive centerpiece for a dining table. Sure. Attractive they were not; instead, they looked like a small version of the human corpses that are stored in the catacombs in Rome and in Mexico. And, besides, removed from where they were located, directly in the smoke from a fire beneath them, they would probably have smelled like a goat that had been dead for a week within a period of a few days.

Just before we left Leticia enroute for our first stop in Brazil, in Manaus, somebody asked me to give the Brazilian Consul a ride in my plane to Manaus; he was unable to get a ride from Leticia to Manaus on the weekly flight of a thirty-year-old flying boat, but could get a seat on it from Manaus to Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon, if he could somehow manage to reach Manaus.

We were already about 1,000 pounds overloaded, and had almost no space in the plane, but I figured . . . "What the Hell, why not? Maybe I will need a favor from him some day." So I took him with us, although he had to hold some of our equipment on his lap throughout the trip. And it was a very rough trip; I was forced to fly through thunderstorms almost every inch of the way; the turbulence was almost constant and the rain was constant, and very heavy.

The tip tanks on that plane were made out of very tough plastic, but I flew through so much heavy rain that year that eventually the leading edges of both tip tanks were eroded away to such an extent by the rain that the tanks started leaking out through holes in their leading edges. All of the paint on the leading edges of both the wings and tail surfaces was gone long before that. You cannot, of course, see a fucking thing when flying in such weather so the entire trip was made strictly on instruments. Flying through such heavy storms is certainly not recommended, but sometimes you have no other choice.

We dropped off the Brazilian Consul and then checked into a hotel in Manaus, and then I went to see Willie Schwartz, the fish dealer who made me the almost unbelievably good deal that Herbert Prechtel then fucked up; I was not sure that he would even talk to me, but he did; although he simply refused to discuss what Herbert told him. He did, however, sell me the largest boa constrictor that I ever saw in my life.

There were, at the time, no roads into or out of Manaus to anywhere, you could reach there only by air or by ship up the Amazon river, a distance by water of more than a thousand miles from the coast city of Belem. But they had started building a gravel road towards the north, intending to extend it clear to the north coast of British Guiana, about

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800 miles away. But while we were there on that trip the road ended only twenty-five miles to the north of the city, a road to nowhere.

But, living alone apart from a large collection of tame wild animals of a great variety, an old man had a small place just beyond the end of the road that was then under construction. Just what the Hell this old man was doing with all of these animals I was never able to learn, nor could I figure out how he could afford to keep them since he appeared to be penniless; yet, while we were there, he came out of his small shack one day and gave one of his animals a large drink of very expensive whiskey from a full bottle. And the animal, a tapir, seemed to like it very much.

We hired the old man and his animals for filming purposes and he was very cooperative; and I paid him what he asked for, which was actually very little. Then, just before dark after our first day of filming with the old man, on the way back into the city, we came upon the scene of a terrible truck wreck; a large truck loaded with boulders had run head-on into another large truck loaded with logs, but twenty-three people had been riding on top of the load of logs when the trucks collided.

The collision occurred at a place where the road was built up above much lower ground on each side of the narrow road, the drop-off being about thirty feet nearly straight down on each side of the road. After the high speed collision apparently the trucks bounced back apart and then one rolled down the steep incline on one side of the road while the other one rolled down the incline of the other side of the road; so both trucks were clear of the road when we arrived there, but there were boulders, logs and bodies all over the road; a total of twenty-nine people were killed and nobody survived the wreck.

Eliza had never seen a dead person before, but she certainly got her fill that day; one old woman who was stretched out near one edge of the road had her head smashed down as flat, and about as thick, as a pancake. Somebody had been there earlier, as we learned later, and had already removed some of the bodies, but nobody was there apart from the dead when we got there. There was still enough light to film by, but I did not feel like filming that scene.

After several more days of very successful filming with the old man and his animals we departed enroute for Belem; but before leaving Manaus I bought another perfectly tame young jaguarondi. We did not have enough range to make it nonstop to Belem, so were forced to stop for fuel in a place called Santarem, and that created a problem: they would not sell fuel to an American registered airplane except for U. S. Dollars, would not accept their own currency in payment. And I had only one U. S. hundred-dollar bill remaining, and knew I would need that in order to buy fuel when we were ready to depart from Belem enroute to another country. I needed only about twenty dollars worth of fuel, but if I paid for it with my one remaining American bill they would have given me change in local currency.

But then a retired senior captain for Pan American Airlines came to my rescue; he was there in his own private airplane, which had Brazilian registration, so he talked them into putting fuel into my plane and charging it to his account. I told him that I had money waiting for me in Belem, where he lived with his much younger Brazilian wife, and that I would pay him for the fuel the following day. He gave me his home address and telephone number and we took off.

When we landed in Belem the first thing that Roy noticed was an airplane that belonged to his girlfriend's father, and it scared the shit out of him; if the missionary realized that Roy was back in Brazil, the game would probably be over before it really started. Roy was then so anxious to get away from the airport without being seen by the missionary that he made a terrible mistake, he somehow insulted the porter who was helping us with our luggage; probably insulted him with his facial expression, or body English, because he could speak only a few words of Portuguese, but insulted him somehow, and a very little of that goes a long way with most Latin Americans, as it does with me. There were no immediate results, but a near disaster occurred a few days later.

I had a relatively young but very experienced pilot friend living in Belem that I had known for several years, and he went with me the next day when I went to Captain Magowan's house to pay him for the fuel that he helped me get in Santarem, and as we got out of the taxi in front of his house we were both laughing; and Captain Magowan asked us what we were laughing about, and I told him . . . "Oh, just some of the myths that many pilots believe."

So he asked . . . "Like what?"

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And I said . . . “Well, for one example, the old myth about crosswind landings; crabbing until the last split second and then suddenly kicking the plane around in line with the runway, supposedly before it starts to drift again.”

And Magowan said . . . “And what’s wrong with that? That’s the way I have been doing it for more than fifty years. What do you say to that?”

All I could say was . . . “Strong landing gear.” Which did not get the following conversation off to a very good start; but what he believed, as many other pilots believe, it simply impossible. Captain Magowan was a very senior pilot, had pioneered many of the earliest airline routes all over South American, but more than fifty years after he started flying he still believed at least one myth that he had been taught many years earlier by somebody who obviously not only did not understand the laws of basic physics but probably was not even aware of them; but, again, as I have said before, trying to point out their mistakes to an expert in any field is almost invariably an exercise in futility at best.

After a few days of filming in the countryside near Belem, we were ready to depart enroute to Surinam, or Dutch Guiana, where Eliza’s father was flying for the Dutch government in connection with an experimental rice farming project, in a location with a number of good filming opportunities. When we were finished filming there I planned to pay Roy off and let him return to Brazil in an attempt to get his girlfriend out of the country.

But when we returned to the airport in order to check out of the country, the shit hit the fan: they accused me of trying to smuggle animals out of the country without a permit, and I was certainly guilty of that but knew that they could not prove it since I maintained that all of the animals that we had were brought into the country with us from Colombia, but also knew that they did not really have to prove anything in order to give me a lot of trouble.

I knew almost immediately that the animal smuggling charge was merely an excuse, that something else was the real problem, but they refused to tell me just what the something else was. But, eventually, I managed to get the Brazilian Consul who I had given a ride from Leticia to Manaus on the phone and he told them that he could testify that the animals were brought into Brazil from Colombia because he rode in the same airplane with them; and he must have put in some sort of good report on my behalf because the problem suddenly vanished and we were free to go.

But I was still curious, so I took the official in charge aside and asked him to tell me frankly just what the real problem had been; and he said . . . “That big gorilla you have with you was the problem; he insulted the porter when you arrived.”

Which, of course, Roy later denied; but which denial I did not believe.

About a week later, after several days of very successful filming in Surinam, and after buying a large number of animals to be used during a following trip a few weeks later, I was ready to leave enroute back to the States; but at the last moment Eliza told me that she would not be going with me, that she had agreed to loan Roy her passport so that he could use it in order to smuggle his girlfriend out of Brazil. She said she would stay in Surinam with her parents until Roy mailed her passport back to her and then would join me again in Slidell.

I told her that I believed it was a mistake on her part, that it might get her in a lot of trouble, but she insisted upon doing it and I could not change her mind. But I did make Roy promise that if the situation blew up in his face and he got caught with Eliza’s passport he would have to claim, as we would do, that he had stolen it from her. And he agreed to those terms and left enroute back to Brazil while I left enroute back to Louisiana.

Then the silly bastard checked into a hotel in Rio with the girl under his own name, and was trapped there by an investigator from the American Consulate who had been alerted by the girl’s father. Then, to make matter much worse, when the Consulate investigator asked Roy how he had intended to smuggle the girl out of Brazil, the stupid bastard whipped out Eliza’s passport and showed it to him; apparently preferring to look like a criminal rather than appearing simply stupid. And, of course, the Consul official immediately seized Eliza’s passport and the fat was then in the fire for sure.

But Eliza and I both stuck to our stories and eventually she got her passport back; what then happened to Roy I never learned since I have not seen him since he left Surinam as I left for the States. Apparently he has avoided me ever since; is probably ashamed to ever face me again.

“...And God Laughs”

The Arthur Jones Collection

On the way back to Slidell I stopped briefly in Laredo, Texas, and learned that there were supposed to be a lot of big crocodiles fairly close to Colima, Mexico, so almost immediately after reaching home I made a quick trip to Colima in my airplane with George Bergin, Donald Spence and Raymond Johnson, but actually captured only two small crocodiles and did not even see any large ones.

The only memorable thing about that quick trip to Colima probably exists in George Bergin's mind more than it does in mine; because we left him standing up to his waist in water, in the dark, in a lake supposedly full of large crocodiles for about three hours, while we unsuccessfully looked for big crocs in another part of the lake. Under the circumstances, three hours probably seemed like a month to him.

So we always had problems of one kind or another, but somehow managed to survive in spite of them; during a period of several years I was probably producing about a quart of adrenaline a week, and it felt like a gallon.