

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“More fun than a barrel of monkeys, you say? Well let me tell you something, I don’t know much of anything that is less fun than a bus full of monkeys.”

Ralph Cramer

Ralph Cramer worked for me first in 1953, and is working for me now, more than forty-one years later; during that period he was in the army for a while, was a fire department officer for a few years, and worked for other people in the animal business when I was out of the country for long periods. He knows many of the people mentioned in this book, and a lot of others not mentioned yet. If you are getting concerned about the length of this book, be advised: I have probably not reached the midpoint yet; my biggest mistakes have yet to be mentioned.

Ralph has traveled with me all over the world, made trips to Africa, Australia, Thailand and several other places; worked for me in Slidell, Louisiana, near Mobile, Alabama, and in both Lake Helen and Ocala, Florida. He has handled hundreds of thousands of snakes, an equal number of monkeys and hundreds of elephants, and damned near anything else you can think of in the way of both exotic and native forms of wildlife.

If it can be done with wild animals, he has done it; and tried a lot of things that could not be done. Has been bitten twice by cobras and thousands of times by monkeys. Like me, he hated monkeys from day one; and learned to hate them even more as he handled them by the thousands. I don’t know how many women he has fucked, but as many as possible as best I could tell; but I only know about a few hundred.

Ralph went to Jamaica with me about eighteen years ago to capture crocodiles; and both Dick Butkus and a copilot of mine named Morris Morrow went with us. While in Jamaica Dick and Morris were sitting around in a restaurant one night when two black whores approached them; Dick was not interested but Morris took one to a room and fucked her. Afterwards Ralph called him the Fat Nigger Fucker, which irritated the Hell out of Morris; so he then told Ralph that the woman was an Indian; whereupon Ralph, who had seen her, started calling him the Lying Fat Nigger Fucker; or, in front of his wife, the L. F. N. F. When his wife asked Morris what that name meant, he told her it was one of those friendly nicknames, like Coke for Coca Cola.

Morris would fuck almost anything; I don’t think he ever fucked a rhino, like John Clark, but that was probably only because he never had the opportunity. His wife trusted him about as far as she could throw their house, uphill, against a headwind. We flew all over the place almost constantly for years, were gone most of the time, and Morris would never tell his wife where we were going; but we would hardly be out of the door before she started calling all over the country trying to locate him; and usually did; as we arrived in our rooms the phone would be ringing, her calling from Florida. I hate to think what their monthly phone bill must have been, and don’t know how they could afford it; although Morris was perfectly willing to steal anything he could, later stole very valuable airplane parts from somebody else he was working for after I fired him and tried to sell the parts to me since I had a similar airplane.

On that trip to Jamaica a crocodile bit Dick Butkus rather badly on the hand, and since we did not have any alcohol to clean up his wound with I used a bottle of strong rum for that purpose; but, later, when we took him to see a Russian woman doctor to get his wounds stitched up she refused to treat him on the grounds that he was drunk. But he was not drunk, his smell came from the rum that we used to wash his hand.

There was a Jewish young man from New York trying to run a crocodile farm in Jamaica. and he was calling himself Ross Kananga, after the villain in a James Bond movie, and his crocodiles were used in making one of the James Bond films, where Bond supposedly escaped by running across the backs of several crocs in a pool of water; Ross actually did that stunt, and damned near got killed in the process.

Later, he had so many people after him that he decided the only way out was to fake his own death, so that people would stop looking for him; so he took his grandmother out in a small boat in the Everglades in order to have a witness

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to his death. The plan being to turn over the boat in a spot where she could easily escape, but where he could get away; leaving the impression that he had drowned, even though his body was never supposed to be found.

But it was found; it was a cold day, and he went into shock and did drown. The grandmother did get out alive, and was able to provide a true account of his death.

I was after him for having done one of the cruelest things I ever witnessed; he tied a bunch of crocodiles very tightly, packed them in a big trailer and then left them there for weeks. When their legs were untied their feet were already rotting off, even though they were still alive. I figured tit for tat, nit for shit, and had similar plans for him; but he was dead before I could find him. Several other people had plans for him as a result of some of his other stunts.

I have always tried to be more than fair with all of my employees or associates, and would give them almost anything they asked for if it was within my power to do so; asking nothing in return. But Morris didn't ask; he sent one of my planes off on a long trip for his own purposes without my knowledge or permission; sent it with another pilot flying it.

But the plane developed a problem in another state and was delayed for several days; was thus unavailable for another flight that I had scheduled for it, a flight that Morris knew about. Had I known what was going on I could have sent another plane to pick up the passengers that were awaiting my plane's arrival; but Morris said nothing, left both the passengers and me wondering what had happened.

His wife had a badly crippled child that had a very short life expectancy from an inherited medical problem, and Morris had a sister with the same problem; so any child by Morris and his wife was almost assured of the same condition. So when his wife got pregnant Morris started flying her to Gainesville every week for both dangerous and expensive tests at the medical school. When Ralph's wife asked her when she was going to get the abortion, she said . . . "Oh, no, I'm going to have this child."

So when I asked Morris just why he got all of the dangerous and expensive tests if he intended to let her have the child anyway, he could not give me a rational answer. He wasn't very smart.

In the summer of 1954 Ralph stopped by to see me for a few hours in Mobile, Alabama, on the way to west Texas to hunt for snakes; four young men were driving an old car with no brakes and no battery; they had to push it to get it started and stop it by cutting off the engine while using the lowest gear ratio. They had almost no money, and were getting gas by using what they called an East Texas Courtesy Card, meaning a five gallon can and a length of garden hose for stealing gas from other cars. But they were on their way to get rich catching snakes. They had four sleeping bags with them and either slept in the car or on the ground, depending on the weather.

Later on that trip, when Ralph caught the other three guys trying to fuck some sheep in west Texas, he took them to a whorehouse in Mexico.

One of the men on that trip, who later committed suicide by letting some cobras bite him, had a medical problem that caused him to sleep almost constantly; he usually stayed awake only two or three hours a day. Would sometimes fall asleep while standing up talking to you. And that sleeping problem almost got him killed on that trip.

Late at night, driving through the highest mountains in Texas, Ralph parked the car on a steep downgrade, leaned forward over the steering wheel and went to sleep; the other three men were already sleeping when he stopped. He stopped on a downgrade so that he could get the car started again by coasting it down the hill and then popping the clutch; parked just to one side of the highway, with the car in low gear and with the clutch out so that it would not roll forward. When the sun came up a few hours later it was shining directly into his face, and that woke him up; all of the other three men remained silent so he assumed they were still asleep. So he depressed the clutch, turned the wheels towards the highway and the car started rolling forward; when it was coasting fast enough he popped the clutch and the engine started.

Then all he had to do was drive a car with no brakes down a steep, winding mountain highway; which is possible, by shifting gears back and forth as required and thus using the engine for braking, but it does require a bit of skill.

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Then, moving quite fast and halfway through a steep curve, a hand suddenly appeared directly in front of his eyes; a hand desperately scrabbling at the outside of the windshield, trying to get a grip on the smooth surface of the glass with its fingernails, which is damned hard to do to say the least. Ralph instantly understood what had happened: one of the other men had been asleep on top of the car when he woke up and started driving again. But he also knew that he had a serious problem: how do you stop a car with no brakes going down a steep road smoothly enough to keep the man on top from sliding off and getting killed?

But somehow he managed it, although doing so did scare the shit out of both him and the man on the car's roof. The long-sleeping young man had been asleep in the back seat when Ralph stopped, but woke up a bit later and got out of the car to take a piss; then, because he was a bit cramped up in the back seat with another man also sleeping there, he decided to put his sleeping bag on top of the car, got back inside of it and went to sleep again. Ralph said later that the young man was so scared he then stayed awake for nearly an hour, which was unusual conduct for him.

A few years later, and knowing that Ralph had been bitten twice by cobras, that young man asked him if a cobra bite was very painful. Some snake bites are very painful, and some are not; so Ralph told him, no, that his bites caused very little pain, which is true with most cobra bites. But the young man picked the wrong kind of cobras; the type he used to kill himself with produces so much pain that it seems like every nerve in the body is on fire, and his following death did not come very quickly. So he probably died in great agony, cursing Ralph.

Some of my rattlesnake bites have been very painful, but my two cobra bites were not very painful; the treatment, cutting and sucking, hurt worse than the effects of the bites.

Altogether, I have been bitten twenty-four times by poisonous snakes; but considering the number of snakes I have handled, that is actually a remarkable safety record. A few supposed snake 'experts' have had some rather snide remarks to make regarding the number of my bites; saying things like . . . "Well, I have been handling snakes for forty years, and I have never been bitten."

Sure. Well, their handling of snakes usually consisted of looking at a dead one preserved in a bottle of formaldehyde; they probably did not even see as many snakes during that forty years as I handled on a daily basis. That's like an old woman who drives an average of fifty miles a year in a sleepy village with almost no traffic making remarks about the number of fender benders that a New York taxi driver racked up during his career. Don't make snide comments until you have done it yourself, and a little experience is sometimes worse than none, simply breeds overconfidence.

Why do some people like snakes so much? I believe that many people who handle snakes do not really like them; instead, they like to show off, to demonstrate just how brave they are. Which has never been the case with me, nor with Ralph; we just like snakes, admire them, find them attractive, would have studied them if we had been the only people alive on this planet.

In any case, handling snakes does not convince many other people that you are brave; most people simply believe you are crazy. Very little that you will ever do in this life will make a favorable impression of any kind on other people; is far more likely to make them hate you.

Roy Pinney, a Jewish man from New York who is now about eighty years old, and who was once a very famous photographer, has been keeping snakes in his house and apartments throughout his life; still keeps rattlesnakes in his apartment in the middle of New York City. Certainly does not do so in an attempt to impress other people.

Roy has been with me on trips all over the world, serving as a camera operator on many of my filming trips; made one trip to India with Bill Carpenter when we were filming the Wild Cargo series nearly forty years ago.

More than thirty years ago, then married to a much younger woman and living with her in a beautiful home in Larchmont, New York, Roy tried to get me to kill a rather well-known man who had been having an affair with his wife; told me that he would kill any two men in the world that I named, would kill them first, if I would kill his wife's boyfriend in return.

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But I refused to do so; would not even discuss his suggestion with Roy. My former agent, Brandon Chase, treated his beautiful young wife very badly, and she tried to get me to kill him; said her father would be glad to kill Brandon if she told him what had happened, but that he was then too old and she hated to tell him about it. I also had good reason to hate Brandon, but was never tempted to kill him; although I would probably have been pleased if somebody else did. I have never killed anybody except in self defense, and even avoided that if I could.

For years I had a license to carry a concealed pistol in the county where I lived in Florida, and later got a license that was valid anywhere in the state; but did not even bother to renew it when it expired, although doing so would have required only about an hour of my time. I still keep two pistols next to my bed, within easy reach, but seldom carry one anymore. Most of the people who might have wanted to kill me are now dead, so I don't have to remain in a state of full alert any longer. But both Ralph Cramer and my son Edgar still do carry a pistol at all times; when I learned that my youngest son carries three pistols, I asked him why . . . "You have only two hands."

People who have never needed a gun for self defense may not understand why other people do carry pistols; but, as they say . . . "You may never need a pistol; but if you do, you need it very badly, you need it quickly, and nothing will take its place." Following that rule throughout most of my life kept me alive in many situations when other people died. Did not prevent the six bullet holes I now have in me, but prevented a lot more of them. I now have so much metal in my body that I sometimes set off the metal detectors in airports; would not dare expose myself to the high level of magnetic force used in a scanning device called an MRI, a magnetic resonance imaging machine. Such a machine would tear me to pieces by pulling all of the pieces of metal out through my flesh.

Most lizards have the ability to regrow a tail that is broken off, will sometimes even regrow a foot that has been cut off, but most people, even most of the supposed experts, are not aware that alligators can do the same thing, although they rarely do. About fifteen years ago, following a discussion on the subject of reptiles regenerating lost body parts, Ralph and Morris Morrow went hunting that night and captured a small alligator that had regrown about five inches of its tail that had been lost. The caimans in Colombia seldom regrow a cut off tail, but at least half of the adult caimans in another country in South America, Surinam, have regenerated tails. The animals appear to be identical, but obviously are not.

More than sixty years ago, I enjoyed thumbing through copies of the National Geographic Magazine, looking at pictures of animals, but also looking at pictures of barebreasted women; and, at that time, that was the only place where I could find pictures of bare teats. But I noticed that they seemed to come in two distinct styles; young, firm breasts or long, soft, droopy breasts, and I wondered about this obvious difference.

Such differences do not occur in any other type of animal that I am aware of except during the relatively brief period while they are nursing their young; there is no apparent difference in a virginal female animal and one that has given birth repeatedly. Why should women be different? But they usually are.

And I believe I know why: human females care for their young much longer than other animals do, thus it would appear that a loss of sex appeal following birth would improve the chances of the infant surviving by tending to keep its mother at home. Which opinion, I am sure, will piss off a lot of women; well, so be it, but even a casual glance at the breasts of most virgins, followed by a look at those of an experienced mother, will usually show a striking difference.

Some few women do not change their appearance much following the birth of a child, particularly after they stop nursing the child; but those are the exceptions, not the rule. Most women, after they stop nursing, either lose most of their previous breast size or their breasts sag down like an empty sack. Break out your old copies of the National Geographic and you will immediately see the difference; you can tell at a glance which women have given birth, and which have not.

Most men are strongly attracted to virgins, or virginal appearing women, for the simple reason that their bodies are far more sexually attractive.