

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“The Dutchmen did not cheat the Indians when they purchased Manhattan island, it was the other way around; the value of what the Dutchmen gave the Indians, if invested at interest rates that have existed since then, would now be worth more money than is in existence.”

Anon.

In the late fall of 1953 I sold my exhibit near Slidell, Louisiana, to my junior partner, Owen Baker, and then took one of the few vacations in my life; driving a new Oldsmobile that Baker had given me as partial payment for the exhibit, I took my wife, Eva, and our two young children for a visit with my wife's parents in Minatitlan, Veracruz, Mexico. During earlier trips to Minatitlan, in 1951, there was nothing in the way of a highway in that part of Mexico and the trails through the jungle that did exist were so rough that a trip over them would usually destroy a vehicle of any kind; but since then a fairly decent road had been built so it was then possible to reach Minatitlan in a car without destroying it.

Eva was still a wet back, an illegal immigrant in this country, so taking her to Mexico was a calculated risk because I would then have to figure out how to get her back into this country undetected by the Immigration authorities. But, having done it once, I figured I could do it again.

During the time that I was operating the exhibit in Slidell I opened a second, smaller exhibit near Pascagoula, Mississippi, and Ray Olive was operating that exhibit at the time we left for Mexico. Ray and I then planned to open a very large exhibit on a Cherokee Indian reservation in North Carolina the following spring, in a location with millions of tourists during the summer and with very little for the tourists to see or do. But we could not begin construction of the planned exhibit until the weather warmed up in the spring, so Ray passed the time running the exhibit in Mississippi while I went to Mexico.

Our youngest child, Eva, was only a few weeks old when we started the trip to Mexico, and since the water in many parts of Mexico was dangerous even for an adult, and a lot of the food was not much safer, we had to take everything that we needed with us; bottled water in five-gallon glass bottles and all of the food that we might need in cans and boxes purchased in this country.

We were in no hurry so took our time about the trip; stopped off in Mexico City to visit some of Eva's relatives there and visited others in Pueblo. So a trip that could have been made from the Texas border within a period of only about two days took us more than a week. Then, after we got to Minatitlan, we spent about two weeks there, and then made a rather leisurely return trip to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, directly across the border from Laredo, Texas. A longtime friend of mine in Laredo, Raymond Johnson, the son of a retired Texas Ranger, could arrange almost anything in Mexico and he was able to get Eva back into this country without any problems.

There was a small apartment located in the rear of the large building that housed most of the exhibit in Mississippi, and since Ray Olive and his wife, Marie, together with her two children, were living in a large house trailer, the apartment was available for our use during the following winter. So I planned to stay there until it was time to start building the exhibit in North Carolina.

I spent most of that winter designing the planned exhibit, but also built an exercise machine and started training with it. And, since I still had a lot of very active snake hunters in south Texas, and had customers for all of the snakes that these hunters could catch, I devoted some of my time to that activity as well. I bought a very large panel truck and used that for picking up the snakes from my hunters in Texas; packed tightly into boxes that were designed for shipping snakes, I could haul more than a net ton of snakes and that still left enough room for a large, coffin like box that we used for hauling large alligators. We removed the right seat from the truck, shoved one end of the alligator box up under the dashboard and used the top of the box as a bed for the codriver.

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On one trip back from Texas with a load of snakes, a large rattlesnake puked up a half-digested rabbit and the resulting smell inside the truck was almost more than we could stand. But locating the right box and cleaning up the mess in order to reduce the odor would have been very difficult under the circumstances, so we had to put up with it as best we could.

About midnight on a Saturday night, I pulled up in front of a restaurant in a small town in Texas and parked, and an old man came up to my side of the truck as I opened the door and tried to sell me a Sunday newspaper. Ray Olive was stretched out on top of the alligator box with his shoes off and with his feet towards the front of the truck; so when the old man was hit in the face by the simply terrible odor coming out of the truck, I turned around and said . . . “This has gone far enough, Ray, you have got to wash your feet; I can’t stand it any more.”

Early that December, a man in Miami, Ray Perez (mentioned in other chapters), imported an enormous load of huge anaconda snakes from Iquitos, Peru; but, after he landed them in this country he did not know what to do with them, had no customers for these big snakes. But I knew what to do with them; knew that I could sell any or all of them for a price that would give me a good profit if I could buy them as cheaply as I believed I could. So we made a trip to Miami in the large panel truck and picked up about a ton and a half of big anacondas from Perez; bought them for practically nothing and then resold them at a profit that was even better than I had anticipated. Anacondas are not the longest type of snake in the world, but are the heaviest; one seventeen footer weighed 280 pounds and was about thirty inches in circumference at the thickest part of his body.

Many books list anacondas up to a length of sixty-two feet, which is utterly ridiculous; I have measured and weighed thousands of them, and the largest one I ever saw was less than twenty feet in length.

Later that year I traded some snakes for a very young black bear cub; wanted a bear because bears are one of the primary tourist attractions in the Smoky Mountain area where we planned to build the exhibit. The bear cub was not yet weaned when I got him, so I asked my son, Gary, who was then about eighteen months old to give the bear his bottle, and he did without hesitation.

At that time I had been lifting weights and training with self-designed and built exercise machines in an on again, off again fashion for about fifteen years; but had never been satisfied with my results although other people considered my results to be outstanding. Over the years I had tried a large number of different training routines, but had finally settled on a schedule of three weekly workouts, with four sets of twelve different exercises; a schedule of hard exercise that took about four hours to complete.

But then I made an important discovery; instead of increasing my exercise I reduced it, cut it in half, performed each exercise only twice during each workout instead of four times. And my results were simply stunning: I gained both muscular size and strength at a rate that was much greater than anything I had produced earlier. Within a few weeks had reached a muscular size and strength level that was far above anything I had been able to produce previously.

With the longer workouts I had been stimulating additional growth, but had not been providing my body with enough rest between workouts for it to respond to the growth stimulation; I had been overtraining, doing far too much exercise. Twenty years later I finally realized that reducing my workouts even more would produce even better results; I now believe that two weekly workouts are all that anybody actually needs for best results, and that each exercise should be performed only once. In exercise, more is seldom the solution, and is frequently the problem.

As somebody said about fifty years ago, when long workouts first became popular . . . “Instead of trying to determine just how much exercise we can stand, we should, I believe, be trying to find out just how little exercise we actually need.” I should have paid attention to that observation, but as usual had to learn the hard way.

Using a MedX Lumbar-extension machine shortly after it was first introduced, a healthy young man from the staff of the University of Florida, Scott Leggett, a man who had been training hard for several years before he started using the MedX machine, increased his lower-back strength in the extended position by 180 percent in a period of only ten weeks; as a consequence of one brief exercise each week, a total of only ten exercises.

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Which was the worst results produced by any member of our first group of subjects: another man who had been training hard for years, Joe Cirulli, increased his lower-back strength in the same position by 450 percent, in a period of five months and eight days, as a consequence of brief exercise performed only once every fourteen days.

The best results in our first group of test subjects were produced by Dr. Mike Fulton, an orthopaedic surgeon who has now been directly involved in our research for fifteen years: his lower-back strength in the extended position increased by 7,300 percent in a period of five months, as a result of one exercise every fourteen days. His strength increased from an initial level of only four foot-pounds of torque to a later level of 296 foot-pounds of torque in the same position.

But, as they say . . . “If I had known then what I know now, things would have been different.”

When the time to start building the new exhibit in North Carolina finally arrived, I was saved from making another major mistake only by accident: we planned to build the exhibit on land leased from an Indian, since it was impossible to buy land inside the Indian reservation, and we had worked out a lease contract with him that appeared to be very satisfactory for both parties. But then I learned that a contract with an Indian was worthless; the Indian we were dealing with had already cheated about a dozen other people out of a business of some kind. He would sign a lease contract with them, let them build and then operate the business for the first year, and then cancel the lease contract and take over the business. And there was nothing they could do about it because of the Federal laws in regard to Indian property. The Indian we were dealing with had already stolen a filling station, a large restaurant, a motel and several other types of businesses from people before he signed the contract with us.

Then, having avoided that mistake by the skin of my teeth, I proceeded to make another major mistake: built an exhibit east of Mobile, Alabama, that turned out to be an outright disaster. But that is a story covered in another chapter.