

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

www.ArthurJonesExercise.com

“If you can’t figure out how to escape, just turn an animal loose and see what he does; and then do the same thing.”

Bo Miller

Can animals think?

You better believe it; and if you ever have much experience with animals you will never doubt it again.

In 1962, a man shipped me five orang utans from Holland, animals that came originally from Borneo; but one of these orangs arrived in such poor condition that he appeared to have an advanced case of leprosy. He did not have a single hair on his body and his skin was dried up to the point that it had cracked, with body fluids coming out of the cracks in his skin.

Under the circumstances I was forced to quarantine all five of the animals, since it appeared to be likely that the other four had been exposed to whatever the sick one had. It turned out that the sick one was suffering from a terrible infestation of scabies, body lice; so we started treating him with a form of insecticide that was delivered in an aerosol spray. The fact that such sprays are quite cold turned out to be an advantage, because he would turn away from it in an attempt to avoid the cold and would thus make it possible to spray him all over.

One day while I was spraying the sick orang, another one was watching with great interest from another cage, laughing like mad because he seemed to believe that the sick orang’s responses were quite funny. So, as I turned to leave, I aimed the spray towards the other orang and gave him a brief spurt; then, with no slightest hesitation, he reached behind himself, grabbed a pie pan that we were using as a food dish, and then held it up in front of himself as a shield to block the spray. He knew exactly what he was doing, even in a situation that was new to him.

Put an orang out in the bright sun, and provide him with the required materials, and he will make a hat and put it on his head to ward off the rays of the sun.

My youngest daughter, Eva, raised a South American jaguar in our house when she was about twelve; she called him Gaylord, and he knew his name. Eva and Gaylord slept in the same bed, bathed together and played together; but a nearly grown jaguar running loose in the house does sometimes present problems, so I decided to lock him in the bathroom to keep him from getting in the way while I was working. That lasted about two minutes: he simply turned the knob, opened the door, and was loose again.

So then I fastened a screen-door latch on the outside of the bathroom door, and that lasted about three minutes; Gaylord shook the door until the hook came out of the ring, opened the door and escaped again.

Then I took a hammer and bent the hook so that he could not get it loose by shaking the door, and that stopped him for about ten minutes; the next thing I knew he was walking into the kitchen from the carport. Having failed to get the bathroom door open he went out the window by breaking through the screen.

So I then closed both the lower and upper parts of the bathroom window, and that also lasted about ten minutes; he simply raised the lower part of the bathroom window and escaped into the back yard again.

Nailing both the upper and lower parts into place stopped that, but it did not stop him from escaping; the next thing I noticed was water coming out through the crack at the bottom of the bathroom door, he had turned on the water and flooded the bathroom, knowing damned well that somebody would come in to turn off the water and that would provide him with an opportunity to escape.

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He also clearly understood the limits of my property, would never leave the yard; but he was afraid of cars and would always come running into the house if a car drove by. If only the screen door was closed he would run right through it, tearing the screen off the frame; but if both doors were closed he would first open the screen door and then turn the knob and open the solid door.

Jaguars are supposed to be strictly carnivorous, pure meat eaters, but Gaylord loved potatoes and would eat them by the peck if given the chance; and he knew where we stored potatoes, under the sink. Once he made that discovery we had to try to keep him out of the kitchen, which was easier said than done; so, finally, I decided to teach him a lesson. I removed the potatoes and replaced them with a sack of large onions, and then gave Gaylord a chance to get into the kitchen. He went immediately to the cabinet underneath the sink, opened the door, pulled out the sack of onions and grabbed an onion with his mouth.

But spit it out? Admit that he had made a mistake? No way, Jose. With tears running down his face like they were coming out of a faucet he chewed it up and swallowed it. But he ate only one; for the first time did not eat the whole sack.

While Gaylord was afraid of cars that drove by my house, he loved to ride in both cars and airplanes; would remain perfectly still and stare out the window. I wanted to use him in a few scenes in a feature film that I was producing, so took him with us to west Texas where we were filming scenes of flying through a deep, narrow canyon. I planned to put him on the edge of the canyon and film from behind him, showing him as he was looking down into the canyon and watching a plane fly by below him. But we never did get the scenes I wanted; because it was very hot, and he was not about to burn his tender paws by standing on the hot rocks; so every time we moved the camera he immediately moved into its shade, utterly refused to stay out in the bright sunshine standing on hot rocks.

I had Leonard McGee with me on that trip, and he was scared to death of Gaylord, so on the return flight to Louisiana I put him inside a large cage in the rear of the airplane; then, just as we arrived over New Orleans, at night, a huge paw came down on my right shoulder and another paw on McGee's left shoulder, and there was Gaylord, out of the cage and loose in the plane. But all he did was stand there leaning forward on our shoulders and looking out at the lights of New Orleans.

One of my neighbors had a large goose that was the terror of the neighborhood, constantly attacking children, dogs and cats; so when he complained to the police about Gaylord, I told him . . . "Look, asshole, anybody who keeps a large goose in a residential area has no right to complain; at least my jaguar stays in his own yard, which is more than you can say for your goose."

At one time or another I have raised African lions, Indian tigers, leopards, ocelots, mountain lions, jaguarandis, margays, wild cats, gorillas, orang utans, chimpanzees, foxes, coyotes, coati mundis, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels and a wide variety of other animals in my house; to say nothing of thousands of snakes and hundreds of tarantula spiders, gila monsters, Mexican beaded lizards, and both African and Indian monitor lizards, some of which reach a length of eight feet.

While living in Durban, South Africa, my daughter, Eva, brought a female kitten home and raised it; she called it Meow. At the time we were living in a large house that we rented from a doctor while he was on a year-long sabbatical in England, and there were no screens on the windows; so Meow got into the habit of going outside by jumping out of a window, a habit that caused her a bit of a problem later.

We lived for a few weeks in an apartment on the eighth floor of a high-rise building next to the beach, and by that time Meow was pregnant with her first litter; failing to understand the changed circumstances, and wanting to go outside, Meow jumped out through a window. It appeared to be a miracle that she was not killed, and she did break her pelvis; but recovered and did not lose her kittens.

When it came time for her to deliver the kittens, she tried to hide in a box under a bed; but I pulled the box out into the middle of the room so we could watch the kittens being born. And apparently that action on my part was permanently imprinted into her brain; because, afterwards, she insisted upon people being with her while she was giving birth. If you tried to leave her alone she would follow you out of the room with a kitten halfway out.

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Later, after we moved to Rhodesia, Meow was obviously impregnated by some kind of a wild cat, because the kittens were more than twice normal size at birth with very large heads and huge paws. One of these hybrid kittens caught and killed a bird when it was only twenty days old, an age at which normal kittens are still totally helpless.

I filmed the birth of those kittens, but never saw the films because they were stolen along with the rest of my property after I returned to this country. We brought Meow with us, but did not bring any of the hybrid kittens; which I now deeply regret, because it would have been very interesting to see what they looked like when they were fully grown.

Having already produced more kittens than we knew what to do with, in South Africa, in Rhodesia, and in this country, we finally decided to have Meow spayed; but doing so required catching her when she was not pregnant, and that proved to be impossible because she would be pregnant again less than twenty-four hours after delivering a litter of kittens. Eventually we had to have her aborted and then spayed.

And it changed her character: before she was spayed she was the terror of the neighborhood, would chase off dogs that were ten times her size; but afterwards, she appeared to be afraid of her own shadow. While she was still in the kitten-producing business she was almost constantly hunting, and then would bring her kills and present them to my daughter if she was home at the time; but if Eva was not there, Meow would leave her kill on Eva's pillow.

But once she went too far, picked on the wrong victim; she walked into the house one day with a young Blue Jay in her mouth, and when Eliza took it away from her and boxed her ears she promptly went back out and caught another one. The second one was still alive and appeared to be unhurt, so Eliza put it on the back porch and fed it until it was big enough to fly. But, afterwards, Meow could never again go out of the house during the day; the adult Blue Jays were waiting for her, and would attack her as soon as she tried to leave the house.

Shortly before we had her spayed, a large tom cat followed Meow into the house in the middle of the night; but apparently he did not suit her fancy because they started fighting in the living room, making so much noise that they woke us up. Eliza went into the living room in order to see what was going on and Meow was chasing the tom cat all over the room; so Eliza opened the front door so that the tom could escape, and he did, but with Meow in hot pursuit. So then Eliza ran out into the front yard, stark naked, screaming . . . "Meow, Meow, Meow."

I have often wondered what would have happened, or what stories would have spread all over town, if somebody had driven by and seen a naked woman standing out in the yard next to the main street of the town and screaming like a cat.

Before we moved to Africa, Eliza had an adult jaguarandi that we called Chirp Chirp, because he made a noise like a bird. Jaguarandis are the smallest but the most savage of South American jungle cats, but if you get them young enough they make perfect pets. When she went to Africa, Eliza left Chirp Chirp with her parents and eventually they gave him to a small zoo; but the people that owned the zoo did not realize that the cat was perfectly tame, so treated him as a cage animal only.

Then, shortly after we returned to this country, Eliza heard that the zoo was closing so went down and got Chirp Chirp back; and even after several years as a cage animal with no human contact he was still perfectly tame. Like most cats, he was primarily a meat eater, but he also loved grapes. We kept him until he died at the age of about fifteen and when he died he weighed twenty-three pounds, which is about twice the weight of an average tom cat. Unlike other cats, jaguarandis apparently do not use their sense of smell, rely entirely upon sight while hunting; and they are utterly fearless, Chirp Chirp would take food away from Gaylord even though Gaylord was about ten times his size.