

Arthur Jones:

AN UNCONVENTIONAL CHARACTER

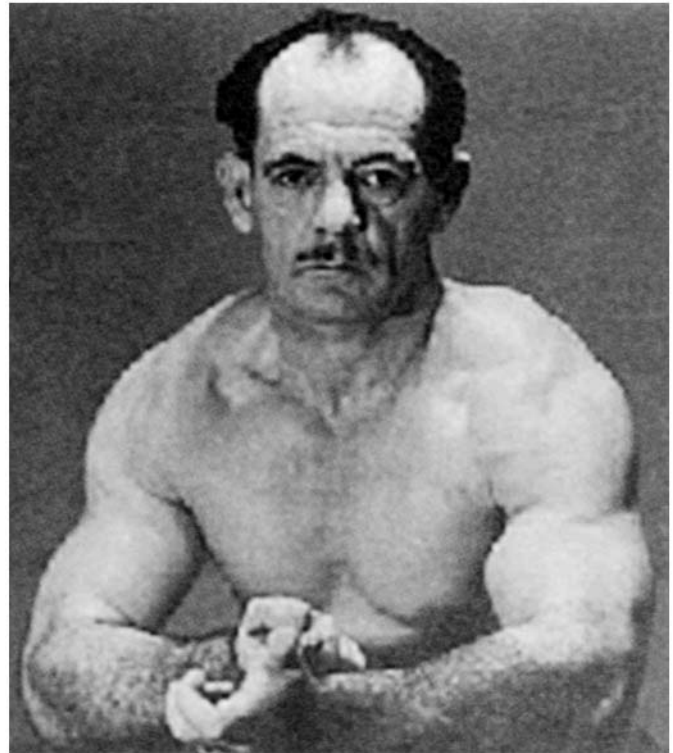
Bill Pearl

It's impossible to overlook this opportunity to give you more insight on the Arthur Jones I know. He is, by far, one of the most unique individuals I've ever met. Mike Mentzer (former I.F.B.B. Mr. America winner) attempted to describe Arthur by stating, "Arthur Jones is not a relaxing person to be with. He does not lightly exchange words. He spews facts, torrents of them, gleaned from studies and perhaps more important, from practical application of theory, personal observations and incisive deduction. You don't converse with Arthur Jones: you attend his lectures. He is opinionated, challenging, intense and blunt."

I am in total agreement with Mike. This is just a taste of my on-again/off-again relationship with Arthur, which began in 1958. Early one Monday morning, while I was opening the door to my Sacramento gym, Arthur appeared out of nowhere. He was wearing khaki pants, a khaki shirt, and a jacket that half-covered a .357 magnum pistol strapped to his belt.

In his heavily southern-accented, no-nonsense, baritone voice, he began the introduction, "You're Bill Pearl. My name is Arthur Jones. I'm from Slidell, Louisiana. I've come to see if you're interested in participating in a 'gawd'-damn movie I'm going to produce. I'll need you for about a month. It's going to be filmed in Florida and Louisiana."

I asked, "Do you make movies for a living?" He articulated every word with a slight pause in between to make sure that he wouldn't have to repeat himself, "Hell, no. I have a large wildlife game reserve in Slidell that supplies most of the animal parks and zoos throughout the country with reptiles, exotic birds, monkeys and oth-



Although Arthur Jones loved his coffee and cigarettes, he loved resistance training, too, and he practiced it in his earlier years. In the early 1960s, as this photo attests, Jones possessed an admirable physique.

er 'gawd'-damn wildlife that I capture in South America. But I'm not new to the film business. I've made several documentaries." "When do you plan to start filming?" I asked. "As soon as I can get your ass down to Louisiana." "What am I supposed to do in this movie?" "Whatever it takes to make the 'gawd'-damn thing sell!" "How much are you willing to pay?" "How much are you worth?" We agreed on a price and, to this day, I've never picked up a tab when we've been together. His pride seemed offended whenever I've tried.

During those few days in Sacramento, it became obvious that we were from different worlds. Arthur had a definite opinion on everything. When it came to bodybuilding, he was convinced that the fastest muscular gains came from doing, "One set per muscle group—three days per week—while training to failure."

On politics, I asked, "Do you think John F. Kennedy will become the next President of the United States?" His reply, "It really doesn't matter. Some right-thinking Texan will take care of the son-of-a-bitch."

Our differences became more obvious during the filming of his movie *Voodoo Swamp*. Arthur could survive on Coca-Cola and cigarettes while holding court with whomever until the wee hours of the morning, and

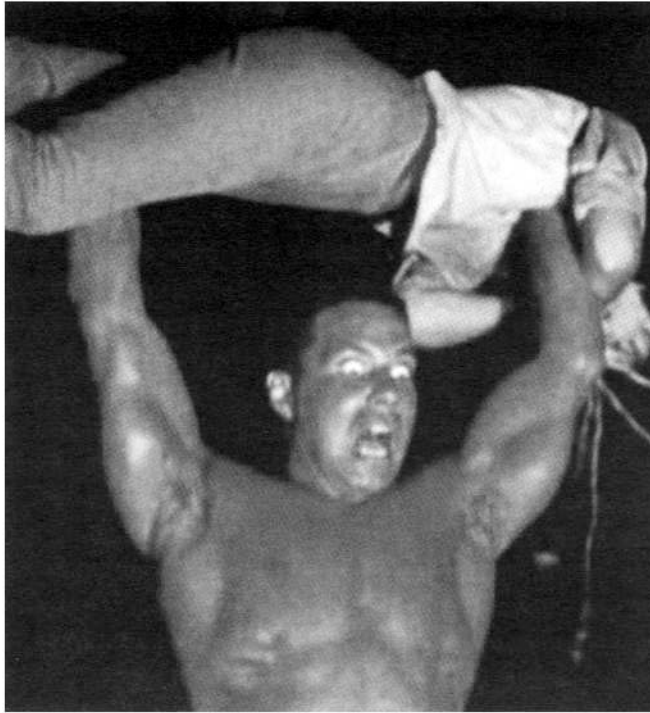
then expect everyone to be ready to go at his beck and call. I needed food, rest, and consistency.

We clashed about a week into the filming. Six of us were jammed into his new Oldsmobile station wagon traveling to shoot a scene that had me trudging up to my neck in swamp water filled with leeches. The car radio was tuned to a country station blaring so loud it was impossible to think. He made matters worse by chain smoking in the closed vehicle. I was dragging from lack of sleep, and a white bread bologna sandwich wasn't my idea of a balanced diet.

Things came to a head when he began playing "grab-ass" with the script girl sitting between us. I sat thinking, "This is ridiculous." I flicked off the radio and shouted, "Stop the car!" Arthur retaliated with, "Why? You got a 'gawd'-damn problem?" I shouted, "I've got several problems! First, I can't breathe! Second, I don't do well on bologna sandwiches! Third, I've had as much sleep this past week as I normally get in a night. Now you two decide to start screwing around. Either there are some drastic changes, or I'm out of here!" He apologized by saying something like, "I didn't realize you were so 'gawd'-damn sensitive."

The more violent side of Arthur erupted while we were shooting a night scene that had me throwing a stunt man off a bridge into a large pool of water. We had done the scene several times, which always ended in a big splash, but on the final take, there was a thud. The stunt man had landed on the bank rather than in the water. With a loud moan he cried, "Arthur—if we're going to do this again, make sure Mr. Pearl tosses me further to the left!"

A carload of teenage boys had stopped to watch the filming. As they drove away, a crew member called out that he was missing an expensive camera. He was insistent that the teenagers had taken it.



Bill Pearl's relationship with Arthur Jones began in 1958 when Jones invited him to play the "monster" in *Voodoo Swamp*, Jones' first attempt at feature film making.

In less than a block, they were pulled over. Arthur ran to their car screaming, "Did one of you steal my 'gawd'-damn camera?" There was no response. Arthur pulled out his pistol, drew back the hammer, placed the barrel in the middle of the driver's forehead saying, "Boy, I'm going to ask you one more time, before I scatter your 'gawd'-damn brains all over this car! Did one of you steal my 'gawd'-damn camera?" His reputation must have preceded him. The driver stuttered, "Honest Mr. Jones, we did not ta—ta—take your camera." Not satisfied, Arthur told me to begin searching the car. Fortunately, one of his crew ran up

screaming that they had found it stored in the back of the station wagon. It seemed everyone but Arthur let out a sigh, as he eased back the hammer of the gun.

In our final days of filming, Arthur had rented a beautiful old mansion on the outskirts of New Orleans. I was to be kept imprisoned in the mansion while recovering from the lady witch doctor's spell. They had me tied to beds, chairs, or whatever, to prevent me from causing more harm. Arthur had left instructions for Shorty, the head cameraman, to shoot a scene in the enormous living room where I was tied between two large pillars.

Shorty, like Arthur, was a chain smoker. He had a bad habit of setting lighted cigarettes on everything, which began to take its toll on the beautiful antique furnishings. What upset me even more was that he'd drop the butts on the marble floors, and then grind them out with the soles of his shoes. I finally told him, "Shorty, you do that one more time, and I'm going to bounce you on your can." Sure enough, the next cigarette out of his mouth went on the floor to be ground to death. I jerked out of the ties and hit him so hard it knocked him, the camera, the tripod, the lights and canisters of film onto the floor.

Arthur heard the commotion and ran into the room

shouting, "What-n-the-'gawd'-damn-hell's going on here?" Shorty looked up, saying, "He just hit me, and I bet he broke the camera." Arthur asked, "Why in the hell did you do that?" I replied, "Because he has destroyed half of the antique furniture in this house with his lousy cigarettes and is now doing the same to the marble floors. It's going to cost you more money for repairs than you'll make from the movie." Arthur looked at Shorty and said something like, "You stupid moron. I should blow your 'gawd'-damn brains out." I returned to Sacramento without ever seeing the finished version of the movie.

Several months later, Arthur invited me to view his latest film, that he shot and produced in Africa. The screening took place in a private Hollywood studio. I had no idea what to expect, but knew it would not be a sequel to the movie *Lassie*. The least violent part of the two-hour documentary was the opening scene. It showed several natives dragging an enormous crocodile from a lake. The natives were close to losing limbs, as they struggled to get the crocodile subdued and turned over on its back, before Arthur stepped in with a huge knife to slit open its belly to pull out a young boy.

After another lapse of time, Arthur phoned from the Los Angeles International Airport asking if he could stay with me for a few days. I had moved from Sacramento to Los Angeles and was living close to the airport in the apartment above the Manchester Gym with a spare bedroom—so—"Sure!"

He was back to supplying animal parks and zoos with reptiles, exotic birds, monkeys and other 'gawd'-damn wildlife. He was headed for the Galapagos Islands, located six hundred fifty miles west of Ecuador.

After keeping me up most of the night, he went to a corner cafe the following morning for coffee. I walked into the spare bedroom to find several large stacks of one hundred dollar bills lying on the bed, which had not been slept in. The apartment had been broken into a couple of weeks before, which caused me more than a little anxiety seeing somewhere between \$35,000.00 and \$50,000.00 in cash lying out in plain view. When Arthur returned, I suggested that he find a better place for his money. Later, I asked, "Why are you carrying so much cash?" His answer, "Money talks, especially American money."

Weeks went by before another phone call from Arthur, which originated from the Los Angeles International Airport's freight depot. Offering no explanation,

Arthur barked, "Bill, this is a matter of life and death! I want you to immediately go to the produce mart in Los Angeles. Pick up five-hundred pounds of 'gawd'-damn bananas! Bring them to the United Air Lines freight depot as quickly as possible." (The telephone went click.)

I was at the produce mart in twenty minutes. I found an outdoor fruit stand and didn't bother shopping prices or explaining why I was buying five-hundred pounds of "'gawd'-damned bananas;" I didn't know myself.

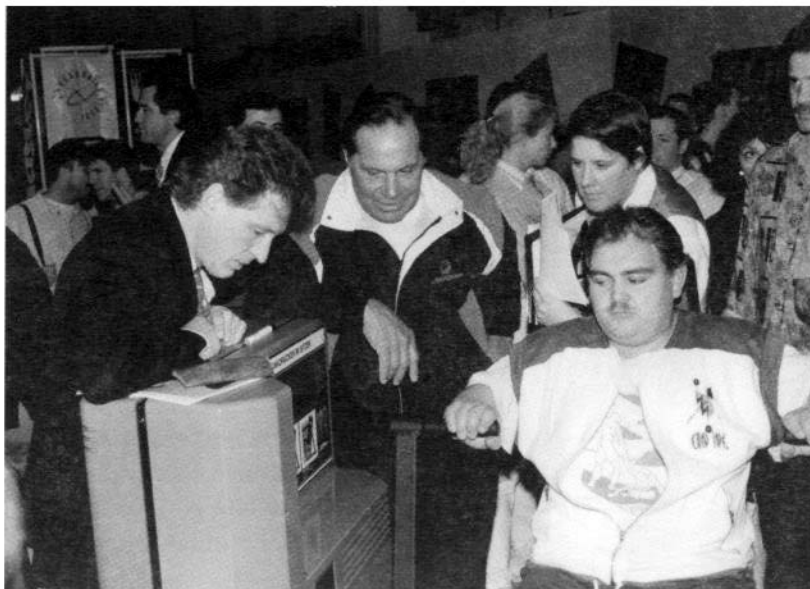
The United Air Lines freight depot's loading dock was filled with crates of exotic birds. Arthur was running around screaming, "The 'gawd'-damn things are going to die if they don't get food and water. You continue filling the water dishes, I'll do the rest."

He eventually calmed down, but insisted he had to travel in the cargo hold of the airplane to be sure the birds were fed and watered on their trip to Slidell. He was told to go the United Air Lines main terminal to obtain permission.

Standing next in line at the ticket counter, I watched Arthur get a pained look on his face while, through clenched teeth he screamed, "My 'gawd'-damn hemorrhoids are killing me." The female ticket agent and everyone close by gasped as he loosened his pants and jammed his right hand down the back of his shorts to take care of the problem. Squaring himself away before stepping up to the counter, he offered the agent his tickets with the hand that had just preformed the miracle. She bellowed out, "I can't take this! I'm calling my supervisor!" He looked at me, saying, "What the 'gawd'-damn hell's wrong with her?"

When we first met in Sacramento, one of our original discussions had been on strength training. Arthur had shown particular interest in a new selectorized arm-curl machine that had been designed by my friend Bob Clark. The machine used an off-centered cam that caused the resistance to vary as the user curled the lever arm through its range of motion.

There was no need to explain Clark's concept of using the off-centered cam to alter the resistance of an exercise to Arthur. He was well aware of the benefits. In fact, he went on a tirade that not only covered strength curves, but also the amount of energy stored in muscles, the recovery time between workouts, and the benefits of shorter, all-out effort training sessions. He was so convincing, my hard-core bodybuilders couldn't wait to



Robert Mills and Bill Pearl encouraging a Lifecircuit user during a trade show in Essen, Germany.

give his system of training a try. Twelve years later, when he launched his new line of Nautilus exercise machines, he was still using the same pitch.

Arthur founded Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries in 1970. His new line of exercise machines became so popular over the next ten years, it was said that more money was spent on Nautilus than on all other commercial gym equipment being sold.

The first version of his machine was previewed in Culver City, California, at that year's A.A.U. Mr. America Contest. I acted as Master of Ceremonies. My training partner, Chris Dickerson, became the first Afro-American to win the title.

Arthur had transported the prototype from Slidell, to Culver City, in a rented trailer. To save money, he stayed at our home in Pasadena. His 13-year-old son, Gary, remarked with confidence, "We can put another inch on your arm in a month, if you'll use the machine."

The Nautilus multi-station unit that sat in the lobby of the Culver City convention hall looked like a bad substitute for the popular Universal multi-station unit. Arthur's unit was cumbersome, poorly built, painted blue and equipped with lever arms to hold free-weights. It was immediately nicknamed "The Blue Monster." Its best selling points were Arthur's gift-of-gab and the off-centered cams, which were pitched to everyone who would listen.

I later commented to Arthur that trying to compete against the Universal multi-station unit might be a mis-

take. I suggested that he design separate pieces of equipment incorporating the off-centered cam and then promote his theory of training, which could only be done "on his machines." How much influence my suggestion had on his decision to do this is anyone's guess, but that's what eventually evolved.

At the beginning of the Nautilus reign, Arthur used the editorial pages of *Iron Man* magazine to promote his concepts. Issue after issue was filled with his opinions on training. The magazine was so hard-core, its readers were more than willing to give Arthur's theories a try, if they could get their hands on his equipment. Sales of his units were going out of sight. Prospective buyers were phoning my gym day and night to confirm what Arthur was preaching. There were so many calls, in fact, that it started interfering with my ability to run my business. He convinced me that my time wasn't being wasted. In exchange, he was going to give me the new Nautilus Biceps/Triceps and Torso Pullover machines, *plus* an exclusive written Nautilus franchise for the State of California.

He then tried to convince me that bodybuilding had changed since my last competition in 1967. The only way I could win the 1971 N.A.B.B.A. Professional contest was by following his training principles, along with incorporating the Nautilus machines into my programs. It mattered little that I'd done quite well with free weights for twenty-five years. When the Biceps/Triceps and Torso Pullover machines arrived, I placed them in the living room of our home for my own personal use. Later, to Judy's relief, they were transferred to the gym, where they became so popular it was nearly impossible to get near them.

Our relationship became more strained when I informed Arthur that I had replaced the lever arms of my Nautilus machines in the Pasadena Health Club with weight stacks. Arthur went ballistic saying, "You ruined the 'gawd'-damn biomechanics by doing that." My reply was, "Arthur, you're wrong. The movement is even better. Because of the weight stacks you now start the motion from a dead stop rather than having a swinging motion. Besides, there are no weight plates to pick up, the machines are more simple, safer and faster to use." "Yah . . . but . . . but," he sputtered. Later it occurred to me that Arthur might not have been so upset because I

ruined the "gawd-damn" biomechanics of his machines, as he was with the fact that he was now going to have to add weight stacks to the machines he was currently manufacturing. It was possible that he didn't have the capital to make the conversion at that time.

It came down to where I either had to replace the lever arms on my machines, or he was going to renege on the exclusive Nautilus franchise for California. Stupidly, I told him it would be a relief to get back to running my gym. That remark probably cost me millions of dollars from the profits of the sales of Nautilus in the State of California over the next several years.

Matters didn't improve when I publicly questioned Arthur's theories regarding the advantages that came from training on the Nautilus Isokinetic machines. Much of the promotional material in the early days of Nautilus was based on the claim that free weights were obsolete, injury-causing antiques. I disagreed. He claimed that three twenty-minute workouts per week on Nautilus equipment could produce a physique like mine. Again, I disagreed by stating, "Nobody who has trained exclusively on Nautilus has won a major physique contest." This enraged Arthur to the extent that he began threatening Leo and me with phone taps and hit men. Why he included Leo is anyone's guess.

He used *Iron Man* magazine to wage his war, which became more venomous with each issue. The final straw occurred when he commented that it was "rumored" that my training partner, twenty-eight-year-old Willie Stedman, had died because of the use of anabolic steroids, which I supposedly had supplied. It was sadly true that Willy had died, but the cause of death was pneumonia, brought on by a lethal strain of Asian flu. I contacted Peary Rader, the owner and publisher of *Iron Man* magazine, threatening a lawsuit if a retraction wasn't printed.

I kept training for the 1971 N.A.B.B.A. Mr. Universe, using the same methods that had brought the best results in the past. By now, Arthur was so irate it was "rumored" that he had given Sergio Oliva \$5,000.00 to come to Florida to train on Nautilus with a promise of another \$5,000.00 if he won the contest.

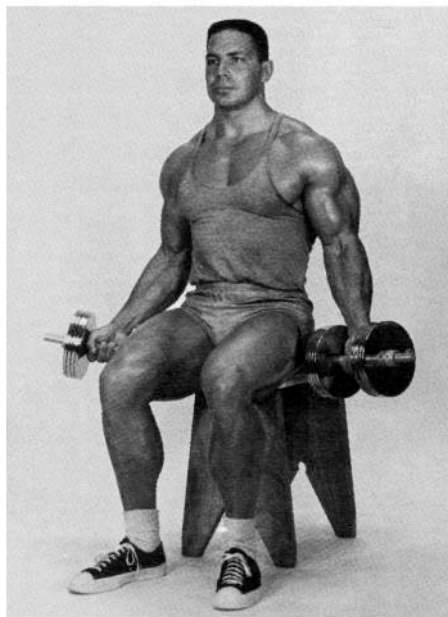
To rattle me even more, Arthur sent recent photos of Sergio with a note reading something like, "What do you think about this?" I sent the photos back with a note, saying, "I have never seen YOU looking better. There is a good chance, if YOU can stay in that kind of condition, YOU might place high in the contest."

Before leaving for London, I gave my final warm-up exhibition in Brooklyn, New York. The backstage was loaded with bodybuilding celebrities: Boyer Coe, Mike and Ray Mentzer, Dave Draper to mention a few. Again, Arthur appeared out of nowhere. He began showing everyone recent photos of Sergio, asking for comment. When he noticed I was ignoring him, he turned, handed me the photos, saying in a loud voice, "What do you think?" I replied, "He looks great—you look like shit." Turning a couple of shades of red, possibly more out of embarrassment than anger, he began muttering something about getting his gun. Before he finished the sentence, I said, "If you come back with a gun, I'm going to stick it up your butt and blow your brains out!"

On Friday, September 18, 1971, the Victoria Palace in London, England, was packed for the 23rd annual N.A.B.B.A. Mr. Universe contest. Leo, his wife, and Judy were seated near the front row, Arthur several rows behind. The audience anxiously waited until the last announcements were made. "Ladies and gentlemen, the 1971 N.A.B.B.A. Amateur Mr. Universe for 1971 is—Ken Waller of the United States."

The Master of Ceremonies, Cecil Peck, went on, "The 1971 N.A.B.B.A. Professional Mr. Universe is (he stopped for a long pause) Bill Pearl!" The crowd went wild. After I received the trophy, Reg Park walked over to congratulate me while Sergio Oliva and Frank Zane walked offstage.

A few years elapsed with no word from Arthur; then again a knock on our door. Arthur, his wife, and their business partner, Dan Baldwin, were standing on the porch. I remarked, "If you're man enough to come to our home, the least I can do is invite you in." Once seated, it became obvious that everyone was on his best behavior—except Judy. The



Pearl at his best, 232 pounds of rock-hard muscle.

following is her version of that day:

"One peaceful Sunday morning, there was a knock on our door. I opened it to find Arthur, his wife, and Dan Baldwin, standing on our porch. I closed the door in their faces before leaving to tell Bill. He shook Arthur's hand, as if nothing had happened. The next is his recollection as to my obstinate refusal of hospitality. When Bill offered them coffee, my reply was, 'We don't have coffee in the house. We're not drinking caffeinated products.' He then offered them tea. My response was, 'We only have herbal tea.' He then asked if they would like milk or sugar. I informed him, 'We don't have any milk or refined sugar, only brown raw sugar.' The response was, 'That'll be fine.'"

Once Judy sat with our guests, she couldn't help but admire Arthur's intellect and vision. He began describing a system for health clubs that would incorporate a membership card that could be swiped into the terminal of several exercise machines, which received their resistance from a computer controlled electronic motor. The machines would record the member's workout and at the end of the training session, print a read-out, or store the material for future reference. Arthur was describing in the early 1970s what became in the 1990s the Lifecircuit® and Lifecenter®, produced by Life Fitness. The visit ended peacefully with never a mention of any break in our relationship or why he had suddenly decided to "drop by."

We stayed in touch, but with long gaps in between. I appeared on two of his weekly *Wild Cargo* television shows. My job was to take gunnysacks filled with venomous cobra snakes and dump them on the floor of the television studio as the cameras recorded Arthur's ability to toy with deadly reptiles. On another occasion he flew me from Las Vegas, Nevada, to Los Angeles, California, in his private jet. Months later, I attended a lecture at the University of Virginia where he was extremely hard on the medical profession, telling the audience what a "gawd-damn" bunch of misfits they were. Later, I toured the Nautilus factory in Deland, Florida, which was indeed impressive.

With time, we grew even further apart. When I phoned, his usual reaction was, "What the 'gawd'-damn hell do you want?" His latest comeback when asked how he was doing, was, "I'm sitting here waiting to die."

Our last face-to-face visit occurred in 2001 at his home in Ocala, Florida. At the age of seventy-nine, he

claimed to be in poor health, but his mind was as sharp as ever. Sitting on a sofa, wearing only a bathrobe that revealed everything from his chest down, his first words were, "It's been 43 years, 5 months and 26 days since we first met." The next couple of hours were spent rehashing research he'd done on negative training in the 1980s. The rest of the time was taken up by his recitation of the mistakes I'd made over the years. I was able to point out a few of his. Yet, I couldn't help but thank him for the profound impact he'd had on my life. I closed the visit by saying, "Arthur, you've been a good teacher." His reply, "Well, school is over! This is the last 'gawd'-damn time we'll see each other." As I reached to shake his hand, he lit another cigarette.

*Editors' note: This article is reprinted from Bill Pearl's **Beyond the Universe: The Bill Pearl Story**. To order the book, go to: www.billpearl.com. We have our own recollections about Arthur, and they rival the ones Bill reveals. Arthur was/is, indeed, a talented, mercurial, violent, creative, egocentric, and fascinating man.*

