

Arthur Jones "Save the Elephants" on 20/20 – Part 2

YouTube video on STG Strength and Power

20/20 with Hugh Downs on an Update to the Original 20/20 Story called "Save the Elephants"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91vVojZ9bBo>

Date: 1987

Length: 11:32

(1:00) **Hugh Downs:** It's been almost three years now since 20/21 reported on this man, eccentric Florida millionaire and inventor of the Nautilus exercise machines, Arthur Jones, and his daring airlift rescue of a herd of baby African elephants marked for death. It was one of the most talked about segments we've done here, but as ABC News Nature and Wildlife correspondent Roger Karras tells us what we thought was the happy ending to this elephant story is actually according to the experts the beginning of a sad and painful journey.

Arthur Jones: I simply could not idly stand by and watch the African elephant become extinct.

Roger Karras: That's how Florida millionaire Arthur Jones explained his mission in 1984 when 20/21 reported this story. Jones wanted to rescue baby elephants in Zimbabwe from a cull or thinning of the herd, like this one. This was a dramatic scene in 1984 when Jones took one of his three 707s across the Atlantic and into the heart of the African continent. His commitment seemed both emotional and financial. He paid Zimbabwe \$750 to every baby elephant they let him save. Sixty-three badly frightened babies were loaded up, and then as the sun began to set, Jones had a rush to round up his people.

Arthur Jones: Buck! Take that damn vehicle and run over and tell those people to get here now!

Roger Karras: Since the African airstrip had no lights, a delay in takeoff would mean no takeoff, because the pilot was afraid of other wild animals wandering out onto the strip. The crew was also worried about whether the plane would lift off at all with 40,000 pounds of elephants aboard.

Finally, airborne, the tension in the cockpit eased, even if the elephants in the cargo bay were not convinced. All night long, the ghostly figures of the handlers moved around as they tried to calm the babies. After a hair-raising 22-hour flight, they arrived at Jones's ranch, for it was assumed the rest of their lives. At least that was the impression Jones gave.

(3:36) **Arthur Jones:** And we're going to give them an opportunity to survive and to build a self-sustaining herd of African elephants in this country.

Roger Karras: For two and a half years. The Zimbabwe orphans lived the good life here on Arthur Jones's estate in central Florida, but all of that's coming to an end. The herd is being dispersed.

Pat Derby is an experienced elephant handler. She says splitting up the herd is a terrible mistake. That nature intended elephants to live in family groups.

Pat Derby: These are extremely social animals. They live for each other, literally. And when you pull a baby elephant out of that situation, that's stressful in itself. I've known of elephants to die just from that.

Roger Karras: And just how big was and is the Ocala herd. The 63 that were brought from Zimbabwe joined 33 Jones already had from another source. 96 elephants total, not the typical American home. 12 of those died of a variety of problems, but considering what they'd gone through, that isn't that bad a result. It should be made clear that Jones's elephants got the very best care from keepers and veterinarians.

84 elephants then survived, but there were only 53 there now. That means 31 have gone someplace. Jones says the elephants were sold by someone else while he was selling his business, Nautilus Sports Medical Industries Incorporated to Ward International Corporation.

Arthur Jones: I lost total control of all of my assets. Things were done in the way of disposing of elephants during the time that I was not in control, that I simply couldn't prevent.

Roger Karras: But Ward says they didn't control anything until August 1986 They never sold any elephants, and the agreement to sell them to a part-time animal dealer named David Meeks was signed by Jones's foreman, Ralph Kramer, in July.

(05:31) **Pat Derby:** Ralph Kramer told me when I was in Florida in May that Arthur had told him to dispose of as many of the elephants as he could.

Roger Karras: When the elephants do leave Florida, this is their first stop, the Little Mountain Zoological Park in Inman, South Carolina. It's here that their conditioning and training begins for the lives that have been chosen for them.

David Meeks runs this private zoo, and although the animals appear well while they are here, the elephants don't get to stay here. Meeks says he tries to find good homes for the elephants, but

good homes are hard to find for animals who may be 12 feet tall, weigh 8 to 10 tons, and be able to walk through concrete walls.

And what kinds of homes has Meeks chosen so far? Three elephants, at least, went to private individuals as pets. Eight to small animal parks and circuses not checked out by Meeks. The sales were made over the telephone. And one to an animal trainer who Meeks himself admitted to 2020 uses cruel training techniques. All these are perfectly legal transactions the problem is an elephant once stripped of its herd dumped, so to speak, will become extremely dangerous if not properly handled.

Pat Derby: So many dumped elephants become quote rogues because they're mishandled. They're the victims of improper diet of every kind of atrocity in the world their only way to retaliate they do one of two things they either attack or they run.

David Meeks: When I said I try to make a decision that time if it's going to a good place, and I want to know that that person is going to be okay. Okay, I can't tell. He comes here one day if he's okay or not, but if this guy is USDA licensed, someone has said that he's okay, other than himself.

Roger Karras: There are a few problems with that theory. First, the USDA elephant licensing standards are minimal at best. Second, they are too understaffed to do very many meaningful inspections. Finally, private owners who don't exhibit their animals are exempt from regulations.

(7:45) **Pat Derby:** Today, anybody with the money to purchase an elephant can get an elephant. There is no provision for quality of life. There is no provision for expertise. We have no, absolutely no laws which protect the elephants or the people.

Roger Karras: I don't imagine a baby elephant has the kind of mind that harbors expectations, but if one did, I don't think that any one of the elephants David Meeks sold expected to end up here in Davenport, Florida, at the Liebel Family Circus.

But one was sent here. It died just after a few months. Mr. Liebel's previous elephant died too. As recently as last December, a USDA inspector found this place suitable for elephants. Mr. Liebel agreed to meet us at his circus's winter headquarters, but when we arrived, he wasn't to be found. We discovered later that he was an Inman, South Carolina, picking up yet another baby elephant from David Meeks.

One important consideration, the elephants Jones brought from Africa are African, a species with almost no history of working with man. They tend, according to most experienced handlers, to be

trickier and less reliable than their Asian cousins, the elephants we used to seeing in most zoos and circuses.

(9:06) Arthur Jones's staff is experienced, but what happens when they aren't around? After all, elephants can live up to 70 years.

Arthur Jones: You know, sometimes I'm not even responsible for the past, Roger, don't try to hold me responsible for the future.

Pat Derby: It's his responsibility that herd was brought over here as a herd, and it should remain a herd.

Arthur Jones: It was never our intention to keep them all. It was impossible, but if we could have saved them, certainly no harm done.

Pat Derby: I really feel they should have been destroyed in Africa. It's a quick death. They would have been with their own herd. They would not have known to send them into anything else is not kind.

Roger Karras: Jones says he doesn't know how many more you will sell. What the optimum herd size may be. Taking responsibility for 96 elephants, a herd that, at maturity, would weigh between 850 and 900 tons, require 4600 gallons of drinking water, and 32,000 pounds of food a day, could be likened to climbing onto a tiger. And Arthur Jones, commenting on elephant ownership in general, says the advice of Confucius might apply.

Arthur Jones: He who chooses to ride the tiger should carefully determine in advance how he intends to dismount.

Barbara Walters: He who chooses to bring over a herd of elephants should carefully think of what he's going to do after he has them in his backyard, shouldn't he?

Roger Karras: Barbara, it's no different than going to a pound and adopting a dog or a cat. If you're rich enough to go to Africa and bring a herd of elephants, for your responsibility for the life of the animals, and elephants live 60 to 70 years. He's a very rich man. He should endow these animals, give them to a university, keep them together, so they can be studied, and they can be cared for long after he's dead, and we're dead.

Barbara Walter: What would it cost?

Roger Karras: Oh, millions, but he's got the millions, 5 million, 10 million, and if not, maybe someone in the audience will come up with the money. But clearly, they should not be dissipated like that. We just got word that six more are being sent to a circus in Mexico as a fate worse than death.

Barbara Walters: You know, we forget, but isn't that isn't it cute we're going to have all these elephants or we're going to adopt these dogs or these cats and we don't think of the next step. Thank you for bringing this to our attention let's hope that something can be done about it.

Roger Karras: Thank you.