

ate as an engineer, told me he was going to become a bond salesman. Another, majoring in agriculture, was planning to take over his father's store. Two fellows in geology were planning to go into business—and forget all about geology.

This, I thought to myself, was pretty ridiculous. What were they studying specialties for? What appeared even worse, they didn't really want business careers. They seemed pushed by vague notions of what they thought they ought to do. They seemed to be wasting their time and their money and, in the long run, their lives.

I'm not trying to imply that a business career is a waste. Far from it. Business can certainly be as fascinating as collecting snakes, if that's what a man wants to do. All I'm saying is that a fellow ought to choose it, not fall into it nor let it fall on him.

RIGHT THEN and there I assumed naively—but, I insist, quite correctly—that if a man made up his mind to turn his chief interest into his livelihood, he could do so. I remember talking it over with my closest boyhood friend, with whom I used to go boating down the river. He was crazy about boats and fishing; that was all he was interested in. Last time I heard, he was in business floating tourists down the White River in long, slender river boats. He loved it and has built a fine business out of it.

So I decided, if you'll pardon the wisecrack, that I belonged in a zoo. I had absolutely no idea how to get

such a job, but I told my father I wanted to quit college.

I knew that my father, who was a circuit judge, deeply wished I would follow law. He had tried several things himself in his early days—railroading, carpentry, farm jobs—but on Saturdays, he'd wander into the courtroom just to watch the judge and the lawyers. Then he began to spend his nights studying law (he never went to college) until he felt he could pass the examinations.

Dad encouraged me to go ahead.

I rented a room in St. Louis, went to the zoo where I had often gone as a visitor, and asked a keeper in the monkey house whom I should see about getting a job. He sent me to George Vierheller, the director, whose office was just upstairs. So upstairs, over the monkey house, I told Vierheller that I was nuts about animals and I wanted to work for him. I gave him a list of the books I had read, the little bit of zoology I had studied, and the zoos I had visited.

"Yes, we're looking for fellows like you," he said. "It may not be quite what you had in mind, but if you're willing to work pushing a lawn mower, sweeping sidewalks, and trimming hedges, you can report tomorrow morning. You'll get \$3.50 a day, six days a week, eight hours a day, with an hour off for lunch."

Before the next day was over I had some pretty sizable blisters. Pushing a lawnmower can be fun if you throw yourself into it, particularly if you can watch peacocks and flamingoes

and elephants at the same time. During my lunch hour I'd walk around and study the animals. I was delighted with the job, hard as it was. Meanwhile, I think Vierheller wanted to make sure this young college boy was willing to work.

In three weeks or so, Vierheller assigned me to look after the reptiles. There weren't many—some bull snakes, some Gila monsters, a boa constrictor, and lots of turtles and alligators, all housed in temporary quarters and generally ignored.

During that Summer (this was 1926) Vierheller and members of the zoo board were interested in building a reptile house. Some were skeptical about spending a quarter-million dollars on a palace for snakes, but they agreed to put on a temporary exhibit. In the old ostrich house, we built some glass-sided cages, assembled water pools, and painted murals. I went out and collected some snakes in the St. Louis area. Vierheller bought a couple of pythons. I made descriptive labels for everything and framed them, and we were in business.

The exhibit was an instant success. The first Sunday, the crowds lined up for two blocks. It wasn't a month before the board was convinced they ought to build a reptile house.

Now they were willing—in fact eager—to invest in me. They sent me for six weeks to the Bronx Zoo in New York. There, under Raymond Ditmars, at that time the outstanding herpetologist (snake expert) in the country, I learned how to handle the

really dangerous snakes. But I wanted to learn about more than just reptiles, so in spare moments I roamed the Bronx Zoo taking notes on the diets of monkeys, rhinos, hippos, and birds.

After a while, Vierheller gave me the title of curator of reptiles. I was in heaven. In 1933, when I got married, my salary was \$3,000. It wasn't great, but it was comfortable, and I was happy. Animals, my hobby, had become my business.

PHOTOGRAPHY was getting to be a hobby, too. I talked Vierheller into buying a good camera for the zoo, and we got his carpenters to set up a darkroom in the basement under the reptile house. I was afraid to ask Vierheller to buy an enlarger, so I improvised one out of my camera and I built an easel. Vierheller liked my pictures and soon I found myself the zoo's official photographer. We put out a zoo guide book, and about 90 percent of the pictures were mine.

One of the board members owned a lot of movie equipment and he loaned it all to me. So I learned how to shoot and edit movies, and soon we were showing films in schools and clubs, stimulating interest in the zoo.

By now, I knew that my naive boyhood notion was quite sound, that if you didn't want your life to fall into an accidental pattern, you had to design it for yourself; that a fellow who set about constructively to realize his ambitions would find a lot of help.

One of my ambitions, not yet realized, was to travel, to go out to some



This 16-foot, 175-pound anaconda bit Perkins' hand before it was finally bagged in the Upper Amazon.



Sinbad, the baby gorilla, cuddles up close in puzzled and wide-eyed wonder upon arrival at its new home in Lincoln Park Zoo.



Porpoise gets "first-aid" treatment for harpoon wound after its capture.