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THE DAY OF THE APES

by Tom Weaver

Missing from too many discussions of Tim Burton's new Planet of the Apes is any mention of Arthur P. Jacobs, the highly successful public relations man turned movie producer who shepherded the original five-film Apes series (1968-73) into production and spawned the entire Apes phenomenon. And who better to help rectify this situation than actress Natalie Trundy, who was not only Mrs. Jacobs during this "hair-storic" era, but played in all four sequels to the original: 1970's Beneath the Planet of the Apes (as the subway-dwelling mutant Albita), 1971's Escape from the Planet of the Apes (as a human animal expert), 1972's Conquest of the Planet of the Apes and 1973's Battle for the Planet of the Apes (as Lisa, chimpanzee mate of Roddy McDowall). Boston-born Trundy showed an affinity for the camera from an early age and was modeling by her ninth year. She won her first acting job (as Red Riding Hood on live TV) at age 11, moving on to commercials, more live TV; Broadway and summer stock. One of her summer performances was caught by producer Samuel Taylor, who was searching for an actress for his upcoming film The Monte Carlo Story (1957). Fourteen-year-old Trundy and her mother were whisked off to the title city, where she worked with stars Marlene Dietrich and Vittorio De Sica—and encountered Arthur Jacobs for the first time. They met a second time years later, married in 1968 and lived in the Hollywood fast lane until Jacobs' early death in 1973. Trundy is today the president of Jacobs' company (APJAC Productions), but devotes more of her time to church work and her pet dogs.

STARLOG: According to your publicity, you were a teenager when you first met Arthur P. Jacobs.

NATALIE TRUNDY: I met him when I was making The Monte Carlo Story. He was not yet a producer—he was still in public relations—and he represented Marlene Dietrich, the principality of Monaco, Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly. Right in the middle of the street where we were filming, he told my mother, "When she grows up, I'm gonna marry her." And he did! I was his only wife.
I’m sure he had many girl friends, but I was the only wife.

STARLOG: Were you right there when he said that?

TRUNDY: No, no, he said it to my mother, away from me. I’m looking at this man, more than twice my age, and I asked my mother, “Who’s that old man?” As far as I was concerned, he was just an old man [laughs]! He was 30-something years old, for crying out loud, and I was not even 15 yet! I was just a little girl, and he was considerably older, needless to say. Anyway, we met again years later, and ended up married and happy.

STARLOG: In between your first two meetings with Jacobs, you did a lot of TV, including Thriller and The Twilight Zone.

TRUNDY: For Thriller, I was in the first episode (“The Twisted Image”). To tell you the truth, I don’t remember how I got the part. I obviously must have auditioned. It was a [Fatal Attraction-type] part, hounding Leslie Nielsen. I knew Leslie personally as well—he lived up the street from me [laughs]. I was still young and couldn’t drive yet, so he used to pick me up in the morning and take me to Universal! It was directed by Arthur Hiller, who has now been nominated for many awards. Twilight Zone (“Valley of the Shadow”) was a little on the weird side, to say the least [laughs], but it was a fun show. I met Rod Serling—he was a very nice person. He actually interviewed me when I was up for the part.

STARLOG: How did you happen to meet up with Arthur Jacobs the second time?

TRUNDY: I was living with a girl friend of mine, Vanessa Mitchell, and her little son. We shared a flat together in London. We were so poor—like church mice. Vanessa and I used to go to her son to get pennies to take the tube [subway] into London! Well, Vanessa went to the opening of the Playboy Club in London and there Arthur was, sitting there, very morose. Arthur was living in London at this time filming Doctor Dolittle [1967]. Vanessa was with her boy friend, and she recognized Arthur and started chatting with him. She said, “You’ll never guess who’s living with me. Natalie Trundy.” He perked up—and he rang me the next day and invited me out to dinner. I refused. Then, he sent me this great big thing of flowers that took up the whole living room of our poor flat! So I agreed to go to lunch with him. He sent his chauffeur to collect me...and it went from there.

STARLOG: And you got married in London in 1968. Who was at your wedding?

TRUNDY: Mort Abrahams [co-producer of the Apes movies], Carol Channing, Peter O’Toole, Petula Clark, [composer] Leslie Bricusse and his wife Evie [actress Yvonne Romain]—there were so many people, I can’t even remember. Sammy Davis took a lot of pictures. And of course Vanessa and my parents, and my sister and aunt and uncle.

STARLOG: Were you dating him in 1967 when he was making the first Planet of the Apes? Did you visit the sets of that movie?

TRUNDY: How ’bout Page, Arizona? Oh, God in Heaven, 120 degrees! That’s where they shot the opening parts of the movie. And Arthur couldn’t go because he already had a bad heart at the time. So, guess what, I had to go. I called him and said, “You know, Arthur P., I’m gonna dump you now!” Page, Arizona, even at nighttime, it’s 100 degrees. It was awful. We had fans; there was no air conditioning. I said, “Can anybody bring me another cup of iced tea, please, with a lot of ice? I don’t want any booze, just iced tea!”

STARLOG: Were you staying in a hotel?

TRUNDY: If you want to call it a hotel. You don’t want to know about it [laughs]! Then when we made Tom Sawyer [1973], that was in Missouri, and that was just as bad [hot]. I had to stay there for that whole thing. Then Escape provided Trundy with her second role in the Apes series—as a human. She went chimp for the final two films.
It was a happy Halloween in 1967 as Arthur P. Jacobs (as Dr. Dolittle, another film he produced) and Trundy (in ape gear) dressed up for a masquerade party. While making her Apes saga debut as the mutant Alcina in *Beneath*, Trundy chatted on set with her producer husband.

We went to Natchez, Mississippi for *Huckleberry Finn* [1974], and I said, “Holy Christ in Heaven, here I go again!”

**STARLOG:** What kind of movies did Jacobs especially like to make?

**TRUNDY:** He once said, “I will never in my lifetime make a film that cannot be seen by the whole family.” He owned the rights to *Midnight Cowboy* [1969] and he gave them away. He gave them away. Arthur said, “I will not have my name on it.” He gave them to [producer] Jerry Heilman, and that movie made millions.

**STARLOG:** Early on, there was apprehension that people would just find *Planet of the Apes* funny.

**TRUNDY:** Really, much of it was funny, but a lot of it was very serious. If you think about it, it was also, in a way, very political. By the way, and this is a true story: During the filming, at lunchtime, the gorillas would eat with the gorillas...the chimpanzees would eat with the chimpanzees...and the other ones would eat together, too. One group here, one group there! Except for the stars, of course.

**STARLOG:** This was on the first movie?

**TRUNDY:** This was on all of them!

**STARLOG:** These *Apes* movies must have been such large-scale, time-consuming projects. Were they just five movies that he made while you knew him, or was this the “Planet of the Apes era” in your lives?

**TRUNDY:** It was. Completely!

**STARLOG:** Whose idea was it for you to start appearing in the *Planet of the Apes*—

**TRUNDY:** [interrupting] Mine! [laughs] Nobody else’s! I wanted to be in it. I wanted to be part of it. I was in all except the first one.

**STARLOG:** So we can chalk your four roles up to nepotism—or is that too strong a word?

**TRUNDY:** No, no, no, no! Not too strong a word!

**STARLOG:** Linda Harrison [Nova, *STARLOG* #213] was the girl friend, and later the wife, of studio exec Richard Zanuck, so that’s the way she got her part, too.

**TRUNDY:** That’s right.

**STARLOG:** So you just said to your husband, “You’re making a *Planet of the Apes* sequel [Beneath], I would like to be in it”—was it as simple as that?

**TRUNDY:** I said, “I wanna be in it!” [laughs]—and I was. All of them, from then on! I really did ‘em for fun, if you want to know the truth.

**STARLOG:** For *Beneath*, would you have preferred playing an ape instead of the mutant role you did play?

**TRUNDY:** Oh, I liked playing Alcina. It was fun, and I didn’t have to wear ape makeup.

**STARLOG:** For at least one scene, your makeup had to be an ordeal.

**TRUNDY:** Those radiation burns had to be painted on my face every single day. It really wasn’t an unpleasant process, but taking it off was a killer. My makeup man had to take it off with a hair dryer, set on cold. And he had to use acetone to get it off my face. It was so painful I would cry. Day after day after day—that was not terrific!

**STARLOG:** At one point, you also had to wear a mask of your own face over all that makeup.

**STARLOG:** We all wore appliances, they weren’t just masks. The extras wore ape masks, but the stars who played apes wore appliances, and as Alcina, I wore appliances. Fortunately, I don’t have claustrophobia, but imagine people who do. I mean, they couldn’t work, it would be impossible.

**STARLOG:** Kim Hunter told me [in issue #160] that Sal Mineo, who was in *Escape*, had trouble with his ape makeup.

**TRUNDY:** Yes, he did. He was claustrophobic. His character didn’t last too long in the picture, he got killed right away—and I think he was very happy about it, to tell you the truth [laughs]! Incidentally, I got along with Kim wonderfully—what a nice lady. A real lady. A wonderful woman.

**STARLOG:** Did Jacobs ever appear in any of his own movies?

**TRUNDY:** No. But always, in all of his movies, some character had the name of Arthur. In *Escape*, the one where I played the psychologist, psychiatrist, whatever, with Bradford Dillman, the zookeeper—his name was Arthur. He always got an Arthur in somewhere!

**STARLOG:** When I was a kid, the *Apes* movies, to me, were just family entertainment—makeup, action and fun. But now that I’m older, I recognize some of the political and social undercurrents. Whose idea was it to slip all of that stuff into the movies?

**TRUNDY:** Oh, the writers. And Arthur.

**STARLOG:** Was he a political person? Did he have time to be?

**TRUNDY:** No, he didn’t have time to do anything. He worked 29 hours a day, 10 days a week. And I think that’s what killed him. He was only 51 when he died.

**STARLOG:** Zanuck admits that he was also unaware of the undercurrents at the time.

**TRUNDY:** I don’t think anybody was aware of it at the time, necessarily. But when you think, years later, about all of the things that happened here, there and everywhere, it was very pursuant. Pursuant to what’s happening...even today!

**STARLOG:** Just out of curiosity, being the wife of the producer, did you get preferential treatment on any of the *Apes* sets?

**TRUNDY:** Absolutely not. Don’t think I wouldn’t have accepted it, for your information [laughs], but I didn’t! I worked as hard as everybody else!

**STARLOG:** You talked about your husband’s workaholic lifestyle. Did that leave time for any home life?

**TRUNDY:** Well...not too much.

**STARLOG:** How did you deal with that? Did you resent it?

**TRUNDY:** No. I loved him so much...we had a good life together. He wanted children—he didn’t marry me to be an actress, he wanted children. When I had my sixth miscarriage, we were living in London. I was in the bathroom, and I started to bleed, and I said, “Arthur, please call the doctor.” The doctor came with a specialist, and they said, “Mr. Jacobs, she just lost another baby.” All he did was sit on the end of the bed and cry. It was a little baby boy. I was five months pregnant. Well, at least I’ve got two children now [by her second husband], God bless ‘em.

**STARLOG:** Drop a few names—who were your best friends and most frequent guests during those years?
TRUNDY: Well, Michael Caine and his wife, Gregory Peck and his wife and people like Quincy Jones from the music end. And Roddy McDowall always. Arthur and Roddy loved to play Monopoly. We used to show movies every Saturday night—we had a projection room in our house. There were certain people who were "regulars," and Roddy was always one of them, because Arthur and he admired each other. After the other guests would leave—I would already be half-asleep—it would be around midnight and Arthur and Roddy would sit on the floor and start playing Monopoly. And Monopoly can go on forever. Finally around 3 or 4 a.m., I would say, "Good night, guys. I’m going to bed." Then I would come down at about 8 a.m., and they were still playing Monopoly. I would say, "I think it’s coffee time, guys," and they would reply, "No, we’re not finished yet!" [Laughs] They did it all the time.

STARLOG: Just the two of them?

TRUNDY: Paul Dehn [the British writer of the Apes sequels], who stayed with us when he was here in America, sometimes played too. One weekend Groucho Marx was there—he was 80 old by then! He said, "Can I play?" and Arthur said, "No. Just sit there and smoke your cigar!" [Laughs]

STARLOG: What was it that you and your husband liked about McDowall?

TRUNDY: He was a very sweet, caring person, and very intelligent. I adored him. But the two of us listened to very different types of music. He enjoyed classical, while I always listened to rock ’n’ roll. When we were together in an Apes movie, we had an agreement that whoever reached the makeup department first would win the right to pick the music we would listen to. I would have the Beatles in my machine, and he would have classical music in his. It was a good-natured race between us to see who would get to choose the music for the day. I like classical music, but at 2 a.m., when you’re trying to stay vaguely awake, it can put you right to sleep [laughs]!

STARLOG: At 2 a.m., would you be having your makeup taken off at the end of a work day, or put on at the beginning of one?

TRUNDY: It was the beginning. It took four hours to put the appliances on. Before they put the bottom part of the face on, the mouth, Roddy and I used to order our breakfasts. Here we were ordering breakfasts at, like, 4:30 or 5 a.m. But the commissary didn’t serve makeup men breakfast. So I would order 20 hard-boiled eggs, 10 orders of French toast, 10 steaks, lots of toast, freshly squeezed orange juice and coffee—the coffee they made in the makeup room was lousy! Finally, the guys in the commissary looked at me and said, "Miss Trundy! How can you consume all this food and stay so slim?" I said, "Easy!" [Laughs]

STARLOG: Who were the makeup men?

TRUNDY: My favorite makeup man was Jack Barron. He was exclusive to me. Roddy’s was Joe DiBella. And, of course, John Chambers and Dan Striepeke, who were like the supervising makeup men, would come around.

STARLOG: Being on the set of an Apes movie must have been quite a trip.

TRUNDY: We were shooting Escape in Beverly Hills. At lunchtime, we would all tramp to La Scala—the owner was a dear friend. You should have seen us going into this restaurant, with Kim and Roddy in ape makeup [laughs]! Sitting in the restaurant, eating veal piccata, salads and everything else. And when we got back to the set, the makeup man would look at us and say, "Boy, you must have enjoyed it ‘cause you look like disasters!"—you know, from the chin down! And walking through the streets of Beverly Hills to the restaurant, people stopped and stared. "Are we really seeing this? Is this for real?" Some people even bumped into each other!

STARLOG: Any other Apes anecdotes?

TRUNDY: I went into a cage with a tiger. I had no fear. I will tell you something: If they don’t sense fear, they won’t hurt you. The trainer told me, "The only thing they can’t stand—it drives them crazy—is if you are on your period. They smell it." I used to go in with them and play. They never put a fang out to me, never a claw. They were so sweet. There was a tiger and a baby lion.

STARLOG: Bradford Dillman, your leading man—did he also go in the cage?

TRUNDY: No. He looked and said, "I don’t think so." [Laughs] He asked me, "How can you do that?", and I said, "I have no fear.
toward them, and therefore they have no fear
toward me.” That’s how it works. And,
believe me, these guys were not
decimated!

**STARLOG:** Your husband gets his share
of credit for the *Apes* movies—and deservedly—as well as some others. But I often think
the late Paul Dehn goes unnoticed. Do you agree?

**TRUNDY:** I certainly do. I think Paul got
short-changed. He was a love. He was so
quiet—sometimes you would walk into a
room and think he was snoozing. But he was
not. He was a very sweet, quiet man.

**STARLOG:** Was there ever any concern
on anybody’s part that you were showing up in
all of these *Apes* movies in different roles?

**TRUNDY:** No. I don’t think so, because they
changed me around. In *Beneath*, I was all
covered up, and in *Escape*, they dyed my
blonde hair strawberry blonde. Then, I was
an ape in the last two.

**STARLOG:** So what was your major
complaint about the ape makeup?

**TRUNDY:** Those big brown contact lenses
they put in my eyes. One night Arthur and I
were at a dinner party at the home of Walter
Grauman, the director. The lenses, of course,
were out by then. Suddenly, I turned to
Arthur and said, “I can’t see anything! Take
me home!” I was crying, in the middle of
dinner. So he took me home and called his
doctor Charlie Kivowitz, who said, “Put wet
compresses on her eyes ‘til I get the ophthalmologist.” They came and looked at me and
Arthur was told that I could never wear those
lenses again. So from then on, for the rest of
the movie, I had to work with my eyelids
down,” so the camera didn’t see my blue
eyes. An ape has to have brown eyes! So I just
kept ‘em closed, like I was sleeping.

**STARLOG:** Where were you when you
heard that Jacobs had died?

**TRUNDY:** I was in the South, in Mississippi,
making Arthur’s *Huckleberry Finn*. He
couldn’t go because of the humidity—he had
already had one heart attack, he couldn’t stay
there. But he used to call me every morning,
10 a.m. my time in Mississippi, 7 a.m. here in
Los Angeles. He was an early riser. One
morning I was trying to teach Southern belles
how to waltz when Bobby Greenhut, the
associate producer, said, “Phone call.” I
assumed it was my husband. I went to the
office, to the phone, and it was Handy Andy,
this chap who worked for us. I said, “Where’s
Arthur?” and he said, “Arthur’s dead.” My
legs went to rubber. I collapsed. I didn’t faint,
but I went down on the floor. Greenhut came
in and said, “What’s wrong?” and I said,
“Arthur has passed away.”

**STARLOG:** Where did he die?

**TRUNDY:** He was found in his bed. When
Andy came that morning to pick him up to
take him to the studio, the housekeeper said,
“Mr. Jacobs didn’t wake up.” So Andy went
up and found that he was gone. He was lying
on top of the bed in his pajamas and dressing
gown, with the dogs all around him, like they
were trying to keep him warm. That’s how I
found out. And then they couldn’t get me out
of Natchez, Mississippi. They only had two
mail planes a day there! So what they did was
get the Governor’s Lear jet and brought it
down. I had to ride to the plane with a police-
man, on the back of a motorcycle—there
were only two cops in Natchez. I arrived in
LA in jeans and a T-shirt. Charlie Kivowitz
met me at the airport and said, “Let’s go into
the VIP Room, I’ll give you a shot of Vali-
um.” I said, “No, I don’t want a shot of Valium.
I just want you to take me to my husband.” Arthur had already been brought to
a mortician. Charlie hemmed and hawed and
said, “Charlie, I have a hundred-dollar bill
in my pocket. If you don’t take me, I’ll take a
cab.” So he took me to the mortician’s place,
and the mortician came out and said, “Your
husband isn’t quite ready yet.” I said, “I don’t
care if he’s ‘ready’ or not. Just leave me alone
with him.” And I went in and sat and talked to
him for about an hour. Just holding on to him.
And...it was OK. Do you think I cared
whether he was ‘ready’ or not, from a mortici-
ian? Do you think I needed a shot of Valium
from the doctor? I don’t think so!

Then, I got back to my house—I had
asked for nobody to be there. Well, the house
was full of people. About the only good per-
sone was Gene Kelly—he manned the phones.
He said, “Sweetheart, just go in the other
room, leave all these people alone.” And then
there was another person who everybody
used to criticize, Rona Barrett. She lived
across the street. She also manned the
phones. People used to call her a bitch. She
was not a bitch, she was just a Hollywood
gossip columnist for cryin’ out loud, doin’
her job. But, believe me, she was at my house
and started shooing people out, “Get out.
Out!” She came up to my boobs, she was so
short [laughs], but she got the guests out! She
said, “Mrs. Jacobs has to be alone now. Mr.
Kelly and I will take care of everything.”
Which they did.

**STARLOG:** Did you retire from acting
after his death?

**TRUNDY:** I did a couple of TV shows, like
*Quincy*, but I let it go. I did remarry, and
I have two beautiful children, 24 and 23.

**STARLOG:** Your second husband—are you
still married to him?

**TRUNDY:** No. Got rid of him [laughs].

**STARLOG:** In more recent years, you made
a humanitarian trip to India.

**TRUNDY:** Not once—I’ve been there 12
times! I worked with Mother Teresa, and I
slept in her convent. She had a walking stick,
and we would go up and down the streets and
she would poke people who were lying in the
street. If they were alive, and not too ill, they
would go to the House of the Ill. If they were
dead, they would be taken to the House of the
Dying, where she would pray over them.

Then we would find the poor little babies—
they were always girls, ‘cause [in India] they
only want boys. The little girls they get rid of,
which is really awful. They’re all so adorable,
with these big black eyes, and they’re so
small I could almost put them in the palm of
my hand. And so we would pick up the
babies. I put them in a big knapsack and we
would take them to [the orphanage]. I’ve
adopted about 25 of them.

**STARLOG:** You adopted 25 babies? They
lived with you?

**TRUNDY:** No, no—I pay for them. I’ve got
adopted children in India and China, about
40. I support them. Because the nuns cannot
afford to support them. What do you think I
would sleep in a convent for [laughs]! I was
on the floor, with the other nuns, and got up
at 4 a.m. Mother Teresa used to come and
poke me with her damn stick! I would say,
“I’m up, Mother!”

**STARLOG:** And today?

**TRUNDY:** I volunteer at church. I spend a lot
of time there. I feed the homeless every Sat-
urday and Sunday afternoon. I happen to be
very Catholic and so I also go to Mass every
day.

**STARLOG:** Are you going to see the new
*Apes* movie? Are you looking forward to it?

**TRUNDY:** I will go to see it, but I’m not
looking forward to it. The first *Apes* belonged
to my husband. And with all of this publicity
about the new movie coming out, nobody
ever mentioned his name. If you’ll permit me
a closing comment, I want to say that the
most important thing that I loved being with
him. Arthur took me everywhere he went,
even if it was just to New York for a day—
everywhere. He never left me behind. I
loved it. Imagine if they had frequent flyer
tickets then!