

## **George Araujo – (Jorge) 1931-1997 and Reginald Cridler – 1912 – 1984**

(by Larry Brown)

Our first month of Peace Corps training (January 1963) was in Puerto Rico - up in the jungle near the town of Utuado. I loved it. It was outdoors stuff - camping, hiking, swimming, climbing, canoeing, etc. - stuff that I grew up doing. We were paid \$2 a day and got a couple of weekends off during that month. One of those weekends four of us took off to see the Virgin Islands. We caught a bus to San Juan for the first night, then flew to the Virgin Islands for the second night. One of the attractions was that St. Thomas was a free port – things like cameras were very cheap.

The first night in San Juan the four of us rented two rooms in a flophouse and went out to dinner. When we got back from dinner we found they had rented one of the rooms a second time and the door locked. We woke up the whole hotel yelling and screaming and beating on the door. We got nowhere. I guess we could have kicked it in. We didn't. The four of us slept in the other room in one bed crossways. Ahh – when young you could sleep about anywhere.

The round-trip airfare to the Virgin Islands was \$6. In the Virgin Islands we slept on the beach on some resorts' beach chairs. It seems like they kicked us off the beach one time but as it got late they gave up and we got a pretty good night's sleep.

The original four of us were me, George Araujo, Dave Sanshuck, and Gary Harms. However, as we were wandering around town we ran into another guy from our training group - Reg Cridler. He was a trainee just like the rest of us but we had no idea he was going to the islands too.

Both George and Reg were, to me, particularly interesting people. George was a small black guy, nine years older than me who had been a professional prizefighter. He had actually worked his way up and fought for the World Lightweight Championship against Jimmy Carter. George was on a hot streak going into the championship fight. He had won recent bouts against good boxers so he was an 8 to 5 favorite to win the championship. He didn't. He told me he got beat up pretty badly in that fight – the referee stopped the fight in the 13<sup>th</sup> round - TKO. He fought 68 fights, won 58 of them (mostly by knockout), lost 9 of them, and tied one. He was a hell of a boxer. You can view the key rounds of the Carter bout on YouTube.

George was interesting to me because we had such different backgrounds – he was black, from the east coast, an ex-pro-boxer of 68 bouts, a painter, 32 years old, etc. Me? – 22 years old, wet behind the ears, fresh out of college, white, had never had a real job, from the Wild West, etc. He told me he had boxed since he was 8 years old. It was very interesting. Boxers are trained to dance on their toes. George even walked on his toes, which made it very difficult for him to hike in the hills - he fell down lots - but that didn't bother him. Another thing I remember was that it was impossible for him to do a pull-up on the straight bar. His muscles were not developed to do pull-ups or walk flat-footed – they were developed to augment only one thing – boxing.

After the month of training in Puerto Rico, we were sent to the U of Minnesota at St. Paul for 3 more months of training – language mostly but everything else they could think of to prepare us for the culture shock of India. George and I played lots of ping pong and pool together between training sessions for those months. We were closely matched in both activities so they were always good matches – and we had great visits. He mostly kept to himself. You'd have never known he was a celebrity.

Reg Cridler was an individualist – a rebel. He was older even – age 51 in 1963 - and I was drawn to him for many of the same reasons I was drawn to George. He was different. I don't know what shopping is like in the Virgin Islands today, but in 1963 the shops were very interesting. They sold all sorts of stuff, some quality stuff and some not - and the prices were very low. And, one of the things used to get someone in the door of a shop was the promise of a free drink. Booze, especially rum, was dirt cheap – so cheap the shops could give it away to get people in the door. As I recall, a liter of rum went for about \$0.60. When we ran into Reg exploring the shops in the Virgin Islands, he was selling himself as Earnest Hemmingway's son (or brother? or cousin?). I don't know if they believed him but he was pretty darned convincing – and he looked very much like Hemmingway – and he had the

same free spirit. He wasn't drunk and I never got any vibes that he was much of a drinker but he sure was having fun in the Virgin Islands – and we were too.

Reg was a free spirit. When he got up in the morning he crowed like a rooster. When they told him he had to jog the mile or two to soccer practice (and back), he just smiled - and walked. He rebelled against some of the other training rules and activities too and that might have caused his demise. He was like a duck out of water. The only person who might have been his peer was Georgia Ziffzer. She was about the same age as him and also single, but she wouldn't have anything to do with him.

Things were pretty emotional and hectic at the end of training – some of us going to India – some not. I don't remember what happened to either George or Reg. Neither of them went to India. We were the third of 122 groups to be sent to India. I think 78 of us started the training cycle - 42 went to India - the rest were kicked out - deemed questionably suitable to spend two years in rural India for whatever reason – or quit. George and Reg both might have quit but I suspect that George decided the PC was not for him and I suspect that Reg was selected out. I got the feeling Reg did things his own way just a little too much to satisfy the PC administration at the time.

I never saw George after training and we did not keep in touch. He was a good friend for 4 months. Wikipedia says he got married in 1963. That was the year we trained and went to India so maybe that's the reason he didn't go. I also see that he died fairly young – at the age of 66.

I did keep in touch with Reg and saw him one more time. In about 1979 I was invited to Michigan State University to give a couple of lectures. And, MSU is Harry and Mary Lou's territory. Harry and Mary treated me like royalty - Harry picked me up at the airport, had me to dinner at the house with much reminiscing and showing of slides, etc. and took me to my hotel. I guess I was there 2 or 3 nights. Reg lived in Lowell, MI, which is not too far from Lansing. I had called Reg and he invited us to his place. Harry drove and we had a delightful visit and dinner with Reg and his relatively new wife. That was the last time I saw him. He was killed in an auto accident in 1984.

Both of these men would have represented the USA very well in India. I'm sorry they didn't go.

RIP George - I'm sad we did not stay in contact. And RIP Reg – you did it your way.

By Larry Brown – the beekeeper February 2022