



Like 10



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AN ARCTIC GIRL TURNS 100

by Nicholas Hirshon

Lucille Jacobs didn't get what she wanted for her 100th birthday last Saturday.

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No one would freeze her alive.



Lucille Jacobs (right) sits atop a block of ice with two other models from the Tomb of Ice exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair. (Photo credit: Paul Van Dort)

Nearly 75 years ago, the daring Jacobs starred in a peculiar exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair in Queens—a spectacle alternately billed as the Temple of Ice, the Tomb of Ice, and, perhaps its most enduring moniker, Frozen Alive. It was on the outskirts of the fair, a grand array of displays promoting countries and corporations in what is now Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, where Jacobs became an “Arctic Girl” – a model who was sealed in ice for as long as she could bear, her frigid arms turning red, her mind racing, slipping out of consciousness.

For most of the fair, Jacobs laid in the ice wearing only a neck bra and a G-string, “like a stripper did,” as she put it. She performed the



than twenty minutes at a time, and earned less than \$100 a week. After the fair closed for good in the fall of 1940, Jacobs toured the country with Frozen Alive. She last entered a block of ice in 1942, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president and World War II was raging.

Narratively interviewed Jacobs by phone a week before her 100th birthday party last Saturday in Deerfield Beach, Florida, near where she lives.

Narratively: How did a 26-year-old girl from Chicago end up at Frozen Alive?

Lucille Jacobs: I was a singer, and my manager wanted something to do at the world's fair. So he said, "What should we do?" So Eddie Jameson, who was the man who held the world record for men being frozen alive in ice, happened to be a friend of ours. So he came over and he was talking to my manager and he said, "Why don't you get a girl to be frozen alive in ice? That would be something that people would like to see." Well, we advertised and got many girls coming, and when they saw what it was supposed to be, they turned around. They said, "No, thank you." So Eddie says, "Why don't you ask Lucille to do it? She might be game enough to try it." So my husband came to me and he said, "Would you like to get encased in ice?" I said, "Are you kidding?" So Eddie said, "Look, I'll tell you what to do." So I said, "OK, I'll try it."

I'm hoping the pay was good if you had to endure that torture.

I'll tell you, at first it was very cold and Eddie said to me, "Now when you get in there you're going to be very, very excited. Don't



all kinds of burns. ... It was just exactly like a coffin. When they went to put the last piece on ice, I was scared. But once I was in there, I was OK, seeing that I got so numb I couldn't feel anything.

Sheesh.

In fact, I'll tell you, not too long ago, there was a man, if you remember, in New York – that he was supposed to be frozen in ice where he had like a tent or something of ice.

That was David Blaine.

Did you see that? Well, at that time he claimed that he held a world record. *[In November 2000, Blaine stood in a six-ton block of ice for nearly 62 hours in Times Square.]* I got on Channel 5 here *[in Florida]* and I told them if he was willing to do the same as I did in a coffin of ice, where I could not move around ... I would challenge him. He wouldn't do it! He refused to do it. But Channel 5 will tell you. I called them and I said, "I'll challenge him any time at all." In fact, I wanted to do it for my hundredth birthday, just to show people, because a lot of people at their age, they'll jump out of a plane or they'll do this or they'll do that and I said to my daughter, "Why don't I show them what I did?" But you can't find anybody that knows how to chop the ice out or get it ready for me to go in to do it.

At any point, didn't your husband or your parents or somebody say, "Why are you doing this to yourself?"

They'd say, "Why do you do this?" I said, "I enjoy it. I enjoy it." I guess it was the publicity at that time. When you're that old, you



you don't care what happens.

Although it sounds like you're still interested in doing it again, even at 100.

I would. If I could get somebody to do the ice, I would show them at my hundredth birthday that I can still do it.

Why does that mean so much to you?

It just proves that it is not a lie, that it actually was true.

I was reading about how the models prepared for Frozen Alive. Maybe you can confirm whether these stories are true. One article said that every model had to drink two quarts of sauerkraut juice daily to prepare for the stunt.

No! Whoever said that?

It was in one of the articles about the exhibit.

Oh no! If you'd drink sauerkraut juice, you'd have to run to the bathroom. What would I do if I was in the case of ice? No way. I'll tell you what the secret was. Eddie Jameson said, "If you want to do this here, before you go into the ice, get under the coldest shower there is, make the temperature of the body as cold as the ice, so that you're not battling a hot-temperature body against a cold ice." Because if you did, you'd pass out. When I went in that ice, I was as cold as the ice was, because for about 10, 15 minutes I was standing under the coldest shower that anybody could take. I was frozen before I got into the ice. And when I got in the ice, the breathing

**Was there anything else that you did to prepare?**

A lot of times when the girls came there to go in the ice, they thought if they drank liquor or something like that – nuh uh. No. If your body is hotter than what the temperature of the ice is, you're going to pass out. So that's what the secret was, to get under the coldest shower there was so the body temperature of your body was the same as the ice before you got in there.

I read that the managers of the exhibit wouldn't unseal the coffin until the models went unconscious or turned purple. Is that true?

No. The only thing was, when they took me out, the sides of my arms that were up against the ice were red. It was like a burn. Never purple. It was always red like a burn. We always had the ambulance or a doctor there at all times. And the minute I got out, they took my temperature to see that I was OK. We even had private doctors come up as I was taken out to examine me to see if I was OK. But they always found that I was 100 percent. My daughter says, "Mom, maybe that's why you lived to be a hundred."

How do you think it helped you live so long?

I don't know. Maybe – I can't say. I said to my daughter, "I wonder if being frozen alive in ice and all that helped me to live to be 100." She said, "Ma, I think it was in your genes, because look at me." She said, "I'm 71." I wish you could come to my party!

Is there going to be an ice sculpture there?



do my ice show, I'd do it. I absolutely would.

I noticed you went by the stage name Annette Delmar during the fair.

That's right. They thought if I went by the name of Lucille Dupree, it wouldn't sound right. *[Dupree was her married name at the time. She later re-married and became Jacobs.]* They thought Annette Delmar was more professional. So that's what my manager said. "You'll go by Annette Delmar."

So it wasn't that you were embarrassed or ashamed of what you were doing?

No, nuh-uh. I wasn't. They just said, "How many people go by their right name that's in show business today? There aren't too many." So I said, "OK, if they think that sounds better, I'll go by that name."

But when you were part of Frozen Alive, did you ever feel you were doing something impure or scandalous?

No. Not our show.

But you did say that you were wearing only a bra and panties, and this was a very conservative age.

No. They were just showing that a person did not have to wear a bathing suit or anything like that to show that they could be frozen alive in ice. That was all. But it wasn't that I was showing for a half hour or an hour like that. I only showed the people enough time for me to get in the ice and out because I had a robe on all the time



robe off. Put me in the ice. When they took me out of the ice, they put the robe right back on me again. So they didn't have very much time to see it.

And you never had any disputes with your parents or your husband about your outfits?

No! They never, never, never, never had any problems.

Do you still have any scars from Frozen Alive?

No, nothing at all.

That's pretty good.

Just the same as I was when I was 26 years old – except I'm a little bit thinner.

Do you think women today should be freezing themselves in order to live to 100 like you have?

I don't think anybody would be able to do it, because at first it's very scary, believe me. When you get in that ice and they put that last piece of ice on top of you, you're so scared because you're almost on top of it.

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[Author's note: Some questions were slightly edited for space and clarity, while other questions were excluded along with the answers they elicited. All questions appear in the order they were asked and



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