



Jaguar by Roland Smith

Subjects: Rain forests; Adventure and adventurers

Award: Sunshine State Young Reader's Award

Book Lists: Latin America, Middle School

Props: Jaguar, bat

J

I'm Jake. I'm 14-years-old and I'm living in a retirement home. That's definitely not normal, I know. Let me tell you, it's certainly not what I had in mind. Last year when my mom died, I joined my dad, a field biologist, in Kenya on a project. It was great and my dad said we were partners. When the project was finished we came back to the States and got a house near my grandfather. I started school and Dad began writing up his research on elephants, a year long project, so he said.

But, just a couple of months later, he sticks me in this retirement home with my grandfather and takes off to help his best friend, Bill, set up a jaguar preserve in Brazil. (*Bring out jaguar briefly*) So much for being partners. Life at the home was definitely different, I'll give it that. I was big news and every day when I got back from school all the old folks or "inmates" as they call themselves, started asking me about my day. I'd get stuck telling the same thing over and over. So, in self-defense, I started holding Press Conferences in the recreation room right before dinner. I thought everyone would get bored after a few days but no, the TV was turned off and everyone came to hear who I talked to, what went on in class, etc. Can you imagine? I had to rack my brains to come up with stuff!

And homework! I had to go hide to do it because everyone wanted to help and they didn't agree on answers and they'd start yelling at each other! I just wanted to go to Brazil with my dad. I was trying to get him to let me take correspondence classes. Finally, he sent me tickets for a one week visit over Spring Break. That was better than not going at all, but not what I had in mind.

When I arrived, my dad was off getting a boat to take upriver to the proposed preserve, so a guy named Buzz met me at the plane and took me to the camp. Projects are never luxurious but this one was beyond belief. I walked in and something plopped on my head. "Oh, I meant to warn you to wear a helmet in here," Buzz said. (*Bring out bat*) He turned his flashlight up on the ceiling and every inch of space was covered with fruit bats, thousands of them. "We got a great deal on this place," he said. No kidding, I thought. The one room that was an office and living quarters was the only safe place! And you don't want to be around when the bats leave at night or come back in the morning! (*Put bat down*)

The next day, Dad and his friend, Bill, came back with the boat but the motor broke down and had to be fixed before we could leave. They got the part to fix the motor but when Bill went on board with it, the whole boat exploded. Bill was killed, Buzz was thrown clear but broke his leg when he landed and my dad's arm and hand were burned. My dad had told me that this was a dangerous mission and that's why he didn't want me down here. But what was going on? Was the explosion really an accident? Who didn't want them to have the land for the jaguars? Would the whole plan collapse because Bill was gone? Or would they maybe need my help to protect the jaguars? (*Bring out jaguar, hold up book*) *Jaguar* by Roland Smith.

