

# LETTER TO MILO STEINBORN

BY TERRY TODD

Unpublished; 18 November 1986

*Preface: On nearly every trip that Terry and I took to see my mother in Plant City, Florida, we made time to drive over to Orlando (about an hour away) to visit Milo Steinborn. Milo's large home in Orlando was filled with Iron Game treasures, and listening to him tell stories about his early career as a wrestler and strongman was every bit as fascinating as you might imagine. After we moved to Austin in 1983 and brought with us the Ottley Coulter Collection and our own personal collection of strength materials, Terry began talks with The University and with other noted figures in the Iron Game about building a library and archive to preserve the history of physical culture. One of the collections we most desired for the archives was Milo's as it contained so many rare books, magazines and other materials—in German—that no one else seemed to have. We'd discussed our hopes and plans for the library with Milo during several visits in the 1980s, and were delighted to get a call from him in November of 1986 in which he told us that he had decided to donate his collection. We were elated.*

*Sadly, Milo died on 9 February 1989 at age 95, without leaving written instructions regarding his desire to donate his collection to The University of Texas. And so, despite several trips to visit Milo's son Henry who remained in the house and, later, his eldest son Richard, who lived in Milo's house after Henry, it was not until 2017 (more than 30 years later) that we were able to work out arrangements with Milo's heirs to purchase the collection from them and finally bring it to Texas so it could be preserved and used by scholars.*

*I've included this letter because it contains a detailed description of Terry's early vision and hopes for our own collection that led to the founding of The H.J. Lutch Stark Center. It remains remarkable to me that so much of what he told Milo he planned/hoped to do has now been accomplished. In the letter there are references to Vic Boff, one of Milo's good friends and the founder of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongman Association; to Roy "Mac" McLean, Terry's weightlifting coach at UT who became the first donor to our work; to Henry, one of Milo's two sons who also lived in Orlando; to Cowboy, his African Grey Parrot who, like Milo, spoke with a heavy German accent; and to Tommy, his dog. Because of the length of this letter, I have made a few small edits to conserve space.*

~ Jan Todd



**D**ear Milo, I'm writing this letter to let you know how grateful Jan and I are for what you've decided to do with your collection of material. As I'm sure you know we're honored by your decision and we'll do all we can within whatever years we have left to continue to strengthen the overall collection and to raise money for it so that it will go down through the centuries as the best and most complete in the world. This is important so that lovers of strength and physical culture can have a place to come and read about the pioneers who went before. Jan and I know that what you've managed to put together through all the years

you've been collecting is far beyond what we could ever hope to assemble on our own, especially your German materials. In fact, we have no doubt that no other collection in existence could mean as much as yours does to the overall strength history library we're building here. Not only do you have a wonderful collection overall, but your holdings of materials in German are completely unparalleled in the English speaking world and perhaps even in Germany itself. And the fact that the very cradle of strongmen and lifting in the world was Germany and Austria means that for us to have a really thorough and complete historical record of what took us from the beginning to where we are

today we really need the German material. We've known for years that we needed it and we always hoped you might decide to place your collection here at The University of Texas alongside the collections of Ottley Coulter, George Hackenschmidt and Dave Willoughby, but we didn't want to bother you about it. We always thought if you could see for yourself what we've done here you'd understand how committed we are and how much we've already accomplished.

. . . Let me shift gears here a bit and tell you how we got the library started. My own involvement began about 30 years ago when I first began lifting weights and reading the lifting magazines. My training partner had a bunch of old magazines and he let me borrow them and I used to read them by the hour. Gradually, I began to buy new ones and whatever old ones I could find around town and then a year or so later, I met Roy "Mac" McLean who taught lifting here at UT. Mac had a very good collection—many of the old books such as Berry's and Calvert's and Saxon's and many magazines going back into the 20s. He let me borrow them and after awhile I had read them all and by that time I was a nationally ranked lifter and I was hooked on the Iron Game. Soon afterwards I decided to concentrate on the history of lifting as the subject of my doctoral dissertation and for that I needed more than Mac's collection and the small amount of material I'd collected up until then. But since I'd accepted an offer from York to be-



**Milo Steinborn on the left, with his son Richard, who wrestled professionally as Dick Steinborn, and Henry (Hank) Steinborn (front), who served in the military, helped Milo run the gym, and later worked as a professional pianist. The three men are standing in Milo's gym, located on Orange Avenue in Orlando, Florida. After the gym closed, Milo moved the wrestling ring to his garage, and moved his antique globe weights and a few other pieces of equipment to his house where he continued training with them into his nineties.**



**Milo Steinborn with Terry and Tommy, Milo's Norwegian Elkhound, in Milo's backyard on a Christmas visit to Florida in the 1980s.**

come the managing editor of *Strength and Health* at about that same time (summer of 1964), I knew I could use the collection at York.

But, when I got to York I was really surprised because there *was* no big collection. Bob [Hoffman] had quite a few books and so did [John] Grimek, but the barbell company didn't have a collection in any one place. I did learn that they had bought Ray Van Cleaf's collection from his widow a few years before but when I asked around no one seemed to know where the collection was. Finally, someone remembered that it had been put in one of the older warehouses and so I got a key and went over only to find that the roof was bad and that quite a few of the things were molding and almost ruined. I'm sure that if I hadn't gone the stuff would still be there and would be completely ruined





One of the few photos we have of Terry and Ottley Coulter together is this picture of them arriving at a York Barbell Company picnic in the mid-1960s. Terry is at his full lifting size in this photo and weighs about 340; Ottley is in the front seat. The other man is unidentified.

many times during the 18 months I lived in York and I got to be a real admirer of Ottley. He was very knowledgeable but also very modest, almost too modest, and I think he was willing to help me because he realized I was paying tribute to the earlier times in my dissertation. He also told me that he hoped young men like me would come along who could take over where he left off and continue to collect material and write about the old days.

A year or so later, after I returned to the university and completed the writing of my 500 page dissertation, I invited Ottley to come down to see The University of Texas because I was working on an arrangement through which his collection would be placed here in the library of rare books. And so in the summer of 1967 he came down and spent a week or so visiting with me and Mr. McLean and my family and also with the people at the library. Unfortunately, my job fell through on that occasion and we had to drop the idea of bringing Ottley's collection down here at that time. But he knew how

by now. Anyway, I brought the material out to the Hoffman Foundation and got it all dried out and built some shelves for it. And, as time went by I used it for my dissertation but I still needed more material and to get it I turned to Ottley Coulter, whom I had met some months before.

People who seemed to know said that Ottley had the largest collection in America and he seemed like such a nice man that I thought he'd let me use some of his books for my research. Fortunately, I was right and he was very kind to me, helping to dig through boxes of material and helping to fill in many of the gaps I had in my dissertation. I travelled to his home in Lemont Furnace



Vic Boff, lifetime physical culturist and founder of the Oldetime Barbell and Strongman Association, was instrumental in helping the members of the strength community (including Milo Steinborn) understand the value of what was then being called The Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection. He is shown here in 1986 in our main room in Gregory Gym, looking at materials from the George Hackenschmidt Collection with Terry.





This photograph appeared in *The Daily Texan*, the university newspaper, shortly after we arrived in 1983. That fall we moved 385 boxes holding books, magazines, and other archival materials from our personal collection and Ottley Coulter's collection into Gregory Gym. Twenty-five years later—when we opened The Stark Center in 2009—we moved more than 3000 boxes of materials and more than 100 book carts filled with books into the Stark Center's more than 27,500 square feet of space.

valuable I thought it was to maintain it in some way and he told his family he would like to see the collection come to me because he thought I'd find a means to preserve it. And, as you know, we did buy the collection about ten years ago from his family and after having it in Auburn, Alabama for a few years we brought it with us to Austin when I was offered a position on the faculty here at the University of Texas.

It was when I got the position here that Jan and I decided to give our collection to the university because we knew we'd be settling here for the rest of our lives and because the university had such a good reputation for housing various kinds of special collections. We wanted to be sure that if something were to happen to us, the collection would have a home. Anyway, when I told Mr. McLean about our decision to give our collection to UT, he seemed

very pleased; and then a few months later he called me over to his house one day and told me he had decided to give *his* collection to UT and also to supplement his gift and my earlier gift with a donation of money. His idea was that the university would be impressed by the gift of money and would tend to give more of a place of honor to the collection. I agreed with him about this and I made arrangements for him to have a meeting with someone in the office of the university which deals with grants of money, but at that time I didn't realize that he intended to give so much. I thought he meant to give \$5,000 or perhaps \$10,000 but when I asked him he told me he had a gift in mind of \$50,000. And that money was doubled because the university was then celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it had decided to match any gift of this sort dollar for dollar. Thus it was that the Roy J. McLean Fellowship in Sport History was established at a level of \$100,000.

The next chapter in this story took place a few months after I'd been helping an oilman from Midland get started on an exercise program. . . . I knew, of course, that he intended to pay me but we had never discussed money, so one day when he was here at the university going through some tests I told him that I'd prefer to have him make some sort of contribution to the library and not pay me any sort of fee for my help. I explained that I made enough to live on and that the library was very important to me and I also explained that if he made a donation to the McLean Fellowship every dollar of his contribution would be matched. Anyway, he wound up giving \$50,000 too, so that means we have a total of \$200,000 in a fund which will draw interest and keep on providing support for the library long after Jan and I are gone. We can only use the interest on the money the principal can't be touched. . . . so far we haven't used any of [the interest] to make purchases as Jan and I have been able to make the purchases out of our own money. This costs us quite a bit each year, but as we have no children we look at it as someone might look at giving to a worthwhile charity of some sort. . . . and I think of it as an investment in the future of the Iron Game. However, since we think the future of the Game will be better if the past is honored and records of it are maintained, we're happy to do it as long as we have the

extra money to spend.

And, things have worked out here at the university just as Mac said they would, and the university has been very gracious and has responded to the sizable donations we've gotten and has provided us with more space as we've needed it. Vic may have told you but we now have over 4000-square-feet and six rooms but they are pretty well filled. . . . I think the McLean's are going to leave a bequest in their will and Jan and I will leave the bulk of our estate to support the collection because of the fact that as the university brings in more money to the university, the university is more willing to provide more space and extra equipment . . . But we feel that we've made a good, solid start and we know that even if something were to happen to both of us tomorrow the collection would continue and the university would hire someone to go forward with the work that has been begun.

Well, I'd better stop before this letter turns into a book. I do want to say that I've told only two people about your decision to see that your collection comes here to the university. One of the people was the head of my depart-



**British physical culturist and Weider magazine author Charles A. Smith was our first volunteer after we moved our collections to UT. Charles sorted photos and clippings and his knowledge of the game was helpful in many ways. Terry wrote a memorial tribute to Charles in *Iron Game History*, vol. 1, no. 4&5 (March 1991): 12-13.**

ment here at the university, and I told her because I wanted to be sure we could have a particular room when we needed it to house the Steinborn Collection. [Ed Note: In 1986, what was then called *The Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection* was housed in a series of former faculty offices in Gregory Gymnasium.] The only other person was Vic. Jan and I, of course, have talked about little else since our call and she keeps telling me how glad she is that she's been studying German. I'll close by saying again how much your decision means to us and how much it will



**Terry stands alongside his weightlifting coach and graduate school mentor, Roy J. (Mac) McLean, as they examine some of the materials we brought with us to the University of Texas in 1983. Mr. McLean's early financial gift has grown significantly over the years and is one of several endowments that help to support the Stark Center.**

mean to lovers of the strength sports in the future. The only way the collection here can be truly complete is if people such as you help us with our work. There's no way we can find and afford everything there is in the field and it's only through the generosity of people like you that the collection can fulfill its promise. Well, enough flowery stuff.

Sincerely,

Terry

P.S. Tell Henry hello for us and give Tommy a pet. As for the parrot, tell him *Kraft Heil!*