

GARY CLEVELAND: THE TRIUMPHS AND TRAVAILS OF AN IRON GAME OUTLIER

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I've never been successful searching for perfect enlightenment in any type of perfection. I don't think most people have. . . . I'm not sure what I'd do with perfection. I think perfect people would be boring. It's our defects that make our accomplishments admirable and our failures commiserable and our lives interesting.*

—Gary Cleveland

Gary Cleveland not only excelled as a national and international level weightlifter but also contributed subsequently to our understanding of the intrinsic meaning of sports. Unlike most other champions, Cleveland took an introspective view of his lifting and attempted to draw parallels with the human condition. His approach was unique in that it went beyond his achievements and what he observed in gyms and on the weightlifting platform to include fictional aspirations drawn from the best traditions of the sport. Using the legendary Louis Cyr, reputed by some to be the strongest man in history, as his touchstone, Cleveland created a revealing portrait of his own life as an exceptional athlete. But he viewed weightlifting as bereft of essential meaning, serving merely as a parody for human striving and his participation in it. The Gary Cleveland story thus reflects the cultural change America experienced at an important juncture of his life when, frustrated over his inability to achieve the American dream, which seemed so easily obtainable to a youth growing up in the 1950s, he gained a more philosophical outlook, turned to fiction, and confronted his disillusionment with irony and an awareness of the human comedy.

MODEST MIDWEST ORIGINS

Gary Gayln Cleveland, the only child of Darrell and Eunice Cleveland, was born on 18

* Gary Cleveland, "Thoughts from the Editor," *The Avian Movement Advocate* 54 (April 2003): 1.

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January 1942 in Hastings, Nebraska, urban kin to the much smaller Pawnee City, the birthplace of Boyd Epley, founder of the National Strength and Conditioning Association.¹ Hastings is perhaps best known as the town where Kool-Aid was invented in 1927 by Eldwin Perkins, an event celebrated each August with a Kool-Aid Days Festival.² Gary's father was a sales representative for a major appliance-maker and so was frequently traveling. The family moved as well to Omaha first, and then when Gary was ten, to St. Louis. Though nurtured more by his mother, he shared his father's temperament. According to close friend and fellow weightlifter Douglas Stalker, Gary's father was "a quiet man who sat in the living room reading the daily paper" while his mother was "animated and outgoing and . . . knew all about Gary's lifting meets. In fact, I never heard Gary say a word about his father but did hear him say many [things] about his mother."³ "His mother was very religious," Stalker observed, but Gary "hated all this and recoiled from strict religiosity the rest of his life. He was an atheist, I reckon."⁴

DISCOVERING A LIFELONG PASSION

Gary became interested in weight training at age 13 after seeing a television clip of Paul Anderson's impressive performance in Moscow in January 1955. "Given his huge size, maybe Anderson didn't lift that much," Stalker quotes him saying, "but he got more publicity for the sport than anyone in history, I think. After his trip to Russia, he appeared on *What's My Line*, *The George Gobel Show*, *The Today Show*, and others that I don't remember. He's the reason I first heard about weightlifting."⁵ Cleveland's

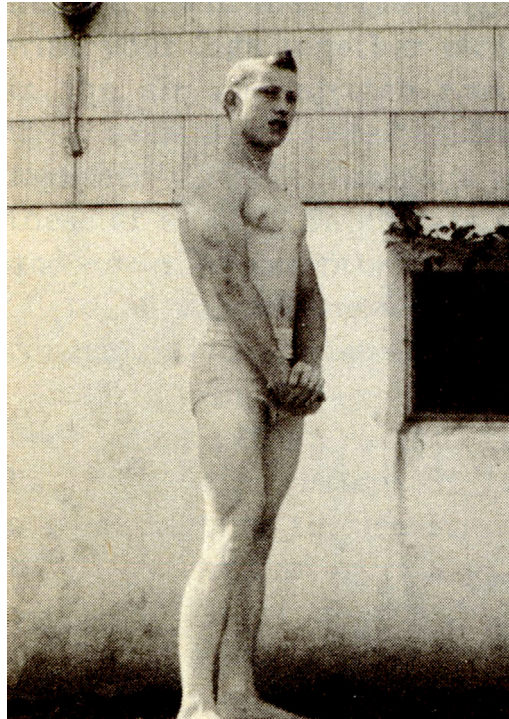
discovery of Anderson was followed by his purchase of the September 1955 issue of *Strength & Health* magazine with “Tarzan” Gordon Scott on the cover. At first, Gary trained at home with a 60-pound barbell set purchased by his parents, doing mostly bodybuilding exercises. Then he joined the St. Louis Boys Club where he was tutored by veteran coach Joe Joseph who taught him the Olympic lifts—the press, snatch, and clean and jerk.

Over the next several years as he trained regularly, Gary’s adolescent growth spurt was complemented by significant gains in muscular strength and size. In 1957, as a 15-year-old high school sophomore, he entered the Self Improvement Contest for Boys conducted by *Strength & Health*. The May 1958 issue, with an impressive physique photo, pronounced Cleveland the winner over hundreds of entrants nationwide. “He registered some wonderful gains in measurement, appearance and strength. His lifting total improved 130 pounds in the course of the three month contest and has continued to go up since.” For his efforts, Cleveland was awarded an engraved trophy and a York

Olympic Standard Barbell.⁶ “I worked my tail off for three months,” he recalled, it “was almost like winning the lottery. . . . I was the happiest kid in the world.”⁷ It was not so much the trophy but the barbell that most pleased Gary, as it allowed him to train at home with his new set, between workouts at the boys club three days a week. In addition to technique coaching from Joseph, his interest and knowledge were supplemented by reading lots of muscle magazines, including *Strength & Health*, *Iron Man*, and *Muscle Power*. Initially, he was able to press 145 pounds, snatch 130 pounds, and clean and jerk 160 pounds, utilizing a routine that emphasized squats and pulls to complement his technique training on the Olympic lifts. At his first competition, the Missouri State Championships on 23 November 1958, he won the lightweight class with lifts of 210 pounds, 200 pounds, and

250 pounds.

Emboldened by his success, Cleveland moved up a weight class and entered a regional meet in Oklahoma City on 7 March 1959 where he pressed 235 pounds, snatched 210 pounds, and clean and jerked 270 pounds, to finish third. But at the Junior National Championships in Cleveland, Ohio, after pressing 240 pounds, and snatching 215 pounds, he failed three times to clean 275 pounds, which put him out of the contest.⁸ Although Gary focused on improving his strength to make gains, he also studied the successful techniques employed by the champions. “I mainly studied the magazines for correct clean and snatch positions and copied them. If Tommy Kono said in the mags this was the correct technique, it was good enough for me. Of course, my coach Joe Joseph helped me a lot and he was one hell of a motivator, but he kind of let us do our own thing.”⁹



When *Strength & Health* magazine announced their 1957 Self-Improvement Contest for Boys, 15-year-old Cleveland entered by submitting this photo, as well as his measurements and lifting accomplishments. His photo was chosen at random to be published in the October 1957 issue along with eleven other “typical” contestants.

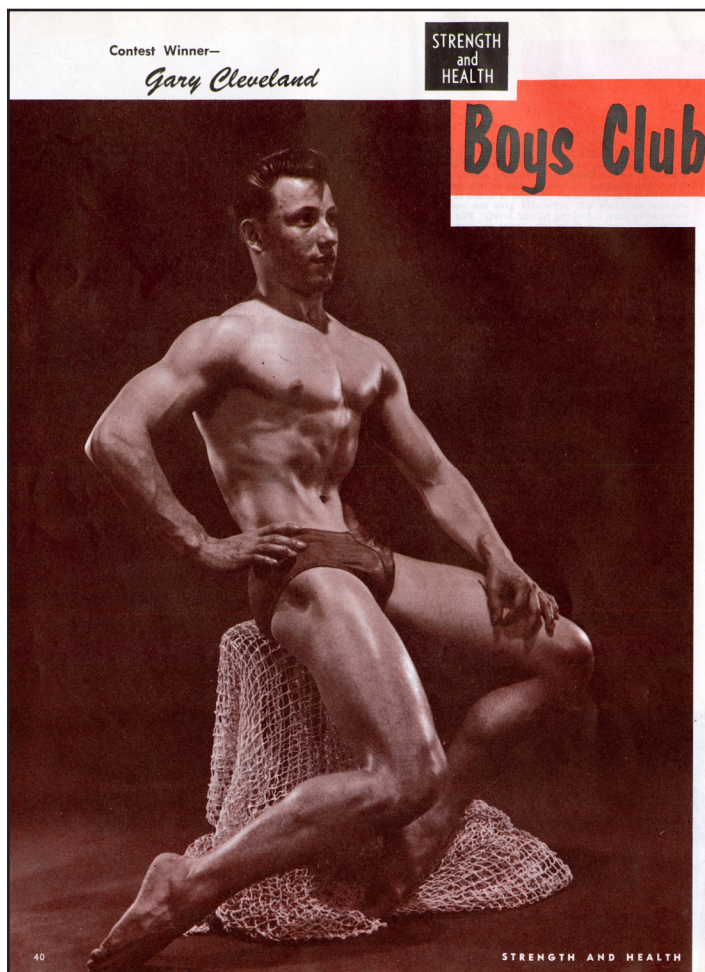
pounds.¹⁰ At age 17, he equaled or surpassed every national teenage record in his class and was regarded as “far and away the best teenage lifter in this country with his fine aggregate of 850 [pounds]” at the 1960 National Championships in Cleveland. Placing second to the legendary Tommy Kono, Cleveland was viewed by Bob Hoffman as a “bright star” who would soon be an international star. “Young Gary won this year’s Junior National championship with 825, and not just three weeks later in the Seniors he showed a 25-pound gain. Several years ago Gary won our Boys Club Self-Improvement [contest] and a prize of a York Olympic Standard Barbell.”¹¹ On the basis of his strong performance at the Senior Nationals, Cleveland was named an alternate for the American team going to the 1960 Olympics in Rome which enabled him to train with the greats of the game at the York Barbell

Club gym in Pennsylvania. It was pretty heady stuff for a teenage kid. "It was great, like dying and going to Heaven," Gary recalled. "I mean I was 18 years old at the time and training with the top lifters in the world. I do not remember learning any particular secrets but it certainly was inspirational."¹² With his lifting in high gear, Cleveland moved up to the light-heavyweight class during the summer of 1960 and at a meet in the Missouri State Prison he negotiated an 870-pound total via lifts of 280-255-335 to take the best lifter trophy. As a St. Louis University freshman in early 1961, he reflected on his progress to *Strength & Health* Editor Bob Hasse, stating that he concentrated on his weak points, namely pulling movements, knowing it was no longer possible to become a champion show-

ing extraordinary ability on one lift and mediocrity on the other two Olympic lifts. Furthermore, though endowed with an abundance of natural strength and athletic ability, his progress was hindered by some serious training challenges. "Since much of his training is done at home," wrote Hasse, "he does not have access to all of the equipment to be found in a gym. On top of that, he usually trains alone."¹³ In succeeding months, Cleveland's advancement was further stymied by a serious bout of pneumonia and his struggle to gain weight to become a full-fledged light-heavyweight.

Fully recovered by the end of 1961, he was able to overcome these obstacles and broke the 900-pound barrier twice within a week, at meets in St. Louis and Dallas, and thereby exceeding his total at the national championships five months earlier by 30 pounds. At the 1962 nationals in Highland Park, Michigan, he went on to total 935 (via lifts of 305, 275, and 355), second only to Kono's 945 pounds. It was his best lifetime total and would have placed him third in the previous year's world championships. It was enough to qualify for the 1962 team going to Budapest.¹⁴

Cleveland's dramatic improvement can be attributed in great part to a new training routine, utilizing a power rack he built for himself, and the revolutionary system of Functional Isometric Contraction, both of which were employed under the tutelage of *Iron Man* Editor Peary Rader. It elicited a new muscular sensation, he told Rader on 25 July 1961. "I am exerting more pressure on the bar with each workout but I wouldn't say that it is entirely from increased strength. . . . I am just learning to strain harder." Isometrics, despite its lack of movement, seemed to activate a form of mental energy which allowed him "to force the muscles to strain harder through intense concentration. For this reason I take my time and concentrate deeply before each strain." Despite the intense summer heat and a new job at Monsanto where he was constantly on his feet, Gary reported that his Olympic lifts were rising rapidly. He felt better, and his physique was also improving. "I have a new spring in my step," he reported to Rader. Most importantly, since his first workout on the new plan less than three months earlier, his training lifts total had jumped nearly 50 pounds.¹⁵ When asked about isometrics in a 1998 interview



This "after" photo of Gary Cleveland announcing his victory in the self improvement contest appeared in the May 1958 issue of *Strength & Health*. Cleveland's win was announced much later than originally planned due to the unexpected death of Harry Paschall in October 1957, as Paschall handled most of the administrative duties for the contest. Over the three months of the contest, Cleveland gained three inches on his chest, one-and-a-quarter inches on his biceps, two-and-a-half inches on his thighs and added 90 pounds to his squat and 55 pounds to his clean and jerk.

with Osmo Kiiha, Cleveland confirmed that he “made tremendous gains from it.” Although he was later talked into substituting a partial movement, isotonic routine when working out in York, it was the “strict isometric program” designed by Rader that “worked for me.”¹⁶

THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM

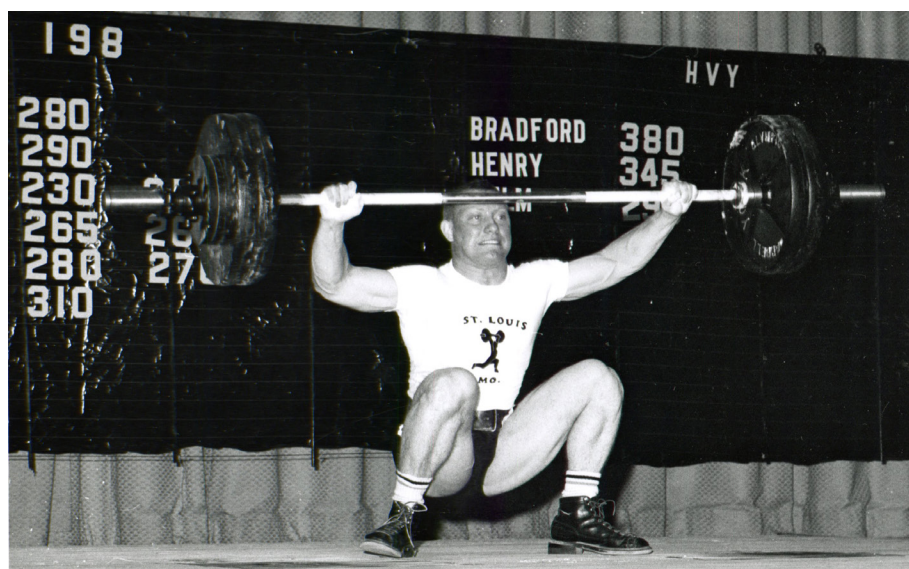
Although Gary finished a disappointing fifth at the Budapest World Championships and garnered fewer team points than his companions, optimism prevailed in the American camp. “He actually performed sensationally,” and proved to be “a very worthy lifter by international standards,” was the view of Bob Hoffman. “He should lift 11 pounds more in each lift very soon, which would put him at the thousand total, and he will press anyone in the world for the Olympic title in 1964.” Hoffman called him “young, strong, enthusiastic,” and “a steady performer who can and will improve considerably in his form.”¹⁷ Peary Rader was no less enthusiastic for the fledgling international star. “Gary’s 964 total gave evidence of his possibilities for the future” and the prospect of a 1,000 total. Rader regarded him as “our hope in the light-heavy-weight class. With rapid improvement in this coming year, he may be hard for anyone to beat next year. Gary has his eyes on the Olympics.”¹⁸ In late 1962, however, his training environment changed abruptly when he moved to Minneapolis and started attending the University of Minnesota. At first, he trained at the garage gym of Mel Hennessy, a well-known powerlifter who went on to bench press a record 560 pounds at 217 bodyweight. “I was always grateful to Mel for letting me workout there for free, but Mel’s gym was set up for powerlifters. So I moved to the garage at the house where I resided. This garage had more room and was better suited for Olympic lifting, but boy was it cold in the winter, an uninsulated building with a small oil heater.”¹⁹ What seems remarkable in retrospect is that he continued to make progress despite such adverse conditions and having to train alone. Although he only made a 930-pound total in May 1963 at the Minnesota State Championships in St. Paul, Cleveland again excelled at the world championships in Stockholm, Sweden, in September with lifts of 325 pounds, 286½ pounds, and 363¾ pounds for a 975¼ pound total. The total was a personal best and 11 pounds more than 1962, but he again finished in fifth place.²⁰

Hopes remained high, however, that Cleveland had not yet reached his potential. Hoffman still believed that he “has the ability to

move up in the world rating, as he is very, very, strong, a lifter we are quite proud of.”²¹ Prior to his trip to Stockholm, fellow lifter, lightweight Tony Garcy asked him when he intended to win the world title. Gary responded that he was “not planning to go all out in any certain year, but rather train hard as possible every year with the hope of making sufficient gains to overtake the leaders.” His optimism was founded partly on his faith in isometrics and isotonics and the need to keep changing his routine to avoid staleness, and not overtrain.²² He also had confidence in his mental powers of concentration. “I used to get more worked up at the World’s,” he later told Osmo Kiiha. “I was able to channel my nervous energy better. I was never a gym lifter, the bigger the contest, the better I lifted.”²³ This was most obvious in his international performances at Budapest and Stockholm. Cleveland also benefited from the tuition scholarship he received from Hoffman for his last two years at the University of Minnesota and the opportunity, as a member of the Olympic team, to spend the summer of 1964 at York Barbell training and working in the shipping department.²⁴

Another likely influence on Cleveland’s progress at this time was the possible use of performance enhancing drugs. Stalker suspects that “Gary tried amphetamines of some kind . . . at the Stockholm world meet or before. He told me they made him so jittery he could not lift well. He stopped using them.” Indeed, Hoffman observed that he was “very nervous” and “shaky” in his Stockholm report.²⁵ Stalker avows that later in life Gary was

certainly anti drugs and would say with emphasis that the winners now only show you who has the best chemist. Well, when I stayed at Gary’s when I was in high school and also prior to my first term at the U, I slept in Gary’s room. On his dresser, there were two prescription pill bottles. Gary had to go to work early and I was sleeping in the room. He came in quietly and took a pill from one or both bottles and swallowed them. I recall one was anavar, one was winstrol. I made sure to note what the label on the pill bottles said; after all, I wanted to copy the ways of the top lifters, which was the only thing we could do back then without CDs, internet, etc.



In the lead-up to the 1961 AAU Senior National Championships, Cleveland suffered a prolonged bout of pneumonia. As a result, he lost bodyweight and training time. Here he misses his third attempt in the snatch, a weight of 275 pounds. Gary posted lifts of 280 press, 265 snatch, and 325 clean and jerk, for an 870-pound total, tying his total from the previous summer.

That is why I made a beeline for York so often. He may not have liked taking pills—he didn't in general, even aspirin for a headache—but I was not dreaming. . . . Anyway, Gary took steroids for a couple of years. Nothing more than the prescribed doses. . . . Anyone who was a top lifter 1965-75 used, frankly. It has become such a black mark that older lifters don't like to bring it up and prefer not to answer questions about the topic. . . . Gary would not have taken steroids if the other top lifters in the world were not taking them, I feel confident in saying. He did not know about them when he did his isometric rack workouts in Mpls; he told me that, saying he didn't know [Bill] March was gaining, using the rack plus steroids. So sometime after that, he may have started and he stopped, of course, when he retired in the fall of '65.²⁶

While it would be difficult to establish a precise time frame of Cleveland's alleged steroid use, a significant elevation in his totals might be suggestive. A dramatic rise took place at the 1963 World Championships in Stockholm when he registered a personal best total of 975¼ pounds,

which exceeded his previous best at Budapest. More importantly, it established a pattern over the remaining ten meets of his weightlifting career when his performance never fell below 950 and on three occasions exceeded 1,000 for an average total of 972.18 pounds or an increase of 43.61 pounds per contest over his previous outings as a light-heavyweight. Similarly, in the wake of adopting his isometrics routine in 1961, his average total for eleven meets was 928.57 or an increase of 59.41 pounds per contest. What can be concluded from these data is that in addition to the influence of Peary Rader in 1961

and Gary's fellow Olympians in York in 1963, the combination of isometrics and probable steroid use helped Cleveland become a weightlifter of international caliber on the verge of winning Olympic and world championships.

The climax to Cleveland's athletic career occurred in 1964 when he had the opportunity to gain sports immortality at the Tokyo Olympics. Hoffman was confident he would at least earn a bronze medal. "He is a very powerful young man and seems to have muscles he has not used yet. I believe he could do it." Those who observed him training in the York gym concurred. "Gary has a case of the dread disease, 'Olympic Fever.' The symptoms are sleepless nights, dreams of missed lifts, and an uncontrollable compulsion to be in the gym lifting weights at all hours of the day and night. The disease leaves only after the last Clean and Jerk in the Olympic Games."²⁷ At Tokyo, Cleveland totaled a personal best of 1,003 pounds via lifts of 336, 297½, and 369½ pounds, which would have been good enough for a silver medal at Budapest in 1962 and a bronze at Stockholm in 1963, but the ante had been steadily rising on the international scene, and Americans were not keeping up. Gary was again relegated to fifth. In an almost pitying tone, Bob Hise in *Lifting News* commented that "Cleveland needs more leg power and a little more International seasoning and he will be right up at the top."²⁸ Hoffman seemed equally perplexed, again noting Cleveland's muscularity. "His back is a larg-

er edition of the famous [Chuck] Vinci back. I could never understand why he did not Snatch more with all that muscle, but this time he did gain." But it was not enough to place.²⁹

Still Cleveland could be consoled that he was rated by the German publication *Athletik* as the sixth best light-heavyweight in the world for 1964, only 25 kilograms from the top spot, and that he seemed set to defend his national championship title at Los Angeles in June 1965.³⁰ But he would need to defeat his nemesis, Tommy Kono, and overcome the threat of up-and-coming powerhouse Joe Puleo of Michigan to be named national champion. Gary served notice that he was prepared to do just that in a meet in St. Paul, Minnesota, on 20 March 1965 when he set a new American total record of 1,015 pounds, which eclipsed Kono's record of 1,014. The three-way showdown in Los Angeles, as described in *Strength & Health*, provided a thrilling climax to Cleveland's aspirations.

Tommy was trailing Cleveland by 20 pounds going into the clean and jerk, but Cleveland only made his first attempt with 360. Tommy also made the 360 on his first attempt, and so easily that it seemed that 380 was possibly within his ability. However, after much pacing, hand-chalking and false starting, the weight proved to be a bit too heavy for [Kono] to fix at the shoulders. After some hard luck in the snatch, explosive Joe Puleo came back to slip past Kono for second position with a magnificent clean and jerk of 385 pounds, 15 better than his previous best.³¹ Peary Rader, impressed by Cleveland's "fine lifting" by defeating Kono and Puleo, believed he "shows great promise and we predict he will be of world class, that is, capable of winning a world title for us in the near future."³²

Cleveland, however, was having second thoughts about his triumph and plans for the future. He "did not feel good" about beating his idol, he told Osmo Kiiha. Kono, though "at the end of his long fabulous career" and "past his time . . . was a constant threat at that contest" and "never out of the race. I was even pulling for him to succeed with the 380 C&J that would have won the contest for him."³³ Gary told Stalker that Kono was "the most dynamic and competitive lifter of that time, maybe ever. He thrived on competition, at his best when pushed." Sadly, it seems that Cleveland, the man whose "career consisted of getting beat repeatedly by Tommy Kono," had finally beaten his adversary, yet found no joy.³⁴

National Champion Cleveland appeared

to be at the top of his game, but he was not tapped for the team that competed at the World Championships in Tehran in September. According to Hoffman, he was "a man who should have been the world champion," but "his future is a bit uncertain." Hoffman claimed Cleveland was not invited because he was in college and "would have lost a full semester of school."³⁵ Gary, however, insists that no one asked him to join the team. "I really don't know why." And he would have gone, "no question about it. I was in excellent condition at the time. Just prior to the world's I totaled 1010 pounds (335-295-380) with only two attempts in each lift."³⁶ Stalker sheds further light on Cleveland's non-participation, noting he never knew the North American Championships on 25 September in Montreal were intended to be a tryout for the World Championships and his assumption was that his Senior Nationals victory would naturally make him a team member. "I recall emphatically saying why didn't you call York, and he had no reply aside from a shrug. Gary was not one to make the first move on things. He waited on others to do that, rarely if ever promoting his own interests by speaking out."³⁷ In all likelihood he would have placed second in the Games, based on his earlier best total of 1,015, thereby surpassing the 1,013 pounds of Russia's Alexander Kidyaev and the 980 pounds of Poland's Jerzi Kaczkowski and enabling him to earn his only world championship medal.

A NEW BEGINNING

After missing the World Championships, Cleveland finished college and decided to pursue a different life course. He recollected in 1999 that "at some point in 1965 or '66 at a meet at the St. Paul YMCA, it struck me that the magic was gone. I wasn't attracted to this activity anymore."³⁸ Furthermore, the road ahead to become an international champion seemed steep and insurmountable. "I had been in two World Championships and one Olympic Games and got fifth place each time," he explains. "I decided that was about as good as I was going to do, and it was not worth carrying on, so I just retired."³⁹ He told Stalker that "four more years at the top level was a lifetime" and he needed to look ahead to his future beyond weightlifting when he was no longer chained to a barbell and could do the things other people do. His decision in June 1966 to join the Peace Corps would enable him to chart a different course, he reasoned. Stalker claimed Gary "did not join the Peace Corps out of some do-gooder drive,"

though he was interested in helping those less fortunate. “He joined to see the world and do some good [and] to get away on an adventure.”⁴⁰ His assignment in Ecuador, to his great dismay, consisted of giving weightlifting exhibitions and clinics in nearly every town in the country. “I had a boss that wanted to get publicity for the Peace Corps, so he put me in the physical education program.”⁴¹ What was new and different for Cleveland, who had previously not dated, was falling for, and then marrying Santos Alejandra Cervantes in September 1967.⁴² When his tour was up and Gary and his wife returned to Minnesota two years later, Cleveland discovered that future employers did not “care that much if you were a lifting champion.”⁴³ After holding several positions, Cleveland became a systems analyst in the Information Technology Department for Hennepin County, Minnesota, in 1973. He worked there until he retired in 2000, repairing computers and problem-solving breakdowns in the county’s infrastructure.⁴⁴

As for his personal life, he and Santos remained married until 1983 and had one child, Maria, born in 1968. After his divorce, Cleveland lived alone for the most part and “kept his cards close to his chest,” according to Stalker. He remained interested in lifting and attended the two world meets held in Columbus, Ohio (1970), and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (1978). He also became a collector of books and magazines, including *World Weightlifting*, the official organ of the IWF.⁴⁵ He satisfied his craving for physical activity and companionship by becoming an avid bike rider and hiker, often accompanied by Susan Elsner who worked in a cubicle on the same floor as Gary at the county office. Theirs was a “complicated relationship” that lasted 17 years. “At times we were romantically involved,” Susan reported, “and at other times just friends. He wanted to get married, and that’s not something I ever wanted to do, but we had a lot of things in common and enjoyed each other’s company.”⁴⁶

As evidence of his quirky sense of humor, YouTube currently contains two videos, both made in 1998, that help demonstrate the ironic lens through which Gary viewed the world. The first is a five-and-a-half-minute video titled “1998 Tettegouche Winter Olympics—Gary Cleveland Reading Long Day’s Journey Into Abs.”⁴⁷ The video shows Cleveland, sitting in a cabin with several unidentified friends, reading a Xerox copy of an article from the *New Yorker* about a man who begins a fitness program; there is much laughter from his appreciative

audience as this is being read. The second, and even more whimsical video is titled “1998 Tettegouche Winter Olympics—Gary Cleveland—Individual Snow Dance.” It shows Gary dressed in black pants and shirt, holding a cane and top hat in front of a cabin, singing and dancing to two Irving Berlin songs, “Top Hat, White Tie, and Tails,” and “Puttin’ on the Ritz.”⁴⁸ The Tettegouche Olympics were, of course, just a figment of Gary’s vivid imagination, as Tettegouche is a state park in Minnesota, and the videos reveal just a group of friends fooling around at a cabin. However, the reading and the dance were not without *some* meaning as Gary had begun to look critically at the world in which he lived, and he soon found a new way in which to share his increasingly ironic world view.

THE WISDOM OF DIVINE AVIAN FLUID MOVEMENT

In the same year as his legendary snow dance, Gary wrote a lengthy treatise titled *First Principles of the Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement*, which he described as “an ‘interpretation’ of the ‘lost teachings of Louis Cyr.’”⁴⁹ It is impossible to know what inspired him to write this satire/reminiscence connected to Cyr, but a plethora of publications by Ben Weider and others in mid-century focused on the Quebec strongman, and likely caught his attention.⁵⁰ That Cyr was “strong as hell” and relied on no one but himself, no doubt appealed to the loner aspects of Cleveland’s psyche just as Cyr’s strength inspired his ideas of human possibility.

According to Stalker, Gary had begun fooling around with writing before he began on the book. “Gary wanted to do more than lifting,” Stalker explained, and was a devoted Bob Dylan fan, but he was “. . . not cut out for music, or the visual arts as he once confessed to me when he looked at art, he had no reaction. . . . He read a good deal of fiction for a systems analyst guy, and he started writing . . . science fiction-esque stories. I don’t know if he submitted any for publication, but he doesn’t have any published fiction out there.”⁵¹

As was the case when James Joyce published *Ulysses*, not all readers of Cleveland’s stream-of-consciousness memoir understood what they were reading. On one level, *The Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement* is a compilation of Cleveland’s life experiences, philosophical musings, lifting lore, and his struggle to understand the human condition. Although some consider it nothing more than a rambling, hodge-podge of disconnected thoughts, Gary



A 363 ¾-pound clean and jerk on the way to a 975 ¼-pound total, a personal record that was good enough for 5th place at the 1963 World Championships in Stockholm, Sweden.

actually applied a pedagogic framework to the treatise. His aim was to impart “first principles” of wisdom contrived and imparted from “the lost teachings of Louis Cyr.” His ironic, humorous imagination permeated every page of the work, resulting in an admixture of fact and fiction. This is reflected at the outset by both the whimsical title and the publisher’s name of “Kleanand Press,” conveniently derived from a Twin Cities dry cleaning and laundry establishment founded in 1987.⁵² No less fanciful is Gary’s story of the origins of his account, which he traces back to 1959 when confronted with the perennial question, “Who am I?” He discovered “the most effective, the most efficient self help system the world has ever known—Louis Cyr’s Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement. That he did not publicize it at age 17 in a society dominated by Cold War fads, the Edsel, Sputnik, Fabian, and the “pleasures of pizza” is not surprising. He assumed there would be no interest in his system of physical, mental, and emotional development. Eventually, after allegedly withdrawing into solitude and privately practicing his system for several decades, Cleveland noticed a surge of interest in physical culture and self-fulfillment with the emergence of giant health clubs, self-help sections in bookstores, and celebrity offerings. Wrote Cleveland, “Public attention has been captured by a variety of these ‘therapeutic systems’ that range from Transcendental Meditation, The Zen of Running, Primal Scream Therapy, to Aerobic Yoga for Couples. Very few offer anything worthwhile—most are useless

quackery.”⁵³ Now as he advanced in age, this “invasion of the charlatans” stirred him, much like “the old soldier that gets out the uniform and flag when peril approaches.” Deciding to give it another try, in 1995 he joined the fictitious, yet according to Gary, “vivacious Brenda Di Carlata” to form the Louis Cyr Institute of Divine Avian Fluid Movement as a refuge for seekers of “genuine and lasting self-improvement.”⁵⁴

Cleveland’s book consisted of 12 chapters, each with three sections: a narrative of his personal efforts to rediscover Cyr’s

teachings, an explanation of each of Cyr’s twelve golden actions leading to an “actualization of mind, body, and spirit,” and a description of a Cyr strongman exercise to enhance one’s physical prowess. While this sounds like a logical approach, internally the chapters were disjointed and often hard to follow. The first chapter, for example, wanders from a description of Cyr’s strongman reputation, to the emergence of a sect of Cyrites in Iraq, to a disquisition on dynamic visualization through soothing thoughts and sounds, to “taking a leashed dog for a walk” as an exercise to increase strength and sooth one’s spirits.⁵⁵

In Chapter Two Cleveland draws on his experience as a “circus strongman” in Ecuador where he discovered an “old” biography of Louis Cyr and decided he was destined to investigate his life. In the process, he explained, he would apply Cyr’s understanding of dynamic visualization to exploring one’s “real self.” For Cyr, “with mind calmed, he looked within, analyzed and shattered his subjective reality.” He contemplated the four interrogative pronouns: Who? (Who are you?), What? (What are you?), Why (Why are you what you are?), and How? (How did you become the who and what you are?) arguing that answering these questions would lead to “a future of unlimited potential.” Gary’s prescription for a strongman exercise involved progressive resistance from bending paper clips to coat hangers to curling irons to horseshoes in order to build strength “the way of Louis Cyr.”⁵⁶

In Chapter Three, Cleveland recounts

that after leaving Ecuador, he worked as a business analyst for nine months then made his way to Montreal to uncover more about Cyr's life and ideas. On the Greyhound bus he encountered a traveler named "Lucky" and a hotelier named Leo who acquainted him with the French Canadian tradition of square dancing. It was practiced by Cyr who once "not only out-danced everyone, but had the creativity to redefine the entire Square World." This interaction led to Gary's Action Number 3 entitled "Affirmations of Being" that Cyr revealed after encountering a bystander at a stone-lifting competition in 1885. In response to the question of whether he was the world's strongest man, Cyr responded, "Madame, your challenge is most formidable, your intentions are most pure, your question is direct, without ambiguity and the three poisons—anger, greed and ignorance—do not contaminate your motives. Yet, when I look upward, beyond the mundane world, up where the birds fly, I can find nothing to question."⁵⁷ It was an epiphany for Cyr who had

"collapsed, discouraged and exhausted from his struggle for self-improvement, lying motionless, his gaze fixed on the serene clear blue sky above. 'Suddenly,' to quote his own words, 'I noticed three birds soaring across my field of vision. I noticed their effortless flight, the naturalness of their movement. In that ephemeral moment I experienced the intuitive flash, the peak experience missed by most mortals. With my perceptions shattered, thereafter, my life was never the same.' Louis would later label this vision "*The Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement*," the final product of a ten-year quest. In that moment, for Louis, the affirmation of his being was no longer in question."⁵⁸

In light of Cyr's revelation, the Cartesian slogan of "Cogito ergo sum" [I think, therefore I am.] had special meaning for Cleveland. Thus motivated, he recommended using automobile inner tubes to simulate the strongman exercise of breaking chains with chest inhalations.⁵⁹

In succeeding chapters, Gary delves into "dynamic conceptual processing" as a means of charting unfamiliar territory for Cyr follow-

ers who should "imagine, visualize, approach, adjust," enabling them to "live with cyclical change" and to "actualize our ideal self." He also begins introducing what may be fictional characters that help him move his narrative. In the course of attaining this understanding, Cleveland revealed his personal experience of curing the business writing flaws in the corporate office where he worked; his Montreal lodging encounters with Franklin, "an aging Mississippi gentleman type;" and Heather, "an exquisite thirty something" who was "stunning without adornment." With the former, Gary could relate from having grown up "in the steamy border city of St. Louis" and "exposure to Southern speech as a boy" and to the latter from her knowledge not only of square dancing, but Cyr's musical training on the cello, likely gained by Gary from Ben Weider's biography. For strongman exercises he recommended, "instead of boulders," lifting one end of a couch or bed, and in lieu of lifting a blacksmith's anvil by the horn, he suggested hoisting an unpleasant person by their shirt or coat near the throat.⁶⁰

In Chapter Six, devoted to "critical evaluation of the self," Cleveland regretted the relative onset of inactivity of his own aging self, brought on by office work during the day and studying Cyr's parchments at night. "My physical condition, once that of a trained circus performer, was declining from long hours hunched over a desk with little rest and lack of vigorous physical activity. The exhaustive nights followed by days of office work left me with headaches, progressing eventually to a mental state resembling a prolonged Bensedrine jag." To replicate a strongman exercise, Cleveland suggested improvising a human bridge with a member of the family or a friend stepping lightly on a plank resting on one's chest.⁶¹

Wild leaps of imagination often show up in the last half of Gary's book. In Chapter Seven, for example, he explains to Heather that when he worked with a small circus in Ecuador, he performed a strongman act "laying on a bed of nails while someone smashes a sledge hammer into a concrete slab that's on my chest." He also relates an incident in 1902 when Cyr was in such great demand as a lecturer and performer of square dancing that it rivaled classical ballet, and he was named lifetime artistic consultant for the Bolshoi Ballet. Little wonder that the emergence of skeptics to Cyr's teachings necessitated a golden action entitled "Recognizing Signs of Danger" where Gary cites the example of how Galileo's doubts about existing

beliefs about the universe led to logical conclusions about the nature of truth. "Truth is a very elusive concept," he contended, and the advent of computers presented an additional challenge for those attempting to extract wisdom from knowledge. "Nowhere in this continuum . . . does the word 'Truth' arise." His strongman exercise prescribes somersaults as a substitute for those who cannot duplicate Eugen Sandow's performance of back flips while holding a 40-pound dumbbell in each hand.⁶²

Chapter Eight pertains to living a sane life by having "realistic expectations," illustrated by his inability to whistle *What'd I Say* anymore or his preference for opening light doors over heavier ones. Louis Cyr, however, could hardly be held to the same realistic expectations as normal people. When a Princeton philosophy professor named Clark M. Breaver, at the behest of his students, visited Cyr as he was sitting in his garden contemplating the movements of sparrows, he called the strongman a "fake and a fraud" for claiming to be the world's strongest man, at which point the professor

thrust his hand toward Louis Cyr's neck, Louis reached for the professor's frock coat collar and lifted him with one hand above his head. Then, holding the screaming professor in that position, Louis climbed the ladder of the water tower. . . . When they reached the top of the tower, Louis Cyr held the professor outward, at arm's length, and said, "Professor Breaver, perhaps, as you say, I am not the world's strongest man, perhaps I am a very weak man, so weak that my arm will grow weary and drop you. Would you now care to hear my ideas on the fluid motion of birds?"⁶³

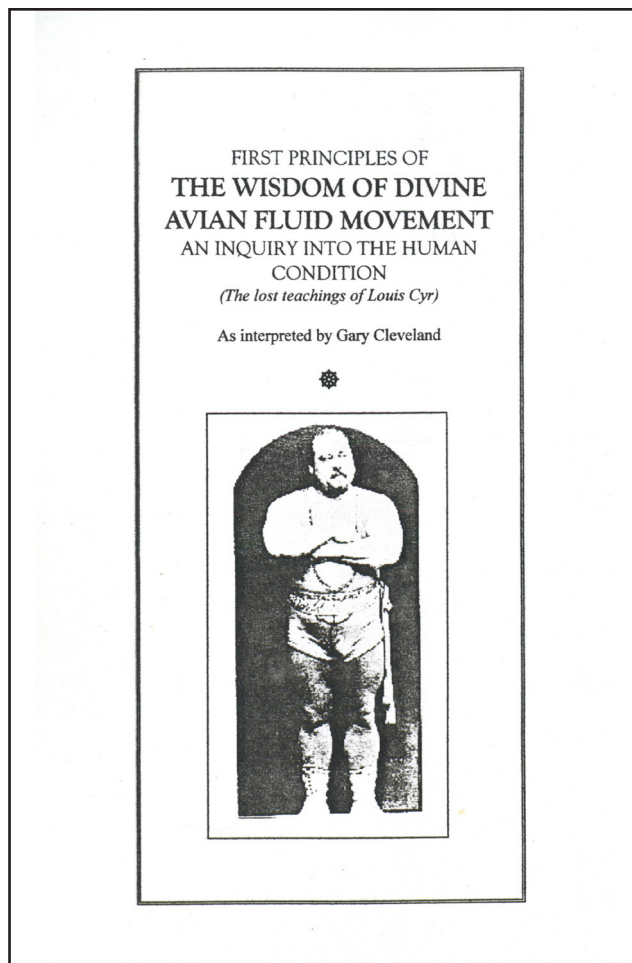
Gary obviously had an obsession with strength, and it hardly mattered if he exaggerated the feats of Cyr to illustrate its importance. Also, to illustrate a point, he could always minimize as well as maximize. He did so in his strongman exercise by suggesting that one could always take pride in breaking pencils in lieu of breaking coins, or humor your friends by telling them, "Yes, I break coins. Give me a quarter and I'll give you back two dimes and a nickel."⁶⁴

"Mental time lapse" was the theme of

Chapter Nine where Gary endows his hero with the gift of time warp, which enabled Cyr through fluid movement to move "the body's limbs in a slow, graceful manner while mentally visualizing the movement as a single continuous flow." In this focused mental state, "Cyr could actually see into the future." He was thus able to predict in 1895 the accession of Calvin Coolidge to the American presidency in 1923. Cleveland was convinced that through self-discipline and a healthy lifestyle "we can control our own future—and that's true *fortune telling*." His strongman exercise was inspired by witnessing Joe Greenstein, "the Mighty Atom," bite through a 20-penny nail at the York Barbell Company. Gary recommended that nail-biting enthusiasts should practice by biting strands of uncooked spaghetti twice a week.⁶⁵

As a fan of Bob Dylan, also a Minnesota native, Cleveland heads Chapter Ten with an epigraph from him: "Let me forget about today until tomorrow." Its golden action of "Adding Final Touches through Avian Observation" added little to information conveyed in the previous chapter, except for a discussion of Cyr's foreseeing the development of computers and the emergence of Mick Jagger a half century later. The tenth strongman exercise is more believable, aside from the fact that Cyr never performed it. Yet Gary devotes nearly two pages to the history and description of the bent press, encouraging readers to "get out on that lifting platform and nail a few bent presses the next time you're at the spa."⁶⁶

In his final chapters, Cleveland imparts some gems of wisdom to seekers of self-improvement. True Divine Avian Fluid Movement, he assures readers, "originates in the mind" and "results in the free liberated movement of mind." He argues that the universe is slightly out of balance. "If it were not there would be no movement, no life. It is from that slight imbalance—that dynamic state—that all creativity emerges. . . . It is only through the interaction of change and stability (the dynamic and the static) that anything worthwhile can be attained." Especially disturbing to Cyr were the self-indulgent lyrics of modern songs "which showcase the composer's narcissistic juvenile state of emotional and intellectual development." As suggested in golden action eleven, Avian Fluidity in Everyday Life, "having freed our mind and body of the limitations of mundane practices, having elevated our awareness beyond superficial stimuli, we develop more discriminating tastes and require higher quality from



The cover to Cleveland's *First Principles of The Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement, An Inquiry into the Human Condition* in which he interpreted the "lost teachings" of Louis Cyr. It was published in 1998 by Kleanand Press.

our composers." But the strongman exercise, as demonstrated by those who stayed at Mrs. MacElroy's boarding house in south Philadelphia during idle times between bookings, could have hardly been more mundane—"their ability to open ketchup bottles." To develop health and strength, Gary suggested lid removal challenges of ordinary jars of mayonnaise, ketchup, and pickles.⁶⁷

Chapter Twelve, ironically titled "Going Beyond Everyday Life—The Completed Evolution of Self," is even more mundane with a lengthy description of Cleveland's return to St. Louis and reminiscences of everyday events of his youth. Despite Cyr's parting advice that one should "look beneath the surface" and also "look above the surface" to "understand the essence of all things" and "find serenity in what you are," the accompanying strongman exercise brings to mind frustration for most people rather than serenity. What Gary describes as

"developing hand-eye coordination and unsurpassed mental concentration" is the challenging feat of "opening a new compact disk in less than five minutes without damage to the case and *without using knives or razor blades.*" Only with tongue in cheek could he conclude that "all good physical courses should hold the most difficult exercise for last. I can't open a CD wrapper, Louis Cyr couldn't, and neither can you. Good luck with your self-improvement."⁶⁸

It was a feeble whimper rather than a robust climax which fell far short of resolving or clarifying the many confusing issues that permeated the previous hundred pages of Cleveland's tale. "It is a satire," Stalker contends, "a spoof of self improvement books and tapes and lectures" and also "improve your business hucksters, MBAs, today's song lyrics, and more. . . . There were no end of self improvement books in Borders [bookstores] in the 90s," he rightly reckons. "Even in the 80s and before. Wayne Dyer made his money from them. Gary just took their lingo, added some philosophy terms (being is a good one), some New Age crap, some business babble, and he was on his way. Satire is comedy with a point, and here the point is the emptiness of all these self help books, courses, and lectures."⁶⁹ Beyond that, it was a revelation of Cleveland's psyche and emotional state at this stage of life. As Susan Elsner reflects, "Gary was very calm, thoughtful, unassuming, and low-spoken. I knew before we spent time together he got seriously into Zen meditation for quite some time. And I think that was sort of his transition after his divorce. Seeking some deeper spiritual meaning to existence he frequented the Zen Meditation Center."⁷⁰

Part of Gary's problem was that he was trying to combine fact, fiction and the present with the past. He was also trying to reconcile his generational status, having been born in 1942, and thus missed the baby boomers, born four years later who induced a cultural turn in the 1960s and beyond. He tried to connect with that generation intellectually by developing an affinity for Bob Dylan music, Peter Sellers films, and the creative writing genius of David Foster Wallace. But he never adopted the accoutrements of the hippie culture such a long hair, psychedelic dress, or living in a commune, and unlike some of the drug-using guys at York in the 1960s, Gary never smoked pot or drank alcohol.⁷¹

What followed the publication of Gary's book was a period of depression according to Stalker. It seemed that life ceased to have any intrinsic meaning as Gertrude Stein once wrote

about Oakland, California, “There’s no there there,” or as Ike Berger told Gary at an Oldetime Barbell and Strongman Association banquet, “Do you know what all this means? It means absolutely nothing.” So disenchanted was Gary at this point that he told his friend, Stalker, “Getting poems published in a journal is something you may take for granted, but I would rather be able to do that (any journal) than be a former weightlifting champion. I would rather be ABLE to teach philosophy (even if I hated doing it) than to have lifted heavy weights.”⁷² It was in this frame of mind that he composed his book, which Stalker speculates was an attempt to “do something far from lifting.”⁷³ He undoubtedly also did it to amuse himself.

THE AVIAN MOVEMENT ADVOCATE

Gary’s next literary effort was *The Avian Movement Advocate*, Gary’s serial journal that first appeared in September 1998 and continued for 59 issues until January 2004. Susan Elsner recalls that the newsletter concept was inspired by workouts with members of his work-related exercise group in 1987 and 1988.

During the first few summers we were together and doing all of these car trips and biking and camping. At the end of two of those summers he wrote a little travelogue on the biking, all the places we went. Yeah. It’s something he started doing to entertain himself, and he’d pick it up and take it farther when the next piece of inspiration came along. I think it was something he just kind of discovered and enjoyed, and when the opportunity inspired him, he would get involved a little more deeply into the whole writing thing. He didn’t call them newsletters. It was something like the biking season was over, so it was just a narrative about the places we had been and the things that had happened with a creative spin to it.

They were personal and somewhat romantic where Gary would share “a lot of beautiful things over time,” Susan concluded.⁷⁴ Given his taciturn manner, Cleveland was often prone to express himself indirectly through writing rather than person-to-person.

The Avian Movement Advocate was meant as a follow-up to his book, which Gary admits was not initially intended for weightlifters. *First Principles* was conceived “in a moment when I felt a rising up of an old passion that ebbs and flows throughout the years, a passion for weightlifting and the personalities of its history.” He traces this passion back to his fascination with Charles Atlas ads, the early strength he showed to his sixth-grade peers, the gains made from his sixty-pound dumbbell set, and the lifting camaraderie he enjoyed at the St. Louis Boys Club. “Nothing since has ever motivated me more than the desire to become a great weightlifting champion once did,” he wrote in 1998. Although Gary’s hopes never materialized, he regarded himself as “extremely lucky. I got to train with five or six of the greatest weightlifters in the history of the sport.”⁷⁵

This lingering passion led not only to Gary’s book and the Cyr Institute, but to new activities such as the aforementioned Tettegouche Olympics that required “a blending of speed, strength, woodsmanship, and grace” with opportunities to practice Avian Fluid movements. Like his contemporary, the journalist Hunter S. Thompson, Cleveland’s fertile imagination continued to create new fictional institutions and characters to populate his writings. He created the Eugen Sandow Conservatory of Reverse Engineering to resolve technology issues. “We don’t mind dumb questions, just don’t ask hard ones.” As he explained in the first issue, the impetus for publishing the journal really came from a decision to invest the cash surplus from the sale of his book to either it or a new lamp for his living room.⁷⁶

It was this sort of low-key humor, along with combining reality with unreality within a weightlifting context, that permeates most of the newsletters and accounts for their ongoing appeal. In the second issue, Cleveland reveals his penchant for attractive females, often as a diversion, with his reference (and picture) of actress Meg Ryan who he imagines wants his phone number. The next three references are weightlifting related, the first a letter from long-time weightlifter Rex Monahan who read Gary’s “magnum opus with considerable interest. You have such a facile pen that I can’t tell where the tongue-in-cheek parts end and the other parts begin. I must say it caused me to laugh a lot and think a lot.” Gary responded by saying that Monahan’s “inability to tell the difference between truth and fantasy in ‘First Principles’ really strikes a chord with me. That’s exactly

what my therapist claims is *my* problem (though I can't tell if he means it)." Cleveland's next comments relate directly to weightlifting—the sport has been ill-served by the elimination of the press, the adoption of kilograms for US meets, and the unflattering wearing of Spandex lifting garb. The sport was well-served, however, by Isaac Berger who he recognized as “a perfected lifting machine” whose achievements come not from “structured programs or organized training centers controlled by bureaucrats comfortable with planning documents and position papers,” but from “the spirit and struggle of the single individual.”⁷⁷ It was a formula for success that once characterized Gary's own lifting.

BRENDA AND PRYCKER

Cleveland's fascination with beautiful women continues in issue three with his one-time fantasy that building a big upper body would lead to an opportunity to meet Brigitte Bardot, or that performance-enhancing drugs would appeal to *Living Out Loud* actress Holly Hunter.⁷⁸ But much more long-lasting was his infatuation with the fictional and “Vivacious Brenda Di Carlata” who he allegedly met when she was teaching line-dancing at a senior adult activities class. “We formed a friendship through stories about the 1950's dances that I had seen performed on *American Bandstand*, such as The Madison and The Stroll. I succeeded in rekindling her interest in the Avian Movement by convincing her that those dances had their roots in Square Dance,” wrote Cleveland. Gary introduces readers to Brenda and her “hapless” boyfriend Prycker M. Graves, an alleged Sandow Conservatory employee, on a trip to some biking trails in southeast Minnesota. They took Brenda's “late model luxury car” with Gary in the back seat and Prycker in the front, “she driving and he riding, thus stretching the abil-



Douglas Stalker (left) and Gary Cleveland in the latter's garage gym during a training session in August 1965. Stalker was in Minneapolis attending school orientation. These two men remained friends and exchanged correspondence until Gary passed in 2004.

ities of both.” What transpired during their cycling journey through the green hills, river valleys, and quaint villages of Minnesota's “Sleepy Hollow” is uncertain, but Gary seems distracted by Prycker's chimerical scheme to use Brenda's money to convert a Lanesboro laundromat into “an exact replica of Sandow's boyhood home” and his plans for an International Membership Conference for Cyr followers in Monaco.⁷⁹

Brenda and Prycker became recurring characters in sub-

sequent newsletters and Cleveland never told readers they were figments of his imagination, so he could use them to convey ideas that were often philosophical and frequently motivating. Brenda's commitment to the Institute seemed to be wavering, he wrote in 1999, much like his own previous commitment to weightlifting. “She's always believed that everyone could reach their dream,” he reported. “Maybe the ‘get rich and play hard’ approach isn't for everyone any more than the ‘get spiritual and contemplate goodness’ approach.” Gary advised Brenda to adhere to Cyr principles, that “life is movement,” and if she keeps training, her enthusiasm would eventually return. When we reach the point that we can only lift 50 pounds, he told his readers, lift it with the same resolve and grace you once lifted three hundred. “Unlike Brenda,” he explained, “I don't believe each of us have unbounded potential, but we owe it to ourselves to revel in what we have.”⁸⁰

These words coincided with the arrival of an article sent to Cleveland by Tommy Kono entitled “Life Struggles.” According to the article, “Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If we were to go through our life without any obstacles, we would be crippled. We would not be as strong as what we could have been. Give every opportunity a chance, leave no room for regrets.”⁸¹ Although Cleveland still harbored regrets over relinquishing his

once-in-a-lifetime chance to be a great weightlifting champion, Kono's message had an exhilarating impact. "A nice note is always uplifting," he told readers, and "when it's from the greatest lifter of all time it's positively exhilarating. . . . Since our daily challenges are unavoidable, anyway, it's comforting to realize that there's an ultimate benefit, a balance between effort and fulfillment."⁸²

Brenda's importance grew in the pages of Cleveland's newsletter as he began regularly including a sultry picture of her relaxing with a glass of wine in a Parisian café.⁸³ It would be easy to conclude that she was a pseudonym for his cycling partner Susan Elsner, but Gary told Joe Puleo that "It wasn't anybody. [I] cut her picture out of a magazine and just came up with a name." Prycer Graves' image and name were also fake.⁸⁴ But Brenda's sex appeal and Prycer's asinine adventures often had the effect of drawing unwary readers to more profound philosophical content.

Interspersed among such physical culture notables as Bernarr Macfadden, John Grimek, and Clarence Johnson, Cleveland injects his own world view, *a la* Louis Cyr, that "it's not our proficiencies but dealing with our imperfection that gives us character." To British philosopher Bertrand Russell, he attributes the observation that "the passion with which one holds a belief is inversely proportional to the strength of the evidence supporting that belief." Nor was he swayed by trendy language. "I've never used the words 'hubba hubba,' 'coolcat,' 'groovy,' or 'far-out' in my life and I'm sure not going to start embarrassing myself now by using 'exciting' to describe the mundane."⁸⁵ In physical culture, Gary ascribed to the solid values of Louis Cyr who "rejected the fluff of the corporate Slim Jim studios" and "tanning booths of the capitol growth fitness club where I train. I don't see many trainees who have ever been within shouting distance of a draft horse (much less tried to hold back four). Try to get some of the younger members interested in lifting those stones down by Shingle Creek? You might as well ask squirrels to recite mathematical proofs in French," he wrote disdainfully. To escape the throes of modernism and "regain a positive outlook," he would "run down to my basement and knock off a few sets of stiff legged deadlifts and some Zottman curls. Life can't get much better."⁸⁶ What permeates Gary's newsletters is a feeling of nostalgia and a need to justify and recapture an activity whose meaning is in jeopardy.

Central to Cleveland's weightlifting remembrances was Bob Hoffman, so-called Father of American Weightlifting. He was mesmerized by Bob's "unique characteristics that enabled him to be both admired and derided, sometimes by the same people at the same time." But few could gainsay that, but for Hoffman's single-minded efforts, along with uncommonly talented athletes, American weightlifting could have reached such prominence in the 1940s and 1950s. Also impactful was Tommy Kono, often called America's greatest weightlifter. Gary reckons that most weightlifters have seen "one lift that was so impressive that it became our standard, a lift that evoked images of Hellenic heroes more than Atlas' sand in the face." This "AHA" moment occurred for Gary at age sixteen when he attended the first of three weightlifting meets between the USA and the USSR in Chicago on 12 May 1958. Ironically, it was a failed lift, and the first time Kono was ever beaten in international competition. Tommy had to clean and jerk a world record 380 pounds to make up a 28-pound deficit to his opponent, Fyodor Bogdanovsky. After Kono failed his second attempt miserably, Cleveland said he

. . . wasn't expecting much. But Kono could captivate an audience and he pulled us in again—and again the tension grew. Standing over the bar, his face had the look of extreme concentration as he must have been waiting for that exact moment that would tell him 'Now.' Finally he bent over, grasped the bar and began the pull from the floor. I recall a strained groin with the second pull. That's where I expected the lift would end but it didn't—he was diving under it. Then I thought he'll never pull it in but there it was on his shoulders. I was certain he'd never stand up, but he began, very slowly and with extreme effort, to rise and at some point near the top we all realized he had just cleaned 380—and that's the most impressive lift I've ever seen.⁸⁷

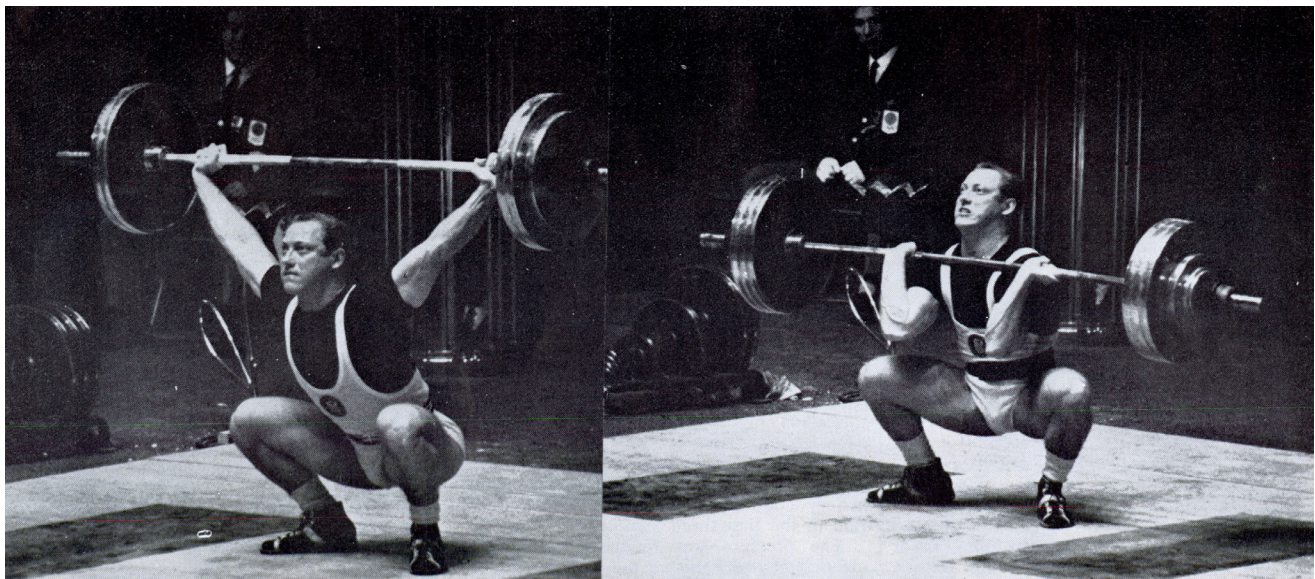
Also etched deep in Gary's memory, though sight unseen, were Joe DePietro's 231½-pound press at 122 bodyweight and Hyman Schaffer's bent press of 200 and snatch of 200 while

weighing only 132 pounds during weightlifting's golden age in the 1940s.⁸⁸

Such meaningful recollections set the stage for Gary to venture further into the realm of fiction with Brenda Di Carlata and Prycer Graves. To help him “fill white space,” Brenda agreed to write an occasional article. But he warned readers not to expect too much because “her vivaciousness doesn't always transfer to the written page as well as it does to other settings—if you get my drift,” a definite double entendre. Brenda's first article was entitled “A Visit to the Coiffeur,” which integrated *Avian Fluid Movement* into her local hair-dressing shop. Gary made the mistake of telling her that Denis Reno had recently inquired about her. “Now she thinks she's being recruited by a ‘real’ (her word) newsletter and pictures herself behind one of those big executive desks like they all have in the plush mahogany paneled editorial offices of *Denis Reno's Weightlifter's Newsletter*. There are stars in her eyes and little else on her mind.” Gary was tempted to let her go to West Newton to “discover what real pressure is.”⁸⁹ Instead, he commissioned two more articles from her, “Royal References in Weightlifting,” about the clean & jerk, the so-called “King of Lifts,” and “An Experiment that Went Bad” about an attempt by one of Cyr's followers in 1915 to merge square dance forms with Cuban Mambo rhythms. “The point is,” Di Carlata asserts, “we all must keep experimenting. Life is reaching and reaching is the natural manifestation of our creative gift.”⁹⁰ Jealous over “how quickly Brenda has moved

up in the organization,” Prycer wanted to submit an article about efficiency. His contribution, “I Don't Have Time to Shower,” was puzzling to Gary “because Graves has time for six hours of showering a day if he wanted as he has *no* demands on his time.”⁹¹ It seemed remarkable that a simple daily task could be analyzed in such technical terms and related to weight training.

Cleveland claimed to be so gratified by the attention his newsletter was receiving that he contemplated making it “an organic being” where he would bring it directly to readers. “I'll come and visit each of you, maybe stay a week or two. We can talk a little about what kind of mileage your car is getting, clean out your basement . . . maybe mow the lawn a couple times. We'll watch *The Antiques RoadShow* and some *Seinfeld* reruns.”⁹² Most meaningful was a letter that warranted the title of “Tommy Kono Endorses Brenda Di Carlata,” where Kono described her as “something else. We need to see more of her.” Gary seized the opportunity for another double entendre, saying “I've tried for years to see more of Brenda but it got me nowhere.”⁹³ As Brenda's articles and picture continued to appear, Dale Harder of Castro Valley, California, was moved to ask, “Does Brenda Di Carlata really exist?” Gary's response linked Brenda to the aphorism of seventeenth century philosopher Rene Descartes, “I think, therefore I exist.” When queried about her existence, Gary's alter ego provided five physical culture scenarios. “If you doubt my existence just look around. I'm there when the last light goes out at the gym and the pain of an



Peary Rader described Gary Cleveland as “a continually improving lifter” when he published these images in *Iron Man Lifting News* in January 1965. Although Cleveland displayed “fine style” while lifting at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, he finished in 5th place in the 181-pound weight class. He is snatching 297 pounds on the left, and attempting to clean 380 pounds on the right.

old injury is throbbing or when you've just discovered some new damage. . . . And when your body becomes so exhausted that you no longer feel the sting of the torn calluses you yearn for a warm whirlpool—I'll be. . . ." Gary then explained, "*I cut her off right there. Her voice was getting a little sultry and I didn't want to experience any thoughts that might cause awkward situations later.*"⁹⁴ Eventually, after allegedly receiving an anonymous letter linking Brenda to a convicted Chicago felon named Vinnie Di Carlata, Gary had enough. He reminded readers that "this is supposed to be an inspirational newsletter focusing on the ideals of Golden Age weightlifting and wholesome life-choices. It's called *The Avian Movement Advocate*, not the *Brenda Di Carlata Advocate*." In a clever ruse to divert attention away from his fantasy figures, Cleveland suspected the letter's author was Joe Puleo with whom he explained he had disagreements over the writings of Bertrand Russell which occasionally led to an exchange of profanities.⁹⁵

Mixing the real Joe Puleo with the fantasy of Brenda and his other characters was part of Gary's genius and was an indication of his fascination with introspection and nostalgia. His favorite subjects and personalities invariably related to the springtime of his youth. "Eventually, we reach an age when we look back, a little wiser, and recognize greatness is not decided solely by the amount lifted nor the measurement of one's biceps, but by the influence one had on the sport during their time. By that criterion, Dave Sheppard qualified" as having been "the greatest weightlifter that never won a world title."⁹⁶ For Cleveland, the 1950s were special, "1955 was my first year of weight training, and each workout was stronger than the one before it." It was also the year that Paul Anderson "was opening the consciousness of the public to the existence of the sport," and Tommy Kono was becoming "the weightlifter's weightlifter." The August 1955 *Strength & Health* cover of him "represented what every weightlifter wanted to become—the best in the world, master of the game." What Gary calls "the 1955-56 Camelot" culminated in the United States Olympic victory in Melbourne with Anderson, Vinci, Berger, Kono, Anderson, Sheppard, and the George brothers as medalists. "Thanks to all those guys, for the inspiration and memories. If you had to go live back in time, 1955 might not be too bad."⁹⁷

STRENGTH

Cleveland was not the only person to

write for the *Advocate*. More realistic and relevant to the newsletter's nostalgic purpose was a memoir by Joe Puleo of fellow "Michigander" Stan Stanczyk and reviews of bygone muscle magazines. Gary also reprinted materials in older lifting magazines such as the September 1922 advertisement in *Strength*, which included a pitch for a "'newly developed' garter for people with crooked legs. It makes trousers hang straight if legs bend either in or out. It also holds the socks up and the shirt down."⁹⁸ He also included an ad about hemorrhoid treatments at Dr. Galatian's sanitarium in Baltimore that suggested before "being cut" that readers try their *wonderful* treatment. Gary noted that "It's seldom that you see the words 'piles' and 'wonderful' used in proximity."⁹⁹

In examining the older lifting magazines, Gary guards against concluding that "those were innocent times and people were simpler back then." He believed men like Bernarr McFadden and Earle Liederman were "astute businessmen who were perceptive enough to accumulate millions of dollars back when a million dollars was a million dollars. More importantly, they transmitted a teaching that continues to evolve."¹⁰⁰ These reflections led him to ponder the trajectory of his own literary contribution from that tradition. "*The Wisdom of Divine Fluid Movement*," he admitted, was a nebulous phrase. "That's how I wanted it to be. I wanted it to have an early 1900s huckster's sound—a little tacky, but also a little intriguing." He believed its meaning was a matter of individual choice. "Like me, you've probably been developing your version over the years. For some it's performing the snatch and clean and jerk. For others it's the bench press or yoga, running, or a round of golf. For some it's sitting absolutely motionless in a meditative pose. For many of us it keeps changing over time." In some respects, this statement sounds like Buddhism, a philosophy in which he dabbled at length. No one can define the right course of action or inaction for any individual. "You have to go out and get it yourself," Gary advised. He likens enlightenment to the momentary "sweet sensation" when exerting a muscle or breathing deeply to "taking a drink of cold water on a hot summer day." As for his ill-defined Avian Fluid Movement, he chose to "just call it 'life.'"¹⁰¹

Strength remained central to the *Advocate*, however and can be seen in his extensive coverage of weightlifters and weightlifting competitions and passion for Louis Cyr. He also featured bodybuilders, especially if they were

Seasons Greetings from the Avian Movement Advocate staff



Brenda Di Carlata



Gary Cleveland



Our Research & Statistics staff



Prycer M. Graves



Stu Drummond

Gary and the fictional staff that starred in, and helped create, the *Avian Movement Advocate* appeared in the December 2002 issue. Though the sultry Brenda Di Carlata did not exist in the same sense as Gary, his descriptions of her, and articles attributed to her, were so elaborate and consistent that more than one reader missed the joke.

extraordinarily strong. Marvin Eder of New York, who was featured in the “Self Improvement Heroes” section in a 1949 issue of *Strength & Health*, was both strong and well-built. Gary illustrates it with several photos of his phenomenal physique and an observation that around 1953 at 197-pounds bodyweight, Eder bench pressed 510 pounds, did a straight-arm pullover with 210 pounds, 80 wide-grip pull-ups, and a parallel bar dip of 435 pounds with two men attached.¹⁰² On his “Ripped” website, iron game author Clarence Bass calls Eder “Pound-for-Pound the Strongest Man of His Time.” Unfortunately, owing to the ongoing feud between Bob Hoffman and Joe Weider and the prevailing amateur code of his day, Eder was never able to compete in the Olympics or for the Mr. America title.¹⁰³

Although strength training had become mainstream over the previous several decades, it surprised Gary to come across those who clung to old muscle-binding myths. “Younger people ignore or laugh off those references. But we who grew up when coaches and physical educators ridiculed the activity that we had made our passion still react by trying to set the record straight. Sometimes it’s not worth the trouble.”¹⁰⁴ Of the many strength-inducing innovations over the past century, isometrics held a special fascination for Cleveland. But this fad was muddled by the fact that its proponents “weren’t honest with us.” Results made by isometric training were “supplemented with privately ingested steroids.” Contrary to the benefits once derived from his own use of isometrics, he concluded that “the wool was pulled over our eyes. In the end, isometric training failed to produce a single world champion.” On the other hand, “the isometric craze led to mass mar-

keting of the power rack which made possible a whole variety of exercises and became a standard piece of equipment.”¹⁰⁵ To allay his uncertainties about the efficacy of steroids vis-à-vis isometrics, Gary analyzed the increase in world records for all weight classes, decade-by-decade, from the 1920s to the 1980s to determine whether there was ever a “surge” after the introduction of steroids in the 1960s. Although he found that there was a notable increase in totals for all classes for all decades, it was more gradual than sudden. He concluded that there were many other variables during this period that also contributed to this progression, including innovations in technique, equipment, training methods, nutrition, organizational support, and rules. Whatever the reason, he concluded there was “no surge in the overall pace of world records coinciding with the steroid revolution.”¹⁰⁶ Gary later wrote that he was skeptical that “pure strength” could ever be attained and measured, taking the view of David Willoughby that “there is no feat in weightlifting, gymnastics or any other field of muscular effort that can be performed by ‘pure strength.’” Skill, speed, and specialized training were present to some degree in all acts of bodily strength.¹⁰⁷

SLOWING DOWN

A frequent theme for Gary and his generation was their commitment to lifting weights as the best way to build strength. “Back then we all wanted everyone to know our secret—the transformational power of weight training. Well, now they know. And muscles are admired.” But this satisfaction brought additional grounds for skepticism. “Some appear as we age,” he believed. “Of all the body’s systems, we never concerned ourselves with any except the mus-

cular system. Now we've discovered the cardiovascular, circulatory, digestive, eliminative, immune, nervous and neurological systems."¹⁰⁸ As Gary reached age 60, growing old became an increased concern. "In our prime the purpose of workouts was to get stronger and bigger muscles. . . . But, "we aren't working-out for the same reasons anymore. . . . I still do strength training. But I'm not getting stronger. In fact, I'm becoming imperceptibly weaker." Upon the advice of his cardiologist, his exercising was reduced to "physical therapy activities like walking a treadmill, riding a stationary bicycle, and waving 5 pound dumbbells. I didn't like the turn of events but during that period a wonderful thing happened. I started feeling great. All my joint pain and muscle stiffness vanished and I felt years

younger." Declaring that his strength days were over, he modified his goals to suit an old-timer's training philosophy. One should therefore not worry if the weight on the bar feels too light, but worry a lot if your bodyweight feels too heavy. It was also important to distinguish between muscle and performance exercises and to vary them frequently. And finally he strongly recommends aerobic exercises of various kinds to "spread the abuse."¹⁰⁹

Gary wrote about his own loss of strength and aging in the *Advocate*, sharing several dreams he had had about his inability to lift weights he had mastered in the past. In one dream that really bothered him he was unable to snatch even 95 pounds. When he woke up, he knew that he could still snatch 95 pounds,

"At least I was pretty sure I could. However I didn't think I'd ever know for sure because I wouldn't go into a gym where other people are watching, load a bar to 95 pounds and snatch it. I've suffered countless humiliations in my life but publicly snatching 95 pounds stretched my own capacity for self-defacement." To resolve his self-doubts, Gary "took the bull by the horns," drove to his gym at "the bustling hour of 6 PM," walked into "the crowded weight room . . . grabbed a 100 pound solid barbell, carried it over to a vacant spot and whipped it over my head a few times." On leaving, however, "some guy paid me a well-meaning but deeply wounding compliment. 'You should try 110, I think you could make it.'" Gary reflected that "aging weightlifters deserve better. We deserve dreams of meadows, rippling brooks, cumulus clouds, and leaping trout—not nightmares that drive us to secretly psych-up for 95 pounds."¹¹⁰

The line between truth and fiction became somewhat blurred for Gary and his fans in 2001 when he reported in December 2001 that Brenda Di Carlata was threatening to resign unless she received a raise to offset a recent adjustment in federal interest rates. "Since her photo is the main reason anyone reads these newsletters, there would be a flood of cancellations following her departure." Not able to handle rejection well, Gary hoped she would stay. "I know that she revels in the glamor at [the] heart of the Brooklyn Center's renowned Newsletter District and suspect she'll find some way to stay. I also suspect her inheri-



Cleveland missing his first attempt at 280 pounds in the press at the 1961 AAU Senior National Championships, held at the Santa Monica (CA) Civic Auditorium. Gary would successfully lift 280 on his second attempt, and missed at 290 on his third. His 870 pound total at the meet was good enough for a third-place finish behind Tommy Kono and Louis Riecke.

tance annuity is doing better than she lets-on.” Contrariwise, Cleveland hoped Prycer would leave, but “he said he would stay-on indefinitely. Since he’s paid nothing I have little leverage with him.” Gary’s uncertainty was eventually dispelled when a portrait of Brenda by an unidentified artist appeared on his doorstep. “It’s the splitting image of Brenda and even I, who know nothing about art, know that you can’t draw splitting images of fictitious people.” This discovery was treated as “an act of providence” and served as the occasion to celebrate a “Brenda Di Carlata Week” with festivities that included a trip to the Panda Gardens Buffet.¹¹¹

In June 2002, the line between truth and fiction became even murkier when Gary claimed that Brenda and Prycer had accompanied him to the annual meeting of the Association of Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen in Saddle Brook, New Jersey. Gary actually had an old friend impersonate Prycer that evening, as his face was much less well known. Gary reportedly even arranged an *Avian Movement Advocate* hospitality suite. But reported later that owing to confusing directions, no one showed up except “a teen-age couple that wandered in by mistake wanting to get married,” thinking the Avian Movement was affiliated with Reverend Sun Myung Moon. The trio were able to observe iron game celebrities, however, including Denis Reno and *Strength Journal* editor Bill Clark, who “arrived in their private limos with their entourages, barking orders at their overworked staffs. I took the opportunity to remind Brenda (who occasionally thinks about jumping ship) that all is not flowers and candy in the mahogany-paneled office suites of those two newsletter giants.”¹¹²

Later that summer, Cleveland again called Brenda to task for nearly causing a riot. The problem, he explained, was that they were all now so famous that “Despite our sullied reputation, the tourists keep coming. . . . During our staff meeting last Thursday,” Gary wrote in the *Advocate*, “I heard a terrible ruckus from the street below. I ran over to the window where Brenda Di Carlata was sitting, painting her toenails. Outside was one of those English style open-air sightseeing buses filled with Portuguese tourists. They had all crowded on the top level, pointing at our window, wildly shouting, ‘Olhar! Olhar! E Brenda.’ When Prycer walked over to the window their shout changed to an angry, ‘Prycer no! No Prycer!—Brenda! Brenda!’ Gary did not appreciate this interruption “by a crowd of lustful tourists” and told Brenda if



Gary Cleveland and Tommy Kono catch up at an annual meeting of the Association of Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen.

she has to paint her nails, she should “use the employee’s lounge, not the front window and reminded her that we are not running a Panamanian taberna here.” While most readers understood that Brenda lived only in Gary’s imagination, letters printed in the *Advocate* from supposed readers with names like “Kickin’ Billy Kendrick” sustained the fiction. In the August 2002 “Correspondence” column, Kendrick reportedly wrote, “she has changed the course of my existence.”¹¹³

In September 2002, Cleveland began looking more deeply into the fictional Prycer’s role and used him to launch several new philosophical ideas. Prycer, “in a rare moment of mental clarity,” wrote Cleveland, “concluded there is a greater audience for de-motivational speaking than motivational speaking.” He reportedly delivered several lectures that revealed three important principles: that what you are trying to accomplish is probably impossible, that it is difficult at best, and you are likely not qualified to do it. Achievement was vastly overrated. As Prycer explained it, “I see mediocrity being lauded as greatness. What some see as miracles, I see merely as the ordinary unfolding of nature’s processes.” So profound were Prycer’s declarations, Gary claimed, his listeners assumed he held advanced degrees. As Gary explained this revelatory moment, “By the end of his remarks, he had the audience in an emotional frenzy and he moved quickly to sell his book, *Don’t Try*. It comes with those icons of mediocrity, a laminated ‘Mission Statement’ and a ‘Quality Partnership’ checklist. I’ve seen gifted architects leave Prycer’s lectures vowing

to resign their positions and become telemarketers. I've seen talented surgeons become financial planners, and plumbers become psychic counselors—all through the influence of our own Prycer M. Graves."¹¹⁴

This turn to a less aspirational and more saturnine view of the world was confusing to many.¹¹⁵ No doubt most newsletter readers, easily seduced by her charm and beauty, were confused that he had abandoned the optimistic outlook of Brenda for Prycer's defeatist approach.¹¹⁶ One follower, reportedly in Milledgeville, Georgia, however, saw merit in this twisted turn of events:

It does really work, the idea of meeting lower expectations and goals. I've successfully pressed it on family members and colleagues and have used it on myself. Also, I have seen too many cases of people, especially students, who have set their goals too high, and when they can't meet them, they crash and burn—usually an all or nothing proposition. It's sorta like starting too high with your opening attempt and then bombing out in lifting. He really does have a point, and much though I'd like to read *Don't Try*, I won't request a copy.¹¹⁷

BOWING OUT

Cleveland's somber tone continued into the early months of 2003, exacerbated by the deaths of numerous iron game notables and perhaps his own ill health. On 26 January, Soviet Olympic high jumper Valery Brumel who was a gold medalist in the 1964 games and an early advocate of weight training for athletes died in a Moscow hospital. In early February, Rudy Sablo, known for his no nonsense attitude as perennial director of the USWF rules committee, died at his New York City home. John Askem, a prolific author of strength-related books, died on 16 March. And Mel Siff, author of the massive *Supertraining* and other authoritative works on weight training and exercise science, died of a heart attack in Johannesburg, South Africa.¹¹⁸ Most impactful to Gary, however, was the death of Steve May, whom he met in the University of Minneapolis weight room in 1963. They were close friends for forty years and shared many sporting interests until a back injury began to

dog him. "Over the years his interests gravitated toward more back friendly activities and he mastered so many. I've seen him juggle like a professional and he became one of the better table tennis league players in Minnesota in the 1970s. The past three years were mentally and physically tough as he tried to recover from a form of cancer with very low survival prospects." Still, he was well enough to impersonate Prycer Graves at the 2002 AOBS meeting. Doug Stalker remembers him as "a quiet and amused guy" who worked for the post office, then after getting cancer he became depressed and killed himself on 23 January at age 59 by inhaling carbon monoxide from his car.¹¹⁹

Although Cleveland showed no sign of grieving for his long-time friend, it soon became obvious from the less frequent publication of the newsletter that he was less vigorous. Then in the May/June issue of 2003 he revealed that he was recovering from surgery and beginning a long period of chemo and radiation therapy.¹²⁰ Henceforth he confined his physical exertions to such simple activities as landscaping, gardening, tree trimming, and carpentry which provided a sense of continued self-worth. Less fulfilling were mental tasks such as composing articles that were often nebulous and needing revision. He admitted that his "current medical treatments have filled me with a great void characterized by indolence and apathy and there can be as much as a twenty-minute time-lapse between me making a decision to do something and actually doing it. Since I firmly believe that you are what you do—not what you believe, think, or advocate—this current condition has led to self esteem issues as well as a messy house, dirty dishes, and uncertainty about the laundry situation."¹²¹

It was not until the December issue of that same year that Gary explained to readers he had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer and in April 2003 had undergone "reasonably successful," surgery. Despite the surgery, the cancer had spread and was no longer treatable.¹²² Susan Elsner confirms that Gary had gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) of the lower esophagus but refused to have it checked out. "The whole time I knew him he had indigestion a lot, and it was pretty bad at times."¹²³ Early treatment could possibly have saved him, but as Stalker explains, "he didn't like to see doctors" and "didn't even like to take aspirin." As a palliative, Gary was taking aloe vera juice. It sounded like Barrett's esophageal disorder to Stalker "which leads to cancer of the esophagus

which he eventually got."¹²⁴ Cleveland died on 4 January 2004, a fortnight prior to his 62nd birthday.

Any assessment of Cleveland's life must first consider his rapid rise to eminence during the latter stages of weightlifting's golden age. By dint of his natural ability and sheer determination he became one of the strongest men in America. That he never became an Olympic and world champion may be attributed to his overreliance on strength at the expense of other athletic qualities that contribute to making a great champion. Gary was a great presser, according to Doug Stalker, but his "downfall was the quick lifts [snatch and clean & jerk] . . . He needed more speed, and like most American lifters was not flexible enough in the shoulders and wrist and hips."¹²⁵ In this respect he resembled his lifelong idol, Tommy Kono, who was well served by his focus on the press which accounted for thirteen of his eighteen world record lifts and contributed to his five world record totals from August 1952 to June 1961.¹²⁶ Yet Gary, unlike Tommy, could never press enough to break a world record or provide enough lead against international opponents to offset his subsequent deficit on the quick lifts.

What motivated Cleveland to give up his lifelong dream of becoming an Olympic champion, seemingly on a whim, remains a mystery, but the decision would nag him for the rest of his life. Bereft of close family relationships and relegated to an occupation that appears to have lacked personal fulfillment, he reverted to an activity whereby he could relive those thrilling days of yesteryear through nostalgia and fantasy. Although his outpouring of thoughts ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime, there was always a thought-provoking message about the relevance of trivial, real-life encounters to human existence, often within a weightlifting context. While many readers looked on Gary's ramblings as "crazy" or just plain "folly," they legitimately served a broader function of invoking joy for thousands of iron game enthusiasts through his sense of humor, his understanding of the irony of life, his insights, and his personal sharing of his own youthful memories. For Cleveland the *Advocate* provided a catharsis and closure for his otherwise inexplicable flirtations with greatness. Alas, it is "the curse of human existence that we will always prize most that which we didn't get."¹²⁷

NOTES

1. "Gary Gaylyn Cleveland," Obituaries, *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), 8 January 2004, found at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/startribune/obituary.aspx?n=gary-gaylyn-cleveland&pid=1779779&fhid=9267>; and "Boyd Epley, 2003 Collegiate Inductee," *USA Strength and Conditioning Coaches Hall of Fame*, found at usastrengthcoacheshf.com.
2. See "Kool-Aid Days" at kool-aiddays.com.
3. Stalker email to the author, 31 March 2021.
4. Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
5. Cleveland email to Stalker, 7 June 1999.
6. "Boys Club," *Strength & Health* (October 1957): 40; and "Boys Club," *Strength & Health* (May 1958): 40-41. Gary's gains were made despite primitive facilities at the St. Louis Boys Club, which he described as "a basic lifting gym—two Olympic bars, a squat rack and a platform. The best Olympic bar was made in the 1930s. The other was newer but bent so we used it for squats. The platform was made from 2x8 planks, and there were usually deep holes where the plates hit. We made the squat racks from 8x8 timbers." "Thoughts from the Editor," *The Avian Movement Advocate* (hereafter *AMA*) 22 (June 2000): 1.
7. "Gary Cleveland," *The Iron Master* 25 (April 1998): 6.
8. See contest results in *Strength & Health* (April 1959): 11; *Strength & Health* (August 1959): 11; and *Strength & Health* (September 1959): 14.
9. "Gary Cleveland," 7-8. During the summer of 1959, Gary worked in a factory loading trucks and boxcars for a company that made foam rubber and industrial binding glue, and the following summer he got a job installing air conditioners. In both cases he found the hard physical labor in the summer heat oppressive. "Speculation," *AMA* 45 (June 2002): 2.
10. *Strength & Health* 28 (April 1960): 26. For Gary the state championships was one of the most memorable experiences of his lifting career because of Bill Clark, who later edited the *U.S. All-Round Weightlifting Association Strength Journal*. "Clark is one of my heroes for many reasons. One reason goes way back to 1959 when he, completely new to the sport of Weightlifting, hosted one of the most spectacular contests I ever competed in. It was the Missouri State AAU Championships (usually not a terribly exciting event), but somehow, Bill managed to promote it and to produce a crowd of spectators that over-flowed the Columbia Missouri Armory, the most enthusiastic crowd I ever lifted for. The platform was an elevated stage trimmed with bunting, just like the world championships. Accustomed to competing in contests held under a basketball hoop, I thought I had been promoted to weightlifting's major leagues. Every attempt was a new personal record that night." "Publication Survey," *AMA* 55 (May/June 2003): 3-4.
11. "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 28 (September 1960): 27; and Bob Hoffman, "Senior Nationals & Olympic Tryouts Report," *Strength & Health* 28 (October 1960): 12.
12. "Gary Cleveland," 9.
13. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 29 (March 1961): 11; and Bob Hasse, "Taking a Workout with Gary Cleveland," *Strength & Health* 29 (June 1961): 16-17.
14. Bob Hoffman, "1962 Senior National A.A.U. Championships," *Strength & Health* 30 (September 1962): 16.
15. Cleveland letters to Perry Rader, 25 July 1961, 10 August 1961, 22 August 1961, and 25 August 1961, *Iron Man*-Peary Rader Collection, H.J. Lutchter Stark Center.
16. "Gary Cleveland," 8-9.
17. Bob Hoffman, "Budapest World Championships," *Strength & Health* 31 (January 1963): 60.
18. "World Championships—Greatest Ever," *Lifting News*

- 9 (November 1962): 7; and "Grunt & Groan," *Strength & Health* (September 1962): 4.
19. "Gary Cleveland," 10.
20. "Weight Lifting News," *Strength & Health* 31 (June 1963): 12.
21. Bob Hoffman, "World Championships Action Report," *Strength & Health* 32 (February 1964): 17.
22. John Terpak, "Lifters Corner," *Strength & Health* 32 (August 1964): 50.
23. "Gary Cleveland," 10.
24. Magazine editors Gord Venables and Tommy Suggs quipped that Cleveland, along with Joe Puleo and Isaac Berger, spent more time "talking about what weights they are going to lift and making bets than they do working. That crooked label on your Energol bottle probably resulted when Cleveland told Puleo that another unknown middle-weight recently totaled 990." *Strength & Health* 32 (November 1964): 61.
25. Bob Hoffman, "World Championships Action Report," *Strength & Health* 32 (February 1964): 16-17.
26. Stalker email to the author, 28 March 2021.
27. Bob Hoffman, "Olympic Weightlifting Predictions," *Strength & Health* 32 (October 1964): 58; and "The Iron Grapevine," *Strength & Health* 32 (October 1964): 59-60.
28. Bob Hise, "It Happened At The Olympics," *Iron Man Lifting News* 11, no. 4 (January 1965): 22.
29. Bob Hoffman, "Olympic Games Action Report," *Strength & Health* 33 (February 1965): 18.
30. "Weightlifting News," *Strength & Health* 33 (August 1965): 10.
31. "1965 Sr. Nationals and Mr. America Results," *Strength & Health* 33 (August 1965), Extra.
32. Peary Rader, "The Sr. Nationals—As I Saw Them," *Lifting News* 11, no. 9 (August 1965): 18.
33. "Gary Cleveland," 11.
34. Cleveland email to Stalker, 18 November 1998, Stalker Papers, and Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
35. Bob Hoffman, "Senior Nationals." *Strength & Health* 33 (June 1965): 76.
36. "Gary Cleveland," 13. Stalker, however, questions Gary's credibility concerning his 1010 total. "Sort of out of spite, he put up that over 1000 total on the day he should have been lifting in Teheran, and most likely in his garage gym." Stalker email to the author, 8 April 2021.
37. Stalker email to the author, 8 April 2021.
38. Cleveland email to Stalker, 24 February 1999.
39. "Gary Cleveland," 13.
40. Stalker email to the author, 8 April 2021.
41. "Gary Cleveland," 14.
42. They married in Dade County, Florida, and divorced in 1983, see <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/10150610:1081>.
43. Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
44. "Gary Cleveland," 14. Gary later recalled that for ten years he worked at a job that "caused me to be called in the middle of the night and go downtown to fix failed computer systems. They had to be fixed by 6:30 in the morning to be ready for the start of the business day at 7:00. Often I had no clue what the problem was and always feared that this would be the time when I couldn't figure it out." "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 44 (May 2002): 2.
45. Stalker email to the author, 21 April 2021.
46. Interview with Susan Elsner, 11 July 2021, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
47. "1998 Tettegouche Winter Olympics—Gary Cleveland Reading Long Day's Journey Into Abs," uploaded 6 January 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOo7hzkGu-vY&t=37s>; Frank Gannon, "Long Day's Journey Into Abs," *The New Yorker*, 17 March 1997.
48. "1998 Tettegouche Winter Olympics—Gary Cleveland-Individual Snow Dance," uploaded 6 January 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxO7a2aafLM&t=7s>.
49. "Gary Gaylyn Cleveland."
50. Martin Franklin, *Louis Cyr, L'homme le plus fort du monde* (Montreal: Your Physique Publishing Co., 1946); George F. Jowett, *The Strongest Man That Ever Lived* (Montreal: Your Physique Publishing Co., 1949); Ben Weider, *Louis Cyr, L'homme le plus fort du monde* (Montreal: Editions Beauchemin, 1958); Ben Weider, *Les hommes forts du Quebec* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1973); Ben Weider, *The Strongest Man in History Louis Cyr, "Amazing Canadian"* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1976); Ben Weider, *Louis Cyr, Memoires de l'homme le plus fort du monde* (Montreal: Edition du Club Quebec Loisirs, 1982); and Ben Weider, *Louis Cyr, L'homme le plus fort du monde* (Outremont: Les Editions Quebecor, 1993).
51. Stalker email to the author, 21 April 2021.
52. Gary Cleveland, *First Principles of The Wisdom of Divine Avian Fluid Movement, An Inquiry into the Human Condition (The lost teachings of Louis Cyr)* (Minneapolis: Kleanand Press, 1998) and "Clean 'n' Press," <https://cleannpress.com/our-story/>.
53. *First Principles*, 9.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 12-20.
56. *Ibid.*, 21-27.
57. *Ibid.*, 28-35.
58. *Ibid.*, 33-34.
59. *Ibid.*, 35.
60. *Ibid.*, 36-53. See also Weider, *The Strongest Man*, 17-18 and 21-22.
61. *First Principles*, 54-61.
62. *Ibid.*, 62-69.
63. *Ibid.*, 72-73.
64. *Ibid.*, 75-76.
65. *Ibid.*, 77-81.
66. *Ibid.*, 82-93.
67. *Ibid.*, 94-102.
68. *Ibid.*, 103-115.
69. Stalker email to the author, 21 May 2021.
70. Interview with Elsner.
71. Stalker email to the author, 29 March 2021.
72. Cleveland emails to Stalker, 21 December 1998, and 7 January 1999.
73. Stalker email to the author, 15 May 2021.
74. Interview with Elsner.
75. "Preface—on a serious note," *AMA* 1 (September 1998): 1.
76. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 1 (September 1998): 5.
77. "Focus on the Louis Cyr Golden Actions," *AMA* 2 (October 1998), 3-5; and Virginia Culver, "Oilman Monahan Had Many Talents," *The Denver Post*, 25 January 2009.
78. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 3 (November 1998): 4; and "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 6 (February 1999): 3.
79. See "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 3 (November 1998): 4; "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 4 (December 1998): 1-2; and "Brenda Di Carlata at a Crossroads," *AMA* 5 (January 1999): 1-2.
80. Brenda Di Carlata at a Crossroads."
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*
83. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 3 (November 1998): 4; "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 4 (December 1998): 1-2; and "Brenda Di Carlata at a Crossroads;" and "Life Struggles," *AMA* 5 (January 1999): 1-3.
84. Interview with Joe Puleo, 22 May 2021, Fort Myers,

Florida.

85. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 6 (February 1999): 3.
86. "To Purchase or To Join, A Trainee's Dilemma," *AMA* 10 (June 1999): 3.
87. Cleveland comments on "Letters from Readers," *AMA* 8 (April 1999): 5; and "The Many Bob Hoffmans," *AMA* 11 (July 1999): 4.
88. "Passings," *AMA* 9 (May 1999): 3.
89. "Thoughts from the editor," *AMA* 10 (June 1999): 1.
90. "Royal References in Weightlifting," *AMA* 11 (July 1999): 7; and "An Experiment That Went Bad," *AMA* 12 (August 1999): 4.
91. Prycer M. Graves, "I Don't Have Time to Shower," *AMA* 13 (September 1999): 1. Gary later noted that "we were besieged by subscription cancellations following publication of that article by Prycer." "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 46 (July 2002): 1.
92. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 16 (December 1999): 1.
93. "Correspondence," *AMA* 13 (September 1999): 3.
94. "More Correspondence," *AMA* 18 (February 2000): 5-6. It would be tempting to ascribe Cleveland's occasional sexual innuendos to loneliness and sexual deprivations, but Joe Puleo did not detect anything from his conversations with Gary that he was "sexually frustrated." His focus on Di Carlata was more "a comical exercise. He had a great sense of humor. I don't think there was any sexual connotation in it. I think it was just something he put together, a sort of humorous, fantasy, comical, so-called intellectual kind of thing with tongue-in-cheek." Susan Elsner, however, has a different take on Gary's fixation on Brenda. "I would guess that some of the things from her personality could be me," she believes. "It could have been his way of working things out. We had a complicated relationship, and it didn't go where he wanted it to go." Whether Gary was sexually frustrated, her response was "could be. We hadn't had a sexual relationship in a while." Another not unlikely scenario could be that the sexually suggestive references were injected mainly to perk up the interest of Cleveland's largely male readership! Interviews with Joe Puleo and Susan Elsner.
95. "Correspondence," *AMA* 19 (March 2000): 4.
96. "Back Issues—*Strength and Health*, October 1954," *AMA* 17 (January 2000): 4. Much the same sentiment applied to his appreciation for Iron Game pioneer Harry Paschall whose inimitable characterization of "Bosco" in *Strength & Health* cartoons was inspired by the legendary Arthur Saxon. Paschall's final words for Bosco, Gary tells us, were "'The Champ is still the Champ.' That's how we felt about Harry too." *Strength & Health*—December 1939," *AMA* 20 (April 2000): 2.
97. "Back Issues—S&H August, 1955," *AMA* 19 (March 2000): 2-3.
98. "Back Issues—*Strength*, September 1922," *AMA* 26 (October 2000): 4-5.
99. *Ibid.*, 4.
100. "Joe Puleo on Stan Stanczyk," *AMA* 29 (January 2001): 2-3; and "Back Issues—*Strength*, September 1922," *AMA* 26 (October 2000): 4-5.
101. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 30 (February 2001): 1. Stalker reckons that Cleveland was an atheist, "though he never discussed the matter with me directly. His disdain for organized religions was obvious enough. His foray into Buddhism was to rid his mind of all thoughts and desires. I once asked Gary what he was thinking as he stood before the barbell in a meet getting ready to lift. He said he tried to not think of anything." Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
102. "Marvin Eder at age 17," *AMA* 34 (June 2001): 2.
103. *Ibid.*; and "Marvin Eder: Pound-for-Pound the Strongest Man of His Time," Clarence Bass' *Ripped Enterprises*, 1 November 2018, found at <https://www.cbass.com/marvineder.html>.
104. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 36 (August 2001): 1.
105. "Correspondence," *AMA* 37 (September 2001): 5.
106. "World Records," *AMA* 46 (July 2002): 2-6; and "World Record Setters," *AMA* 47 (August 2002): 2. A year later Cleveland, having second thoughts about his findings, decided to analyze world championship results rather than world records to determine whether there was a different rate of progression. "To my surprise (and relief) this second search for the steroid surge didn't reveal anything different from the first." "Steroid Surge Revisited," *AMA* 56 (July/August 2003): 4.
107. See "The Saxon Trio," *AMA* 38 (October 2001): 3-4; Harry B. Paschall, "Behind the Scenes," *Strength & Health*, (June 1957): 58; and David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970), 81.
108. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 41 (January/February 2002): 2.
109. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 43 (April 2002): 2-3.
110. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 44 (May 2002): 1; and "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 48 (September 2002): 1.
111. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 40 (December 2001): 1; and "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 42 (March 2002): 1.
112. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 46 (July 2002): 1-2.
113. Thoughts from the Editor, *AMA* 47 (August 2002): 1; and "Correspondence," *AMA* 46 (July 2002): 7.
114. "News from the Institute," *AMA* 48 (September 2002): 2-3.
115. *Ibid.*, 2.
116. Likely intended to contrast his two fictional constructs, Gary explains that he was giving his employees a month off in the fall of 2002. The always elegant Brenda "plans to join her cousin, the effervescent Heather Montage for a stay at an expensive spa in Sweden then on to Paris for a week of café hopping," while Prycer, relishing his unpaid position at the Institute as a "family success story, intended to return to work early to "work on his autobiography." "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 49 (October/November 2002): 1.
117. See letter by John D. Fair in "Correspondence," *AMA* 49 (October/November 2002): 3.
118. "Passings," *AMA* 51 (January 2003): 4; and "Passings," *AMA* 54 (April 2003): 6.
119. "Passings," *AMA* 51 (January 2003): 4-5; and Stalker email to the author, 29 March 2021.
120. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 55 (May/June 2003): 1.
121. "Thoughts from the Editor," *AMA* 56 (July/August 2003): 1.
122. Cleveland letter to his subscribers, 16 December 2003.
123. Interview with Elsner.
124. Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
125. Stalker email to the author, 25 March 2021.
126. See "Tommy Kono's Athletic Performances" in Tommy Kono, *Championship Weightlifting, Beyond Muscle Power, The Mental Side of Lifting* (Honolulu: Hawaii Kono Company, 2010), 185.
127. Cleveland email to Stalker, 7 January 1999.