



It seems that I have always had an interest in muscularity and strength. When I was a boy I wanted to compete with Supersnipe for who was the boy with the most comic books in America. I wanted to grow up to be like Tarzan or Batman or Captain Marvel or The Phantom. To the boy that I was, their strength and mighty physiques were what I wanted. One day, while I was in a store trying to decide which of the many tempting comic books I wanted, my gaze was suddenly riveted to a magazine that had photographs of a man on the back cover who looked more powerful than any of the comic book characters. This man was doing some type of exercises with strange iron things. I knew they were iron weights but I didn't know that they were called dumbbells and barbells. The magazine was *Strength & Health*. The man was John Grimek. I had about as much chance of ever meeting John Grimek as I did of meeting Lord Greystoke or Clark Kent. Or so I thought.

Some time passed. It was 1945 and we were now living in the Bronx. I was still a boy and interested in boxing. Jake LaMotta, the Bronx Bull, was my hero. Until the day that I walked past a news stand and saw another *Strength & Health* magazine, with a cover that stopped me dead in my tracks. The man in the photograph had a physique that took my breath away. I didn't know that it was possible for any human being in real life to have muscles like that. Once again, it was John Grimek, this time in the now legendary side pose leaning against a pillar. He was showing left biceps, right triceps, super thigh and calf development and everything all in that one pose. I was totally stunned. I bought the magazine for 15¢ and decided that I wanted to look like that. Optimism was in great abundance back then. My parents gave me the \$16.00 to send away for the York 7 in 1 home training equipment. When it was delivered a couple of weeks later I plunged into working out after school in our basement.

November 1947, the New York City Siegmund Klein Strength and Physique Show advertised participation by John Farbotnik, Pudgy Stockton, Klein himself, the 1947 Mr. America Steve Reeves and John Grimek. John Grimek! The opportunity to see John Grimek in person was reason enough to go.

I bought my ticket, took my seat in one of the last few rows of the St. Nicholas Arena and watched in total fascination as one by one Sig Klein then John Farbotnik then Pudgy Stockton then Steve Reeves went through their posing routines. Adding to my absolute, complete and utter entrancement was John Grimek, well dressed in a beige suit, sitting a few rows in front of me, smiling, relaxed, appearing unconcerned and chatting amicably with those seated around him. Wow! There was Grimek, the main attraction, seemingly indifferent to the fact that he would be posing last and would be measured against those who had preceded him, including Steve Reeves. Seeing him in person, it was easy to see why Grimek was referred to as "The Glow," as his skin almost literally glowed. The color of his suit complimented his brown hair; and added to the impression created by his ruddy complexion, his strong-looking neck, and his broad and powerful shoulders. He was a picture of health and strength. The Glow. It was an impression I will never forget.

Finally Grimek did pose and there was no doubt that he indeed was the king, the monarch. After the show ended and I was in the subway on my way home the compelling picture of John Grimek drove everyone else from my thoughts. I plunged into my training with a new determination, resolve, and ferocity.

Six years later I was living in Santurce, Puerto Rico, training hard and in pretty fair shape. My friend Roberto Santana was then Mr. Puerto Rico and owned the best gym in town, Roberto decided that a

promotion for his gym would be to bring John Grimek down to do a few training seminars and a posing exhibition. So he contacted Bob Hoffman and Grimek in York, Pennsylvania and made the deal to bring John down to Puerto Rico. I remember vividly, as if it were yesterday, that the newspapers were proclaiming the arrival of Mr. Universe. Santana and I and many other bodybuilders as well as reporters were waiting in the airport when John arrived. Then there he was wearing a tight-fitting polo shirt and surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic fans. He looked vibrant, healthy, youthful and strong. There was a charisma, a magnetism that was palpable. Once again, he glowed. The reporters and cameramen all wanted him to "make a muscle," which John good-naturedly kept declining to do. Finally he struck a quick and stunning double biceps pose. The flashbulbs all went off. Everyone wanted more, but John said, "that's it." He smiled a lot at everyone and signed autographs. After a while, little by little, the crowd thinned out until I was the only one left standing there, a few feet away from John. I was extremely shy in those days and I was in such awe of him that I didn't dare to even say hello to this legend. John apparently sensed this because he looked at me and said, "Hi." I was dumbfounded. He noticed me! He said hello to me. I couldn't get over it. A day or so later, Santana arranged to give Grimek a motorcade parade through San Juan with John sitting up on the back seat of an open convertible waving to the crowds. Wearing a tight polo shirt, John leaned back on one arm to brace himself and he was waving with the other arm. I was in the car right behind Grimek's car with a clear view of the triceps of his straight, bracing arm. Astounding! That triceps development is indelibly etched in my memory.

John was staying at the famous Caribe Hilton Hotel when I first became aware of the phenomenal Grimek memory. One morning we were in the area of the hotel's pool. John looked intently at the swimming instructor/lifeguard and suddenly exclaimed, "I know you. You're George Johnson. I remember you on the USA swimming team in the 1936 Olympics." Everyone, including George Johnson, was amazed. Of course, John Grimek had been a member of the USA weightlifting team in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. (At this time, George Johnson still lives in Puerto Rico.)

One day, Roberto Santana took John, along with several young gym members and me, for an

outing at the popular Luquillo Beach. We all had a great time with Santana doing some muscle control and Grimek stripped to the waist one arm pressing Roberto's then two-year-old daughter overhead. We took movies of the event and I have a cherished copy. In Puerto Rico, John Grimek is remembered reverently by Iron Game people of Roberto Santana's vintage, and my own.

The next time I saw John Grimek was in 1964 when I visited the York Barbell Company. He was sitting at his desk, wearing a polo shirt and his arms looked huge. I was still in awe of him. He seemed to understand and was most gracious. I'll always remember that.

Nineteen seventy-six was when I again went to see John at the York Barbell Company. I was told that I could find him downstairs working out in the gym. My excitement mounted when I entered the gym and there indeed was Grimek doing flys. His ribcage looked immense and deep; he was his usual friendly self. We had a camera with us and John allowed us to photograph him as he exercised. He commented that he had injured his hip and lamented that it prevented him from doing squats. He looked powerful with arms still huge at 66. I'll always remember that, too.

In 1986, John was the honoree of that year's Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen reunion. I was there. By that time I now had years of experience doing my own radio program and writing magazine articles. I was no longer the shy kid I had once been. Before the Oldtimer's reunions, I had always addressed John as "Mr. Grimek." With no less respect I now had the courage to call him John, and we had a conversation as two adults rather than as an adult and an adolescent in a man's body, which had been me. John looked wonderful in a white blazer, which gave evidence of his still-athletic-looking physique. He still looked healthy and the glow was still present. At age 76 he looked happy, relaxed and marvelous. I now interpret the glow to have been his vital life force. In healthy childhood, youth and adulthood, it can be very strong. The life force is stronger in some individuals than others. In some people it is so strong that it apparently can produce what can appear to be a glow. Grimek had that. In my conversations with John I mentioned Puerto Rico and Robert Santana. John staggered me when he remarked, "You had some pair of arms." I couldn't believe it. John Grimek had actually noticed me back in Puerto Rico. He remembered meeting me

and he actually thought that I had good arms. John was smiling and having a wonderful time in the company of his physical culture colleagues. Later that evening, he gave a stirring speech, which inspired everyone. He spoke of how, in his day, some competed, some just worked out but everyone trained for the sheer love of the sport. He said that in times past we were friendly with each other, not trying to denigrate other guys. Back then there was a camaraderie non-existent as of 1986.

John was also the first honoree to be inducted into England's Oscar Heidenstam Foundation Hall of Fame in 1992. He was even more entertaining in his London speech. Most of them remembered him from



ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE ASPECTS OF GRIMEK'S CAREER WAS HIS ABILITY TO STAY IN SUCH IMPECCABLE PHYSICAL CONDITION YEAR AFTER YEAR.

when he was chosen Mr. Universe after a rousing battle with Steve Reeves. John's remembrances of Britain three years after World War II drew some laughs and much applause from an appreciative audience. He was older now but still looked impressive. He told me that night that he now pedaled his stationary bike for leg exercise.

John enjoyed spending time in England in the company of British friends like Reg Ireland, Malcolm Whyatt, Dave Gentle, Ian MacQueen, Tom Temperley, Cliff LeMaistre, and Colin Norris. I also remember the enjoyable conversations we all had in the afternoon before the evening's festive proceedings as we lounged around the hotel lobby exchanging stories and looking at photographs of people like Andre Drapp, who Grimek said should have received more recognition.

It was an honor for me to have been invited, along with my friend of many years, Dr. Serafin Izquierdo, to the fiftieth wedding anniversary of John and Angela Grimek. It brought tears of appreciation to my eyes when the polka music began and John immediately went looking across the large room for Angela. They met on the dance floor, which they had all to themselves. It was beautiful to watch as they danced. Everyone cheered and applauded.

John Grimek represented a time when bodybuilding meant health and strength manifested in an outstanding physique. It was when an outstanding physique was developed by hard training, proper nutrition, and sufficient sleep. John Grimek represented a time when all bodybuilding was natural bodybuilding. There were no chemical monsters during John's time. How would the chemical monsters of today have fared against Grimek? If we had a time machine we could put all the chemical monsters in it and transport them back to 1949. Because there were no anabolic steroids in bodybuilding at that time it would mean that they would be compelled to be natural. Grimek had a genetically superior structure, and he almost invented modern posing. Today's chemical monsters, deprived of their drugs, would lose to John Grimek, in my opinion.

John Grimek has now left us and a part of our youth has vanished as well. For he remembered that we all are but flesh, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again. God bless you, John Grimek. There will never be another.