

OUR READERS REMEMBER

“VIC” BOFF: 1917-2002



Dear *IGH*:

Throughout each age of history—almost as a special gift to us from God—are born men and women of great wisdom and insight—ambassadors of a higher dimension sent to teach us a greater truth and to open our eyes to things we might have failed to see on our own. Without their guidance and direction lighting the path of universal truth, we would stumble and bruise ourselves along another darkened road overgrown with lies, snares, and half-truths.

These special ambassadors are people of great courage, conviction and compassion who most of all are led by a burning need to share their deeper knowledge and understanding with others. Sadly, many times, the enlightenment they bring us comes with little or no financial reward to themselves yet in their selflessness they are rarely deterred from sharing and giving to those who seek.

In our never-ending need for labels, we have pegged such persons as giants, heroes, gurus, pioneers, and leaders-but unfortunately also radicals, eccentrics, kooks and rebels. Yet, it is by these very individuals that the world has been prompted to move forward throughout the ages. For whether in the light of adulation and praise or the shadow of scorn and derision, they still put forth their hand to us and say: “come—let me teach you!”

We now say goodbye to such a giant, a great man, a hero, a pioneer, a role model, a mentor, and most of all a friend. To those of us who had the good fortune to know Vic Boff personally and benefit from his great wisdom and insight, this is a very sad day. Our teacher has left us. And now in our sorrow and pain from such a great loss, we look desperately for another hand to guide us and lead us and encourage us to “carry on.”

And even now as we are forced to look for another to show us the way, we still savor and cling to the words, the wisdom, the guidance, the love, and especially the cherished memory of our beloved friend Vic.

For even in death, his powerful constitution and the unswerving strength of his convictions bid us all to “carry on” our own good fight no matter what the obstacles. And through his good example of a life well-lived, a life totally in service to others, a life of sharing and caring and giving, we will find deep within ourselves the ability to “carry on,” for Vic would have it no other way.

Yes, this is a very sad day indeed for all those in the world of health, and nutrition, and physical culture. A giant of a man has now left us to join that great Old Time Barbell & Strongmen Association in the sky—no doubt to be greeted warmly by those brothers in strength who went before him.

And as we now look up to the heavens to catch one last glimpse of the image of our good friend Vic slowly dissolving into the clouds, and if we listen really carefully through the silence of death, we assuredly can hear his words as he turns to us one last time and says: “Carry On!”

Goodbye Victor and may God bless you. You were a great friend.

Tom Ciola
Orlando, FL



Dear IGH:

I was quite shocked and saddened by your letter on the death of Vic Boff. While I never met Vic in person, we kept in touch quite often by phone and in letters. I am enclosing a short article on the personal impact Vic had on me over the years. I hope we can find a replacement to carry on, as he would have wanted.

The Passing of a Hero

Beside my easy chair in the living room lies the most valuable book in the world, at least to me. I have for 58 years been a fanatical physical culturist. I started in 1944 as a pupil of Charles Atlas, and his diploma still hangs in my home gym. Then in 1945, my older brother Tom bought me a York Barbell set that changed my life forever. I became a gym owner (Jakes Pennsylvania Health Gym in Altoona, PA.)—the first in central Pennsylvania. I put on a strongman act many times over the next 35 years, with a standing offer of \$1,000 for anyone who could duplicate all my feats on stage, which I never had to pay. I was also a dealer of rare and used books for over 50 years, and sold Bob Hoffman hundreds of health books.

I have grand admiration for that great strongman Joseph Greenstein, "The Mighty Atom," from whom I got the inspiration to have my own strongman routine. While not in his class of twisting horseshoes and biting through spikes, I was able to put on my routine that was last performed before thousands in Altoona, PA. On the same show were Dennis Tinerino, Mr. America and Mr. Universe; and the Pittsburgh Steelers' John Kolb with four Superbowl rings.

A small city gym owner, who dislikes travel, my only contact with the stars in our field was mostly at my contests, which I held several times a year, or at visits to my gym. A few greats visited, such as Bruce Randall, Mr. Universe; Ray Mentzer, Mr. America 1978; and super heavyweight Hugh Cassidy, national champ in Powerlifting. So when the President of the Oldetime Strongmen Association would telephone me, I would always feel honored. Vic was a kind and generous man and he always asked me about my training and laughed when I told him I still trained every day on an exercise bike or weights as I have for the last 58 years. He also would ask about a young man who I had trained in my gym—Gary Stitch, who had one of the strongest grips in the world and probably held a record in the grip machine I had made, with a very strict 325 lbs. with the right

hand. (A write-up by Joe Roark appeared about Gary in *Iron Game History* April 1990.) I was sorry to inform Vic that a stroke had stopped Gary from any lifting and grip feats.

From time to time, I would send Vic various books, photos, etc. that I knew would be of interest. When I recently ran across a large write-up on Vic's beloved Coney Island in New York City, I sent it to him.

Vic called me on September 11, 2002 and as usual we talked about many of the old-timers, many before my time but also about Hoffman, Grimek and my old friend Walter Good, who had built so many nice pieces of equipment for my gym. And, of course, the Mighty Atom, who Vic had known quite well and even worked with for awhile. Vic told me that he saw the Mighty Atom put down two men in a few seconds in a fight. I told him that I lent a friend my copy of the book on Joseph Greenstein and it was never returned and I was looking for another copy.

Then, October 7th, five days after my 73rd birthday, I received the most valuable book in the world: *The Spiritual Journey of Joseph Greenstein, The Mighty Atom World's Strongest Man*, inscribed by Vic, "To Jake. In appreciation of our friendship and mutual interest. Sincerely. Carry On." In the front of the book, Vic was thanked by Ed Spielman, the author.

I wrote Vic back telling him I would cherish it. Not only for my admiration for the Mighty Atom, but moreso for the kindness of Vic himself, the man who, above all others, carried the torch for all lovers of physical culture, as it was really meant to be. I hope I was able to get my message to him, as I read the letter from Terry and Jan telling of his passing.

Jake Webb
Huntingdon, PA



Dear IGH:

Thanks for your letter concerning Vic. Sure am sorry to hear about his death—just spoke to him a few weeks ago by phone. He seemed to be feeling fine at the

time.

You asked for memories, reminiscences, etc., so I wrote the enclosed poem to his memory. I'm also sending a copy to his wife, Ann.

Use the poem in any way you think is fitting or ditch if you find it bad verse. I'm going on eighty-seven now—still working out and walking my favorite hills here in Southern Illinois. Hope all goes well with the two of you.

TO VIC BOFF

To Vic, a man we all enjoyed
To Vic, a man whom fate employed
To keep our Iron Game alive
and help our legend to survive.
He was a pleasant, kindly man
who had a dream and drew a plan
to make our sport vital and strong
and prove our critics sorely wrong.
With sympathy we say to Ann,
Vic was a great and gracious man.

Gene Jantzen
Carlyle, IL



Dear IGH:

Thank you so very much for informing me of the passing of Vic Boff. It was certainly a sad feeling to experience the loss to the Iron Game of one so great. His knowledge of the muscle sports and the value of nutrition exceeded his years on this planet.

What I found the most interesting about him was the literal person of Vic Boff. I loved his accent, his direct no-nonsense explanations of this beloved occupation (my sentiments) as a divine purveyor of Strength and Health. Most importantly, I loved his compassion and his graciousness. We spoke over the telephone a few times. He gave me his time and sincerity. It was like talking with an uncle that the whole family loved. Although I never met him personally, I can imagine kids and adults wanting to be near him.

Vic Boff offered me an opportunity to perform

my act at one of the AOBS annual meetings. Unable to obtain the finances to make the trip, I truly missed a once in a lifetime chance. Vic still believed in me and had enough faith to publish an article on one of my shows in his newsletter. It was a tremendous honor to have him do that.

Ironically, I was sending out my Christmas cards when I received your letter. When I came to Vic's name it stopped me cold. The Lord has called one of his "Good Shepherds" home—he who tended the flock of the "Iron Brotherhood." God bless the Boff family.

John Patrick Sullivan
Greenwell Springs, LA



Dear IGH:

Please know that I was very shocked to get your letter, dated November 29, 2002, informing me that Vic Boff had passed away on November 9th.

Your write-up (obituary) covering Vic's lifespan 1917 - 2002 was excellent. It speaks volumes, loud and clear! Vic's main mission in life was dedication to clean living with emphasis on physical fitness, throughout one's entire lifetime.

Vic was an ideal role model. He practiced what he preached. He was a pioneer and motivator. A shaker and a mover. In appearances and action, Vic (to me) looked and acted about age fifty. Vic always had a most positive and upbeat philosophy of life. He had tons of energy, inner drive, and dedication (to his cause). He never became discouraged or complacent. He was a people person and a very, very dedicated professional.

Vic's tremendous dedication as founder and president of the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen (for almost two decades) was a great contribution to our sport. We will all miss Vic, for what he did to help others. I always enjoyed talking with Vic and his devoted wife Ann.

Joe Pitman
Vero Beach, FL



One of the all-time great weightlifting group shots is this photograph taken at the 1960 York picnic at Brookside Park. From left to right, the men are: Bob Snyder, Dick Bachtell, Ottley Coulter, John Grimek, Sig Klein, George F. Jowett and Vic Boff.

Photo courtesy Gary Cleveland

Dear IGH:

I first met Vic and his wife Ann when I was sixteen years old, at his health food store in Brooklyn. As I walked in his store, above the counter were many framed photos of old-time strongmen, all autographed to Vic. Vic walked over to me and started talking to me about these great strongmen that he knew. All I can say is I was hooked on strongmanism after Vic's talk. Vic was always there to answer my and others' questions, whether it was on nutrition, exercise, or my favorite old-time strongmen.

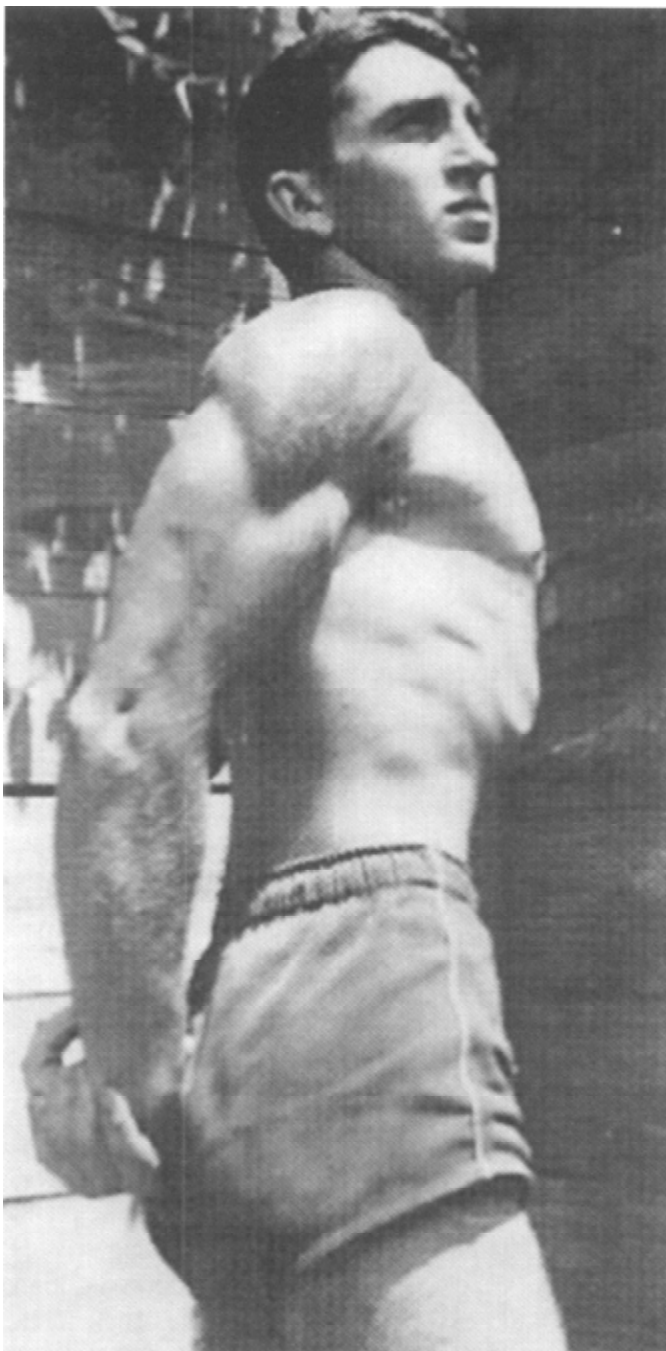
Sometimes, later in our friendship, Vic talked about the Iceberg Athletic Club. With a name like that I knew something was cold. Sure enough the Iceberg Club was a winter bathing club. The way I was involved was to talk to Vic and the members in the clubhouse and on the beach, taking pictures on Sundays. Not in the water! Vic was the president of the Icebergs, and was also the best at winter bathing. I remember one storm I met Vic

at the Iceberg Club, with blizzard-type weather, bad visibility, heavy snow and winds.

When Vic and I walked out of the clubhouse, I was in heavy clothes and boots. Vic was wearing a bathing suit and nothing on his feet. Before getting in the water, he would take a snow bath. After fighting our way to reach the water, Vic went swimming for about a half-hour. I could hardly see him; he went swimming way out there. When Vic came out of the water, the water drops on his chest turned to ice. Did you ever see people in the winter shiver and shake, their eyes tearing? Well, not Vic. He acted like it was a spring day. Truly an amazing man.

In closing, I am grateful for our friendship for thirty-one years. Vic will deeply be missed by me and many others, and especially his beautiful wife Ann and family. Carry on Vic, my friend.

Thomas Null
Ronkonkoma, NY



Vic's powerful deltoids and thick forearms are shown to good advantage in this photo taken when he was only 19 years of age.

Dear IGH:

I hope you are both keeping fit and well. What sad, sad news that Vic (Boff) has died and of course I wrote to Ann. Vic was a superlative physical culturist and he taught me much, I'm sure his devotion to the healthy life-style was contributory to his longevity. He

will be greatly missed and there's no doubt that he will leave an indelible and honorable place in the history of physical culture.

**Malcolm Whyatt
The Oscar Heidenstam Foundation
Hereford, England**



Dear IGH:

Thank you very much for the most thoughtful letter with the sad news that Vic Boff had passed away. I was shocked and had not heard the news. I spoke with Vic just prior to that date and had no idea he was in ill health.

Vic attended our grand opening of the Institute-Museum on Sept. 18, 1998, and had kept in regular contact with me ever since. He had a passion for his sport that matches what I have for wrestling, and I always enjoyed talking to him. He was such a gentleman and always made sure to tell me to say "hi" to my wife, as well. I will miss the friendly chats very much.

My last correspondence with him was in regards to Tom Tyler, the cowboy movie star of the 1920s who also played Captain Marvel and The Phantom. I have seen written articles that claim Tom was national heavy-weight weightlifting champion in 1928 under his real name, Vincent Markowski. *[Ed note: That's correct.]*

By the way, I know you are caretakers of the George Hackenschmidt legacy, and I would like you to know that he is being inducted into our George Tragos/Lou Thesz Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame on Aug. 1-2, 2003. We have a huge section on Frank Gotch, who is my all-time favorite athlete, and we have quite a bit of Hackenschmidt memorabilia as well. Even though I am partial to Gotch, I am a huge fan of Hackenschmidt, as well, and I am very pleased that he is going into the Hall of Fame.

**Mike Chapman
International Wrestling Institute and Museum
Newton, Iowa**

Dear IGH:

Vic Boff, my thoughts..

When I was an adolescent it seemed that all good things simply would last forever. My parents, my own youth, all of my heroes, my friends, the good times. They all would be eternal. But they were not.

It was my friend, Pete Marozas, who telephoned me with the news that Vic Boff had died. During the next few days my thoughts traveled back through thirty years and beyond. I first heard the name Vic Boff mentioned by my friend Leroy Colbert in the late 1960s when Leroy had his World Health Center on West 84th Street and Broadway in New York City. My bodybuilding competition days were behind me but I continued to train in my home basement gym. However, I grew to miss the camaraderie of other guys such as there had been in the Bronx Union YMCA and Abe Goldberg's Gym. After all, an important part of training always was the social component. It was 1981 or so when Anibal Lopez told me about a small gathering that had met to celebrate the birthday of Sig Klein and was organized by Vic Boff. I missed that first gathering because I learned of it too late, but made it my business to attend the next one as well as all those following annually right up to and including June 22, 2002. Frequently I was accompanied by my longtime friend Dr. Serafin Izquierdo. Of course, I met Vic Boff and realized just how dedicated he was to the cause of strength in particular and natural physical culture in general.

Through those years I watched the attendance grow at each reunion to where it was necessary to seek much larger meeting facilities. Thus, the prestigious New York City Downtown Athletic Club became home to the Association Of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen for many years, thanks to Vic Boff and Johnny Mandel.

Many were fortunate to have attended—while others only read about—the legendary York Barbell picnics years ago. The pioneers of our Iron Game were there. Vic Boff was among them. With the Association of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen reunions Vic Boff created a needed successor to the discontinued York picnics.

We in weightlifting, bodybuilding, physical culture and allied activities are a family. Members of our family come from near and far to attend reunions. The patriarchs and matriarchs of our family were people like John Grimek, Steve Stanko, Jules Bacon. John Davis,

the whole York group, Sig Klein, Clarence Ross, Steve Reeves, Pudgy Stockton. Each reunion attracted larger numbers of patriarchs and their disciples. With the 1990s the disciples of the disciples were now attending. Some of our Iron Game family from overseas were joining us. Our functions inspired similar gatherings internationally. The annual Oscar Heidenstam Memorial and Hall of Fame dinner in England, which started in 1992 with John Grimek as its first honoree, is the stellar example. Thus, our family has extended worldwide. It was Ed Spielman, creator of television's Kung Fu series, who said that he had not seen such camaraderie in any other group of people. Vic Boff is responsible for this.

In recent years Vic telephoned me fairly frequently. We would have hour long conversations touching on subjects from music, chiropractic and physical culture; pros and cons of orthodox medicine: health food stores; nutritional supplements; boxing and wrestling history, to values in life or the deterioration thereof. Vic related to me that one of his regrets was his never having had a photograph taken with Jack Dempsey when they met. Vic was steadfastly against anabolic steroids. He would not knowingly honor anyone who had used steroids and/or who did not publicly denounce that use and speak about the harmful effects of those chemicals on health. Vic maintained that the Iron Game should be about strength and health attained by natural means.

One of the high points of my life was when Vic said to me recently, "You're one of us" because of my *Iron Game History* writings. I will cherish that as long as I exist.

There were times when I had wished we could help Vic a little more with the Herculean task of the reunions, which involved having to remember an endless number of details. But Sinatra did it his way. So did Vic.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack forced Vic to cancel our reunion for the first time since its inception. The dastardly destruction of New York's Twin Towers was only a couple of blocks from our former home in the Downtown Athletic Club. The attack drastically affected the entire world. Everything else was rendered inconsequential. Our reunion, scheduled for the following week in New Jersey, obviously could not take place.

The future was unclear. There were many questions to be answered. On what date would it be appropriate to re-schedule our cancelled reunion? Could we get our scheduled honorees again? Would people attend

on a new date? Would people now want to travel?

Vic eventually re-scheduled our reunion for June 22, 2002. The fall is when we usually meet. This would be a new time of the year for us. Would it affect attendance? At first the reservations came in very slowly. Then the numbers began to accelerate until it became evident that there indeed would be a large turnout. Large turned out to be an understatement. Perhaps the postponement made our Iron Game family realize just how much we needed our annual get-together. Perhaps coming together would help to reduce the residual trauma of the September 11 attack. The 19th Association Of Old-time Barbell & Strongmen was attended by 250 people who packed the large Saddle Brook Marriott meeting room. Encouragingly, there were many young people present as well as families and many not quite so young anymore but young and vibrant in spirit.

The honorees were inspiring. The world class strength show was spectacular. It was absolutely the best reunion in the twenty-year existence of the Association Of Oldtime Barbell & Strongmen. Vic and I discussed the marvelous event a week or so later. He was mostly happy with the way it turned out and was anticipating an even bigger 20th reunion.

I did not anticipate that Vic Boff would leave us quite so soon. We never get used to the fact that nothing is forever. We will miss our patriarch but we must do as he would wish. We must "Carry on."

Dr. Ken Leo Rosa
Bronx, NY



Dear IGH:

Vic Boff, President of the Association of Old-time Barbell and Strongmen is gone, but his great legacy will live forever. I was shocked when I received news of his death because I had talked with him by phone just a few weeks earlier. Though I never met him in person, he and I had many, many phone conversations over the

last few years. He always called me "Bill" and was always extremely courteous.

He loved physical culture and would always share stories with me about legends he personally knew. He was very knowledgeable about our sport and I would always tell him he should write about his career and the people he knew in a special book/autobiography.

He and I often traded memorabilia and newsletters. I looked forward to receiving his and he said the same about receiving mine. Many times he would call me and just want to talk. His stories and life were fascinating. He often spoke of Jack Dempsey and Joe Bonomo. His phone calls were always encouraging and he would tell me to keep up my work in helping keep our sport alive.

William E. Moore
Tuscaloosa, AL



Dear IGH:

It's been a rough fall in many ways. Losing Vic was a heartbreaker. Vic and I have been friends since 1939 when Ray Van Cleef introduced us. The early years were devoted mostly to swapping collection items. The last dozen we spent reliving the past and sharing experiences in weightlifting with a healthy dose of political opinions. We met at all the shows and meets and had wonderful visits together during the early years.

Vic called me regularly about once a month and always right after the banquets to get my slant on them. I was most pleased that he saw fit to print my article about John Hordines in his last issue. I had pressed Vic to honor John with an award at the banquet (for none is so deserving) but, while not directly rejecting the idea, Vic felt John hadn't been sufficiently in the forefront since his Mr. America contest. I guess I hadn't sufficiently presented my argument that John's training his

blind students with weights for 30 years was of such noble character that it surpassed the attributes of all those whose only claim to fame was their personal weightlifting prowess.

I called Vic Sunday the 3rd to thank him for printing my article and was immediately distressed by his obvious pain. He told me that he was having excruciating pain in his genitalia and back. That he was unaware of the seriousness of his problem was apparent from his statement that he was going to see a chiropractor the next day. Obviously he thought his problem was back-related, but I knew better. On our visit with Vic and Ann a year ago, Ann mentioned to Marge that Vic was having a prostate problem, but Vic had never mentioned this to me. As much as I wanted to warn him of the potential seriousness of this problem the fact he hadn't mentioned it to me made me hesitant to do so.

On ending the phone conversation, which was brief because of Vic's discomfort, I immediately said to Marge, "I am very upset, I am sure Vic has prostate cancer and it has spread." I called again on Tuesday to learn of his condition and Ann informed me Vic was sleeping. I called again on Thursday and received no answer. I called again on Saturday, the day he died, and received the recording on which I left a message requesting a call as to Vic's condition. When Mike Bondurant called me that evening, I knew. as soon as he introduced himself, that Vic was gone. I am so sad. The only comfort from such a tragedy is that he didn't linger in pain.

Alton Eliason
Northford, CT



Dear IGH:

We are losing too many good friends of late, and none will be missed more than Vic Boff. He has had a full life and made many contributions to our game, but he has been unique in founding and maintaining the

Association of Oldetime Barbell & Strongmen. Vic has provided the opportunity for other old-timers—I'm one of them—to reminisce about the many good times that we have shared. I hope, along with Terry and Jan, we will all continue to "Carry on."

Jim Murray
Morrisville, PA

*Editor's Note: Jim Murray was honored by the AOBs for his contributions to the Iron Game as a writer. He was the editor of **Strength & Health** for seven years and also co-authored (with Dr. Peter Karpovich) the first major book advising athletes to train with weights, **Weight Training for Athletes**.*



Dear IGH:

Thank you very much for the updates regarding the passing of Vic Boff. My very fond memories of Vic Boff begin approximately twenty years ago at his health food store in Brooklyn, New York. As a teenage weight-training enthusiast at the time, it was my first experience in meeting one of the great pioneers of our field. Vic was his usual warm and friendly self, answering all of my questions and "introducing" me to all of the Iron Game champions pictured around his store. I can especially recall being extremely impressed by Vic, in that along with quoting the accomplishments of John Grimek he also referred to him as a "dear friend." Thus, I gained a wonderful sense of the camaraderie shared by individuals with a common interest, and realized for the first time that there was more to our beloved Iron Game than the actual lifting.

Through the years, the Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Dinners have given me such a wonderful opportunity to meet so many of the "Iron Game Greats," as Vic would refer to them during our many phone conversations. Vic would share with me many of his stories and recollections of strength lore from bygone times. But what I am most thankful for is having had the oppor-

tunity to spend time with and get to know this multi-talented strongman, athlete, health practitioner, and physical culture scribe.

Vic Boff was a most giving man, who had a vision to create, in his words: "An association dedicated to the Oldetime drug-free ideals of strength and health." I can see Vic right now busy organizing a reunion banquet of barbell(e) brethren who have gone on before us. Thank you again Vic for all of your accomplishments, but most of all for being a "dear friend." My prayers go out to Vic, his wonderful wife Ann, and their family.

Lou Tortorelli
Howell, NJ



Dear IGH:

What a shock! I had spoken with Vic Boff four months ago and I think he mentioned something about some problems he was having with his doctors. I don't remember if it was prostate or what, but he wasn't happy with them. Little did I know! He was a real gentleman and I chatted with him on the phone regularly. He will be greatly missed.

Dr. Craig Whitehead
Tampa, FL



Dear IGH:

My dad, Walter Magnuson, Sr., is Norwegian. His family had a lot of men. His dad's name was Ole Edward Magnuson. Ole and his brothers all lived in the Bayridge. They were all large, strong, proud men. Some

worked tugboats, most were dockworkers. Most of the time they unloaded cement bags. They worked hard when work was available. They also worked out hard and played hard. During the Depression Ole and his brothers lost their jobs and set up a workout gym in an old two-car garage. It was quite Spartan! Most of the barbell plates were actually blocks of cement. As a child I remember seeing photos of my great uncles and my grandfather, muscles rippling, ripping decks of cards in half, blowing up hot water bottles till they burst and doing pushups with their feet on a window sill.

Ole lost his wife in the early 80's, developed some circulation problems, and entered a nursing home in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. He was about 80 years of age. Doctors gave him several months to live. He ended up outliving several of those doctors.

Somewhere along the way I came across a newsletter for the Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Association. There was something in the newsletter about Kimon Voyages. It rang a bell. Dad worked out in the early 1950s in the gym owned by the Degni brothers in Queens Village. He met Kimon Voyages there. I was pumped up about this connection. I called Vic Boff to join the association. I did this primarily to read the newsletters to my grandfather while visiting Doylestown. He enjoyed the readings. Just prior to receiving my first newsletter Vic called on the phone to welcome me. We spoke for a long time. As a recreational and occasional lifter I knew I did not fit the mold of most of Vic's friends and most of the people featured in the articles. But Vic's tone and personality convinced me of the AOBS camaraderie. I finally attended an AOBS reunion several years ago, hoping Mr. Reeves would make an encore. Vic stopped at my table and spent some time with me so I did not feel out of place.

Ole passed away just shy of 100. I did not see him as much as I would have liked but I enjoyed reading him the newsletters. At 50, I am a bit younger than most of the membership but I remember being warmly accepted by Vic Boff at the reunion and enjoying myself. I will never forget Vic or my experiences with Association.

Walter Magnuson,
Franklin Square, NY

Dear IGH:

Coney Island in Brooklyn, New York, was known as America's Playground; it's where Warren Lincoln Travis and the Mighty Atom and others appeared. It's where the Atlantic Ocean swept up to the shore and found a beach, used by millions of people every summer. And in the very cold and snowy, windy days of winter, it was where the Iceberg Club frolicked as a group under the organizer of the club, Vic Boff.

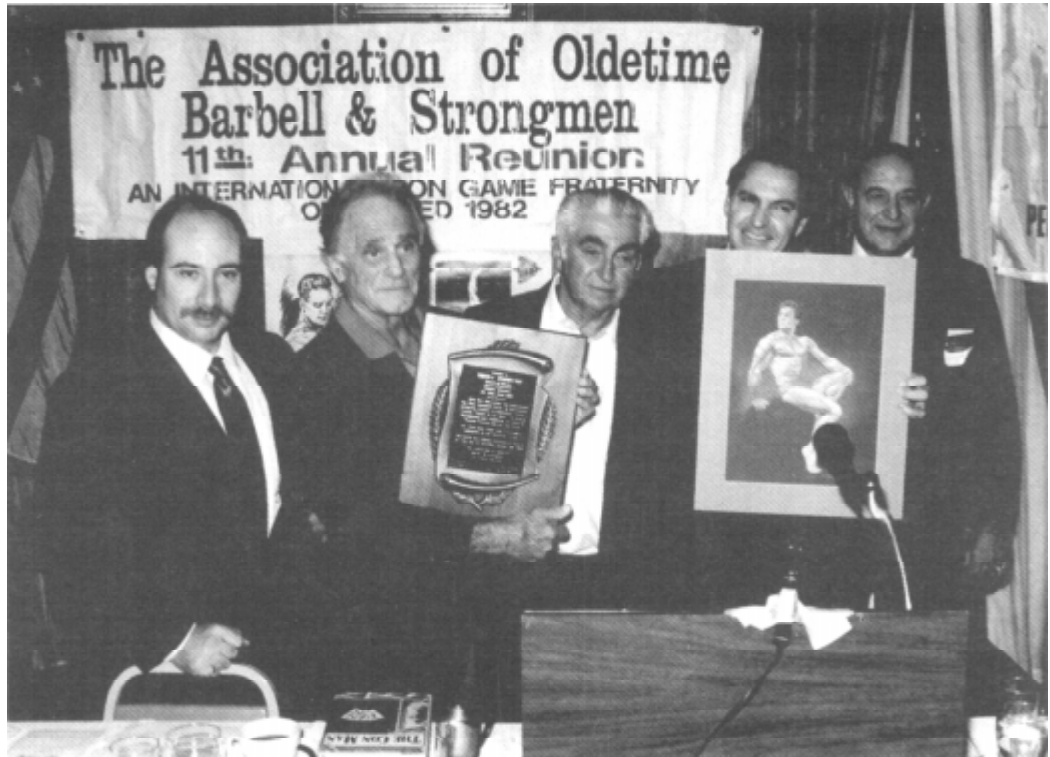
Vic, a well known strength athlete, a health food devotee, a good baseball player and boxer, kept his group exercising in the snow with the medicine ball and then running into the ocean for a swim in water around 45 or 50 degrees, often even lower.

People, like myself, would stand on the boardwalk in our warm clothes, our hats over our ears, our winter coats on as well as our gloves, scarves, and heavy boots, and we'd marvel at the antics of Vic and his inspired group.

Vic Boff was always a great ambassador of good health through exercise, proper eating and friendships. Vic was a doer not just a talker. He knew everyone in our field, from Jowett to the beginners of today. His book, *The Body Builder's Bible*, was a bestseller, and we all can still marvel at his words.

Vic, everyone of us that met you and talked to you was richer for the experience. Your friendship and your cheerful creed of "Carry on," will live in our hearts forever.

Terry Robinson
Los Angeles, CA



Fitness legend Terry Robinson was recognized by the AOBBS for his contributions to physical culture. Shown in this photo are emcee Steve Sadicario, Robinson, Vic Boff, artist Jim Sanders and Johnny Mandel.

Photo courtesy Terry Robinson

Dear IGH:

I don't remember how we got together on the phone for that first chat some eight or nine years ago. I do remember that Vic Boff was a name that I recognized from his many photos in the old (*Strength & Health*) magazines over the years. I believe he was sincerely surprised that I knew who he was. Imagine that.

From that day on, we spoke at least once a week, sometimes two or even three times. I was in the gym business then and looked forward to his calls and his stories. For a few moments, he would take me away from the day-to-day activities of the business world into the "thrilling days of yesteryear," the golden days of early Iron Game history. Sometimes the phone will ring, and for a moment I will wish it could be Vic calling to tell me another great story about Jowett, Klein, or Macfadden. But I have them here in my mind, Vic, and I'll do my best to pass them on, old friend.

Mike BonDurant
Muscle Museum Forum
Clearwater, FL

Dear IGH:

We are all the better for having known Vic Boff. It is through his efforts that many of us got to know each other at the annual meetings of our association. Those of us who love Iron Game history are in his debt. Vic and Andy Jackson were my personal bridges to the Iron Game past. I will always be thankful for having known men such as these.

Carl Linich
Poughkeepsie, NY

**Dear IGH:**

I had the pleasure of meeting and working for Vic Boff at his health food store on 86th street in Brooklyn, NY around the mid-1970s for a few months. I worked for Vic and his wife, Ann, and they were two of the nicest people I've ever met. I recall Vic showing up at the store during the winter, his hair still damp from a morning dip in the icy Atlantic with his fellow members of the Iceberg Club. Vic loved to discuss all aspects of bodybuilding, strongman culture, and weightlifting. He beguiled me with countless stories about the strongmen of the past, most of whom he knew well. The only times I watched his usual ebullience fade was when the discussion turned to drugs. Vic felt that drugs were ruining his cherished weight-training culture, and was vehemently against the use of any type of pharmacological substance in the pursuit of strength and muscle. He viewed those who indulged in such use as cheaters. To Vic's way of thinking, the most vital aspect of weight-training involved the development and maintenance of optimal health and fitness, of which he himself was a paragon. I also fondly recall the close relationship that Vic had with his wonderful wife, Ann. They seemed like equal partners in every way, and you could see the love and respect they felt for each other every time they met. Although I haven't seen Vic in many years, I've always had the utmost respect and regard for him, and I'm sorry to hear of his passing. The world has lost another good person, but I know that Vic is now likely

training in that big gym in the sky with all of his old cronies, and if there is a way to jump in a freezing pool, you'll surely find Vic there, too.

Jerry Brainum
Via Email

**Dear IGH:**

I have heard that if you have had one very good friend in your life, you are very lucky. Personally, I have found that not to be true. When I lost my very best friend, Joseph Greenstein, years ago, I thought that I would not meet any more "diamonds" in my life. Since then, I have found several more bright jewels. They have since passed on, but still shine in my memory. Just to name a few, Bert Goodrich, Milo Steinborn, Sig Klein. Ed Jubinville, Joe Ponder, John Grimek, etc.

Until now Vic, whom I have found to be one of the most giving and helpful men since I lost Atom, helped fill the void. I could only go a few weeks before I had to call Cape Coral, Florida to have him pick up my morale. He surely was one of the brightest gems of them all, and I will always cherish his warm, helpful friendship.

Slim "The Hammerman" Farman
Pottstown, PA

**Dear IGH:**

I received your letter on the passing of Vic Boff. It was a great shock and loss to a great many of his friends and followers alike. I first met Vic through my dad, The Mighty Atom. It was when my dad was lecturing on health next to the Half Moon Hotel on the board-

walk. Vic would keep my mom company alongside of the platform. I also saw him swim with Saroki and the Iceberg Club on several occasions.

I remember him as more of a friend to our family—which consisted of ten of us—than a bodybuilder. He visited our home on many occasions, and I and my sister Esther visited him in his store in Bay Ridge. I spent some time last year in his home in Cape Coral, with his wife Ann. We will miss him and never forget him.

Mike Greenstein
Rockaway Park, NJ



Dear IGH:

Being around weight training since 1970, I've seen you both on TV in the past, so, I was curious why I would be getting a letter from you. After reading the first sentence I understood why. After reading about Vic Boff passing away I actually said aloud, "No, no, no!" although I knew what I had just read. I had not even had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Boff in person.

I had spoken with him different times on the phone, however. The conversations with Mr. Boff were usually about people he had known as well as speaking to him about himself. I had wanted to get a copy of Mr. Boff's book, *Physically Perfect, Powerfully Strong*, and during one call, I mentioned that I had been trying to get a copy. Mr. Boff said he would send me the book.

I received the book promptly in the mail. I sent Mr. Boff a money order and he sent me the money order back. "No charge for the book," he told me. Over the years I've talked to many people that were involved in the "Weight Game," in different capacities. All those people didn't know me, yet I was treated like I was a well respected family member. I definitely want to get the future edition of *IGH* that you dedicate to Mr. Boff.

Phil Maxwell
Eastpointe, MI

Dear IGH:

Vic Boff inspired those who value our history as much as our present through his *Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen*; through those wonderful annual dinners; through his writings; but most importantly, through his sincere interest in others.

He was a generous man—generous with his resources and generous with his time—and he loved to talk. Fortunate to have been one of the many on Vic's "call list," I often answered my phone with a grumpy, "Hello," expecting another telemarketer, to be greeted with a happy, "Hello Gary, this is Vic." With those words, my spirits lifted (and I'd start looking for a chair because I knew it was going to be a while). Then for the next half-hour or more he would take me on a tour that included the likes of Travis, Jowett and Bonomo, and I loved it. My phone will never again ring with such magic.

The last time I visited Vic and Ann's home I noticed, on the floor of the patio, along with the potted plants and the patio furniture, there was a turn-of-the-century set of dumbbell-shaped hand-balancing stands from Sig Klein's old gymnasium. Though nearly a hundred years old, they were completely appropriate there, a harmonious union of past with present, like Vic himself. Hope we can all "carry on" half as well as Vic.

Gary Cleveland
Minneapolis, MN



Editors' Note: Vic was, of course, also a close friend of ours, and a great supporter of our efforts here at the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection. Several years back, the three of us drove from Houston to Memphis, Tennessee to pack the Hal Weiss Collection and move it to the University. During that trip, we taped Vic as he related his life story so that it could be saved as part of the archives. For a future issue of IGH we are editing the transcripts of those tapes and will publish his recollections of his life in the Iron Game.

*We miss him more than words can say.
—Terry and Jan Todd*