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Pudgy Stockton: The Belle of the Barbell

Elizabeth McCracken

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The New York Times Magazine—The Lives They Lived, December 31, 2006.

The passing of Muscle Beach pioneer Pudgy Stockton on 26 June 2006 was notable not only for the loss of a pioneering figure in the history of women's exercise but also for the interest her passing generated among some of the most prestigious media outlets in the world. It wasn't unusual that the *Los Angeles Times* ran an obituary (Dennis McLellan, "Abbye Stockton, 88; Weightlifter Elevated the Status of Women's Fitness," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 2006) on Stockton, but it was surprising that her obituary took up nearly a full page of the newspaper. In the weeks that followed, notices of her death appeared in the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and in a variety of other newspapers, like our own here in Austin, which reprinted the wire service versions of the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* obituaries. There were even two different BBC radio shows that dis-

cussed Pudgy's passing. This coverage, together with the coverage in newspapers and muscle magazines, suggests just how important Pudgy Stockton was to the history of physical culture. Of all the attention paid to her death, however, the most surprising was the decision the *New York Times Magazine* editorial staff made to include her in their end-of-the-year special edition called *The Lives They Lived*, in which they featured the stories of the most notable men and women from around the world who had passed away that year. Pudgy—a genuinely humble person—was given two full pages in that magazine, and so we thought we would share with our readers the gracefully-written tribute to Pudgy's life crafted by novelist Elizabeth McCracken. It begins on the next page.



This photo ran as a full page image in the *New York Times* tribute to Pudgy Stockton.

—Jan Todd

The Belle of the Barbell: She Believed That Lifting Could Set Women Free

In those days it seemed that superheros were born—Created? Discovered?—every other day. Kal-El was shot from his doomed home, Bruce Wayne witnessed his parents' murder, an Amazonian princess's life on Paradise Island was interrupted by a crashed plane and a handsome wounded soldier. And in Santa Monica, sometime in the late 1930s, a young woman named Abbye Eville decided she'd put on too much weight in her job as a telephone operator and picked up the dumbbells that her boyfriend had brought her. Then she put them down. Then she picked them up again.

In real life, strength is not a rocket shot or expo-

sure to a wizard or a spider bite: you're not weak one moment and superheroic the next. It's a decision you make daily. Abbye Eville kept lifting the dumbbells. The telephone-company weight dropped away; her childhood nickname, Pudgy, became a fond joke. Her muscles became visible and then impressive. She taught herself to do a headstand, and then a handstand. Her first costume was a two-piece bathing suit jerry-built by her mother: men's swim trunks and a top patterned on an old bra—one-piece bathing suits were too confining for the stunts that she and Less Stockton, with the weights, had started to do with their friends south of the Santa

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Monica pier, a stretch of sand that picked up the name Muscle Beach.

There were plenty of superheros in the making on Muscle Beach back then: Jack LaLanne, Steve Reeves, Joe Gold (who would found Gold's Gym). Crowds gathered and gawked. Harold Zinkin, who later invented the Universal Gym, made himself into a belly-up table to support a totem pole of three bodybuilders, feet to shoulders, standing on his stomach. A strongman named George Eiferman—a future Mr. America—lifted weights with his left hand and played the trumpet with his right. Adagio dancers tossed one another around like javelins; acrobats defied gravity and common sense. In photographs of the Muscle Beach hand-balancers, you can find Pudgy as a top-mounter or under-stander, upside down and right side up, with two women on each arm and a man on her shoulders or alone in a handstand, muscular and pocket-size: 5 foot 1, 115 pounds. Make no mistake: She's not toned or firmed-up or any of those timid terms that even 21st-century women persist in using when they decide to change their bodies through exercise. She's built. Her back is corrugated with muscles as she supports a likewise-muscular man—Les Stockton, now her husband, 185 pounds of bodybuilder—upside down over her head.

There were strong women before Muscle Beach, pale, leotarded circus and vaudeville performers, stoic as caryatids as they lifted extraordinary weights. Even their names seem carved from stone: Minerva, Vulcana, Sandwina, Athleta. But Pudgy Stockton was something brand-new. Every inch and ounce of her body refuted the common wisdom that training with weights turned women manly and musclebound. She was splendid as a work of art but undoubtedly, thrillingly, flesh, blood, breath.

What does musclebound mean, anyhow? It's an insult dreamed up by the underdeveloped. Pudgy Stockton's mission was to show women that muscles could only ever set them free. After the war she ran a gym on Sunset Boulevard called the Salon of Figure Development, and then she and Les opened side-by-side men's and women's gyms in Beverly Hills. Her business card

showed her on tiptoes—on the beach, of course—showing off her hamstrings, her biceps, her tiny waist, her impressive bust. “Foremost Female Physical Culturist,” it read. “Writer, Authority of Feminine Figure Contouring, Cover Girl.”

Women could also read “Barbelles,” the column she wrote for *Strength and Health* magazine. Jan Todd, a friend of Stockton's and co-director of the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas in Austin, and a weight-lifting pioneer herself, says that the columns “argued that lifting weights would make you a better athlete—that was a very revolutionary message to be preaching to women.” Stockton featured stories of female athletes and ordinary women who trained with weights. “This woman over 30 years of age,” she wrote of one protégée, “with two children, and with no athletic background whatsoever, has brought about, by her persistence, these amazing changes. Her beautiful figure is a living proof of the intelligent application of this system of figure contouring.”

Pudgy Stockton retired from the gym business in the 1950s to raise her daughter, Laura. A few years later the Santa Monica workout area was torn down, and Muscle Beach—or a vague idea of it—moved down the coast to Venice. By then, Steve Reeves was Hercules and Jack LaLanne was a TV star.

“It seems like it was always sunny,” Pudgy Stockton said of the first Muscle Beach, her Muscle Beach. In photographs it is. See Pudgy and Les in the brushed-steel black-and-white California sunlight, showing off for the cameras and crowds. You can't see all the work it has taken them to get to this bright beach, both of them looking like sculptures come to joyful life; you can't tell who has kissed whom alive. They have lifted all those weights so they can lift each other. The wind pulls back Pudgy's hair and makes her squint. She stands, blond and lovely, on the palms of her husband's upraised hands while she presses a 100-pound barbell overhead. Then they switch places, and she supports him above her, hand to hand, she smiling up and he smiling down, as satisfactory a portrait of a marriage as ever could be.



Pudgy supported her husband, Les Stockton, and a barbell at Sig Klein's gym in New York City, November 1947.

Center Ring: Katie Sandwina and the Construction of Celebrity

Jan Todd

The University of Texas at Austin

Kate Carew, an unconventional newspaper-woman, was famous in the early twentieth century for a “New Journalism” approach to the interview, in which she conveyed her own impressions about how it felt to be in the presence of the Progressive Era’s leading celebrities. To be featured by this print version of Barbara Walters meant the interviewee was a person that mattered. Sarah Bernhardt, Ethel Barrymore, Theda Barrow, D.W. Griffith, Mark Twain, Pablo Picasso, Bret Harte, Jack London, Emil Zola, The Wright Brothers, and Teddy Roosevelt, for example, all made space on their calendars so Carew could do an interview and then draw pen and ink caricatures of them to accompany her stories.¹ In early April of 1911, Carew turned in a full-page article and three drawings of New York’s celebrity *du jour*—the professional strongwoman Katie Sandwina, who’d just been promoted to the center-ring in Barnum & Bailey’s Greatest Show on Earth.² Carew’s article was an overwhelmingly positive piece that helped ensure Sandwina’s status as a major star.

The author’s carefully chosen words and neatly-drawn cartoons created a majestic yet decidedly feminine image of the strongwoman that was reprinted in newspapers across the United States. Further, Carew’s piece provided other journalists with a vocabulary of flattering adjectives and allusions that turned up again and again in articles written about Sandwina in the years that followed.³

Although parts of Sandwina’s story have been recounted in newspaper articles, in reminiscence pieces

in muscle magazines, and in several academic publications—including *Iron Game History*—surprisingly little attention has been paid in any of these pieces to Sandwina’s two seasons with the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1911 and 1912, despite the fact this was clearly the period of her greatest fame in the United States.⁴ Weightlifting pundits have spent considerable time debating how much she actually lifted overhead, and whether she deserves the title of “Strongest Woman that Ever Lived”—which Barnum & Bailey’s publicity staff bestowed on her with a full-color promotional poster of her act in 1912.⁵ But the story of how Sandwina got to Barnum & Bailey’s center ring and simultaneously emerged as a glamorous beauty despite her “masculine” profession and large stature, is an equally fascinating tale and represents an interesting case study in the construction of identity.

Carew’s article in the *New York American* was, in reality, the capstone of a carefully crafted campaign orchestrated by Robert Fellows, head of publicity for the the Barnum & Bailey circus. How involved Katie and her husband, Max Heymann, were in the decision to promote her in this new way is unknown, although the Sandwinas seemed to embrace their new roles once circus management told them that they no longer wanted an act called “The Sandwinas”—but did want an act called “Katie Sandwina and Troupe.”⁶

It was a delicate balance Fellows, Katie, and Max were trying to achieve—to make people want to see a woman perform strength stunts and at the same time to



make her a celebrity with broad cultural appeal. Carew certainly helped the cause. She opened her article by writing, “Lo! These eyes have beheld the Superwoman. Her head is the head of Juno. Her form is fit for a mother of kings and heroes. She is twenty-five years old, weighs 210 pounds and moves as lightly as a greyhound. . . . She is as majestic as the Sphinx, as pretty as a valentine, as sentimental as a German schoolgirl, and as wholesome as a great big slice of bread and butter.”⁷ Throughout the article Carew employed remarkably positive descriptions of Sandwina’s body and general appearance—“Her head is large,” wrote Carew, “and that makes the beauty of her features positively startling. With her curled upper lip and her classic chin, she has the look of some heroic work in marble...Her throat is a column. Her shoulders and back might have been hewn by Michel Angelo [*sic*].” Continuing, Carew explained that Sandwina was not at all masculine and that although Katie’s arms could lift 240 pounds overhead, they were still supple and smooth enough to show off in a ball gown. Sandwina, she proclaimed, had “No horrid lumps of muscle, dears—just a little ripple under the skin, like mice playing in a mattress.”⁸

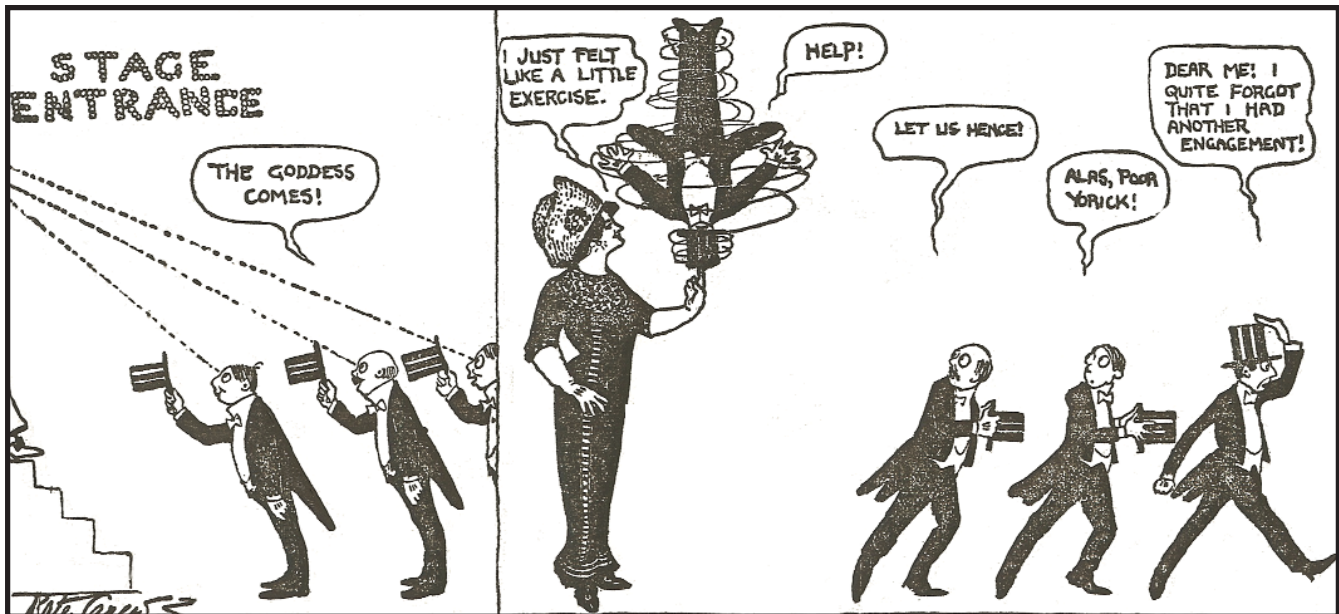
That Carew could wax so rhapsodic about a tall, sturdily-built, strength athlete weighing over two hundred pounds seems amazing given our twenty-first century preference for

hyper-slender women. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, there were several competing ideals of feminine beauty, according to historian Valerie Steele, and one of the most popular types was the large, robust woman referred to by historian Thomas Beer as a “titaness.” It was a type, wrote Steele, in which simple prettiness “had given way to height, grandeur and sturdiness.”⁹ There was, however, apparently something

truly unique about Katie Sandwina. Patricia Galli, who married Sandwina’s second son Alfred in 1944, described her as “beautiful . . . close to six feet tall, with black, Spanish eyes and very soft spoken.” Galli also recalled that Katie—who by then, of course, was over 60 years old—“didn’t show much muscling, just firm curves. Galli also said that Sandwina “painted her finger and toe nails and although you may find this surprising, I believe Katie was the most feminine woman I’ve ever known.”¹⁰ And professional strongman Ottley Coulter, who saw Sandwina perform several times, could not deny Katie’s beauty even though he doubted she was as strong as Barnum & Bailey’s press agents claimed. Wrote Coulter in a letter to David P. Willoughby, “I doubt that Cyr or Travis could equal Sandwina for public appeal. . . . I saw Katie perform several times and consider that she was a wonder. She was billed as Europe’s Queen of Strength & Beauty. I must say she appeared beautiful



During her second season with the Barnum & Bailey Circus, this full-page photograph of Katie Sandwina appeared on Saturday, 8 June 1912 as a special “supplement” to the *National Police Gazette*. It was a photo designed to be saved and framed, and few athletes were granted such treatment by the *Gazette* unless they were true celebrities or beautiful women. In 1912, Katie was considered to be both.



Kate Carew helped glamorize Sandwina with this two-panel cartoon showing a group of suitors waiting to see the "Goddess." The text accompanying this caricature reads: "The Lady Hercules receives many attentions from stage door 'Johnnies,' but her husband declares that she deals with the problem in a masterly fashion." This cartoon appeared with Carew's interview on 16 April 1911 in the *New York American*.

to me..."¹¹ In a letter to Jack Kent, Coulter Coulter similarly observed, "She had everything, even sex appeal."¹²

Even if Sandwina was a *nonpareil* among titanesses, physical appearance alone doesn't explain why she connected so powerfully with the American press in 1911 and 1912. The Carew interview, for example, linked Sandwina with many of the important social movements of the day—particularly eugenics, suffrage, physical culture, and "New Womanhood."¹³ However, Sandwina was also identified with certain elements of "separate sphere" ideology—the Victorian view that women's greatest influence was to be found through homemaking and childcare—and in Carew's article and many other pieces Sandwina emphasized her maternal nature during her time with Barnum & Bailey, a fact which confirmed her sexuality in the public's mind and made her seem less threatening.

Unlike other strongwomen working at the turn of the century, Katie was never considered masculine, too-large or unattractive during the early years of her career.¹⁴ Even William Inglis' light-hearted piece in *Harper's Weekly* warning men of this new challenge to male hegemony describes Sandwina as possessing, "as pretty a face, as sweet a smile and as fine a head of silky brown curls as a man could ask to see."¹⁵ In other newspaper articles from these years, Katie is called a goddess, beautiful, majestic, feminine, and completely

charming. And in 1912, when Barnum's publicity staff cooked up a beauty contest pitting circus women against Broadway show-girls, Sandwina's name was at the top of the list to uphold the circus' reputation.¹⁶ New York newspaperman Franklin Fyles saw the Barnum & Bailey Circus in early April of 1911, for example, and remarked upon the large number of women playing starring roles in that year's show. While Fyles did not care for the Japanese wire walker's brand of beauty, describing her as a "chubby Jap girl with stubby legs, knotted and gnarled muscles, like an old-time ballet premiere's," he found Sandwina to be "positively the most commanding beauty I have seen staged in years. Katie is a full six feet in height . . . with no suggestion of either soft fat or hard muscle. . . . She stood forth like Venus in something like what sculptors call heroic size, feminine in aspect and extra-gentle of visage; yet she did all the acrobatic things common to the best men in the circus and bounced her husband about like a rubber ball."¹⁷ And Margaret Mooers Marshall, who interviewed Sandwina backstage, provocatively reported: "Mrs. Sandwina had received me in her own apartments, and under a thin dressing gown, her supple, beautiful figure bent and curved as she brushed her long brown hair and talked. She was an unconsciously perfect illustration of her text that beauty is strength, strength beauty."¹⁸ Near the end of Barnum & Bailey's run at Madison Square Garden, Charles Eldot

summed up the fourth-estate's nearly unanimous opinion: "In an entertainment where there are 1000 persons taking part it is a difficult thing to single out individuals for mention in detail but the press of New York . . . have selected Katie Sandwina, the strong woman, as the most perfect specimen of womanhood that has ever been seen and are exploiting her as the greatest single attraction the circus has offered in many years."¹⁹

The historian Janet Davis argues that circus owners particularly sought out female performers in the era just before World War I in order to capitalize on the public's interest and confusion about the emergence of a new kind of womanhood. Writes Davis, "In an era when a majority of women's roles were still circumscribed by Victorian ideals of domesticity and feminine propriety, circus women's performances celebrated female power, thereby representing a startling alternative to contemporary social norms."²⁰ Sandwina's performances were certainly about power—she physically dominated her husband, Max Heymann, lifting him overhead as if he were a light barbell—and the evidence of her physical size and superior strength led to a certain sexual *frisson* in the audience as they watched the pair go through their act. Carew in fact, told Sandwina, "Oh, I would give

anything to be able to bat a man around like that."²¹ All the reporters remarked on the size disparity between Katie—who stood in various reports anywhere from 5'9" to 6'1" tall at a bodyweight of 200-220 pounds—and her husband Max, who was 5'6", 156-165 pounds.²² While Max's size was important given the fact that he often constituted the "weight" she lifted in her daily routine, circus patrons no doubt also indulged in quiet speculation about marital relations between the physically mismatched pair.²³ The anomaly of the woman being both larger and stronger than her male partner was not just unconventional; it was radical, and more than one reporter suggested that Sandwina was

proof that suffrage could work, that "the 'female Hercules,' was a living argument in favor of equal franchise."²⁴ One reporter even warned his readers, "The anti-suffragists who go to the Barnum & Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden, and see Sandwina, the German strong woman, lift her husband and two-year-old son with one arm, tremble for the future of the anti-cause. When all women are able to rule their homes by such simple and primitive methods they will get the vote—or take it."²⁵ Sandwina did not discourage the connection. A supporter of the women's suffrage movement, she became vice-president of the suffrage group that formed within the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1912. Some reporters even began referring to her as "Sandwina the Suffragette."²⁶

So, while Sandwina may have had feminist leanings, she nonetheless didn't overlook the opportunity to use the birth of her first son, Theodore Roosevelt Martin Beck Sandwina, to confirm herself in the public's mind as a "true woman" who saw motherhood and domesticity as important aspects of her selfhood.²⁷ Teddy, as he was called, was born in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1909, and according to press clippings, Katie took almost no time off from her vaudeville obligations at the Orpheum The-

ater, even doing two shows with all her normal stunts on the evening before his birth.²⁸ The New York press was fascinated by these maternal aspects of Sandwina's life. The fact that Teddy—who was quickly dubbed "Superbaby" by the press—weighed fifty pounds at age two, and could "pick up a twenty-five pound dumbbell and run around and play with it like it was nothing," prompted Carew and other interviewers to include Sandwina's advice on childrearing and the feeding of children in their articles so that other children might also become large and strong.²⁹ While "Superbaby" was paraded in front of reporters during several important interviews in New York in



Kate Carew captioned this caricature of Sandwina with: "The Queen of Strength, Beauty, Etc., Picked Me Up and Extended Me at Arm's Length As If I Had Been a Feather." In the drawing, "Aunt Kate," as Carew called her cartoon self, warns Sandwina, "For the Love of Mike, Woman, Be Careful!"

1911, he did not travel with the circus for the rest of the summer but, rather, was left behind at a boarding pre-school in Westchester.³⁰

Teddy's unusual vigor—and Katie's own size and strength—were also perceived, however, as validation of the Progressive Era theory of eugenics.³¹ Carew focused on this aspect of the Sandwina story, concluding, "In fact, for a couple centuries or more, the mighty-muscled people of Bavaria have been intermarrying and turning out large families of great athletes, culminating in the gigantic and beautiful young creature who now twirls her lord and master over her head twice a day in Madison Square Garden."³²

Katie's strength and physique were undoubtedly influenced by her genetic heritage. She was born in the back of a circus wagon belonging to Philippe and Johanna Nock Brumbach on 6 May 1884 either in, or just outside Vienna, Austria.³³ Her father, Philippe, who stood 6'6" tall and weighed approximately 260

pounds, was one of the strongest man in Germany during the 1890s and could reportedly lift more than 500 pounds with one finger.³⁴ Katie's mother, Johanna, whose measurements were reportedly close to Katie's own, was, like Phillippe, also descended from a long line of circus performers; and when she wasn't overwhelmed by child care, she performed as a strongwoman.³⁵ There were eventually 15 or 16 Brumbach children; Katie was born second, and was the eldest daughter. Three of her sisters, Barbara, Marie, and Eugennia also became professional strongwomen. Another sister appeared as Wilma Morelly in an acrobatic act.³⁶

When Katie began actually performing outside her family's circus is not clear. She began doing hand-balancing with her father at a very young age (some papers suggest that she did handstands on her father's arm at age two), and probably began lifting light dumb-



This photograph of Sandwina with her husband, Max Heymann, gives a good idea of the size difference between the two and also allows one to see that underneath her tights, Katie's legs were shapely and muscular. Note the heels she's wearing to accentuate her height.

ells while still a small child; by her mid-teens she had grown into a large and powerful young woman.³⁷ In newspaper accounts published in 1911, Katie dismisses the idea that she did any special training as a child, stating in one article: "I never trained myself to be strong...My mother had fifteen children and she was too busy keeping us going to pay any attention to training us. I was just born strong and big, that's all."³⁸ Dr. H.L. Lepworth of Chicago, Illinois, however, who claimed in *Physical Culture* to have known Sandwina, stated that she began exercising at age five and was fourteen when she began more systematic training in tumbling, artistic dance, apparatus work, and "light and heavy dumbbell work." By the time she was seventeen, Katie was stronger than most young men and, according to Lepworth, her natural strength brought her to the attention of "Professor August Schwore, who began to teach her weight-lifting, and fifteen months later she broke two records, held in Germany by women."³⁹ According to Max Heymann, when he met Katie—in Zwickau, Saxony—she was sixteen years old and had become the star of her father's circus. Max recalled that as the finale of her act Katie would take on any man or woman who wanted to try to best her in a wrestling match. Max, who was then nineteen, had not been successful in trying to build his own acrobatic career and so decided to try to win the 100 marks offered to anyone who could pin her.⁴⁰ In an article written just a year after her death in 1952, Max claimed that when Katie quickly threw him to the ground in their match, they realized they loved each other and decided that very same day to run away and get married over the protests of her family.⁴¹ This story, the veracity of which has been questioned by several weightlifting historians, does not appear in any of the press clippings from Katie's time with Barnum & Bailey.⁴² It also doesn't match up with

the information the Heymann family reported to the U.S. Census Bureau in 1930, which included a question about their respective ages at the time of their marriage. According to that form, Katie was nineteen and Max was twenty-one.⁴³

What we know definitively is that by 1905 Katie and Max were performing with at least one and possibly two other men in an act known as “The Sandwinas.” Whether the other man was one of her brothers, and when and how she and Max separated from her father’s circus, is unclear. Although it is a common perception that the Sandwinas came to America to work in vaudeville and became overnight sensations, the historical record tells a different story. Research indicates that the Sandwinas worked primarily in Europe during the first seven years of the twentieth century. A German poster of the Sandwinas by the artist Adolph Friedlander from 1905, for example, shows Katie holding up three men and a bicycle.⁴⁴ In 1906 Edmund Desbonnet published an article on the *two* Sandwinas in his magazine *La Culture Physique* when they were playing in Paris. A historian of strength, Desbonnet describes in detail the 242-pound overhead lift he witnessed.⁴⁵ Rather than focusing on Katie’s appearance, however, Desbonnet wrote, “It is unnecessary to add that she shouldered this weight in the German style, that is to say by rolling the bar on her belly and chest.” Even so, he continued, “for a ‘weak’ woman, we are certainly of the opinion that this represents a rare performance!”⁴⁶

Although the Heymanns stated on the 1930 U.S. Census that they had immigrated to the United States in 1905, the earliest newspaper mention that has been found in any American paper is not until March of 1908 when “The Sandwinas” show up in *very* small print in an ad for Chase’s Polite Vaudeville, in Washington, D.C.⁴⁷ They are clearly not the stars of the show. Nor are they the stars in May 1908 when they performed in Syracuse, New York, or in the ad from July 1908 for Sheedy’s Theater in Newport, Rhode Island.⁴⁸ In 1909, however, the Sandwinas returned to the United States for an extended tour with Benjamin Keith’s more prestigious Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit. In January and February they were playing in Sioux City, Iowa, where Teddy was born (25 January 1909), and in March they appeared in Anaconda, Montana; in May they stayed for several weeks in Oakland, California, and later that summer they were in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Although the Orpheum Circuit was considered a step up professional-

ly from the small, individually-owned theaters like Chase’s and Sheedy’s, Katie and Max were no higher in terms of their overall billing than they’d been in the smaller houses. At Cedar Rapids, for example, they were billed well down on the show’s list of performers as “The Sandwinas—The European Acrobats Extraordinary”⁴⁹

After this extensive run in the United States, the Sandwinas returned to Europe where they turned up in Paris in 1910 appearing at the Olympia Theater, where the finale of the act involved Katie holding three men overhead with one hand.⁵⁰ Watching their performance one evening was circus magnate John Ringling, who owned at that time both the circus that bore his family name and the Barnum & Bailey Circus, which he’d purchased in 1907.⁵¹ Starring at that time in the Ringling Circus was the impressive German troupe known as The Saxon Brothers.⁵² When Ringling saw the The Sandwinas perform he was interested because he already knew that the American public enjoyed strength acts. What he could not have predicted, however, was just how popular Katie Sandwina would become once her talents were properly packaged by publicists and once she stepped out from behind the shadow of her partners to become the central focus of the act.

Katie was not a center ring attraction and she did not receive top billing when she and Max joined the Barnum & Bailey Circus in March of 1911. They began their run in Madison Square Garden as one of five acts performing simultaneously, all vying for recognition. After several newspapermen wanted to know more about the strongwoman, however, a decision was made to move Katie into the spotlight, and a special press event was organized for 2 April 1911 at Madison Square Garden to introduce her. When the reporters assembled that afternoon, they discovered that Fellows had arranged to have more than a dozen physicians from medical colleges and universities in and around New York City there, and the reporters then watched this group of distinguished physicians examine, weigh, and measure Sandwina. Their conclusion, as reported by Dr. Peter Anderson, was that “In every way, according to her measurements, she is a perfect woman by all the accepted standards.” The physicians reported that Katie stood 5 feet 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall, weighed 210 pounds, and had a 44 $\frac{1}{10}$ inch chest measurement when expanded, a 29 inch waist, 43 inch hips, a 16 $\frac{1}{10}$ inch calf, and her flexed right biceps measured 14 inches.⁵³ This public taking of

MATINEES 10-20-30	MATS DAILY 11-1		PHONE 4115	EVENINGS 25-35-50-75
	GRAND			
KEITH'S VAUDEVILLE				
ALWAYS A GOOD SHOW				
CONCERT TO-NIGHT	WEEK MAY 4	12 BIG 12 NUMBERS		
THE 4 HUNTINGS				
ORIGINAL FAMILY OF ECCENTRIC ENTERTAINERS				
Mr. and Mrs. ALFRED KELCY				
Presenting a Domestic One Act Farce, "A Tale of a Turkey"				
THE QUARTETTE 4 Great Blessed Voices		LEW HAWKINS The Famous Minstrel Man		
LAWRENCE CRANE THE MARVELOUS IRISH WIZARD				
GIRL BEHIND DRUM A Real Musical Novelty		THE SANDWINAS European Wonders of Strength		
FRANKLIN & GREEN				
HER SONGS ALL HITS—MUSIC THAT CHARMS				

This ad appeared in the *Syracuse Herald* on 3 May 1908. As can be seen, "The Sandwinas—European Wonders of Strength," are not the headliners of Keith's vaudeville show and Katie is not recognized individually. In other ads from this early era The Sandwinas are described as "European Acrobats Extraordinary," and "European Athletes."

measurements was not unprecedented. In a remarkably similar circumstance, Harvard professor Dudley Allen Sargent had declared the strongman Eugen Sandow to be the "most wonderful specimen of man I have ever seen."⁵⁴ Sargent was a pioneer in the science of physical anthropometry and believed that a person's health and general well-being could be ascertained by comparing their measurements to that of an ideal. After measuring Sandow, Sargent used Sandow as his "ideal" male. Sargent had even created an elaborate charting system that allowed people to see how they compared to the ideal.⁵⁵ Katie's measurements, although larger than those of the average woman's, revealed that she had an "hour-glass" figure that was proportionate. And, as was hoped, the reporters left that afternoon, went back to their typewriters, and wrote sentences like this one from the *New York World*, "The feminine Hercules has a wonderful figure, full of symmetry, and not marred by a display of muscles"; and headlines like this one from the *New York Herald*, "Frau Sandwina, Circus Marvel. Physically Perfect, Experts Find."⁵⁶ Katie then treated the journalists and photographers to an impromptu show, lifting Max overhead several times with one hand, and then, while

holding him aloft, lowered herself to the ground and rose again to a standing position. For her finale, she lifted both Max and her massive son, Teddy, supporting their more than 200 pounds of total weight with only one arm.⁵⁷

The publicity bandwagon was off and running once Katie had been declared perfect. In subsequent weeks the papers never failed to mention her perfect measurements, and as the season wore on she was increasingly referred to as the perfect woman.⁵⁸ The physical culture community saw in Sandwina a living example of the benefits of exercise and that, too, was exploited by the smoothly-running Sandwina publicity machine. Bernarr Macfadden featured her in *Physical Culture* magazine, for example, explaining that the ease of Teddy's birth was because Sandwina followed a physical culture life-style, ate sparingly, avoided meat, and, theoretically, followed his principles.⁵⁹ Yet in other interviews, Sandwina told reporters that she never watched what she ate, never dieted, and "I take beer with my lunches, two or three times a day."⁶⁰ When the opera star Mary Garden, a practicing physical culturist, attended the circus in 1912, she made a special trip back stage to get exercise advice from Sandwina, because she was so interested in Sandwina's "perfect form."⁶¹

In earlier press reports, of course, Katie had told reporters she never trained systematically and did only a little light dumbbell work in the mornings to keep herself supple. Whatever the truth was—and circus press agents, like pro wrestling promoters, are not averse to stretching the truth—by the end of the 1911 season, a combination of Barnum & Bailey's publicity machine and Katie's unique gifts had turned her into a bona fide star. In the press clipping book kept by Barnum & Bailey for the 1911 season, her presence in the show was remarked upon repeatedly, and was cited as one of the main reasons the circus sold out in city after city that summer. Katie and Max were brought back for the 1912 season, and a full-color poster was commissioned—a poster with text clearly written by a publicist. Katie was 28 in 1912, not 23 as the poster suggests; and if we're to believe Dr. Anderson and his colleagues she was at most 5'10" and not 6'1" as the poster claims.⁶²

The focus of this piece is narrow because the story of Katie Sandwina is still being "unpacked." Her best lifts are not listed, for example, because there is such controversy over what she actually lifted and the manner in which she lifted it. Nor does this piece exam-

ine the story of her death from cancer in 1952; the café/tavern she ran in Queens, New York, in the late 1940s; her work in the WPA circus during the 1930s; or the birth of her second son, Alfred in 1918—a birth her descendants say occurred during a civil disturbance in Istanbul that forced her to crawl under barbed wire fences to reach a hospital only to learn that the hospital was full, whereupon she gave birth on the floor.⁶³

What is most fascinating about Sandwina, besides the colorful life she led, is how this performer—who'd been working for nearly a decade—suddenly created a new identity. Her metamorphosis into a goddess of beauty who regularly sold out the Barnum & Bailey Circus was the most important transformation of her life. But it was not to be her last. Janet Davis and other historians have demonstrated that popular amusements matter and that the circus and vaudeville were powerful

transmitters of culture which helped to assimilate immigrants into the American experience. It also seems clear that the circus empowered people, helped to challenge the prevailing social mores and conventions, and opened people's eyes to new possibilities. Kate Carew certainly believed that to be the case. In closing her article on Sandwina she admonished all women: "If there's a moral to the story of Katie Sandwina, it's that the rest of womankind—ye wives of wealth and fashion—should try to emulate this goddess of the sawdust, this fearless mother, this beautiful friend."⁶⁴

Notes:

1. Born Mary Williams in Oakland, California, in 1869, she took the name of Kate Carew when she began work at the *San Francisco Examiner*. She joined the staff of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* in 1890 and later worked for *The Tatler* in London and the *New York Tribune*. She died in 1960. For additional information on Carew see: www.twainquotes.com/interviews/confessions.html.

2. Kate Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strong Woman' Tells Kate Carew—This Young Goddess of the Tan Bark, Who Tosses Her Husband About as She Would a Feather, Explains How She Came By Her Strength," *New York American*, 16 April 1911, 2-M.

3. See, for example, "This Woman Has Strength of Ten Men," *The Fresno Morning Republican*, 10 September 1912, n.p. at: www.newspaperarchives.com. See also: "Fyles Letter," *Montreal Star*, April 4, 1911, Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida; and Charles Eldot, "Last Week of the Circus," *North Side News*, 4-18, Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

4. David P. Willoughby, "The Muscular Strength of Women as Compared with Men...With Special Reference to the Feats of Katie Sandwina," *Skill* No. 69 (December 1967): 4-5; John D. Fair, "Katie Sandwina: Hercules Can Be A Lady," *Iron Game History* 9 (December 2005): 4-7; Jan Todd, "Bring on the Amazons: An Evolutionary History," *Picturing the Modern Amazon* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999): 48-61. In 1960, *Skill* magazine published short pieces on Sandwina from Leo Gaudreau, Siegmund Klein, Tromp Van Diggelen, Gerard Nisivoccia, and Peary Rader in an article entitled, "Katie Sandwina: The World's Strongest Woman?? *Skill's* Search for the Truth," *Skill* (n.m.; 1960) pg. 13-17; Partially-dated clipping, Coulter Strongwoman File, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin. See also Robert J. Devany, "Stars of the Big Top: Katie Sandwina," *Muscle Power* 3 (July 1947): 16-17; Ernest Edwin Coffin, "A Feminine Hercules," *New Physical Culture* (March 1948): 24-25, 69; and Robert Nealy, "The Feminine Sandow: Katie Sandwina," *Iron Man* (January 1961): 20-21, 46.

5. The best examples of the debate over Sandwina's strength can be seen in Willoughby, "Muscular Strength of Women," and in Gaudreau, et. al., "Katie Sandwina: The World's Strongest Woman," see above. An original copy of Sandwina's Barnum & Bailey poster can be seen at the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

6. In her article, Carew states that her interview was set up by a Mr.



In 1912, when Katie returned for her second season with the Barnum & Bailey Circus, copies of a full-color, large-size poster from the Strobbridge Lithography Company were commissioned to advertise: "Miss Katie Sandwina & Troupe: Germany's Beautiful Herculean Venus, Possessing the Most Perfect Female Figure. Strongest Woman That Ever Lived." The poster's claims that she was 6'1" and only twenty-three years old were inaccurate.

Fellows, who escorted her behind stage, introduced her to the Sandwinas, and then took her to a special box seat to watch the show. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strong Woman.'"

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 96. See also: Thomas Beer, *The Mauve Decade: American Life at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, Carol & Graf, 1997 [1926]).

10. Interview by the author with Patricia Galli, 6 June 1999. Galli separated from Alfred in 1952, the year of Katie's death. He worked as a stage and film actor under the names Al Sander(s).

11. Ottley Coulter to David Willoughby, undated letter, Coulter Papers, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

12. Ottley Coulter to Jack Kent, 30 October 1956, Coulter Papers, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

13. See: Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press: 2005), for an excellent discussion of the New Woman in early twentieth century America.

14. The most famous strongwoman working in America prior to Sandwina was Josephine Blatt, who appeared under the stage name Minerva. See: Jan Todd, "The Mystery of Minerva," *Iron Game History: The Journal of Physical Culture*, 1(April 1990): 14-17.

15. William Inglis, "Here's the Circus," *Harper's Weekly*, April 1911. Clipping, Todd-Sandwina File, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

16. "Circus Boasts its Beauties," N.P. 1912. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

17. Franklin Fyles, "Gotham's Spring Season Brings Novelties," 3 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

18. Margaret Mooers Marshall, "Katie Sandwina, Her Husband and Baby," Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

19. Charles Eldot, "Last Week of Circus," *North Side News*, 18 April 1912, Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

20. Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 83. See also: Marcy Murray, "Strong Women and Cross-Dressed Men: Representations of Gender by Circus Performers During the Golden Age of the American Circus, 1860-1930," *Bandwagon* 48(3) (May-June 2004): 18-23.

21. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strongwoman.'"

22. Although the Barnum & Bailey poster showing Katie's act lists her height at 6'1" and her weight at 220, Katie was formally weighed and measured by a team of physicians and physical culturists shortly after she opened at the Garden and found to be 5'9 3/4" in height. Edmund Desbonnet lists her height in *Les Rois de la Force*, as 1meter, 80 centimeters which converts to 5' 9.5." See: "Frau Sandwina and Her Muscles," *Telegraph*, 9 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Scrapbook at Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida for more information on her measurements in 1911. Katie always performed in tightly laced boots with two-inch heels and piled her thick hair on the top of her head to accentuate her height. Max claimed in his reminiscence of his life with Katie (written after her death) that he was 5'10" tall. Max Heymann, "I Married the World's Strongest Woman," *American Weekly*, 5 July 1943. Daughter-in-law Patricia Galli, who knew him when he was in his late sixties, remembers Max as no more than 5'3".

23. Janet Davis argues that the circus capitalized on the audience's natural

curiosity about the bodily logistics of sexual activities between mismatched performers. It was common for press agents to report the "marriage" of skeleton men with fat women or dwarves paired with giants as a way to hype the gate. Davis, *Circus Age*, 120. See also: Murray, "Strong Women and Cross-Dressed Men," 18-23. Additional insights on the lives of circus performers can be found in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

24. "Circus Performers Dance While Executing Dexterous Ring Feats," *New York Evening Journal*, 29 March 1912.

25. "Happy Family Ruled by Giantess Makes Anti-Suffragists Tremble," *American*, 10 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

26. It is possible that Sandwina and her circus friends involved themselves in the Suffrage Movement purely for publicity purposes, attempting to strike a chord with yet another group of possible ticket buyers. One bit of evidence to argue against this having the sanction of Barnum & Bailey's management, however, is that in 1911 one of the most talked about features of the show was the clowns' routine in which suffragettes were arrested by police and wrestled into small paddy wagons. "Circus Dropped for Today," *Press*, 3 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

27. For a discussion of "true womanhood" see: Francis B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth Century America*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989): 4-9; and Barbara Welter's classic work which introduced the term "true woman" to feminist studies, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976).

28. Although Max Heymann claimed that Katie returned to work just four days after giving birth, in his 1953 *American Weekly* tribute to her: "I Married the World's Strongest Woman," earlier articles suggest she waited two weeks after Teddy's birth before she began to do her strength act again. See, for example. "This Woman is a Sandow," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 12 July 1911.

29. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strong Woman.'" According to Sandwina, Teddy ate an orange, two eggs, three rolls and several glasses of milk at breakfast and then would "holler for more." As an adult, Teddy became the heavyweight boxing champion of Europe and had 68 professional fights. He won 46—38 by knockouts—had 16 losses, five draws and one "no decision." See: <http://www.jewsinsports.org/profile.asp?sport=boxing&ID=275>.

30. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strong Woman,'" 2-M.

31. See Patricia A. Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Exercise and Doctors in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 149-156, for an excellent discussion of the role of eugenics in early-twentieth-century women's lives.

32. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strongwoman.'"

33. The story of Katie's early life (with differing details) can be found in: Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strongwoman'"; Ernest Edwin Coffin, "Strongest Woman on Earth: A Biographical Sketch of Katie Sandwina," *Your Physique* 2(5) (August-September 1942): 11; Robert J. Devenney, "Stars of the Big Top: Katie Sandwina," *Muscle Power* 3(July 1947): 16-17; Barbara Ray, "Sandwina: The Strong Name," 1(2) (May 1990): 1-4; and in Edmund Desbonnet, "Brumbach Family," *Les Rois de la Force* (Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault/Librairie Athletique, 1911), 227-8. The reference to her mother's maiden name is from her obituary in *Variety* on 23 January 1952.

34. Katie claimed she had only fourteen siblings in: "She Tosses Husband About Like Biscuit, Frau Sandwina is a Giantess in Strength," undated clipping in Sandwina clipping file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin. Barbara Ray who has done a genealogical study of the family believes Katie was born second, and was the eldest daughter. Most news-

paper accounts, such as Carew's, credit Johanna with sixteen children. See also: "Strong Woman Has Figure of Gladiator," *World*, 3 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

35. "Frau Sandwina, Circus Marvel, Physically Perfect, Experts Find," *Herald*, 3 April 1911. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

36. Katie's sister Barbara (Babette) Brumbach, who appeared with Marie Brumbach in an act called the Braselley Duo, was reportedly stronger than Katie—but being shorter at approximately the same weight—had a less pleasing physique. Desbonnet, "Une Famille d'Athletes," *La Culture Physique*, 7(126) (1 April 1910): 197-199. [Special thanks to David Chapman for translation assistance.] See also: *Femme Musclevania No. 10, From the Orrin J. Heller Collection* (Privately published anthology), p. 22-23. Todd Sandwina file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports; and: "The Sister to Sandwina," *Skill*, (undated clipping in: *Femme Musclevania No. 10, From the Orrin J. Heller Collection* (Privately published anthology): 42.

37. H.L. Lepworth, "Letter to the Editor: A Famous Woman Physical Culture Exponent," Clipping from *Physical Culture*, no date. Coulter Strongwoman scrapbook, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

38. "She Tosses Husband About Like Biscuit, Frau Sandwina is a Giantess in Strength," undated clipping in Sandwina clipping file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

39. Her obituary reports that she developed into a "child acrobat and trapeze artist with the Sandwina Circus," operated by her father. "Katie Sandwina, 68, Circus Performer," Obituary, 1952. Sandwina clipping file, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin. No information on the lifting records mentioned by Lepworth has been found.

40. The improbable tale that he and Katie fell in love and eloped on the day they met is told in: Jack Ross, "The Strongest Woman Who Ever Lived," *Man to Man* (May 1953):48; and in Max Heymann with William Asher, "I Married the World's Strongest Woman," *American Weekly*, 5 July 1953.

41. Heymann, "I Married the World's Strongest Woman."

42. Leo Gaudreau, "Katie Sandwina: The World's Strongest Woman?? *Skill's* Search for the Truth," *Skill* (March & April 1961): 13. The story is told, however, in an article originally published in 1947 by Sidney Fields, "Hercules Can Be a Lady," *New York Mirror*, 15 December 1947. That article was reprinted with an introduction by John Fair in *Iron Game History* 9(December 2005): 4-7.

43. 1930 United States Federal Census, available at www.Ancestry.com.

44. This poster, by Friedlander, is located in the Library of Congress.

45. The author would like to thank David Chapman for his assistance in translating this article. Serrano (pseud. for Edmund Desbonnet), "The Sandwinas," *La Culture Physique*, 3(April 1906): 445-6.

46. Ibid. At that time some French lifters "cleaned" the barbell to their shoulders in one quick motion, while most German lifters raised the bar to the shoulders by pulling it to the waistline and then either rolling or "hitching" the bar to the shoulders.

47. "Chase's Polite Vaudeville," Advertisement, *The Washington Post*, 1 March 1908, p. 3. See also: "Chase's Polite Vaudeville," Advertisement, *The Washington Post*, 7 March 1908, p. 4; Advertisement, *The Post Standard*, 2 May 1908; and "The Grand, Keith's Vaudeville," Advertisement, *Syracuse*

Herald, 3 May 1908, p. 15. All retrieved from: www.newspaperarchive.com. 48. "Sheedy's Theater," Advertisement, *The News—Newport, Rhode Island*, 27 July 1908. Retrieved from: www.newspaperarchive.com.

49. "Orpheum Theater," Advertisement, *The Anaconda Standard*, 11 March, 1909, p. 11; "Orpheum Theater," Advertisement, *Oakland Tribune*, 25 April, 1909, p. 7; "Orpheum Theater," Advertisement, *Oakland Tribune*, 26 April 1909, p. 16; "Orpheum Theater," Advertisement, *Oakland Tribune*, 2 May 1909, p. 4; "Orpheum Theater," Advertisement, *Oakland Tribune*, 7 May, 1909, n.p. See "Large Crowds Enjoy Circus," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 21 July 1911, p. 7 for the description of Teddy's birth in February of 1909. All retrieved from: www.newspaperarchive.com.

50. Leon See, "Une Famille d'Athletes," *La Culture Physique*, 7(126) (1 April, 1910): 197-199. See also: "Hercules Can be a Lady," *Iron Game History*: 9(December 2005): 4-7.

51. Freeman Hubbard, *Great Days of the American Circus* (New York: *American Heritage*, Harper and Row): 71.

52. "Strong Men at the Circus: The Saxon Brothers Show Athletes Feats in Weight Lifting," *New York Times*, 12 April 1909.

53. "Frau Sandwina Perfect Woman," *Telegraph*, 3 April 1911; "Frau Sandwina Circus Marvel, Physically Perfect, Experts Find," *New York Herald*, 3 April 1911. "Lifts Husband and Son: Sandwina of the Circus Does it With One Hand," *New York Tribune*, 3 April 1911.

54. Quoted in G. Mercer Adam, ed, *Sandow's System of Physical Training* (New York, G. Selwin Tate, 1894), 121.

55. For more information on Sargent and his ideas see: Carolyn de la Pena, "Dudley Allen Sargent, Health Machines and the Energized Male Body," *Iron Game History*, 8(October 2003), 3-19.

56. "Strong Woman Has Figure of a Gladiator," *New York World*, 3 April 1911; and "Frau Sandwina, Circus Marvel. Physically Perfect, Experts Find," *New York Herald*, 3 April 1911.

57. "Frau Sandwina, Circus Marvel." Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

58. "Frau Sandwina Perfect Woman: Exhibition of Form Divine," *Telegraph*, 3 April, 1911 and: "Frau Sandwina and Her Muscles: Strong Woman of the Circus Proves One of

the Most Sensational and Interesting Features," *Telegraph*, 9 April 1911, in Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

59. "A Remarkable Mother," *Physical Culture* magazine clipping, Coulter Strongwoman Scrapbook, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

60. "Frau Sandwina Circus Marvel" and "She Tosses Husband About Like Biscuit, Frau Sandwina is a Giantess in Strength." Undated clipping, Coulter Strongwoman Scrapbook, Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection, Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports, The University of Texas at Austin.

61. "Miss Garden Sees Her First Circus: Diva Deeply Interested in All She Sees on Visit to Madison Square Garden," *New York Herald*, 28 March 1912. Barnum & Bailey Route & Clipping Book for 1911, Ringling Museum of Art Archives, Sarasota, Florida.

62. Black and white copies of the poster have appeared frequently in muscle magazine coverage of Sandwina. It can also be seen on page in David P. Willoughby, *The Super Athletes* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1970), 533. An original copy can be seen at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

63. Katie's bar was in the Ridgewood neighborhood of Queens, close to the Brooklyn/Queens border. Interview with Patricia Galli, 6 June 1999.

64. Carew, "Barnum & Bailey's 'Strong Woman.'"



A Perfect Storm: An Analysis of the American Youth Obesity Epidemic

Baker Harrell

The University of Texas at Austin

It is our hope that the readers of *Iron Game History* will see this article for what we believe it is—an objective analysis of something that lies at the heart of physical culture. In order to build strength, to enhance muscle size, to improve endurance and cardiovascular fitness, and to live a long, full life it is important—if not essential—to remain healthy. Health lies at the core of the physical culture life, and it is almost impossible for a person who is either obese or significantly overweight to maintain health and the vigor that goes with it. There was a reason why the British magazine was called *Health and Strength* and why the American magazine was called *Strength & Health*. Health and strength cannot, and should not, be separate. Baker Harrell is a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas, and the following article reflects some of the research he has been doing for his dissertation. We suspect that most of you will nod your heads in agreement as you read what he has written, but we also suspect that you will shake your heads in shock as you realize the full extent of this problem and at how suddenly it has overtaken our culture.

—Terry Todd



Since the 1970s, the American political, economic, environmental, and cultural landscapes have changed in dramatic, unprecedented ways. As part of these changes, we, as a nation, have become increasingly sedentary, increasingly obese, and increasingly dependent upon those mediums and products which provide us quick and accessible “fixes.” More than ever, we live second-to-second and day-to-day in a world that values “fast” over “healthy,” “digital” over “real,” and “high scores” over “play.” No group lives in this world more than America’s children and adolescents.

In the last twenty-five years, the number of overweight and obese preschoolers ages two to five and adolescents ages twelve to nineteen in the U.S. has doubled, while the number of overweight and obese children ages six to eleven has more than tripled.¹ The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has even labeled childhood

obesity an “epidemic.”² In a 2006 article, John Cawley writes, “The problem for researchers is not figuring out what could have caused the rise in childhood obesity; the problem is that too many things could have caused it.”³ This statement reveals both the complexity of the U.S. youth obesity epidemic and the persistent gaps in the scientific community’s understanding of the factors which contribute to the disease.

The quest to better understand the root causes of the U.S. youth obesity epidemic is, at best, a frustrating one. The current dearth of data, the quality of that data, and the often contradictory research that has produced the data make a definitive judgment about the etiology of the U.S. youth obesity epidemic an impossibility. Nevertheless, a review of the potential and identified causes is an important step in developing solutions for the health crisis. In an attempt to provide a more holistic analysis of the rapid growth of the disease over the last thirty years, this article will focus on the leading cultural, economic, environmental, and political changes that have together created the conditions for obesity’s “perfect storm.”

Eye of the Storm

The choice of the word “epidemic” by the CDC to describe the problem of youth obesity is well-intentioned, but is a poor choice. What this country faces is not an epidemic; it is a cancer. The cancer that is adolescent obesity did not occur like the outbreak of a highly communicable disease, as the term “epidemic” implies. Rather, the prevalence of youth obesity in the U.S. began as a slow-moving wave in the 1970s and rapidly gained momentum in the 1980s. Over these years, our nation grew increasingly motionless, living within a digital reality and addicted to fast food, sugary beverages, and larger portion sizes. The CDC is right, of course, in sensing that the problem of childhood and adolescent obesity has reached epidemic proportions. However, the word “epidemic” implies a sense of finality to the degree that one is left with the sense that the situation is as bad as it has ever been (which is true) or will ever get (which is completely false). This, in turn, leads

to a false perception that all we must do is find a cure, apply the cure, and sit back while the problem disappears.

Before a discussion of the contributing factors to this American “cancer” can take place, however, it is first necessary to outline the ways in which the U.S. defines and assesses youth “overweight” and “obesity.” The terms obesity and overweight are often used interchangeably. The two classifications, however, are not the same. Overweight refers to an increase in body weight above an arbitrary standard, whereas obesity refers to an abnormally high proportion of the body composition as body fat.



Sitting on the sidelines happens all too often for overweight and obese children who are often fearful and embarrassed to participate in sports and exercise, thus perpetuating their weight problems. They are also more likely to be psychologically isolated, have lower levels of self-esteem than children and teenagers of normal weight, and are much more likely to become obese and unhealthy adults.

Because children and adolescents mature along a spectrum of chronological age, assessments of youth overweight and obesity are more difficult than evaluations of adults. The Body Mass Index (BMI) is the most widely used method for assessing whether youth are overweight as it requires minimal equipment, measurements, and calculations. In children and adolescents, BMI is assessed by dividing a person’s weight in kilograms by his or her height in meters squared; the resulting value is then compared to baseline percentages based on gender and age. BMI’s major limitations are a result of its primary strength—its simplicity. Researchers have been unable to demonstrate BMI’s ability to precisely distinguish weight from adiposity. What’s more, very short and very tall individuals, as well as individuals with inordinate amounts of lean muscle-mass—like bodybuilders—are often classified as overweight or obese in error. BMI for adults is not based on baseline age percentages; instead a baseline score of twenty-five is used. The established “age norms” for children, however, are often imprecise due to the physiological changes that occur concurrent with the maturation process and which differ from child to child.

The classifications of overweight and obese for youth are further confounded by the way in which the CDC defines the terms. Unlike adults, the CDC defines those children and adolescents between the eighty-fifth and ninety-fifth percentile of BMI for age and gender as

“at-risk-of-overweight” (the adult classification for this range is overweight) and those children or adolescents above the ninety-fifth percentile of BMI for age as “overweight” (the adult classification for this range is “obese”).⁴ The CDC uses these terms to avoid labeling children or adolescents as “obese” for fear of stigmatizing them.⁵

Although well-intentioned, the CDC’s classifications for children and adolescents often lead to conflicting reports about the prevalence of “childhood obesity” in the U.S. If one uses the CDC’s definitions, the percentage of “overweight” children and adolescents in the U.S.—sixteen percent—appears worrisome, but is in no way worthy of the “epidemic” label. When, however, the “at-risk-of-overweight” group of children and adolescents is combined with the “overweight” group, the number rises sharply to thirty-one percent.⁶

Beyond the potential for confusion that the CDC’s classifications cause, many researchers point out that the CDC definitions are not only inaccurate, but that they belie the seriousness of the disease within each classification. As such, most researchers use the same classifications for children as those for adults. In a report to the International Obesity Task Force, William Dietz and Mary Bellizzi concluded that the CDC’s definitions of overweight and obese for adults are consistent with the respective BMI ranges for youth and, thus, should be used in lieu of the CDC’s standard youth classifications.⁷

This article will do as Dietz and Bellizzi suggest in applying the term overweight to those children and adolescents within the eighty-fifth and ninety-fifth percentile of BMI for age and gender. Moreover, the term “obesity” will pertain to those children and adolescents with a BMI for age and gender above the ninety-fifth percentile.

Despite the problems with the multiple definitions of the disease, the speed at which the disease has gained ground within the U.S. youth population and the crisis this disease represents for the future of the country are undisputable. In the U.S., youth overweight and obesity are tracked by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which began in 1971.⁸ According to the NHANES 1971-1974 survey, approximately five percent of American youth were obese. Between the years 1976 and 1980, the number of obese youth was only marginally higher. By 1994, the number of obese youth in the U.S. had nearly doubled. The 2002 NHANES revealed that fifteen percent of U.S. youth were obese and another sixteen percent were overweight.⁹ According to Dr. William J. Klish of Texas Children’s Hospital, today’s youth are the first generation in one-hundred years to have a lower projected life expectancy than their parents.¹⁰

In a recent article, Patricia Anderson and Kristin Butcher reported that overweight and obesity rates in the U.S. are higher among minority and low-income youth than among youth as a whole.¹¹ In a slightly earlier study, researchers found that 42.8% of Mexican-American boys and young men, ages six to nineteen, were overweight or obese, as compared to thirty-one percent of African-American, and 29.2% of Caucasian boys and young men.¹² Richard Strauss and Harold Pollack also concluded in 2001 that African-American and Hispanic youth were more likely to be overweight or obese than Caucasian children.¹³

Obesity is a primary predisposing factor for chronic diseases such as hypertension, Type II diabetes mellitus, and coronary heart disease. In 2000, obesity and physical inactivity accounted for an estimated 365,000 deaths in the U.S.; in addition, obesity is a leading factor for the nation’s number one killer—heart disease.¹⁴ Numerous studies also link youth obesity to an increase in the incidence of Type II diabetes.¹⁵ In a 1999 study, Freedman, et al. determined that overweight and obese youth are at much greater risk for several cardiovascular disease risk factors.¹⁶ According to a 2005 report published by the Institute of Medicine, sixty percent of obese children, aged five to ten years, had a min-

imum of one cardiovascular disease risk factor and twenty-five percent demonstrated two or more risk factors.¹⁷ A 2003 study determined that a severely obese youth was 5.5 times more likely to have an impaired health-related quality of life as compared to a normal-weight youth.¹⁸

In addition to the numerous physiological complications associated with obesity, the negative psychosocial effects of the disease are many. In a 2003 study, researchers determined that overweight and obese adolescents are more likely to be socially isolated and peripheral to social networks than peers who have normal weights.¹⁹ Moreover, children and adolescents with chronic diseases such as obesity are at twice the risk of experiencing behavioral and social problems when compared to their peers.²⁰ Richard Strauss found that, on average, obese adolescents reported lower levels of self-esteem than normal-weight youth, and the obese adolescents with lower self-esteem demonstrated significantly increased degrees of sadness, loneliness, and nervousness.²¹ In a 2001 book, Jana Parizkova and Andrew Hill wrote that obese individuals generally report a fear of participating in sports, recreational activities, and other social activities. It is for these reasons, Parizkova and Hill claim, that overweight or obese youth often avoid physical activity, which only serves to perpetuate their unfavorable conditions.²²

As one might expect, the “boom” of overweight and obese children in the 1980s led to a rapid increase in the number of overweight and obese adults in the United States. Research suggests that obesity which begins in childhood is more severe than that which begins in adulthood because of the longer timeframe in which an individual carries additional body fat and his or her consequent increased risk of co-morbidity and enhanced mortality.²³ Whitaker et al. determined that fifty-two percent of children who are obese between the ages of three and six will be obese at age twenty-five, compared to only twelve percent of their normal-weight peers.²⁴ In another study, Guo and Chumlea determined that the probability of youth obesity persisting into adulthood increases from nearly twenty percent at age four to between forty and eighty percent at adolescence.

In an editorial for a February 1999, edition of *American Family Physician*, Dennis Styne, professor in the Department of Pediatrics and Director of Pediatric Endocrinology at the University of California at Davis, wrote:

The increase in childhood obesity in

the U.S. is not caused by a change in the gene pool, but rather by changes in the environment that have caused genetically susceptible populations to express the obesity phenotype in increasing numbers. For many reasons, including fewer mandated physical education programs in school, lack of safe areas to exercise and play in many inner-city neighborhoods, and the ever-present television set, physical activity levels are lower now than they were twenty years ago.²⁵

These “many reasons” are what this article will now explore and we start with an analysis of changes within the school environment.

Recess Takes a Time-Out

Unfortunately, there remains a shortage of reliable research on the ways in which the school environment may have contributed to the rise in youth overweight and obesity. The research that does exist falls primarily into three categories: A) trends in participation rates by students in physical education classes; B) school lunch and vending trends, and; C) trends in the provision of recess. Of the three categories of research, the “vending trends” category is the most robust in terms of raw data.

In a 2003 study, French and colleagues found a three percent increase in the share of soft drinks served in school cafeterias between the years 1977-1978 and 1994-1998. They also noted a forty-eight percent increase in the share of soft drinks consumed by students from vending machines over that same period of time.²⁶ In a 2003 report, researchers found that seventy-three percent of high schools, fifty-eight percent of middle schools, and forty-two percent of elementary schools had exclusive “pouring contracts” with soft drink manufacturers; these agreements allowed manufacturers to place vending machines within the school grounds in exchange for revenue sharing between the school and manufacturer. Forty-six percent of the high schools, twenty-nine percent of the middle schools, and thirteen percent of the examined elementary schools allowed these manufacturers to advertise to students.²⁷

Using the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBS), the primary source of data on U.S. physical education participation rates, conducted between 1991-1997, Lowry et.al. found significant decreases in the number of high school students who attended daily physical education (down from 41.6% to 27.4%). A sharp

drop-off was also shown in terms of the percentage that participated in more than twenty minutes of moderate to vigorous activity during daily physical education classes (down from 34.2% to 21.7%).²⁸ More recent data from a 2004 survey by the CDC supported these findings.²⁹

A 2000 report by the CDC demonstrated that 71.4% of elementary schools provided “regularly scheduled” recess for kindergarden to fifth grade students.³⁰ In a report issued the following year, it was noted that forty percent of elementary schools had reduced, deleted, or had considered terminating recess since 1989, when ninety percent of elementary schools had some form of regularly scheduled recess.³¹ As will be discussed, it is not just the school environment that has changed over the last few decades. Home environments have also undergone significant shifts in the last thirty years.

The Meltdown of the Nuclear Family

From 1960 to 2000, the number of single-parent families with children under eighteen grew from 8.2% to 27.1%.³² This is a significant statistic, as was demonstrated in a 1999 study, in that children in homes with single mothers are at a significantly greater risk for becoming overweight or obese compared to children in two-parent homes.³³ In a related issue, a 2004 report revealed that over the last thirty years the number of women (with children younger than age eighteen) participating in the labor force grew from forty-seven percent to seventy-two percent, with the most significant rise among mothers with children younger than three years.³⁴ This shift, which includes an increasing number of married women with children under the age of one entering the labor force (thirty-one percent in 1975 to fifty-five percent in 2003) may have resulted in the increased prevalence of youth obesity: first, because of more meals being consumed away from home and, second, because there were more children who required child care.³⁵

In a 2004 study, Roland Sturm found that for the entire U.S. population, the number of daily minutes dedicated to preparing meals declined from forty-four minutes in 1965 to thirty-two minutes in 1999.³⁶ A 1999 report revealed that the total share of calories consumed away from home rose from eighteen percent to thirty-four percent between the years 1977 and 1995.³⁷ In another study, Lin and Guthrie determined that between 1994 and 1996, children consumed thirty-two percent of their calories away from home.³⁸

Story and colleagues found in 2006 that thirteen million of the twenty-one million pre-school children in the U.S. “spend a substantial part of their day in

child care facilities.”³⁹ Moreover, the Children’s Foundation and National Association for Regulatory Administration estimated that the number of child care facilities in the U.S. grew from 25,000 in 1977 to more than 116,000 in 2004.⁴⁰ In a 2003 study, Smolensky and Gootman determined that employed mothers of children aged five and younger have their children in child care for an average of nearly forty hours a week.⁴¹ Unfortunately, little scholarship has been done regarding the quality of food offered at these child care facilities.⁴² Kranz and colleagues, in a study of a nationally representative sample of children aged three to five between the years 1977 and 1998, found that total energy intake increased, along with the consumption of excess juice and added sugars. Also, while the consumption of grains, fruits, and vegetables also improved, they fell far below recommended quantities.⁴³

More is known, however, about the amount of physical activity in which individuals in child care facilities are engaged. A 2004 study determined that many children in pre-school settings are not receiving the recommended two hours of daily physical activity and that youth in these settings need more play and exercise.⁴⁴ These findings are significant because, as was noted by Cubed in a 2002 report, the number of U.S. children aged four and younger is, in the next decade, expected to grow by six percent, which equates to an increase of 1.2 million children. Accordingly, the number of working parents dependent upon child care is also expected to rise.⁴⁵

Big Gulps in a Fast Food Nation

John Cawley, citing a report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, writes:

A quick comparison of the various consumer price indexes indicates that between January 1989 and January 2005, the real price of fruits and vegetables rose 74.6% while that of fats and oils fell 26.5% and that of sugars and sweets fell 33.1%. Thus energy dense foods have become considerably cheaper, relative to less energy-dense foods in the past 15 years.⁴⁶

Drewnowski and Specter, in a 2004 article, support Cawley’s findings. Like Cawley, they find that energy-dense foods are much cheaper than foods that are low in energy density.⁴⁷ Lakdawalla and Philipson, in a 2002 report, make the case that the decline in the relative price

of food over the last twenty years has resulted in people eating more which has, in turn, led to increased obesity.⁴⁸

Of the myriad categories of “energy-dense” consumables, regular (non-diet) soft drinks and fast foods have demonstrated the most significant link to youth overweight and obesity. In a 2004 study, James and colleagues demonstrated that a reduction in the consumption of regular sodas by a sample of children aged seven to eleven resulted in a reduction of the number of overweight and obese participants.⁴⁹ In a 2003 article, French and colleagues chronicled the consumption of regular soft drinks by children between the years 1977-78 and 1994-98. They found that the average intake of regular soft drinks by children more than doubled, from five to twelve ounces a day.⁵⁰ Likewise, Gleason and Suitor, in a 2001 report, documented that children aged nine and older are heavy consumers of regular soft drinks. They noted that by age fourteen, thirty-two percent of young women and fifty-two percent of young men consume at least three servings of regular soft drinks each day.⁵¹

In the preceding section, the dramatic increase in the number of calories and meals consumed away from home was noted. In a 2003 study, Paeratakul and colleagues found that those people consuming fast food meals experience higher energy intake with lower nutritional values than those individuals not consuming fast food.⁵² Bowman and colleagues, in a 2004 study, come to a similar conclusion. They found that children who eat fast food, as compared to those who do not, consume more total calories, more calories per gram of food, more total fat, more total carbohydrates, more sugar-sweetened beverages, more added sugars, less milk, less fiber and fewer fruits and non-starchy vegetables.⁵³ Moreover, in a longitudinal study of girls aged eight to twelve, Thompson and colleagues concluded that those participants eating fast food a minimum of two times a week had larger weight gains at the end of the three-year study.⁵⁴

But it is not only the frequency of the consumption of fast food that has led to the increases in youth overweight and obesity. With the fall of the relative price of food, the ability of vendors to provide larger and larger portions became a reality. In a 2002 study, Young and Nestle document the increases in portion sizes that have occurred in the U.S. from the 1970s to the late 1990s. For 181 products, Young and Nestle report a sixty percent increase in portion sizes.⁵⁵ Rolls and colleagues, in a 2000 study, found that individuals as young

as five would eat more if offered larger portion sizes.⁵⁶

It was the promotion of those low prices and ever-increasing quantities that developed a significant youth market for these energy-dense products. These promotions drove the youth market to demand and consume more and more of these calorie-laden foods and beverages. In a 1999 report, Anthony Gallo reveals that, the food industry spent seven billion dollars on advertising in 1997—second only to the automobile industry.⁵⁷ Harris and colleagues, in a 2002 report, document the increase in spending for the advertising of soft drinks from \$541 million in 1995 to \$799 million in 1999—an increase of nearly fifty percent. As a contrast, Harris and colleagues point out that overall food advertising increased only twenty percent, from \$9.8 billion to \$11.6 billion, during the same time period.⁵⁸

Kunkel estimates that the number of television commercials viewed by U.S. children doubled from nearly twenty thousand in 1970 to forty thousand by the year 2000.⁵⁹ During this same time period, the length of the average commercial had decreased, thus exposing children to a greater number of commercials within a more compressed amount of viewing time.⁶⁰ In a 1995 article, Taras and Gage reported eleven percent more commercials per hour of children's programming than in 1987.⁶¹ In a 2003 report, Hastings and colleagues conclude that the trend among advertising to children is a near total reduction in advertisements for fruits and vegetables and a rapid increase in the numbers of advertisements for fast food, soft drinks, snacks, and breakfast cereals.⁶²

With the discussion of advertising, it is appropriate that we now turn our attention to the ways in which the media—especially television, the internet, and video games—have contributed to the youth obesity epidemic. As the title of the next section (a play on the popular, online game *Second Life*) suggests, modern young people straddle two realities: one real and one virtual. Increasingly, it seems, the virtual, digitally-mediated world is where children are spending their leisure time, rather than in active play.

Second Lives

In a 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation report, Roberts and colleagues chronicle the dominance of television over the last thirty years. They report that in 1970, thirty-five percent of homes had more than one television set, six percent had three or more sets, and only six percent of sixth grade students had a set in their bedroom. By the year 1999, things had dramatically

changed. Eighty-eight percent of families had more than one television set by then, sixty percent had three or more sets, and seventy-seven percent of sixth grade students had a set in their bedroom.⁶³ Despite the proliferation of television sets during this period, the amount of television being watched by children actually decreased. A 2001 study, for example, revealed that the amount of weekly television viewing fell four hours between the years 1981 and 1997.⁶⁴ According to Nielsen Media Research data, children aged six to eleven in 1982 watched twenty-four hours of television weekly. Female teens averaged nearly twenty-one hours of weekly television and male teens averaged twenty-four hours. By 1999, though, weekly television viewing for both groups had fallen to 19.7 hours.⁶⁵

The decline in television viewing in these years, particularly the mid-1990s, resulted from youth substituting other forms of media. The Roberts 1999 report found that children spent 19.3 hours a week viewing television, another 2.5 hours in front of the computer, and 2.3 hours playing video games.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Vandewater and her colleagues revealed that even the youngest of children are becoming heavy media consumers. In her 2007 study she found that seventy-five percent of children up to six years of age watch television for an average of eighty minutes a day, and thirty-two percent of those same children average an additional eighty minutes of video or DVD viewing in a typical day. They also found that twenty-seven percent of children aged five to six use a computer for fifty minutes a day. Finally, they found that twenty percent of children up to the age of two, and thirty-three percent of children aged three to six, have a television set in their room.⁶⁷

Also worth noting is the modern dominance of video game consoles, even over computers, among children and adolescents. In 1999, thirty percent of boys and seventeen percent of girls owned at least one video game console. By 2004, sixty-three percent of boys and thirty-three percent of girls owned at least one video game console. Television sets owned by boys during the same time period only increased by two percentage points while for girls the number actually decreased by six percentage points. Computers owned by boys during this period increased from twenty-two percent to thirty-five percent, while ownership decreased by a single percentage point, from twenty-seven percent to twenty-six percent, for girls.⁶⁸ When looking at the rapid increase in popularity of video games among youth, it is no wonder then that the video game industry—with \$12.5 billion in sales in 2006—surpassed the movie industry's \$9

billion in total box office sales.⁶⁹

The discussion of media's dominance in the lives of modern youth is an important one because of the link between sedentary behaviors and overweight and obesity. In their groundbreaking study, Dietz and Gortmaker determined that each additional hour of television viewing per day increased the prevalence of childhood obesity by two percent.⁷⁰ Thomas Robinson, in a 1999 study, confirmed the results of Dietz and Gortmaker's study. He found that a reduction in children's television viewing lowers their BMI.⁷¹ In a 2004 study, however, Vandewater and colleagues collected data that contradicted the studies of Dietz and Gortmaker, and Robinson. Vandewater and colleagues found that video game usage was related to children's weight status while television viewing was not. They also noted that children with higher weight status spent more time involved in sedentary activities than their normal-weight peers.⁷²

Researchers are nearly unanimous in stating that increased amounts of sedentary activity (the kind of activity so often associated with media consumption) accompanied by higher caloric intake leads to increases in adiposity and weight status. But it is not merely the changes in media consumption that have led to the increases in sedentary activity among youth. Larger environmental changes have also played a significant role in the way in which youth interact with their world.

Built for Big

In a 2006 article, James Sallis and Karen Glanz define the "built environment" as "the neighborhoods, roads, buildings, food sources, and recreational facilities in which people live, work, are educated, eat, and play."⁷³ Their definition includes the environments of home and school, which we have already explored. For this section, the focus will be limited to two primary components of the "built environment": transportation routes and neighborhood composition.

In a 2002 report, Ewing and colleagues document the urban sprawl that has occurred in the U.S. in recent decades. They determined that urban sprawl increases automobile travel and as sprawl has expanded, so too have the number of vehicle miles the average person travels on a regular basis.⁷⁴ Hu and colleagues, in a 2004 report, found that the number of daily vehicle miles traveled per household was fairly consistent at thirty-three between the years 1977 and 1983. By 1990, the number had increased to forty-one daily vehicle miles and in 2001, the number reached fifty-eight.⁷⁵

Closely related to the number of daily vehicle

miles is the subject of how children travel to school. In a 1999 report, Corless and Ohland concluded that between the years 1977 and 1990 the percent of trips to school by bicycle or foot by students had fallen from 15.8% to 14.1%. In 1995, the percent of trips to school by bicycle or foot by students had dramatically decreased to 9.9%.⁷⁶ The decline in the amount of walking and cycling to school by students is an important statistic to track because research demonstrates that both activities require substantial energy expenditure by students.⁷⁷ Other research has shown that children who walk to school are, overall, more physically active than those who do not.⁷⁸

A 2003 report completed by Russonello confirmed the findings of Corless and Ohland. In 2002, Russonello surveyed a nationally representative sample of parents. He found that fifty-three percent of school-aged children were often driven to school by their parents and thirty-eight percent rode the school bus. Only seventeen percent of the children sometimes walked to school and five percent rode a bike to school.⁷⁹ Among the parents surveyed who reported driving their kids to school or putting them on the bus, the most common response (sixty-six percent) as to why their children did not walk or ride their bike to school was that the school was too far away.⁸⁰ Finally, as a pure example of the urban sprawl phenomenon previously discussed, seventy-one percent of all parents participating in the survey reported walking or biking to school as children.⁸¹

Research on the composition of neighborhoods may partially explain why youth obesity is more prevalent among low income and minority populations. In a 2004 study, Estabrooks and colleagues found less access to fitness clubs, parks, sports fields, and walking and biking trails in low-income neighborhoods as compared to more affluent ones.⁸² Gordon-Larsen and colleagues, in a study conducted in 2006, also found that recreational facilities which promoted physical activity were less common among minority and low-income populations. They noted that the availability of just one such facility per census block group is related to a five percent decrease in the probability of overweight among the group.⁸³ In a 2000 study, Sallis and colleagues determined that youth with easy access to recreational facilities are more physically active than those without access.⁸⁴

The perceived safety of a neighborhood may also influence whether parents encourage their children to be active outdoors. Timperio and colleagues, in a 2004 study, found that the way people in a neighborhood

perceive the environment can affect the degree to which children regularly walk and cycle.⁸⁵ They demonstrated that in settings with heavy vehicle traffic (as is often the case in many dense, urban neighborhoods), children are less likely to walk.⁸⁶

The effect of the built environment upon physical activity is just one side of the coin; the built environment also influences the way in which residents consume. In a 2002 study, Morland and colleagues discovered that supermarkets were less common in low-income and minority neighborhoods.⁸⁷ This finding is important because recent research has linked availability of supermarkets with fruit and vegetable intake among African-Americans.⁸⁸ What's more, Block and colleagues, in a 2004 study, found higher fast-food restaurant density in minority and low-income neighborhoods.⁸⁹

In summary, the many disparate and interrelated factors associated with the U.S. youth obesity epidemic make comprehensive research on the issue a daunting task. Though intimidating, the work is critical if effective preventative measures are to be developed, implemented, and tested. The future viability of our country hangs in the balance. As a society, we must all commit to end the cancer of obesity if we are to save generations of young people from a life that will be less active, less socially satisfying, and significantly shorter.

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STRONG WIND VERSUS WEAK TREE - MY TRUE STORY -

Richard Hubert

Editors' note: Recently, while looking through some of our photo files, we found and opened an envelope that contained a somewhat longer version of the following article, which was written in the early 1950s. The envelope also included two letters and half a dozen photographs by the well-known photographer Gebbé, several of which accompany the article. We consider the article to be one of the more unique artifacts in our collection, and we are proud to be part of the process that has allowed it to finally be published. The article has been very sparingly edited, as have parts of the letter which precedes the article.

July 24, 1953

Peary Rader
Iron Man Publishing Company
Alliance, Nebraska

Dear Sir:

I've tried to do everything that you instructed me to do. I do hope I answered all of the questions you asked and wrote the story you wanted. You are an educated man, and you know how to make it shorter, but it would make me very happy if you could use all of it, word for word because it is the naked truth.

I believe that my story will help somebody because it will help some people see what some other people are forced to go through. I believe that many good people, and some bad ones, too, will see the truth in what I've written and then try to make things better. If enough people read this, it will help them to be friendlier and to promote inter-racial understanding.

Men cannot have too many friends.

Sincerely,
Richard Hubert

I was born on a rented share-cropping cotton farm 22½ years ago outside Swainsboro, Georgia, being one of ten children my mother and father had. While living on this farm I kept physically fit because there was an exceptional amount of hard work that was compulsory for us to do. Being in debt and staying in debt, we had to work or we didn't eat. When I was eight years of age I could pick, sometimes, as much as 160 pounds of cotton in nine hours—in a day's work. By the time I was nine I could plow good. Doing this hard work didn't give us huge, bulky, strong, weight-lifting muscles but it did give us a lot of endurance and stamina and also a little strength.

Early in the morning the men would get up and cut wood, feed all the animals and help milk the cows. The girls would do the cooking, clean up the house, and sometimes help milk the cows. Early after breakfast we would go and do our daily work. Such work as plowing, chopping cotton, working in the corn fields, picking cotton, and sawing wood.

My mother and father were not educated people. But, to me and my sisters and brothers they were the two sweetest people on earth. My father was a little man about 5 feet 4½" and 140 pounds but he was very strong. My mother was about the same height but she weighed no more than 115 pounds. We remembered them most because of some of the things they said to friends during depression days, which didn't end in our county until about 1940. The friends and neighbors would tell my mother and father that only the older and larger ones in our family who did the hardest work should eat what little meat we had. Our father and mother would thank them and say, "all of our children will eat what we eat." Then my father would heat some water in a great big pot, go up to our hog pen some five hundred feet away from the house, kill one of the hogs, put him on his shoulders unassisted, and bring him all the way back to the house. Then we'd eat meat for awhile, but there were many days when the whole family went without food.

We sometimes would have to carry a wagon load of watermelons into town and sell the big ones as cheap as three for twenty-five cents to get money to buy

other supplies. After the cotton-picking months were over we would have picked anywhere from fourteen to twenty-six bales of cotton on the land we share-cropped, and one year we made forty-four bales because the weather was good and because we were living on some of the very best land. Then came the school days.

By that time our all-Negro schools would have already started for some of the students, but many of the rest of us who had to pick all that cotton couldn't attend school when it first opened. All the schools were segregated in the south at that time, like they are now. In fact, most of the White and Negro schools are not even close together. My younger brothers and sisters and I went to the country school that taught no higher than the seventh grade, but my older sister and brothers would walk some eight miles into the city to attend the Negro high school. We didn't have a school bus. At all of these schools I must say that what little muscles, strength, endurance, and toughness I had really came in handy. Even though I was skinny and underweight, I always could fight. I had to fight. There were fights I sometime had to win while knowing that I was the underdog. Sometimes my life depended on winning those fights. Even when our nice Negro teachers would stop us and punish us in school for fighting we would get into fights either going or coming from school with other kids who made fun of us. We were always angry.

When I was ten years old we moved into the city [Swainsboro] with the help of some good friends and relatives, and my father got a job at the saw-mill. My next older sister and brothers who had not already married had to quit school like some of the others had done before to help out the family by getting themselves a job. Living in the city was a little better in some ways than living on the farm except that I got into four times as many fights in the city as I did in the country. Due to the fact that I was getting older it was here that I really began to notice something which is as bad—and probably much worse—than anything else anyone can mention. This bad, evil thing is race prejudice.

To describe race prejudice, I will name some very bad things: leprosy, black plague, cancer, pneumonia, cholera, anthrax, dengue fever, rabies, tuberculosis, infantile paralysis, etc. Many people may not want to admit this but race prejudice belongs at the top of this list. Everybody including myself knows that this great country, even with its faults, is still the greatest in the whole world. But this country is filled up with race prejudice. I would be lying if I should say that this evil did not affect me. There were days when I got into as many

as five fist fights in one day. Not one week, but in one day. On my way to our all-Negro school I'd have my first fight—with some White kids. At the school I would get into fight Number Two with some Colored kids, then at lunch-time some more Colored kids and I would fight my third fight. When school turned out in the afternoon I would get into fight Number Four with some White kids on my way home. And when I got home my mother would send me to the store to get some food, and on my way I would get into fight Number Five with some more White kids. This getting into five fights a day did not happen every day, but I fought so often that it sometimes seemed like five fights every day. Everybody was always so angry—particularly us Colored kids.

I couldn't afford to start any of these fights because I was new in the city and didn't know my way around. Some of the Colored kids would make a habit of running from some of the White kids while going to school. But each morning while they ran they would be getting madder and madder. Finally, whenever they got to the schoolhouse they'd be so worked up that they had to let off some of their steam among their own color. Sometimes the fights would start from nothing, just from being angry and having no one else to hit. But this isn't the only reason why some Negroes fight each other. Some fight each other because they are crazy or misguided. I remember one morning when I got to school one of my Colored friends said to me, "I heard you got into a big fight a couple days ago." I told him that some White boys who played football in an open field near our house had kicked the ball into our house through our window. What made it so bad was that this boy walked straight into the house without knocking and walked by my mother on her sickbed and into the back room to get the ball. That made us feel as though we didn't exist. My father and the larger ones were working. On his way out of our house I noticed that the White boy was twice my size and I knew I wouldn't have a chance with him in a fight. But when he got outside I called him names and told him that he had no right to walk into our house that way. So he dared me to come outside. He told me what he was going to do if he ever caught me outside, and sure enough one day while I was returning home from school he caught me. At school, I told my friend, "I gave him a good whipping." My friend said, "You mean to say you whipped him?" "Yes, yes" I would say knowing all the time that it was the big White boy who whipped the daylights out of me. He beat me so badly until I ran away leaping. I lied to my Colored friend because I knew he was going to tell everyone he saw and



Richard Hubert sent this striking snapshot of himself with his younger sister, Parrie, in a letter to Peary Rader in December of 1953 inquiring about his article. Although Hubert doesn't say so, it was probably taken on the roof of his apartment building on Moore Street in Brooklyn. He told Rader that he'd gained four pounds since the photo shoot with *Gebbe* and was hoping to have his weight in the 220 to 225 pound range soon.

I wanted my family to look big and important—not look like they didn't exist.

The terrible thing about our situation was that we did not have to get out of our own home to be treated bad. No matter where we were we were in a bad place. The place they had us in is something like a very deep hole filled with snakes, and we were like a bug trying to crawl out. But each time we'd try to crawl out we would slip and fall back. And the snakes in our hole would bite and snap at us and chase us around and around in a circle so we would run and holler and scream while some of the others would build a fire around us to keep the snakes away. The fire would make it even hotter down in the hole, and the smoke would almost blind us. Some would holler, "the smoke is getting into my eyes, put out the fire! I don't care if the snakes do bite me or swallow me please put out that fire!" To the White people that hole was where we belonged. They were afraid that if White and Negro children went to the same schools and churches together and segregation was abolished it would lead to inter-marriage. That is the one thing they don't want to happen because the off-spring from such a marriage is always a Negro. Yes—a mulatto, a quadroon, an octoroon, or even a Kingsblood Royal is still a Negro, especially down there. When two

White people of different countries marry, their baby is described as part Irish and something else or half Jewish and something else and etc. But let a Negro marry anyone from any country and his baby will be called not part Negro and something else but just a plain Negro. White people say that God did not intend for the races to be mixed. Geese are made for geese. Ducks for ducks. They use the good Bible to try to prove their point about Negroes not being their brothers.

But there are many cases down South of White men having secret affairs with Negro women and then joining a posse to lynch a Negro for having an affair with a White woman. Notice who dies in the electric chair for rape. Every time a Negro is convicted of the rape of a White woman he dies in the chair. But when a White man does the same to a Colored woman and even admits it he usually doesn't go to trial and, if he does, they never fry him. Even during wartime—when Colored men are fighting for Whites as well as Coloreds—they won't give a White man the chair. If a southern White man is criticized about his treatment of Negroes he sometimes says that Negroes are uneducated and the White people are forced to control them. But most of the White people want the Negroes to be uneducated so they can always profit from it. If the Negroes were educated they

wouldn't work for cheap wages. They would leave and go someplace else and work for higher wages. This all kept us confused until whenever we'd meet an honest-to-goodness nice White man he would be hard to recognize because we would think that it was some kind of a trick. There were some who grub-staked me when I didn't have anything to eat and they had me loving them like I did my own mother and father. But then the bad ones would insult me and chase me so that it was hard not to dislike the ones I had finally made friends with. We used to say that if a strong wind surrounds a weak tree the tree must bend or be pulled out by the roots.

For our main enjoyments we would go every Saturday to a segregated movie with White people downstairs and Colored in the balcony where they had no restroom. Every Sunday we would go to an all-Negro church. At church the preacher would preach to all of us and we would also sing some of the same songs we sang while living in the country. Such songs as "All God's Children got Shoes," even though some of them didn't—like the Crawford children. I asked my mother about that one day and she said the song was right. She said that not only the Crawford children but even African children of all types will have shoes to wear when they die because God puts their shoes aside for them. She said that the children who live in hell on earth are God's children after they die and that they'll get their shoes when they get to heaven.

Besides church activities, we would sometimes give a Saturday night fish fry at our house. At those fish fries the most interesting conversation was about race prejudice. One night I heard Brother O'Neill say, "I do believe this country would be better off if they would let the White women run it and let the White men stay home and cook." The rest of us looked at each other and laughed. Brother Calvert said, "What do you mean, O'Neill?" and we all came in close to hear better. Brother O'Neill said that he believed White women had a more merciful feeling and a better heart than their men-folk. Then Brother Smith interrupted and said, "this is a man's world and White women are little people like us when it comes to being president, governor, and many other high positions." O'Neill then said, "Well, let's pray that if one is ever elected president or governor she will try and remember that Negroes are small people too and need her help." After that many of the fellows laughed but Brother O'Neill didn't laugh.

I once asked my mother, "What is a Negro?" She said, "That is what you are, son. We all are

Negroes." "But mother," I said, "the way people talk someone would think that the word Negro had another meaning to it." "Get the dictionary and look it up" said my mother. I did, and the meaning that the dictionary gave was almost horrible. By this I mean the dictionary gave this nice word, "NEGRO" almost the same meaning as it did the word "nigger," which is one of the worst kind of insults. I then asked my mother to explain to me what color a white man was. She told me that white people didn't have any color in their skin and that was why they were white. "But Mother," I said, "White people have color in their skin." My mother then looked straight at me and told me that if I ever said that to a White man I would be "missing in action."

We stayed in Swainsboro for two years. During those two years four people in my family died, and the last two were my father and mother. My mother was just forty-seven years old when she died and my father was forty-nine. I will go on record by saying that they would both be alive today if Swainsboro had hospitals like they have everywhere up here—hospitals that would give anyone what is needed even if the patient was a Negro and didn't have any money. When the sick people in my family down in Swainsboro needed medicine we would have to go without food in order to buy the medicine. And sometimes the sick would go without medicine so we could buy food.

After our parents died some of my brothers and sisters and I moved some 250 miles to another city named Brunswick, Georgia, to live with our oldest brother, who had gone there to work. Because of World War II there was a ship-yard where many ships were built and launched. There was also a pulp and paper company as well as two or three other factories. People would come hundreds of miles to this city just to work. The city was also a seaport and so a man could fish for his food if he ever became unemployed. Not only was there an all-Negro movie theatre there but we also had a segregated swimming pool. After living in Brunswick for a short while we were forced to split the family up because we couldn't find another place to live. The house my older brother rented was only for a few months, so some other people could go on vacation. When they returned we had to get out, so some of the family went to other cities and states in the South to live with relatives, but most of them went up North.

I was left down in Brunswick with two very good friends we had made while living there. Although I was only twelve years old I put my age up to fifteen so

I could get myself a job. Another friend of mine found me a job at the Western Union telegraph company as a porter, and I worked on this job before school and after school on Saturday and Sunday for 40¢ an hour. While living this way I learned to cook for myself, wash and iron my clothes, and live like a man. At the school I didn't tell any of the teachers or school kids about my parents being dead and me taking care of myself, because I was afraid I'd be put in a home. It was during that time that I came to be known as a "coward," but it was only because I couldn't afford to fight anyone who picked fights with me. For two good years I ran away from fellows that I knew I could whip in a fist- fight.

On my fourteenth birthday I quit my job at the Western Union because the other workers took advantage of me. But I do believe my working there did some good. The manager told me that I was the best janitor they'd ever had there, and he gave me a chance to do more. This happened because sometimes there would be a shortage of White messenger boys and they started to send me to deliver the telegrams. No Negro had ever delivered telegrams in that city before, because these jobs had always been for White boys only. I did have to deliver the telegrams in the rain without wearing one of the special-made raincoats they had for White boys. After I quit the manager remembered this and sent out to the Negro school and hired several Colored boys to deliver telegrams.

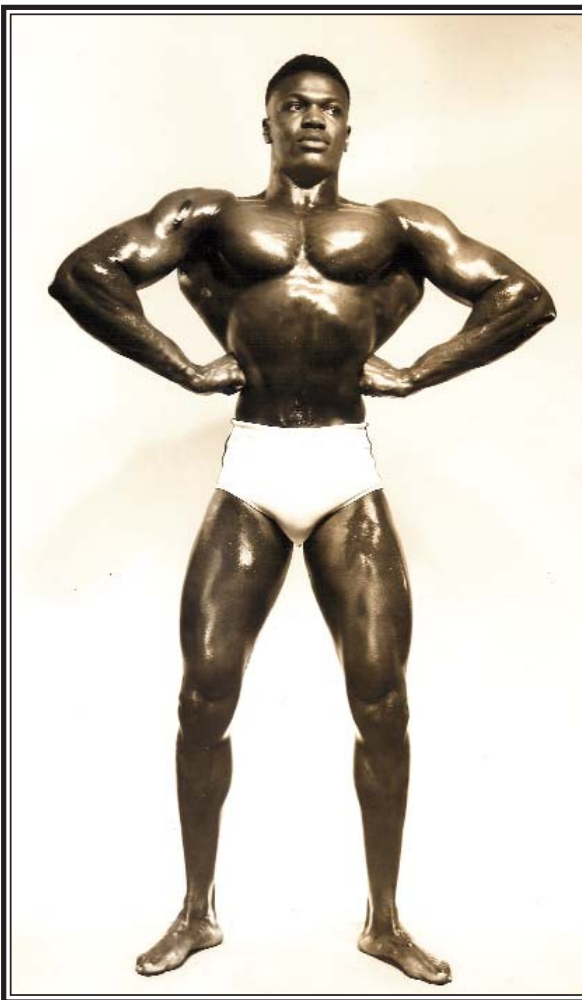
During the summer days I would contact Mr. H.L. Summerall, a Colored school teacher in Lynchburg, Va. I would meet him and about one hundred other schoolboys of his between fourteen and eighteen years of age and we'd ride a special bus to Hartford, Connecticut to work on a tobacco

farm. We worked like men in Connecticut. And we also had good times. The White people treated all of us like we were celebrities. At first I thought they were playing some kind of joke on us, but later I felt almost like I was one of them. There may be many evil and prejudiced White people living in Hartford, but I didn't meet a one out on Hartman's tobacco farm where we were. The only time we ever got into arguments or fights it would be on the weekends with some of the other poor Colored fellows.

After our ten or twelve weeks were up we would return South with each boy having some \$200 saved up. I would buy some school clothes and get myself a job delivering some 350 newspapers with my friend Clinton Quarterman. It was that year, 1944, that I first heard of

weight lifting. An older friend of mine, Charles Moore, had some back issues of *Strength and Health* magazines and one day he showed them to some fellows on the school campus. On the cover of one was the picture of John Grimek. Then one of the Colored fellows said, "Ah man, the guy is muscle-bound. They're not strong." Another said, "Men who are muscle-bound can't knock a fly down." Then Charles showed them one of Steve Stanko being the first man to total a thousand pounds in the three Olympic lifts. Another student said, "Fool, he didn't lift that much weight over his head. They just printed it that way to sell the book."

Then all of a sudden the argument stopped, and all of them were staring at one of the magazines and asking, "who's this, who's this? Why haven't I ever heard of him before?" What they were looking at was a picture of the Great John Davis, one of our own race. Charles then told them that Davis, Stanko, and Grimek were close friends because



New York photographer Gebbé (who did not use a first name professionally) wrote Peary Rader on 1 August 1953 that he had finally photographed Richard Hubert and found him to have a "very fine body and [be] a very nice guy." Said Gebbé, "Sure will be proud to see them [the photos] in *Iron Man*."

they and some other men lifted on the same weight lifting team, trying to defeat teams from other countries. We looked at Davis' picture for a long time, and at Grimek's and Stanko's, too, and as I was walking away going to the cafeteria I heard one say, "Man if I had a build like that Grimek I'd wear a polo shirt all winter."

The only exercise I did during that time was calisthenics, although sometimes I'd do curls with two buckets of water, but not in sets. I was tall for my age, and our coach at school, who taught us football and basketball, told me that if I would practice like some of the other boys I could become one of their greats in about two years time, but I would lie to him and tell him I didn't like football or basketball. I was on my own and couldn't afford to get hurt playing football. I also couldn't afford to be playing a sport when I could be working—which I had to do to live. At that time, when I didn't deliver papers I did other work such as dishwasher, delivery boy, porter work, helper, etc.

After returning from Hartford the second time I did everything I could to find myself a job but I couldn't find one. After several months of looking for work and spending all my savings I then caught a rare case of malaria. I was very sick, but with the help of some good friends and God I managed to live. I went from 147 lbs. to 85 lbs. in body weight. When I recovered I had to learn to walk all over again.

After recuperating I moved North-east to live with the rest of my sisters and small brother in Jersey City, New Jersey. I noticed that Jersey City had a certain amount of housing and job discrimination, as well as a few slums and some bad White people, but it was almost heaven compared with the South. I got myself a job as a helper at the Monarch Photo Studio, one of the largest in Jersey City. I also went to school from 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. at Dickinson high school, which was equal to any school in America. We didn't have evening schools in the cities I lived in down South.

At Dickinson, the teachers had names of all nationalities and they treated me like I was something special. I will never forget them for doing this. I remember once that when a big boy with an Italian name



In this Gebbé photo, Hubert's exceptional pectorals and small waist command the viewer's attention.

tried to start a fight with me for something our lady teacher, who also had an Italian name, had a private talk with the boy. After the talk, he became my best friend and even tried to help me with my lessons. I also noticed many of the other White students overlooked the evil "dictatorship" of the color line.

After graduating from Dickenson, I and my family were forced to move to Brooklyn because our house was condemned, but each morning I would ride by subway to Jersey City to work at the studio. One morning while riding to work I noticed a man that looked like Captain Marvel or Superman. Sure enough it was Abe Goldberg, the fellow I had read about in the magazine. After introducing myself, Abe told me that he worked in Jersey City, too. He also introduced me to the East Side Barbell Club, where he worked out in New York City. At first I just trained on my own. I not only ordered myself a 50 pound York dumbbell set but my

employer's son at the photo studio bought himself a set of Weider weights right around the corner, and I then did upper body work as well as leg work too. After a few weeks of training my bodyweight jumped from 160 to 175 pounds.

A few weeks later I was laid-off from my job in Jersey City but I found a job in New York not far from the East Side Barbell Club. So I joined and began to work out with such greats as Abe Goldberg, Marvin Eder, Leroy Colbert, Lenny Rukofsky, Angelo Caminiti, Artie Zeller, Sammy Glass, Morty Gottcliff, Lou and Joe Marino, Judah Tatarsky, Joe Maggio, George Stark, Morris Tanenbaum, Ken Rosa and many others. At first, I worked out only once a week because of money problems at home. I would work out all day every Saturday, and I made gains, too. Later, my younger sister and I found an apartment together. With me being the man of the house I managed to find a better job and could afford to work out three times a week. After a few months my bodyweight jumped to 190 lbs. at a height of 6 ft. 1½ in.

When I was twenty-one years old I was drafted. As bad as I was needed at home they took me anyhow. I was so upset that it made me ill. Some months later,

after they checked and found that I was telling the truth about having my little sister and little brother as dependents as well as three other little cousins looking upon me as a father, they couldn't discharge me because by then I was so depressed that I was under the care of special army doctors. I even had a nervous breakdown, an operation on my brain [*Ed. note: probably a lobotomy, common at that time and, since he was in the service, involuntary*], and many electric shock treatments. These shock treatments made me forget my worries, but they also made my reflexes slow and my memory very bad. I also lost my initiative and I became suspicious of everyone. The only good thing about it all is that they were human enough to give me a pension after my honorable discharge. I was in such a bad way that I would have died of starvation after getting out if it hadn't been for the pension.

After months of looking for a job, I was lucky enough to get one temporarily as an elevator operator which helped me to get into the union. Although I am unemployed right now, I am feeling better, I am still in the union, and I will go to work soon. I didn't train at all while I was in the Army and being treated, and I put on about fifteen extra pounds—all fat. After re-joining the East Side Barbell Club, the fat I had on me changed into solid muscle. I noticed my friend Abe Goldberg had put up his own gym which looks like paradise inside. It is not far from the East Side Club, but I still work out at the East Side because I came to love it like a home. I even had my own key. Many of the same fellows like Marvin Eder and the Marino brothers still trained there. This Marvin Eder, I must say, is probably the strongest boy of all times. Only the other day he grabbed 320 pounds, cleaned it to his chest, and pressed it three honest-to-goodness repetitions, with almost no backbend. I saw him with my own eyes one day, after he did a three-hour workout, bench press 445 pounds with a dead stop at the chest. He did it almost too easy.

I have been training off and on with barbells ever since I was eighteen, but I have more time to train regularly now. I don't train for strength. I believe, like many others, that you should train for shape and the strength will follow. I work out three times a week. My first exercise is the squat, because I don't like squats; I do them first so the rest of my workout will be enjoyable. I use only 300 pounds in this lift for eight to ten reps but could use much more. I do them on a block with toes pointing straight in front and heels only about eight inches apart for four or five sets. I sometime do the Hack squat in the same manner with a much lighter

weight. Then come toe raises with a heavy friend sitting on my back. Next is the military press. I never use over 160 lbs. for five sets of eight repetitions, and then I do straight arm lateral raises with dumbbells, three or four sets of eight to ten reps. My next is rowing motion. I have a very good way of doing this that really gets my lats. I keep my back bent parallel to floor and my feet close together while using a narrow grip and holding the weight awhile at the chest after the last rep before dropping it to the floor. I do three or four sets with 200 lbs.. Next I do front lateral raises with dumbbells. Then comes the prone press [*Ed. note: in those days, even many magazines referred to bench presses inaccurately as "prone" presses.*]. I do four or five sets starting with 230 ending with 290, doing less reps as I go up in weight. After prones I do bent-arm pull-overs, using up to 190 while having a friend sit on my thighs. I then do presses behind neck—using a light weight of about 120 lbs. for eight to ten reps.

Then comes the arm work. After warming up like I do in all of my other exercises I take a heavy barbell of about 170 lbs. and do cheating reps for six to eight reps and three to four sets; then I take two 70 pound dumbbells and do alternate cheating curls for four sets of eight reps. I sometimes add reverse curls and Zottman curls, but not regularly. Next comes the seated concentration curl with a dumbbell that lets me do ten or twelve reps without cheating for three or four sets. After this I do my one waist exercise—leg raises on a bench. My waist never goes over 30¼" no matter how much I eat or lay off. I do believe if I worked on my waist every day it would go down to 28" and that I don't want. Right now it's 29½" and that's small enough. After doing three sets of 25 reps, I do deadlifting to strengthen my waist. I start off with 250 lbs. doing 6 to 8 reps and sometimes I work up to 400 lbs. doing less repetitions. My best is 500 lbs..

I don't do neck work any more, because it grows too fast when I work on it. I had a 20¼" neck but it's down to 18½" now. My last exercise at the gym is dumbbell prones. I do these while keeping the inside of my fist pointed parallel to the bench so it will work my upper pectorals, and triceps as well. I save my triceps until after I get home some 45 or 60 minutes later; for this exercise I use only one 40 pound dumbbell while holding the inside of my biceps next to the side of my head for about five sets of ten repetitions. I can't press at all, because of my small waist and height, but I've done three reps in the full squat with 430.

Sometimes when I don't feel like working out

when I get to the gym I open my locker and look at some pictures I keep in there of Melvin Wells that were published by a Negro magazine called "Our World," and they really encourage me to work out. Those shots are some of his greatest. I also try to eat the best and most healthy food, which includes liver, raw eggs, self-cooked steaks, honey, brown cereal, milk by the pint each meal, leafy vegetables, whole wheat and rye bread only, prune juice, grapefruit juice, etc. I don't eat many starchy foods.

I have also tried Johnson's, Hoffman's and Weider's high protein food for awhile. My measurements are—expanded chest, 50 inches, 29½ inch waist, 25¼ inch thighs, 15½ inch calves, 18 inch arm, body weight from 209 to 214 lbs. at a height of 6 feet 1½ inches with shoes off. I don't smoke, drink or use profanity. The only bad habits I have, that I know of, are not attending church regularly, being anti-social, and eating too much candy because I couldn't get candy when I was a child. My ambition for the future is to work hard and save so I can buy myself a home and also put myself up a gym not far from my home—a gym for men and women with results guaranteed.

I have several favorite bodybuilders. Although John Grimek is getting old, I still think he is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, bodybuilder of all times, for he looks good from any angle, even in relaxation. Another fellow I like is Reg Park, who's over six feet tall, like me. It was his photos that showed me a tall man could come close to looking like Grimek. Not only can Reg Park do strength feats and win the top physique contest, but he can also win almost all the special awards such as best chest, best back, best abdominals, best arms, best legs, most muscular man, and best poser—just like Grimek can.

I also enjoy reading about or watching strength feats by all the greats, like Norbert Schemansky, Jim Bradford, Pete George, Tommy Kono, Marvin Eder, Dave Sheppard, Joe DiPietro, Doug (see it and believe it) Hepburn, Paul Anderson, and, of course, the great John Davis—who stayed near or right on the top as a heavyweight for approximately 15 long years and who still shows winning form even in a contest where they have strict judges.

Many people who have seen me wanted to make a prize fighter out of me; they keep telling me that's where all the money is, but I turn them down because watching guys beat blood out of each other for a crazy audience, even if they are getting paid, looks sadistic to me.

Some people say nothing is impossible. Well, it may not be possible for me to build my tall body up like Reg Park or Steve Reeves, but I do hope to win a few local awards such as Mister City and State. I also would like to enter the Mister America contest one day, but I am not going to do it because, frankly, I don't believe a so-called Negro can win. Even if he had big calves in his legs and looked like Clancy Ross, Steve Reeves or Reg Park, or even Grimek. But even if the judges do ever let a Negro win one, it would be many long years from now [*Ed. Note: The first African-American to win the major Mr. America title was Chris Dickerson, in 1969.*] I will say that the Mr. America contest is, in a way, much better than that thing called the Miss America contest because Negroes can at least enter the Mr. America contest.

Another thing that's wrong is the way some of the magazine publishers forget to use Negroes on their covers. They only use Negroes on their covers every once in a long, long, long, long while even though there are several men whose pictures could, or should have been on some cover or another. Some of the men who either haven't been on any covers or haven't been on as many as they deserve are: John Davis, George Paine, Robert Shealy, Leroy Colbert, Arthur Harris, Rocky Kent, Jim Johnson, Arthur Ollivierre, and Len Peters. Some have very good write-ups inside the magazines, but what's wrong with the cover? I guess some of the publishers believe it will keep their magazine from selling, which isn't true today because a magazine like THE RING uses many Negroes on its cover, and it sells, too. I don't think my own picture should be on a cover, but some of the others should.

Today, a Russian communist or any other enemy with a white skin could go down South while hiding his identity and he might be treated like a king. And if he should come back up North, take up bodybuilding, and become one of the all time greats he not only will be on the cover of magazines, but will also become Mr. America. Mr. America. That's why the word Negro shouldn't be used. Just plain "American" should be good enough. In that way, if a White man put a Negro on the cover of his magazine, that publisher would just be using his own brother—an American. To tell the truth, I believe the world would be better off if we all acted as if there were only one race, the human race. I really have to take my hat off to some of the educated Negroes down south who could come up here and be much more successful, but who feel it is their job to stay down there teaching the needy. Today, after so many

Negroes fought and died for this country in the last World War, their children still can't get a good education in the South since the White people won't let a Negro come into their schools to learn and to better themselves.

Some people who read this story, if they see it, may say, "what is he squawking about? He's much better off than some poor people." While that may be true, I think people all over the country, as well as in the government, should be told by every kind of newspaper, by every kind of magazine, by every kind of book, and by every kind of other way that they are making a mistake by not concentrating on the race problem now.

What people should realize is that our biggest enemies, the communists, use all of America's "faults" to try to make our country and our government look bad. Every time some harm is done to a Negro in America, the communists and non-communists all over the world hear about it. Even when we do not hear about it ourselves, they hear about it. Some people may say that if the communists don't use race prejudice to make the U.S. government look bad they would just use some other fault. I say let them pick some other fault, and not race prejudice. Nothing is as bad as race prejudice. I know. I have experienced it.

While ending this, I would like to say that I don't believe this story is the wrong kind of story for this nice little magazine, or any other type of magazine. Therefore I would like very much to thank Mister Peary Rader for being an honest to goodness "True-American" for not only publishing other stories of many Americans—but my story also...

Thank You,
Richard Hubert

Ed. Note: Whereas Peary Rader did not publish this remarkable article, had he not been interested in it he would never have written to Richard Hubert to ask him to send more information. Nor would Rader have taken the article, the two letters from Hubert, and the half dozen photographs and put them all together in an envelope that remained in his files until, as per his instructions, his wife, Mabel, gave them to us. It should be remembered that Peary Rader—along with Joe Weider and Bob Hoffman—did more than most leading sports figures of the day to advance the cause of fairness between the races. Similarly, weightlifting and bodybuilding did more than most sports, including baseball and football, to break down the color line. Also, we should not forget that John Davis was a National Weightlifting Champion prior to World War II, or that

many photographs of African-Americans appeared in the major muscle magazines during the 1940s. Could the iron sports and the magazines that covered them have done more? Of course they could have. But the iron game has been better than most when it comes to looking beyond skin color. Why else would the audience at the 1966 AAU Mr. America contest have booed so lustily when Bob Gajda instead of Sergio Oliva was chosen by the judges to be that year's Mr. America? Or why else would so many weightlifting fans all across the country have cheered when the great John Davis proved again and again on the platform that from the late thirties until the early fifties he was the strongest man in the world? And why else would Peary Rader not have thrown Hubert's article in the trash as soon as he read it, instead of asking Hubert to send more information and asking Gebb  to take Hubert's photos? Had Rader not saved it we would not have it. Very likely Rader agonized over whether to publish this long, often heart-breaking article in 1953, and we like to think he hoped that one day it would be given the space Hubert requested. Well, today is that day.



We have spoken to several men who remembered Richard Hubert from his days at the East Side Barbell Club—Ken Rosa, Joe Marino, Marvin Eder, and Leroy Colbert. All of these men remember Hubert's height, his breadth, and his troubled mind. They recall a quiet, gentle, friendly man. The men who knew him best also remember how emotionally wounded he was by what had happened to him growing up and, later, in the service. Leroy Colbert recounted a phone call he got telling him that Hubert was at Bellevue Hospital. When Colbert rushed down, he learned that Hubert had been brought there in handcuffs by the police after they had responded to the calls of a woman who was frightened when Hubert tried to start a conversation. Believing he was blameless and shouldn't have been handcuffed, the police took him to the hospital, where he was put in a straitjacket. The policemen asked Colbert about Hubert, and Colbert vouched for him and told them that the big man was "just a bodybuilder"—a rare breed in the early fifties. They let Hubert go, but the incident only served to deepen Hubert's sense of racial injustice. Unfortunately, none of the men who remember him from the East Side Barbell Club have either seen or heard from him for over fifty years. If anyone has any information about his whereabouts we'd very much like to have it. We have never paid for an article, but we want to pay Hubert for this one. And send him a copy.

Remembering "To The Ladies"

Vera Christensen

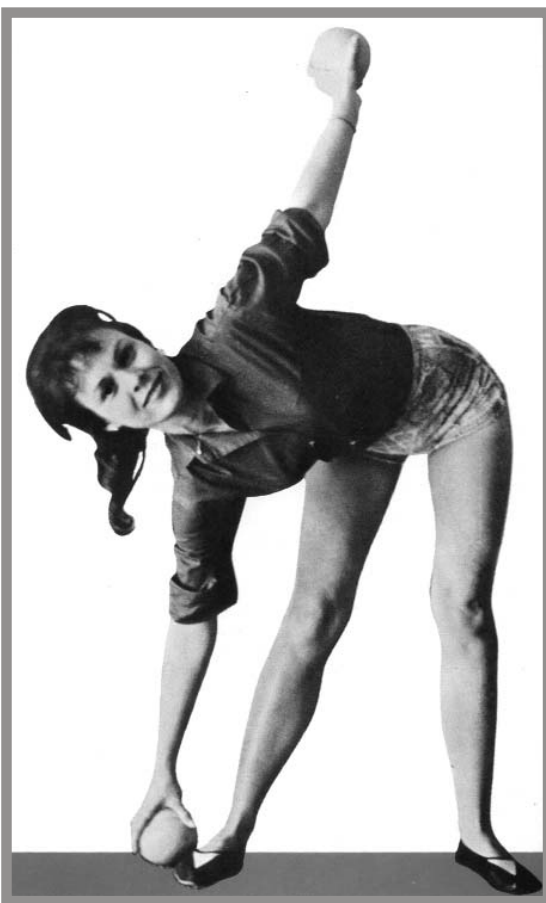
When I was asked recently how I managed to write for *Strength & Health* magazine for so many years, I had to reach back fifty years, to the Spring of 1956. Harry Paschall, who had been editor of *S&H*, had retired and was living in Pompano Beach, Florida. One day he happened into our gym in Ft. Lauderdale, which is only a few miles south as we had the only gym in Broward County at the time. Our friendship developed quickly. Harry apparently liked Al, my husband, and me, and he appreciated our knowledge of the business. So he just asked right out if I would like to author a "Ladies" section of *S&H* each month. Of course I was flattered and said yes. Harry then had to call Ray Van Cleef, who was the editor at that time. (A further note about Ray Van Cleef and Harry Paschall. After Harry was instrumental in my long writing career, he went back to York, PA, and became the editor again of *S&H* after Ray moved his family to California. I had met Ray and his family at their home in York, in the early 1950's, before I started to write. Harry named our very first weightlifting team in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. That was, of course, Bosco Weightlifting Club.) And then Ray talked to Bob Hoffman to okay it all. As I said, it all happened quite

quickly. I really had to get into it fast as the first article was to be published in the June 1956 issue. I also needed a photographer. Wouldn't you know, Al had been dabbling in the dark room and had a good Roloflex camera which could provide the type of photos needed for reprint. So, Al did all the photography up until 1976 when we were divorced.

As anyone who read *S&H* could tell, we were a traveling family, operating gyms all over. By living in so many interesting places, it provided us with lots of material and varied types of ladies, all of whom were thrilled to be in a published magazine. During all those years I don't think anyone was used as a model more than once, except for yours truly.

While living in St. Vincent in the Caribbean we had a very pretty native girl who exercised and was photographed for the article. She was a clerk in a native grocery store. While living on Barbados, the interest in weight training was quite large. And what a beautiful island on which to photograph the models. Then, while living on Grand Cayman Island, one of our models was the principal of the elementary school my children attended. She was a marine biologist as well.

We also spent a great year in



Vera Christensen's articles on fitness training for women appeared in *Strength & Health* from 1956 to the magazine's demise in 1986. Like Jack LaLanne, Vera tried to get all women involved with exercise and often showed women how to exercise at home, using objects from around the house, like these softballs, as well as dumbbells and barbells.

Lake Placid, New York. Lots of skiing and ice skating on the personal side of our lives. I conducted a weight training and exercise class at the high school there for the state of New York. I became the personal trainer for a female ski jumper who was a particularly interesting person. She was trying very hard to get on the ski jump team, which, of course, was all male. She never made it, but what made me feel even worse was that my own twelve-year-old son made the team and he was a first timer on snow skis. He was a natural, and loved the whole daredevil part of it. Of course, it scared me to pieces to watch him jump. We also had several other interesting people as models while living in that beautiful, beautiful part of New York. I even got to be a passenger down the four-man bobsled run, and it was one of the greatest thrills I have ever had; I will never forget it.

While just visiting, not living, on the Isle of Pines, which is south of Cuba, we got a lot of pretty shots for one of the articles. Actually, it was the last time we visited Cuba and the Isle of Pines, as Castro was not being friendly and we were actually strip-searched, even our small children. What a shame, as we had been weekend-ing both places for several years in that absolutely beautiful country. The gym in San Diego gave us lots of ladies to use in the articles.

Another interesting girl was a professional horse rider. She had a bad knee injury, so after her surgery I trained her so she could get back in her saddle and onto the race track. So many, many different types of women were used in my articles, and I think that was one reason why the series ran so long. Lots of variation.

Now to the ladies in Las Vegas. One in particular. I became the personal trainer for Mrs. Horn, the mother of Roy Horn of the famous Siegfried and Roy act. I trained her in their home, or should I say their compound, as it takes up several blocks. Unfortunately, Mrs. Horn would not let me publish an article about her training. I did, however, get to romp with a couple of male lions, only three months old. Anything older would have been too dangerous.

Unfortunately, another article I did was never published. It was about Jayne Mansfield. It seems that Bob Hoffman wouldn't use her photos because her husband, Mickey Hargitay, was affiliated with Joe Weider's



Pretty Vera Christensen served as a powerful role model for the cause of women's training and figure improvement. Her graceful, feminine physique was firmly muscled, athletic, and yet alluring. Hers was a body average women aspired to match, and her column in *Strength & Health*—"To The Ladies"—was one of the longest-running features in the history of the magazine.

International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB).

Another group of articles that had lots of appeal involved a weight loss contest I created. Ladies sent in their "before" photos and a short bio. These were published and after three months of dieting and new photos with information on how they lost their weight, we then published the results. First, second, and third place prizes were awarded. It went over well; I don't know why I didn't do it again.

During the last several years the magazine was published, I was asked to write two articles a month. No one really knew this, as I wrote under an assumed name. Well actually, it wasn't that assuming. It was my middle and maiden names put together (Hope Coleman).

So as to how I remained with *Strength & Health* for so many years, until it went out of circulation near the passing of Bob Hoffman, I guess it was because the series was so varied in topics and areas, and because many lovely ladies spent so much time training their bodies and then gave their time to be photographed. And, ultimately, I just was not fired!



Dear *IGH*:

Great to receive the Jan-Feb issue of *IGH* with the announcement of the Lutch Stark Center. This is indeed Ulysses' "Some noble work of note"! You have a great location for the Todd-McLean Collection, on the campus of UT, which has one of the largest and most impressive libraries in the world.

I look forward to new issues of *IGH* just as eagerly as I did to *Strength & Health* in the early 1940's to get news of Grimek, Stanko, Terpak, Terlazzo, John Davis, John Terry, the Self-Improvement Contest, editorials by Bob Hoffman, and just pure motivation.

Channel surfing not long ago, I saw a TV program on "superhuman strength," in which you were interviewed about steroids. Very impressive were a 97-lb. girl snatching a heavy weight overhead and a professional strongman of not large size, bending all sorts of metal objects with great tensile strength. [Ed. note: That was Dennis Rogers, the "Grandmaster of Grip," who pound for pound is the strongest man in the world in such feats.] Being of normal size, I always admired men that had great strength in small frames (Adrian Schmidt). My greatest hero was "the Incredible Shams," the title of an article in *Strength & Health*, many years ago. If memory serves me well, he was 5'9" and weighed 142, and cleaned and jerked well over 300! That is pure tensile strength.

"Yearning for Muscular Power," was a very informative essay. Do you remember Hoffman's editorials in *Strength & Health* in which he praised the quickness and athletic ability of his lifters as opposed to the ponderous Cyr and Swoboda? Now with Savickas *et alii*, we have men of four hundred pounds, enormously strong and explosive, but perhaps not "healthy"! Remember the big nosebleed at the Arnold Show awhile back? High blood pressure could be a problem with these "dudes." I have had blood pressure problems for years, probably from trying to match Arthur Saxon and Mac Batchelor with drinking beer! Keep *IGH* coming. I will try to come to the opening of the Center in 2008.

Les Longshore

Ed. note: I've known Les Longshore since the late

1960s, at which time he was the tennis pro at a country club in Birmingham, Alabama and I—having retired as a powerlifter—had gone up with a friend to play doubles in a tennis tournament there. Les had read of me in the lifting magazines, and was surprised and pleased that I'd gone back to tennis as a way to lose weight and stay in condition. We've remained in touch since then. An outstanding tennis player and a former president of the U.S. Tennis Association of Teaching Professionals, Les was a serious weight trainer back in the days when you were considered to be deranged if you lifted. In his later years Les continued to train, but he also began to do long distance running—completing many marathons in the process. He also remains deeply devoted to his favorite beverage, and is fond of quoting the famous line from A.E. Housman, "Malt does more than Milton can, to justify God's ways to man." A man of many parts, Les also taught Greek at the college level for many, many years.



Dear *IGH*:

Jack Lano loaned me your *Iron Game History* for May to read; enjoyed it. I like the old time stuff, like Colonna's Picnic. My lifters from the Old YMCA in Akron, Ohio and I went to a couple of his picnics back in the late thirties and early forties. I remember that he used to have them on this island out in a river by his house. I always looked forward to them, but now I can't remember too many names of people I met there. But I do remember we always had a good time.

Enjoy reading about how we used to enjoy lifting and going to the shows—because we did enjoy them. I like reading about the "old" guys, as it really takes me back to an enjoyable time of life.

Out here in California there is not much lifting. They do have Powerlifting down at Venice Beach where I referee, but that's about it. I see some of the old time bodybuilders down there but not many lifters. I still go to all the World Weightlifting Championships now that I'm retired. The IWF treats me pretty good, and I always have a good seat.

Again, I enjoy your magazine. Please find enclosed a check for \$60.00 for a subscription. (I'm not buying for a longer time—might not be here long enough. I will renew if still kickin'.) Hope you're both well and enjoying life.

Jack H. Hughes

Ed note: Jack has been lifting competitively for more than sixty years, and we both remember him refereeing during our own lifting days and in the decades since that time. He was always willing to lend a helping hand and has been a tireless worker for the Iron Game.



Dear IGH:

The following is my account of a visit Marlin Weitzel and I had with the late, great Davey “Peppy” Moyer in November of 2003, several years before Moyer died:

I met Marlin Weitzel at Providence House, Eighth & Court Streets yesterday, and Marlin drove us to Davey’s home on Moss Street. Davey greeted us at the door with a bright smile and “Hello!” He had a wooden crutch under his right armpit, gray thinning hair, and a plastic “Extension Cord—his oxygen tube and “Life Line.” He invited us in and we followed him thru a second door into his living room, took off our jackets, shook his hand, then sat down on a sofa. The TV was on but he lowered the sound and he and Marlin talked about the work-outs at Coulson’s Barbell Club and Gym at Tenth and Marion Streets in Reading—all the carrying on with the guys there...Fun! Fun !! FUN !! Hijinks of all types, plus the serious hard work of pumping iron—training, lifting, bodybuilding—getting ready for weightlifting competition(s) and physique contests. Marlin and Davey reminisced about their many weightlifting competitions.

I explained how I got started going to Coulson’s Gym with Charlie Schell, Richard Palkon, Dave and Lane Garrison—brothers who lived down the street from Charlie. I started there around 1955 shortly after John Coulson brought Bruce “Ox” Hunsberger, Huck Hunsberger, Bob Schollenberger, and Davey Moyer to the Reading High School Gym one school day afternoon in September for a weightlifting demonstration. All the boys from tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades were assembled in the gym. Davey was in the locker room out of sight. John introduced Bruce, Huck, and Bob who in turn did cleans and presses, increasing the weight on the bar after each series of lifts. They also did clean and jerk lifts of higher amounts of weight. Next Huck and Bob demonstrated the technique of “squat snatching” the bar in one smooth pulling motion. Huck and Bob were very skilled at the squat-snatch technique even with a very heavy weight on the bar.

Then, John asked for a rousing round of

applause for the one and only Davey Moyer. As the applause rang out and loud cheers were heard, Davey ran from the locker room onto the basketball court doing a forward leaping flip high in the air landing on his feet followed by forward handsprings with blurring speed three quarters the length of the basketball court. After the last flip he jumped high in the air and with a twist of his body landed on his feet facing the locker room, to thunderous applause and deafening yelling and cheering.

Then he ran full speed back toward to the wall adjacent to the locker room . . . it looked like he was going to run into the wall. At the last second he jumped up, about five feet, onto the wall with his feet then sprang off the wall doing an end-over-end backwards somersault twisting his body then landing on his feet with arms fully extended, raised high, and a big smile on his face! Ta ! Da !!! That piece of gymnastics by Davey blew the roof off the place—the huge audience of teenage boys went wild, yelling and applauding for a long time.

Bruce, Huck, and Bob did more lifting, and Davey joined in doing some very heavy cleans and presses as well as clean and jerk lifts. It was an unbelievable demonstration by these powerful young men giving it everything they had as a show of their strength, athleticism, dedication, skill, and perseverance—years of practice at the sport they loved dearly, unfolding there, in the moment, before our eyes . . . I will never forget it.

We continued our conversation with Davey until about 3:15 P.M., at which point Marlin asked if I was ready to leave, and I said yes. We thanked Davey for inviting us and he said he was glad we stopped by. He walked us to the door where we shook hands and said so long. Davey was smiling and so were we as we walked down the steps to Marlin’s car for the ride home.

Davey was on oxygen all the while we were there, but he was in great spirits. So “alive,” so full of life in spite of his life circumstance. I felt so privileged to be there with him and Marlin as we jumped in the “Time Machine” and went back to those good old days at Coulson’s Gym. I really enjoyed the conversation—about all the weight-lifting demonstrations and competitions—with unquestionably the strongest man, pound for pound, in Reading, Berks County, and even far beyond its boundaries. We have to remember that Davey was the first man in the United States to press twice his body weight and that he established national records in both weightlifting and powerlifting.

Arthur J. Rohrbach