

A TRUE HERO
LARRY POWERS

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THE POWER OF POWERS

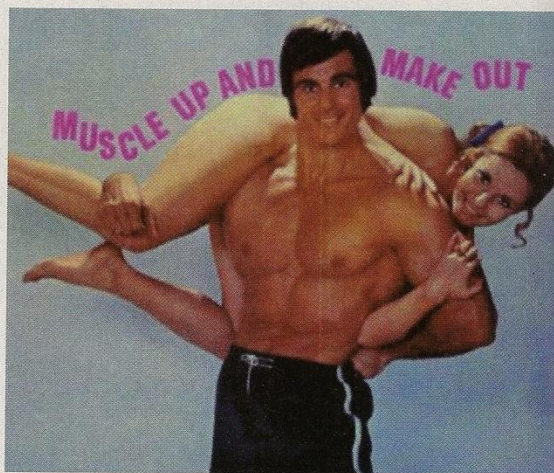
“Now I’m not sure what the neighbors may have thought about all of this — this was the mid-1950s after all — but I didn’t really care, as I was determined to look like Steve Reeves.”

— Mr. America winner, Larry Powers, recalling his early workouts in his backyard.

Larry Powers (born Larry Cianchetta), 1960 Mr. America winner, was born in Staten Island, NY, in April 1939. Fortunate to be living in close proximity to the water in his younger years, Larry spent a lot of time hanging out on the beach during the summers. One of his fondest memories was surfing and body boarding while the large Atlantic liners such as the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth were sailing by on their way into New York harbor.

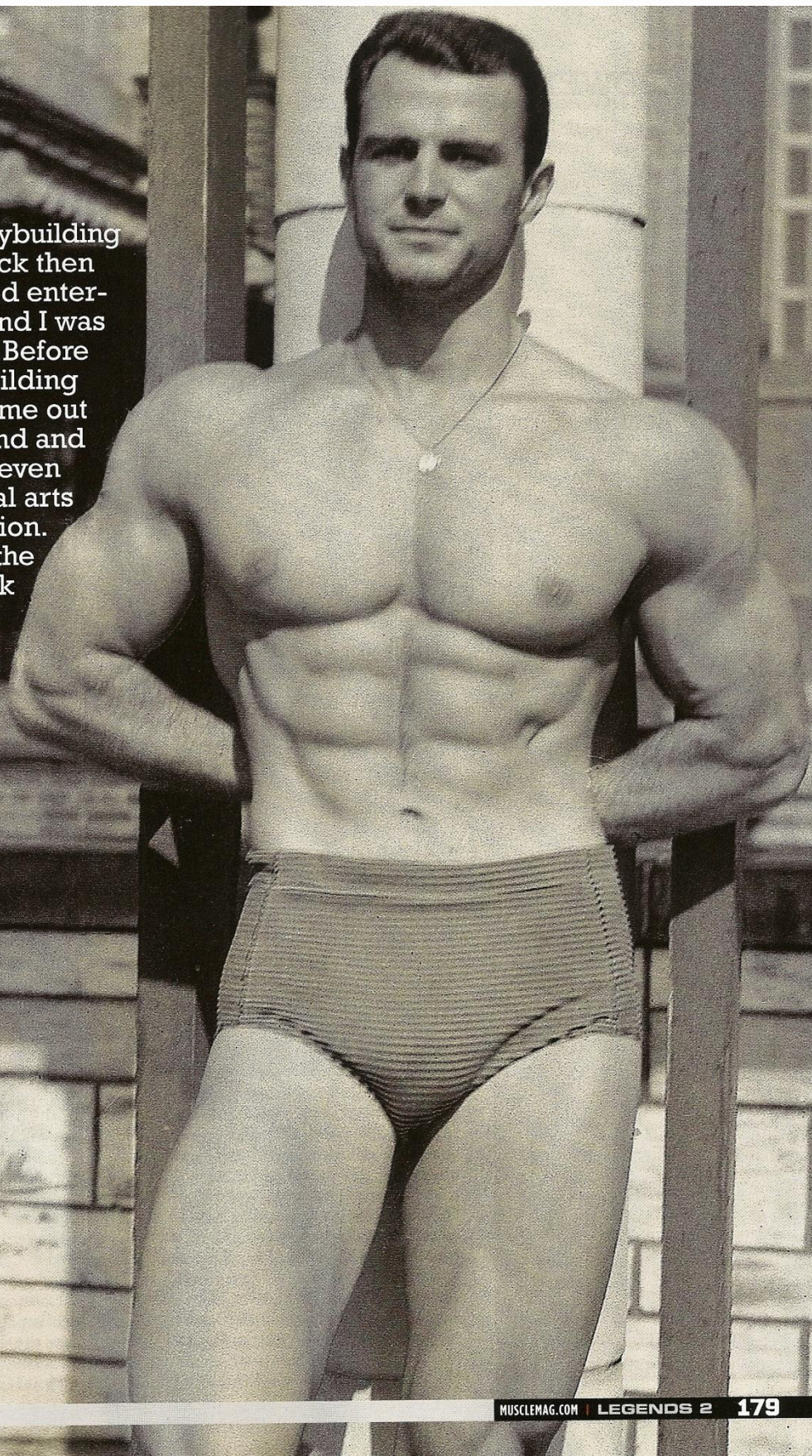
He participated in most childhood sports and from an early age started to pay close attention to his physique. Like many teenagers Larry got his first introduction to weights from a Weider barbell set. He saved up his money and at 15 was the proud owner of a barbell and dumbbell set. During the winter months he did his training indoors but as soon as the weather permitted he took to the backyard to tease the neighbors with countless sets of curls, squats and presses.

Weightlifting also made up a large part of Larry’s beach activities. As soon as he and his friends would come in from surfing they’d start pumping away on the beach. One of his favorites was grabbing 50-pound dumbbells and doing standing presses for 30, 40, sometimes 50 reps. Not one to shy away from heavy weights in his prime Larry could front squat with 300 pounds for 30 reps and do lying leg curls with 70–80-pound dumbbells held between his feet.



BY GERARD THORNE

“Many bodybuilding contests back then also featured entertainment. And I was it that year! Before the bodybuilding contest I came out with my band and sang, and I even did a martial arts demonstration. Then I won the Mr. New York State title!”



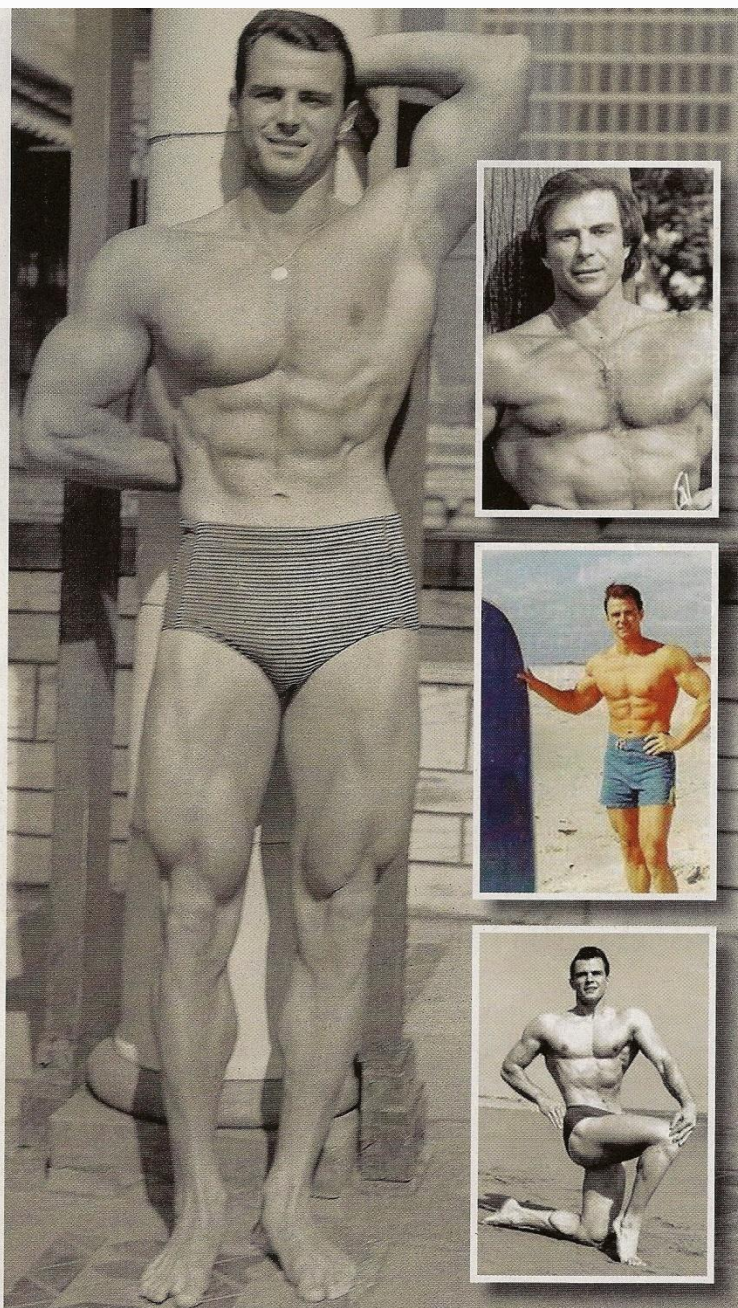
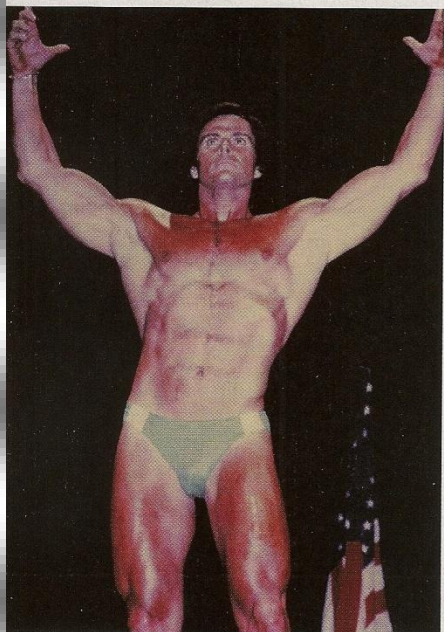
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In 1960 Larry joined the U.S. Marines. All those hours spent surfing, swimming and weightlifting paid off, as he was voted "Most Fit Marine" during his service. In the fall of 1962, Larry was on standby during the Cuban Missile crisis but, as he says, "Thankfully cooler heads prevailed and World War III never erupted." It was also while in the marines that Larry took up jujitsu. His combination of muscular power and newfound martial arts training made him a force to be reckoned with.

In the bodybuilding competition realm, Larry entered his first contest, the Mr. Eastern America, in 1959, a year before entering the marines. He placed a respectable fifth in the medium class. One year later he won that same division at the IFBB Mr. America contest. Over a span of 10 years Larry would win the Mr. Staten Island, Mr. New York State, Mr. World's fair, the tall class at the North American Championships, and medium class at the Mr. America.

Although winning his class at the Mr. America was his greatest bodybuilding accomplishment, it was one of his Mr. New York State wins that he remembers. "Many bodybuilding contests back then also featured entertainment. And I was it that year! Before the bodybuilding contest I came out with my band and sang, and I even did a martial arts demonstration. Then I won the Mr. New York State title!"



During his formative years Larry greatly admired Steve Reeves, Serge Nubret and John Grimek. It was Reeves who inspired him the most: "There was no one like Reeves. He had that great blend of size, shape and symmetry."

Larry's era in bodybuilding included some of the greatest names in the sport. During his career he competed against such stars as Harold Poole, Larry Scott, Yvon Brunet, Allen Keene, Jerry Winick, John Bianculli, Reg Lewis, Freddy Ortiz, Arthur Harris, Carlos Rodriguez, Dominick Juliano, Ernie Phillips, Hugo Labra and Leo Pereira.

Good friends with John Bianculli, who won the 1962 most muscular and short-class Mr. America, the two would often pose together. "With the differences in our heights we were the Arnold and Franco of our time," says Larry with a laugh.

Shortly after his Mr. America win Larry moved to California and became a model and actor. A meeting with Johnny Carson proved to have a profound effect on Larry's future. "A few days before the show Johnny came to me and jokingly asked how I pronounced my last name (Cianchetta).

LARRY'S CONTEST HISTORY

1959 Mr. Eastern America, Medium-Tall, 5th
1960 Mr. America, Medium, 1st
1962 Mr. America, Tall, 2nd
1963 Mr. America, Tall, 3rd
1963 Mr. East Coast Tall, 3rd
1964 Mr. Atlantic Coast, Tall, 2nd
1964 Mr. East Coast, Tall, 2nd
1964 Mr. New York State, Winner
1964 Mr. American Championships, Tall, 1st
1964 Mr. Northeastern States, Tall, 2nd
1964 Mr. World, Most Muscular, Tall, 2nd
1965 Mr. New York State, Winner
1965 Mr. Northeastern States, Tall, 2nd
1966 Mr. East Coast, Tall, 4th
1979 Pro Mr. America, Masters, 3rd

Was it 'Chickenetti' or 'Cincinnati?' After a few more jokes he told me that it might be a good career move to have a more mainstream anglicized name. Given my size and physique we decided on Powers."

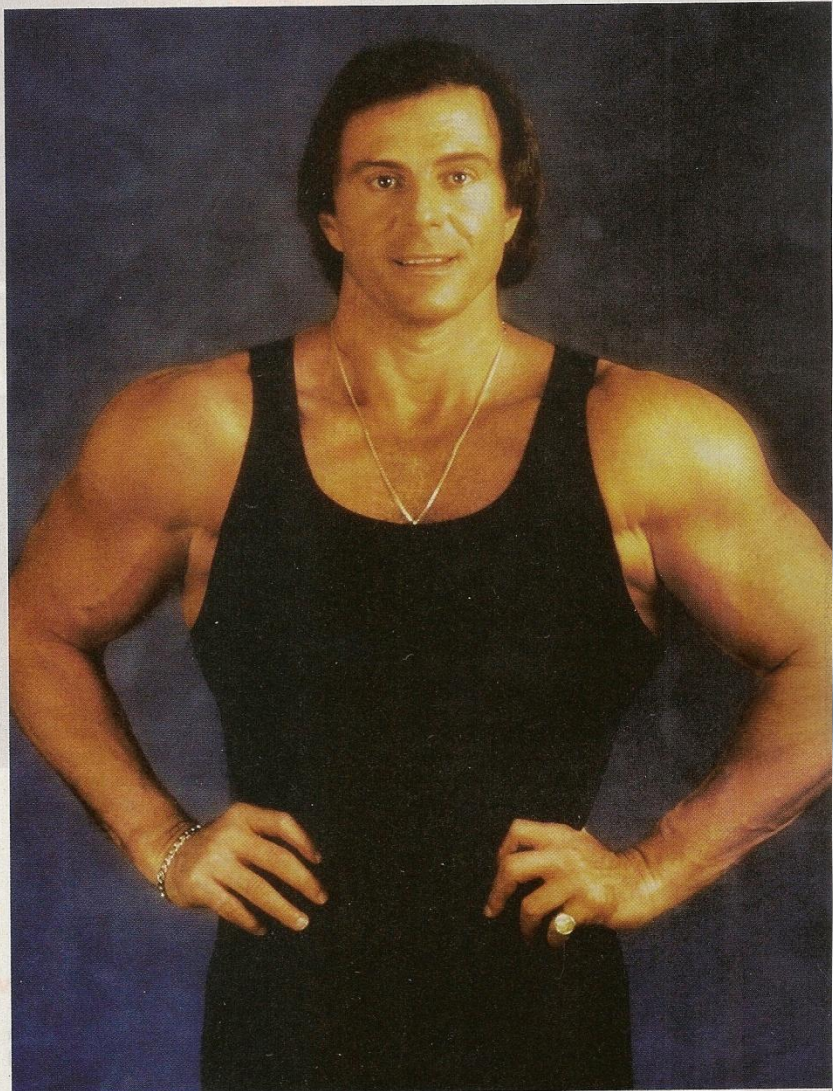
With his physique, most of his roles were playing the "heavy" in numerous TV shows and movies. During a TV career that lasted nearly 40 years Larry moved back and forth between Los Angeles and New York. He made numerous TV appearances including "The Oldest Rookie," "Playboy after Dark," "Wonder Works" and "Dream Street" in addition to being a regular on "The Jackie Gleason Show." He also did commercials for such products as Volkswagen cars and Maxwell House coffee. Between acting jobs Larry also had a successful career as a stockbroker in both New York and Beverly Hills.

In the early 1990s Larry was faced with his biggest challenge after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. But he didn't let this condition slow him down. With a continuous effort to be involved and make a difference, Larry became a recipient of the National Gym Association award for his "pioneering contribution, dedication, life achievements and excellence in character in the field of health and fitness training."

TRAINING

Given the debilitating effects of Parkinson's, Larry has had to totally transform his approach to training. Physical activity is still naturally a vital com-

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Larry has been battling Parkinson's disease since the early 1990s.

ponent in his life, but he stresses that any exercise must be neurologically stimulating, rather than neurologically depleting, meaning a bigger focus on stretching the muscles. He's also shifted from traditional bodybuilding workouts that stress balancing flexor and extensor work to targeting the extensor muscles more. "I don't do as much flexor work because these muscles get worked so much in daily activities such as whenever you pick up a cup of coffee or brush your teeth."

Larry says he could still bench press 250 pounds, but he wouldn't recover from it properly. He explains, "My hands get like claws and my feet feel like lead and I can hardly walk out of the gym." To help him with his conditioning and rehab Larry's designed a workout that involves about 25 movements using exercise bands, light dumbbells and a multi-station machine.

Despite having to curtail some of his once famous athletic abilities, Larry lives each day to the fullest. "I don't let Parkinson's beat me. Let's face it, when your dream dies, you die." **END**