

The Best of
Reminisce



Celebrating Our First 10 Years
A special collection from the memories magazine
that brings back the good times.

Charles Atlas Taught Me a Lesson

By Richard Murphy, San Augustine, Texas

WHEN Charles Atlas was still Angelo Siciliano, a skinny immigrant boy living in a tough section of Brooklyn in the early 1900s, he was beaten by a neighborhood bully.

About a year later, Angelo was at the beach with his girlfriend when a husky lifeguard taunted him and kicked sand in his face. At age 15 and weighing about 97 pounds, Angelo was not in a position to do anything about the humiliation.

Then he discovered the secret that would soon make him stronger—at the New York Zoo!

Standing before the lion's cage, Angelo watched one of the big cats awake and stretch. "The muscles ran around like rabbits under a rug," he recalled. "I said to myself, 'This guy doesn't need barbells and exercisers—he's pitting one muscle against the other!'"

That's how Angelo discovered "Dynamic Tension", now known as isometrics. In the next few weeks, he worked up a system of fundamental exercises and began to do them every day. In a few years, he had put on 50 pounds of well-proportioned muscle.

Practiced What He Preached

Angelo became Charles Atlas, wrote a book on his discoveries and began marketing his system. By the 1950s, under the management of a brilliant adman, Atlas was enrolling students from all over the world.

Atlas practiced what he preached. He did his Dynamic Tension exercises twice a day, didn't smoke or drink and maintained a healthy diet. His advice: "Get to exercising. Get on a healthy basis. We were created in God's image, and God is no weakling."

I'm one of the millions of boys and men transformed by the Atlas method. I, too, was a skinny kid who got regular beatings in 1940 in San Augustine, Texas from the neigh-

borhood bully, Jesse. I tried to fight back but got only black eyes, a split lip and assorted bruises for my efforts.

With the help of Grandma's egg money, I sent for Atlas' book. I began doing his exercises every day after school.

After 2 weeks, I looked at myself in the horse trough and was certain I was on my way to becoming another Atlas...although the penny scale in front of the drugstore said I weighed 89 pounds, just a pound more than when I started my regimen.

Still, I figured it wasn't pounds that counted, it was muscles. After 3 weeks, I decided to put my new muscles to the test. I took the direct route home from school past Jesse's house. He was outside getting a drink from the well, and his mean little eyes peered at me over the rim of the gourd dipper. I swelled my chest and flexed my arm muscles menacingly. Jesse was not impressed.

Hero of the Playground

With a banshee yell of "Yee haw! I'm gonna git you, sis-syface—gonna make you eat dirt again!", Jesse came across the sandy yard like a runaway train.

My instincts told me to run. But I remembered Mac in the Atlas ads getting even with the beach bully. I braced myself, stuck out my right arm and doubled my fist. I also closed my eyes. Jesse, expecting me to run, came in too fast to dodge. His 140 pounds burtled face-first into my fist. I felt the jar clear down to my toes.

When I opened my eyes, Jesse was flat on his back, twin streams of blood running from his nostrils. "You broke my nose," he sputtered, tears on his freckled cheeks.

Word spread, and I became the hero of the playground. True, Charles Atlas' Dynamic Tension didn't make me a muscular hulk...but it did teach me not to run away from my problems—a lesson worth more than the cost of the course.

SKINNY KID. The author, shown in striped coveralls with fellow fifth graders, concentrated on a comic book project. A year later, he put his efforts into a stronger body with help from a book by Charles Atlas (above).

