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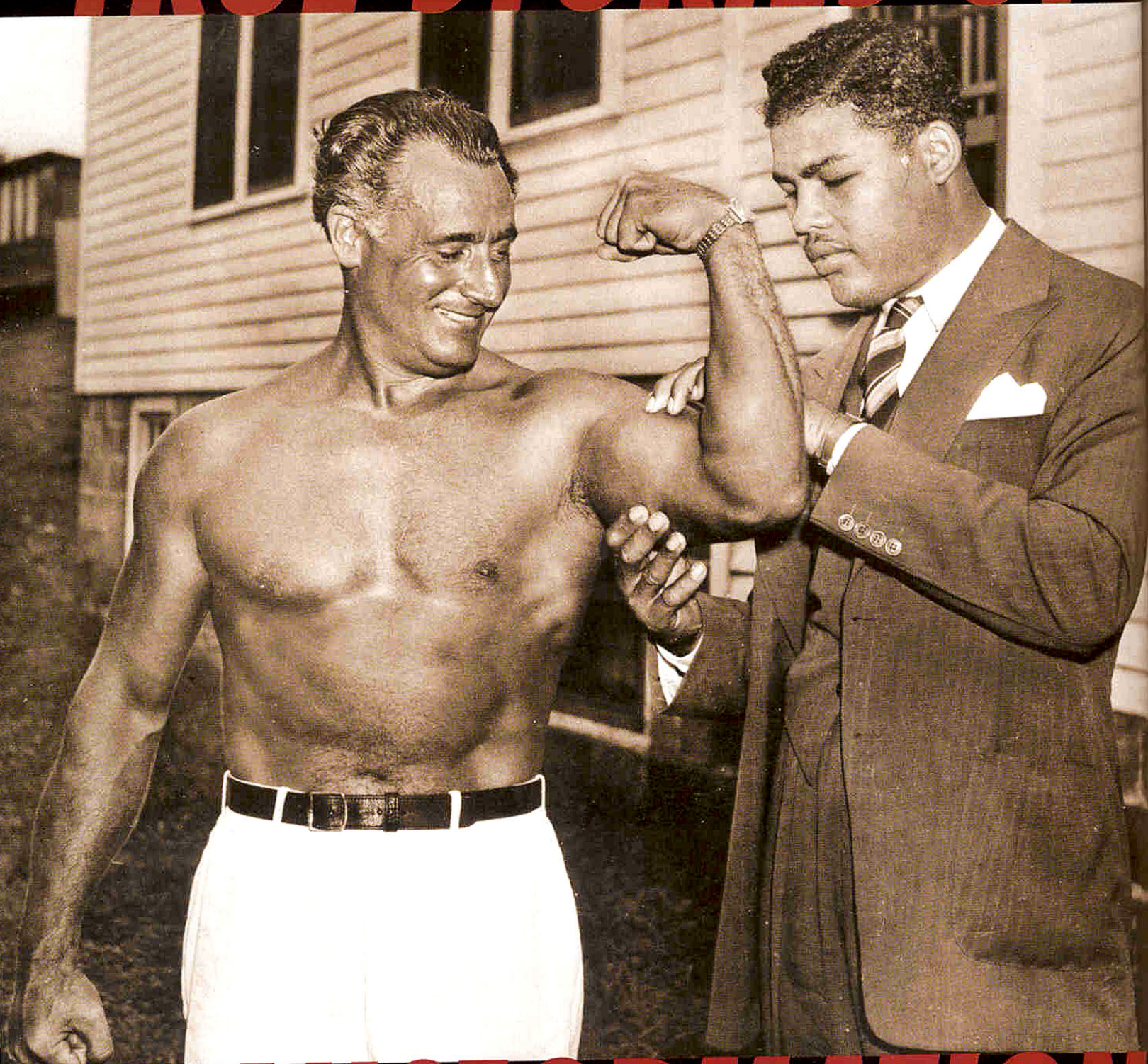
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TRUE STORIES OF



TRANSFORMATION

Remembering
Charles Atlas

Charles Atlas was a mentor to many, including former world heavyweight champion Joe Louis.

Even 30 years after his death, Charles Atlas remains a synonym for strength, determination and the courage to fight back

It's every young boy's worst nightmare. A day at the beach. A beautiful girl on your arm. And a well-built bully who kicks sand in your face. No one should be so humiliated, believed Charles Atlas, who, himself, caught a faceful as a young boy one day at Coney Island, while his girl looked on. The experience, the low point of his life, would not only inspire the self-described "97-pound weakling" to transform himself into the world's most perfectly developed man but propel Atlas toward what would become his life's work: Teaching others that when you strengthen your body, you strengthen who you are as a person.

THE MAKING OF A MAN

If it didn't really happen, you'd think the life and times of Charles Atlas was a far-fetched Hollywood screenplay about living the American Dream: A poor immigrant lands at Ellis Island and, determined to make something of himself, becomes renowned the world over and earns millions of dollars during the height of the Great Depression. But Atlas' life isn't the stuff of screenwriters—it's a real-life example that success doesn't discriminate. Atlas goes to show that literally *anyone*—given the courage and resolve—can, in the words of one G. Porter Freeman, climb out from that rut and achieve your dreams ...

Charles Atlas' real name was Angelo Siciliano. He was born on October 30, 1893, near the small town of Aciri, off the coast of Southern Italy. At the age of 10, Angelo and his mom emigrated to the United States and settled in a cramped apartment on Front Street, in Brooklyn. It was a tough neighborhood, made up of poor Italian, Jewish and Irish immigrants, and young Angelo had

a hard time fitting in. He didn't speak English and weighed but a hundred pounds ... 97 to be exact. That made him an easy target for local bullies. One severe beating left a lasting impression on him ...

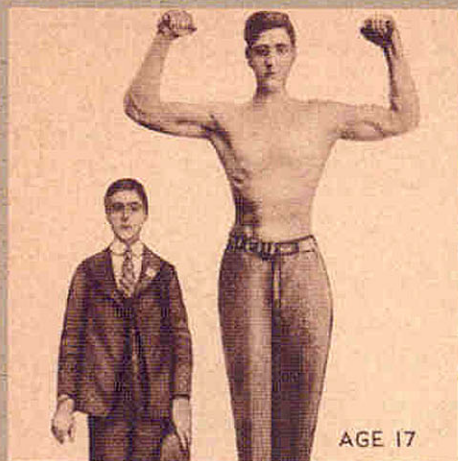
At the age of 15, Angelo was returning home on a Halloween night when a local street ruffian stopped him on one of Brooklyn's mean streets. What followed was a whipping so severe that young Angelo was knocked unconscious for over an hour. Upon regaining his wits, Angelo ran back to his room and as he cried himself to sleep, he prayed for the inner-strength to stand up for himself.

But his prayers went unanswered. And the beatings continued. One afternoon at the age of 16, Angelo brought a girl to Coney Island. The story now becomes legendary. "We were sitting on the sand, and suddenly a bully came along—a very handsome fellow with a fine physique—and he looked at me, this scrawny guy with a beautiful girl, and he kicked sand in my face," recalls Atlas, in a 1969 television interview. "And,

of course, I had to take it. I couldn't get up and fight him—he was too big for me, and the girl felt funny. I told her that someday, if I meet this guy, I will lick him." The girl found herself another date.

Humiliated, Atlas knew he had to do something. But what?

Days later, while on a field trip to a local museum, inspiration struck. There Angelo spotted a statue of Hercules, and the boy was fascinated by the Greek God's well-muscled physique. Soon after, during a visit to the local zoo, Angelo sat watching the lions, amazed by the muscle rippling under their skin. Lions don't lift weights, so how did their



Atlas once weighed 97 pounds. With hard work and undying determination, he transformed his physique, and by doing so, his life.

muscles get that way, he wondered? He decided that it must be because they were pitting each muscle against another, creating tension, and thereby strength.

By 19, Angelo had transformed his physique through his new daily regimen of push-ups, sit-ups and deep-knee bends. It was a transformation that was not lost on his friends. One day, while on the beach at Rockaway, one of Angelo's pals jokingly told him, "Hey, Angelo, you look as good as that statue of Atlas on that hotel across the street." Angelo liked the sound of that. The name Atlas symbolized strength and power. It was also much more American sounding than Ciciliano, his very Italian last name. And that appealed to a young immigrant eager to succeed in America. In fact, he had already adopted the nickname Charlie for that very reason. And from that moment on, Angelo Ciciliano would forever be known as Charles Atlas.

COMPLETING THE TRANSFORMATION

By the age of 21, Atlas, while proud of his new body, wanted more than the attention of a few local girls. He was hoping his new build would also make him some money. At the time, one of the few professions open to bodybuilders was working as a strong man in Vaudeville. And in 1915, Atlas opened his own act at Coney Island. But he was hardly the first person to make money showcasing his muscles.

For decades, crowds at county fairs and circus sideshows were dazzled by the antics of these musclemen. The strongman circuit produced its share of stars, but the most popular performer of the day was a Prussian immigrant by the name of Eugene Sandow. Sandow performed all the usual feats of strength, but his greatest appeal was his sculpted physique, which he showed off to perfection with cleverly orchestrated lighting. Sandow's act helped jumpstart a growing trend on the strongman circuit: showcasing the body not only for power but also for beauty and symmetry.¹

This trend mirrored a shift in society's attitude toward the ideal male body. A shift that was evident in the pages of several leading magazines. "In the later 19th century, if you're male, one of the real signs of prosperity and success was to be round," historian Harvey Green, a professor at Northeastern University, tells *A&E's Biography* in a

recent memoir of Atlas' life. "By the turn of the century for men, that begins to change toward a more lean and sleek profile. Beards disappear, ideal men are perceived as being smooth shaven, and there's a further evolution in the '20s to a body shape that is more triangular, with the shoulders being the broad part of the triangle, shaped to a slimmer waist and strong legs and thighs."¹

Charles Atlas fit this new ideal to a T. He was 5-feet-10-inches tall, and weighed 180 pounds. His chest was 47 inches around, his waist 32 inches, his biceps 17 inches, and his calves 16½ inches. And with those dimensions, he didn't go unnoticed long.

In 1921 and 1922, Bernard McFadden, the leading authority on fitness, health and nutrition in America and the publisher of *Physical Culture* magazine, sponsored a natural bodybuilding competition called "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." In both years, Atlas won. After the second win, Mr. McFadden decided to stop promoting the contest because he felt Atlas would always win and there would be no competition. His measurements from those



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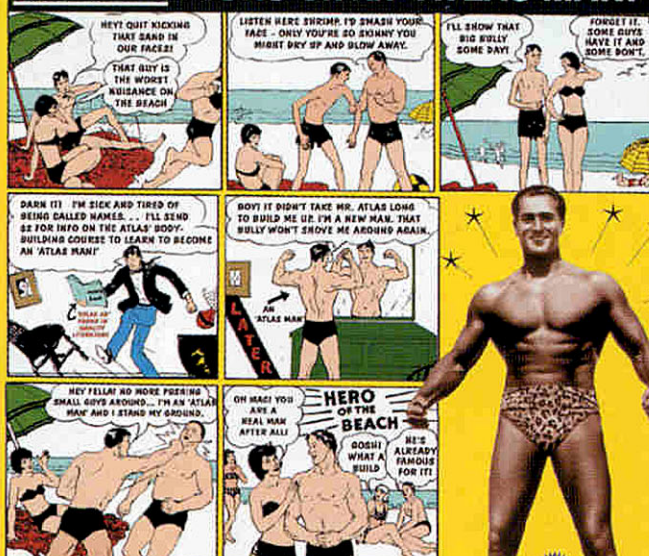
competitions are on file as being the ideal specimen for the 20th century man (according to the standards of the 1920s).

But much like the Austrian Oak, who would decades later first gain prominence for his physique, Atlas had visions that stretched far beyond the sport of bodybuilding. He would invest all the winnings he received from the various bodybuilding contests he entered in an upstart mail-order business. And after

partnering with copywriter and marketing wizard Charles Roman, the 97-pound weakling ad was born—one of the most famous and long-running ad campaigns in history, and one that would, by 1930—a time when most Americans were scrambling for pennies and standing in long unemployment lines—make Atlas a millionaire many times over.

Of course, Atlas was much more than a successful bodybuilder and businessman. Indeed, he was a model of clean living. He practiced what he preached and was a life mentor to many—President John F. Kennedy, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Joe Louis, Bruce Lee and Joe DiMaggio, included among those. His “Dynamic Tension” mail-order program, which included isometric and calisthenics exercises, but was founded on getting your mind in order before setting out to transform your body, set the standard for the hundreds of programs that future exercise authorities would pitch to audiences craving better bodies. Today, fitness, bodybuilding and exercise programs are everywhere. But it all started with a poor Italian immigrant who dreamed of a better life and had the courage to stand up for himself and go after it.

TIRED OF BEING PICKED ON? NOBODY PICKS ON AN "ATLAS MAN!"



I WAS PICKED ON TOO - NOT ANYMORE!

That's right folks, I understand how it feels to be "picked on." I was a skinny "97-pound weakling." I was so ashamed of my scrawny body that I couldn't bring even as a victim and go to the gym. The girls wouldn't look at me and the guys gave me no respect. That all changed for me, and I'll change it for you. I'll make you an "Atlas Man." I will build you a massive muscular body to impress the girls and stop the bullies! You have my word on that!

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No dumbbells? No problem ...

5 tension exercises that produce body-rippling results!

Most of us have grown accustomed to the full span of exercise equipment available in commercial gyms or in our home gyms, but what do you do if you're on the road, in some godforsaken motel whose idea of a fitness center is a circa 1981 exercise bike positioned in front of a television set? You improvise! The following tension exercises, inspired from the great Charles Atlas himself, are easy enough—but don't be fooled. Put a little elbow grease into

them, and squeeze your muscles with all your might, and you're actually increasing your muscles' tonus—the degree of muscular contraction that the muscle maintains even when the muscle is relaxed. In fact, even if you never travel and always have a set of weights at the ready, you should regularly do "tension" exercises like these if hardened, ripped muscularity—what bodybuilders refer to as the "dry" look, is at all appealing to you.

DYNAMIC BICEPS BLAST

Position your left hand on the top of your right wrist (or vice versa if working your left biceps), and slowly bring your right hand up toward your right shoulder (just as if you were doing a biceps curl) while, at the same time, pressing down on your right wrist using your left hand. It's the ultimate push-pull dichotomy—really squeeze your working biceps and don't let your arm come up easy. Tension is the name of the game. Do three sets of 10 dynamic reps with each arm.



DYNAMIC CHEST PRESSES

This is a terrific exercise for hardening up and bringing out the striations in your chest (if you're already lean). Clasp your hands together about six inches in front of you, at waist level. Using a "flyeing" motion, push in with your right hand as your left hand resists with all the might you can muster up.

Push hard for 20 seconds using your right hand before reversing the action, this time pushing hard with your left hand, as your right resists. Do three sets of 20-second "reps."



DYNAMIC TRICEPS TENSION

The reverse movement of the above biceps curl. Instead of pulling up using your biceps, you're going to be pushing down with your triceps. To provide the resistance—the *tension*—position your left hand behind your right wrist. Push down with your right arm as you pull up with your left. Do three sets of 10, squeezing your triceps as hard as you can throughout the exercise.



DYNAMIC ABDOMINAL SQUEEZE

Stand up straight with your hands flat on your thighs. Take a deep breath and flex your abs hard as you expel every last bit of air from your lungs. The key here is the contraction of your abs, which is aided by resisting the air coming out of your mouth with a "Tssss" sound. Do three to five sets, each set lasting about 10 to 20 seconds.



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References cited:

A&E Biography, "Charles Atlas: Modern Day Hercules."

Thanks to Charles Atlas, Inc.; David Kennedy; L.J. Chadderon and A&E's Biography, who contributed to this story. For more information on the Atlas program, visit www.charlesatlas.com