

THEN AND NOW

My powerlifting memories start in 1966, just one month before my induction into the Army. I feel like Captain Ahab with his obsession with Moby Dick. I am strapped to powerlifting, and I know I will be pulled to my chalky death by it eventually, but I can't stop.

All my memories and my friends are involved in powerlifting, so I am drawn to it even more today than ever. So this is my story as I remember it.

My first exposure to powerlifting was a power meet in Dayton, Ohio, late in 1966. I had Olympic lifted since I was 12 and competed at 14, doing a 175 snatch and a 260 clean/jerk at a body weight of about 155. I really thought I was a strong guy until that first power meet. There were 11 men in the 165s and I got 10th place, beating only a 55 year old dude.

This was an eye opener for me. I never Olympic lifted again. My Olympic lifting training partners should have worn signs saying "I lift weights", because if they were brought into court for it, the case would be thrown out for lack of evidence. However, the powerlifters I saw not only were strong but looked like they were strong.

One of these men was Milt McKinney, a future world champion in the 132s. George Crawford was amazing at 165, trying a 525 world record squat with legs like tree trunks. He later squatted 650 at 165 with no gear, when 500 was good. George was the first to help me with my squat form. He was always helpful at meets. His son came to visit years later, and it was my honor to help him. Vince Anello was in the meet as well, showing signs of his deadlift prowess even then. Vince told me once that anything made his deadlift go up. He was doing the conjugate system without knowing it. I just saw Vince at the 2004 IPF World Bench Championships in Cleveland, OH. He still looks great.

That meet in 1966 was my introduction to Larry Pacifico. He would become one of the greatest lifters I ever saw. There was nothing I did not do to try to beat him, but I never did, nor did anyone else until injuries and a technical error in the 1980 Senior Nationals cost him his chance to win 10 Worlds in a row. He would give advice on benching, which was to gain weight and work your triceps. Larry's son is becoming quite a shot putter, throwing 60 feet as a ninth grader.

This group, along with Ed Matz and a few top lifters around the world had a network of training knowledge at their disposal, which was a major factor in their success.

Today we have the Internet, but unfortunately many use it to bad-mouth each other, to cry about their training partners, or, worse, to be a legend in their own mind.

After that power meet, I went into the Army. The next month I was in the infantry, but did not go to Vietnam. Instead I was sent to Berlin, I think because of my father's untimely death in 1968. Now I could train fairly regularly, but my lifts were going nowhere. No one knew anything about powerlifting. One day I picked up a Muscle Power Builder, which later became Muscle and Fitness. In that magazine, there was a powerlifting article about the Westside Barbell Club of Culver City, California. It was about box squatting. I had never heard of this, but with nothing to lose, I gave it a try. To my amazement, the

box squats worked to the point that I later made top 10 squats in five weight classes.

Bill West, George Frenn, and the guys, through those articles, got me started on the right foot. I was never able to visit Westside in Culver City due to work, which I regret to this day.

After getting out of the Army in 1969, I built a power rack, got some weights, and started training full time using what I learned from the articles. They were my only training partners. After Bill West died, I refer Red to my place as Westside Barbell, but never publicly until 1986. Westside Barbell is a trademarked name (and so is Louie Simmons).

I often wondered if I was on the right track with my training. Roger Estep was doing a 1600 total in the early 1970s. Then out of nowhere, he made an 1800 total. I asked him how he jumped 200 pounds so fast. He said he went out to Westside in Culver City, and the rest WAS history.

Chuckie Dunbar, Jack Wilson, Luke Iams, Paul Sutphin, and some others were known as the Wild Bunch and were a very strong team. They proved to me that I was on the right track. My problem was that I had no training partners. When I went to meets, I would ask lifters who excelled in each lift for tips on that lift. When it came to benching, Larry Pacifico was always telling me to train my triceps and lats.

I was lifting in Indiana and met Bill Seno. This dude was huge. He had won best chest in many Mr. American contests, but was also the American record holder in the bench press. I also asked Bill how to get my bench up to a top 10 lift (at the time there was only atop 10). First he stared at me, then grabbed me by the arms and said I needed to do illegally wide benches for a 6 rep max. When progress stopped, go to 8 reps, then to 10 reps 1 to failure. I hated the higher reps but the 6s pushed my lousy 340 at 181 to 445 at 198 then finally 480 at 220 and a top 8 bench. Bill was a close-grip bencher, and he was telling me to bench extra wide?

What gives? In the end, he knew what he was talking about. Bill was training with Ernie Frantz. Ernie was 12 or 13 years than me. A former bodybuilder turned powerlifter, Ernie was old by my standards, but not old-fashioned. He was and still is on the cutting edge with power gear — denim shirts and canvas squat suits—which are still some of the best today. For years he was a top 181, 198, and 220. He also formed the APF and WPC to lift some of the restrictions of the IFF. His wife, Diane, was also a top lifter in the 1980s. There were top lifters such as Jack Barnes, who could out-squat everyone at 181 and 198, and John Kanter at 242 with a 2000 total. The heavyweights were always in the limelight: John Kuc, Jim Williams, one of the greatest benchers of all time, and Jon Cole, who made a 2370 total at 286 with no gear.

I entered my first national meet, the Junior Nationals in Patterson, NJ, in 1971. I got third. I thought I had second place locked up until Joe Spack, also known as Spack the Wack, came out and pulled a 650 deadlift to push me into third. I made the top 10 in 1972 in Powerlifting News, a Dan Dewelt publication that was the predecessor to Mike Lambert's Powerlifting USA. In 1970, I met Herb Glossbrenner, who thanklessly keeps stats to this day. Herb and Mike keep it real for everyone.

My arch rival was George Clark. This guy was built like a tank. He would always beat me by 40-50 pounds. But what made it worse was that when he would arrive, everyone would stop and stare at him

because he had muscles that did not have names yet. I dreamed about beating him every day of my life, but I never did. I did outlast him though.

I made my first Elite total in February 1973 in Toledo, Ohio. I did 605 - 380 - 670 and a 1655 total. At that time there was no gear. I almost made a 700 deadlift. A lot of good lifters, including Bill Ennis and Ed Matz, participated in that meet. It was known as The Key to the Sea.

The Chattanooga Open was a big, but not national, meet as well. After that meet, I said to myself that my back was indestructible. Boy, was I wrong. I broke my fifth lumbar vertebra. I was on and off crutches for 10 months and in severe pain. I could not do any exercises that had made me strong before. By luck, I came up with the Reverse Hyper. It first helped the pain, and then it repaired my back to its former strength.

Walter Thomas was new and on the rise in the early 1970s. Inaba, Precious McKenzie, Eddie Pengelly, and Ron Collins were making names for themselves. Powerlifting was becoming international. The IPF was formed to organize the first world power sport. The AAU had run powerlifting in the beginning. The early 1970s was the springboard for U.S. powerlifting.

A lot of Canadians would lift in our meets in Ohio. I don't think Dr. Di Pasquale was one of them, but everyone knows him today by his column in Powerlifting USA. A lot of powerlifters hang on forever. Bob Cortes was in many meets in the early 1970s. I recall he was older than dirt then, and he is still lifting today.

In the 1971 Junior Nationals I broke the squat record with 565, breaking the mark held by Tony Fratto, who was a huge influence in my squatting. Its funny how although you are competing against these great lifters, they were also great men, as they were the pioneers of this great sport. I trained by myself until I saw Doug Heath at Ohio State University. He was strong as hell, but really eccentric, to say the least. He had many great contests with Ron Mercer of Glass City Power Team, in Toledo. Doug is still strong today, making top 10 lifts. After my back injury, it took me a few years to reach top form again. Spanjian supersuits came on the scene. They did not do much, but I was glad to have some support. I recall that they cost \$24.00. Bob's Belts supplied a 4 inch power belt, which I still use today.

Larry Pacifico was not only lifting big, but was putting on the greatest power meets ever. I lifted in the 1977 Junior Nationals in Lincoln, NE. It was the first time I saw Fred Hatfield. He would become a squatting machine, maybe the greatest pure squatter of all time. I met a kid there who told me he was going to break the world record in the bench at 148. His name was Mike Bridges. He did break the record. I never saw such a lifting machine. He was and is the strongest man under 200 pounds I ever saw. If he would choose to use the best gear of today, it would be crazy. My friend Arnold Coleman broke Mike's and Gene Bell's total record at the 2005 Arnold Classic. I was amazed to see Arnold break these records. It was unexpected, but the unexpected is commonplace today.

Sam Mangialardi, Dennis Reed, and Henry Waters were making big noise, as well as Clyde Wright, Larry Kidney, and Paul Wrenn, who at super heavyweight sure could squat deep. I was now a 198. Estep, Jones, Cash, and my new training partner, Gary Sanger, were doing big lifts. In 1978, I was strong again: fourth in the squat, seventh in the deadlift with 710, and fifth in the total at 1825. I wanted to go to 220, but had a hard

time gaining weight. I thought my injuries were behind me, so I go to the 1979 Senior Nationals. Bridges is killing then, but Ricky Crain is right there. Walter Thomas was at the top of his game. I was there to beat Pacifico like everyone else. I did everything I could to beat him, but — of course — I didn't, but neither could anyone else.

The 1979 Seniors was known as the Meltdown in Mississippi, for good reason. Bill Kazmaier was making a name for himself and had planned to dominate the meet. I was sitting poolside with some lifters when Bill said, "Beam me up Scotty." His luck got worse when he bombed out with an 804 deadlift. He would have won by over 100 pounds. It was very humid, which caused a lot of missed deadlifts. I weighed only 212 and made a 733 PR squat and a PR bench of 462. My opener of 677 would place me second behind Larry Pacifico. I pulled the weight easy, but as I locked it out, my grip slipped a little. The head referee was looking at my hand, and then my bicep tore loose, causing me to drop the bar. My second place quickly became no place. What a meet. Only two made a total: Larry and Dr. Steve Miller.

To this day, people ask me where's your bicep? I reply, "Bay St. Louis, Mississippi." Two surgeons recommended surgery, but one said no, and that's the way I went. Many people asked if I was going to lift again. I said, "Hell yes." Six months later, in January 1980, at the Y Nationals, I was back. I squatted 765, benched 480 (my first top 10 bench), and deadlifted 705, to total 1950. It was the third best total ever, for a short time. That's the good news. The bad news was that I had hurt my groin and lower abs. I was in extreme pain, but I was getting to like pain, maybe a little too much.

Next stop, the 1980 Senior Nationals in Wisconsin. I opened with 722, but failed. I made my second attempt, but with a lot of pain and a popping sound. For the first time I used my head and passed the rest of the meet. Ernie Hackett, a world record holder and physical therapist, looked at me and said I had torn tendons of the pelvic bone and some lower ab muscles. He was right, and I was out for a while. Meanwhile, Larry Pacifico had won his ninth world championship at the 1979 Worlds in his hometown of Dayton, OH. Japan, England, and Canada had world champs along with the United States. At the 1979 Worlds Lamar Gant beat Precious McKenzie at 123 by pulling a 617 deadlift. The world record was 551, and Lamar made 617 to a standing ovation, the only one I've ever seen. With there being only one federation, my main goal was to do top 10 lifts in my third weight class. I had some time to think about training. I knew I was doing something wrong because I was stronger in training than at the meets. After breaking my fifth lumbar vertebra for the second time in 1983, I sought medical advice. The doctor wanted to remove two disks, fuse my back, and remove bone spurs. I said, 'No way, Jose'. In next month's article the story and the pain continue.