

The Amazing Transformation of Bruce Randall

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*Editors' Note: The following article is taken from a book published two months ago by Randy Roach. Called **Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors**, this fascinating work is the result of six years of research and writing. A full 562 pages in length, it is also the first of two volumes. Both volumes deal with the history of the relationship between bodybuilding/strength training and nutrition. Roach has been an active participant in the Iron Game for three decades, and for the past 20 years he has operated a private training facility. A Canadian living in Ontario, Roach has a background as a senior programmer in the fields of museum work and environmental engineering. The book may be ordered online at: www.musclesmokeandmirrors.com.*

In 1966, an 18-year-old Terry Strand responded enthusiastically to a *Chicago Sun Times* advertisement announcing the appearance of a former Mr. Universe at a downtown Montgomery Ward department store. Strand recalled very few people showing up to see and listen to the physique star promote Billard barbells, a company the musclemen represented. What impressed the young Strand was not just the amazing physique of the 1959 Mr. Universe, Bruce Randall, but the very demeanor and sincere nature of the athlete. Strand reflected:

Bruce was much less interested in hawking Wards' products than in evangelizing the passersby as to the glory of a fit and toned body. As an eighteen-year-old already with a bad case of iron fever, I listened enthralled to his impassioned pitch for health via the barbell lifestyle. I squeezed in a question now and then, asking him about protein, reps, sets . . . just the usual inquiries.



This photo of Bruce Randall was taken in the summer of 1955, when he weighed 387 pounds at a height of 6'2" and his chest was measured at 61". Later that summer he reached his top weight, 401 pounds, at which time he radically changed both his exercise routine and his diet. Thirty-two weeks later he had lost 218 pounds.

He could have blown me off, seeing that I was a ragamuffin kid with no lucre for the till. Instead he ended up volunteering his personal home address in case I needed some further illumination.¹

A year later, Strand met up again with Randall at a Chicago Teenage Youth event where both were participating. Strand was fulfilling a commitment to the YMCA, which awarded him a scholarship for being one of the top five outstanding teenage athletes in the region. Bruce Randall was still as impressive in character as Strand remembered him from the year before:

He was as always more of a Jack Lalanne educator than a Joe Weider marketer . . . He was never given a lot of coverage because he head-



Randall, weighing about 350 pounds, was very strong, particularly in the deadlift. He claimed to have done 770 pounds, well ahead of the best deadlift done up until that time. As can be seen in the photo, he also had unusually well-shaped thighs and calves, which were two of the reasons he was successful as a bodybuilder several years later.

ed up the Billard Barbell Company for Diversified Products of Canada. So he was looked upon as a competitor by the Hoffman and Weider equipment companies.²

What was so special about this [future] 1959 bodybuilding champion that even Peary Rader would dedicate both his editorial and a feature article to him in the May 1957 issue of *Iron Man*? Rader set the tone in his editorial titled, "A Lesson from Bruce Randall's Story":

VERY few, if any, men have come along in the Iron Game who created such a sensation as Bruce Randall. We had followed this young man's rapid rise to fame during the past year or so through friends who knew him and watched his progress. His remarkable gains in bodyweight and power were truly unbelievable. When he reached a little over 300 lbs. none of us ever thought he would go on to over 400 lbs. How much farther could he have gone? He feels he could have reached at least 500 lbs., and no doubt he could have. He feels that at 500 lbs. bodyweight he could have dead lifted 1,000 lbs. After seeing his remarkable accomplishments we would not want to doubt his ability to lift so much.³

Rader's lesson in this story was firmly on faith and determination in one's God-given abilities to do what he or she sets their mind to. Randall not only willed himself to bring his bodyweight up methodically to over 400 lbs. (181.8 kg) for strength purposes, but to then make such a dramatic transformation that he was able to capture the 1959 Mr. Universe crown. In the same May 1957 issue of *Iron Man*, Rader shared the "Amazing Story of Bruce Randall."⁴

Randall believed his appreciation for the value of proper diet was obtained during a summer job on a merchant vessel. It was during his stint at sea that he attributed the fresh air, hard work, and good eating for taking his bodyweight from 164 lbs. (74.55 kg) to 192 lbs. (87.27 kg) in 58 days. Back to school and playing football and putting the shot, his weight dropped back to 185 lbs. (84.09 kg), where it remained until he graduated.

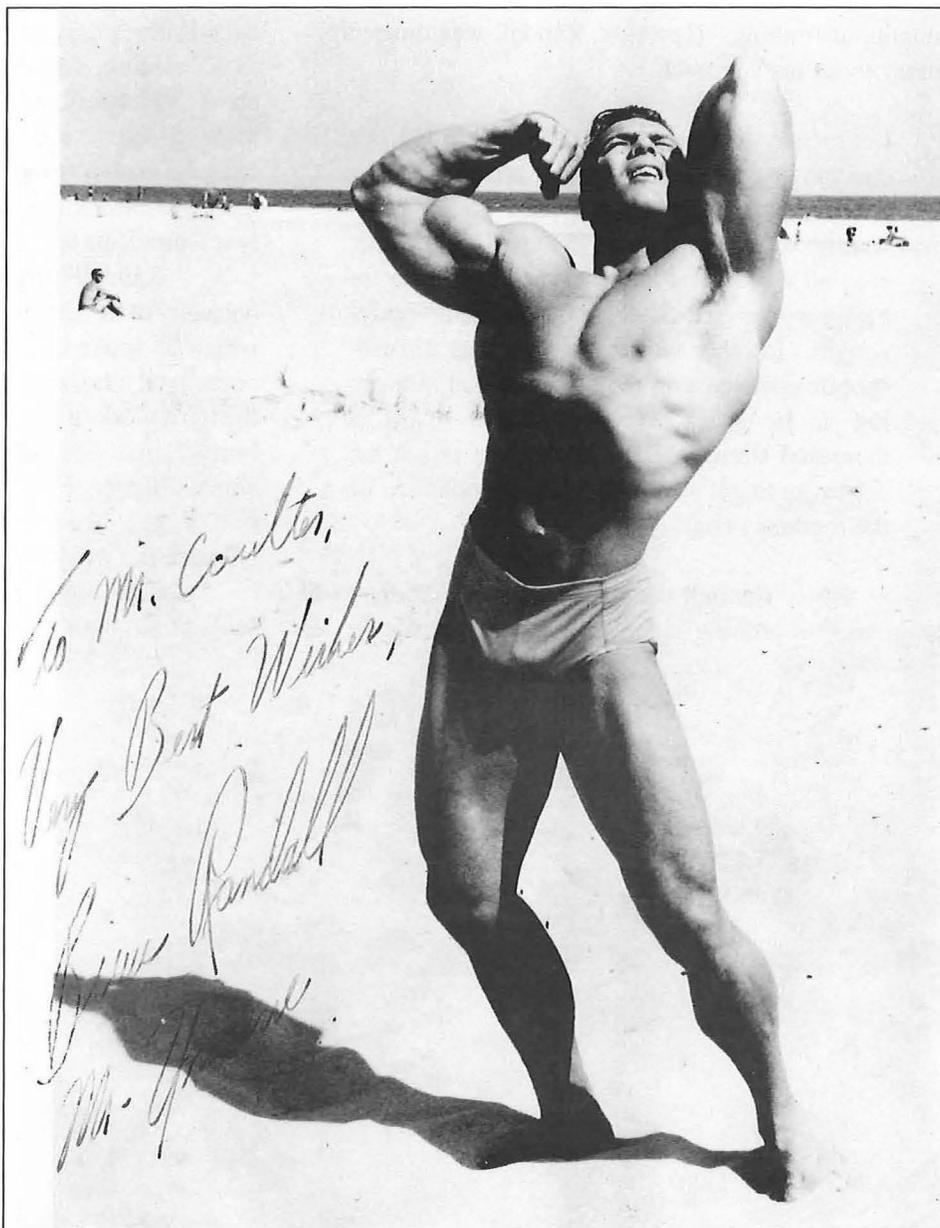
After entering the Marine Corps and finishing

boot camp, he was stationed at the Norfolk Naval Base. It was at this point where Randall stated he was six months past his 21st year in January of 1953 when he was introduced to the finest weight training facility in the Navy, run by Chief Petty Officer Walter Metzler. Randall was still playing around with his shot put and weighed 203 lbs. (92.27 kg) but he wanted to get up to 225 lbs. (102.3 kg) in order to play football for the base.

Randall stated his initiating strategy for getting bigger and stronger:

In order to increase my food intake, each time I sat down to a meal I would take an extra chop, glass of milk, slice of bread, etc. before leaving the table. By doing this at every meal, (and I made it a point never to miss a meal), my stomach seemed to stretch in order to accommodate the increase in food. Also my digestion, assimilation and other body functions stepped up to take care of the increase. (Now I do not necessarily recommend this method for those who wish to gain weight. I merely relate this to illustrate how I gained so rapidly.)⁵

Randall shot from 203 lbs. (92.27 kg) up to 225 lbs. (102.3 kg) in six weeks. By spring, he was up to 265 lbs. (120.5 kg). At that point, Metzler convinced him to drop football and focus on the weight training. Peary Rader liked and respected Randall's attitude and disposi-



This photo, from the Todd-McLean Collection, was given to Ottley Coulter by Randall in the late 1950s, when he weighed approximately 225 pounds. It demonstrates the body Randall had when he won the coveted NABBA Mr. Universe title in 1959. The remarkable physical transformation he was able to make in just a few years, before the arrival of anabolic steroids, is unprecedented in the annals of physical culture. Even today—with anabolic steroids, human Growth Hormone, food supplements, and an improved understanding of nutrition and training techniques—no one has come close to doing what Randall did.

tion, but was a bit perplexed over his choice of training routines. It was well known that Rader and others were adamant about heavy leg work anchoring a big eating/strength program, but strangely enough, Randall chose to work nothing but arms for those first initial

months of training. However, Randall was quite diplomatic about his approach:

Let me say here and now that I do not believe one can just get fat and become strong. Things such as what foods were used to gain the weight, routines used in training, living habits, etc., all have to be done properly in order to become stronger through increases in body-weight. In other words if one makes a corresponding increase in the weights used in training as he gains weight the end result is increased strength. This of course is not the only way to get stronger. It just happens to be the method I employed.⁶

Bruce Randall did make some alterations to his program, but nothing elaborate and still no squats. He

added some chest work and the “good morning” exercise to his routine. On the latter movement, he would build up to an unbelievable weight of 685 lbs. (311.4 kg). Most people were afraid of doing the good morning exercise with an empty barbell or even a broomstick, let alone dare think of a weight of that enormity. It was truly a Herculean feat of strength.

Randall originally shied away from the squat because of a serious injury three years previously in which he broke his leg in seven places. He would periodically test his strength in this movement and attributed the hard work in the good morning exercise for allowing him to squat 680 lbs. (309.1 kg). Not bad for an occasional attempt. He actually once took a shot at a 750 lbs. (340.9 kg) good morning, but had to drop the bar because the weights shifted on him.

The only thing rivaling Randall’s incredible feats of strength was the quantity of food he consumed.

It was his belief that in order to increase his strength, he would have to increase his size, and this meant a significant increase in food. He structured his diet around four meals starting at 6:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 4:30 p.m., and finally 9:30 p.m. The only food he would allow between meals was milk. On average, he consumed eight to ten quarts (7.26 to 9.08 L) a day along with 12 to 18 eggs. As mentioned, this was average! He stated it was not uncommon for him to drink two quarts (1.82 L) of milk for breakfast, along with 28 fried eggs and a loaf and a half of bread. He once consumed 19 quarts (17.25 L) of milk in one day, and 171 eggs in total over seven consecutive breakfasts! That’s almost five gallons, or close to 15,000 calories and over 600 grams of protein in milk alone. He was known to virtually fill an entire cafeteria



In this photo, Randall weighs 187 pounds, which is almost as low as he went before upping his food intake and altering his weight-loss training program. He added almost 40 pounds before he won the Mr. Universe contest. The training programs and the diet he used to trim down were at least as radical as the techniques he used to gain from 203 pounds to 342 pounds in just over 14 months. For example, during his weight-loss period he once trained for 81 hours in one week, and in the first 15 days of 1956 he did at least 5,000 sit-ups every day. He realized that these procedures were potentially dangerous, and did not recommend them.

tray with rice and pork and consume it all at a single sitting. *[Editors' note: On one occasion, this resulted in a trip to the hospital. What happened is that by the time Randall got to the mess hall most of the food that he liked was gone—except for rice. So he ate a cafeteria tray full of rice which, not having been thoroughly cooked, swelled so much once Randall had eaten it that he had to have his stomach pumped.]*

Randall was discharged from the Marines on March 11, 1954 and tipped the scales at 342 lbs. (155.5 kg). This was a gain of 139 lbs. (63.18 kg) in just over 14 months. He continued to bring his weight up to 380 lbs. (172.7 kg), when he made the following lifts:

- Press:** 2 repetitions with 365 lbs. (165.9 kg),
1 rep with 375 lbs. (170.5 kg);
- Squat:** 680 lbs. (309.1 kg);
- Good morning exercise:** with legs bent, back parallel to floor, 685 lbs. (311.4 kg);
- Deadlift:** 730 lbs. (331.8 kg) 2 repetitions,
770 lbs. (350.0 kg) 1 rep;
- Curl:** 228 lbs. (103.6 kg);
- Dumbbell bench press:** with pair of 220 lbs. (100 kg) dumbbells, 2 repetitions;
- Supine press:** with 482 lbs. (219.1 kg) after 3 seconds pause at chest;
- Decline dumbbell press:** with pair of 220 lbs. (100 kg) dumbbells, 1 repetition;
- 45 degree incline clean and press:** 380 lbs. (172.7 kg), twice, 410 lbs. (186.4 kg) once;
[Ed. Note: This was probably a continental clean of some kind and not a power clean.]
- Support weight at chest for 1/4 squats:**
1320 lbs. (600 kg);
- 1/4 squats:** with weight well in excess of
2100 lbs. (909.55 kg).⁷

These lifts were rivaling those of the phenomenal 1956 Olympic heavyweight weightlifting gold medalist, Paul Anderson. Randall stated that he brought his weight up to a final 401 lbs. (182.3 kg), but was finding it difficult to focus strictly on his training. *[Ed. Note: Not to mention the expense of his diet.]* To this giant athlete, his quest for strength through sheer size was driven by the power of a willful mind resembling that of The Mighty Atom:

I am a firm believer in the power of the mind when it comes to lifting (or anything else for

that matter). It is only with the constant urging of the mind upon the body to do more and more that one attains the pinnacle. As much as one uses his body in this sport I believe he uses his mind more. Strength, I believe, depends upon one's mental attitude. How many times I have seen a man say, 'I can't lift this,' and consequently he can not. Conversely many men can lift a weight because they think they can. And they do! It all boils down to this. Without the proper frame of mind nothing is possible and with the proper frame of mind nothing is impossible.⁸

What Goes Up Must Come Down!

His "never say never" attitude was about to be put to the test. It was August of 1955 when he hit 401 lbs. (182.3 kg) and decided he wanted to "look at life from the other side of the weight picture." Upon his decision to reduce his weight dramatically, he was met by some negative feedback, including some from authorities in the industry. Undaunted, Randall viewed the challenge methodically as he stated:

Take a sculptor about to create a statue. He takes a big, ungainly piece of rock and with his hammer and chisel he chips away at the rock until he creates the desired effect. Well, I was that big ungainly hulk of rock and the dumbbells and barbells were my hammer and chisel. I also had something on my side that the sculptor does not have, Diet.⁹

Randall's strategy was basically to reverse all engines. Just as he gradually increased his calories by incrementally adding food to each meal, he did the opposite by slowly reducing the size of each meal until he settled into the following regimen:

Breakfast

- 2 soft boiled eggs
- Plain pint (0.45 L) of skim milk
- Glass of orange juice
- Apple

Lunch

- Salad, dates, nuts

Supper

- Round steak
- Two vegetables

Quart (0.91 L) skim milk with additional powdered milk
Gelatine
Coffee occasionally¹⁰

He adopted a system formatted similarly to one Vince Gironda used the next year, but Randall would be much more radical in his exercise regimen. He eliminated the starch and much of the fat from his diet and went very light on the lunch. His eating plan was primarily lean protein and some fruits and vegetables. Once again, Randall matched the dramatic reduction in calories with an equally phenomenal increase in his training. Repetitions jumped from three to five up to 12 to 15. His sets went from three to five and his repertoire of exercises went from six to 20. He claimed his sessions lasted from six to seven hours. He stated that he once trained 27 hours in two days, and 81 hours in one week.

In his New Year's resolution for 1956, he vowed to do 5,000 sit-ups daily for 15 days straight. He feels the 75,000 sit-ups helped him reduce his waist to 33 inches (83.82 cm). Randall also incorporated a lot of running into his routine and by March 20, 1956, he weighed in at 183 lbs. (83.18 kg). This was an amazing drop of 218 lbs. (99.09 kg) in 32 weeks. Below are Bruce Randall's measurements at his various weights. He stated the measurements listed at 401 lbs. (182.3 kg) were actually taken at a lower weight.¹¹

January 3, 1953 203 lbs. (92.27 kg)	August 2, 1955 401 lbs. (182.3 kg)	March 20, 1956 183 lbs. (83.18 kg)
Arm: 16 1/4" (41.28 cm)	23 1/8" (58.75 cm)	17 1/4" (43.81 cm)
Chest: 45" (114.3 cm)	61 3/4" (156.84 cm)	49" (124.46 cm)
Waist: 31" (78.74 cm)	58 1/2" (148.59 cm)	29" (73.66 cm)
Thigh: 23" (58.42 cm)	35 1/4" (89.54 cm)	24" (60.96 cm)
Calf: 16" (40.64 cm)	22 1/8" (56.21 cm)	17" (43.18 cm)

Randall went on to compete in the Mr. America that year and placed thirteenth. His weight had gone from 183 lbs. (83.18 kg) to 219 lbs. (99.55 kg) for that event. What was amazing is that it was noted in *Iron Man* that after all the weight manipulations, there were no stretch marks or loose skin visible on his body at the America show. At six feet two inches tall (187.96 cm), 183 lbs. (83.18 kg) was not an appropriate weight for him and most likely represented a very emaciated,

chronically over-trained state. He probably had little difficulty bringing his competition weight up to 219 lbs. (99.55 kg). According to the November, 1957 issue of *Muscle Power*, he placed sixth a year later at 195 lbs. (88.64 kg), 24 lbs. (10.9 kg) lighter than the year before.¹² Randall's off-season weight seemed to have settled between 230 lbs. (104.5 kg) and 240 lbs. (109.1 kg). He competed and won the 1959 NABBA Mr. Universe title at a body weight of 222 lbs. (100.9 kg).

Randall said it was unlikely that he'd bring his weight to such a size again, but would not totally rule the possibility out. His food bill was often over \$100 a week and that wasn't cheap back in the mid-1950s. He did state, however, that if he did choose to do so, he felt he could reach 500 lbs. (227.3 kg) in 18 months.¹³ Bruce Randall finished his revelations to Peary Rader in that May 1957 article with the following advice, "In conclusion I should like to say that I have found these two rules enormously helpful in any undertaking I have attempted. 1. Ask and ye shall receive. 2. The Lord helps those who help themselves."¹⁴

It may have been the muscles of Bruce Randall that first drew the young Chicago native, Terry Strand, to go with such enthusiasm to see the 1950s physique star. However, it was Randall's nature that left so powerful an impression on Strand that 40 years later, Strand had exhausted all Iron Game avenues in order to ascertain the remaining legacy of the idol of his youth. Surely, many would be curious as to just what else the amazing drive of Bruce Randall brought him through the subsequent decades of his life.

Notes:

1. Interview with Terry Strand, 2006.
2. Ibid.
3. Peary Rader, "Editorial: A Lesson From Bruce Randall's Story," *Iron Man* (April/May 1957): 7.

4. Peary Rader "The Amazing Story of Bruce Randall," *Iron Man* (April/May 1957): 12-17, 42, 47-51.
5. Ibid., 12.
6. Ibid., 13-14.
7. Ibid., 15-16.
8. Ibid., 16.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 42.
11. Ibid.
12. Charles Coster, "Ron Lacy Gains Double Victory at Daytona," *Muscle Power* (November 1957): 25.
13. Rader, "Amazing Story of Bruce Randall," 48.
14. Ibid., 42.