

**Dear IGH:**

I was saddened to learn that the great John Grimek had left this vale of tears for Olympus. The death of this genial bodybuilding god, however, serves to remind all of us that even the strongest, smartest, and richest humans are mortal.

Although I never had the pleasure of *personally* meeting John Grimek, I was inspired by his photos and I learned from his articles in the various muscle magazines. Likewise, I believe the Monarch of Muscledom inspired millions to build better bodies through weight training.

I did have the opportunity to correspond with John a number of times over the years. He was always cordial in responding to my requests for bodybuilding information. In fact, he was kind enough to edit and publish my first bodybuilding article ("In Search of the Perfect Man," *Muscular Development*, June 1983).

Although we will all miss his presence, I know the world is a better place because John Grimek passed this way!

Grover Porter, Ph.D.
Huntsville, AL

Dear IGH:

I am stunned to hear the news of John Grimek. While his mobility was limited, he seemed in great spirits and great health at the banquet. If it had to be, I guess passing (quickly) was the best way; he deserved not to be bedridden for an extended time. This is such sad news but I am so happy that my son and wife and I got to meet him at least once. This is a sad day.

Norman Komich
Beverly, MA

Dear IGH:

I'm sure you know by now that John Grimek at 88 has died. John wrote a regular column for *MuscleMag International* after he left *Muscular Development* magazine. To us, he was a true champion, and a wonderful man. I never tired of hearing his stories, and his pictures and writing inspired me back in my early teens, and continue to inspire me to this day.

Robert Kennedy
MuscleMag International

Dear IGH:

I met John at Sig Klein's Bent Press contest the first weekend in May, 1941. I was an eager, enthusiastic 16 year old. (I am an enthusiastic 74-year-old now.) Anyway, he was so approachable and pleasant and I had a chat with him.

Four weeks later the Senior Nationals were held in Philadelphia. I was there and had the chance to see Stanko, Davis and Abele lifting. Afterwards I went backstage where the Mr. A contestants were preparing for the posing. I went to where Grimek was and spoke to him. He did not tell the pesky kid to go away, don't bother me. He was courteous and pleasant; as a matter of fact I helped him apply a bit of oil on his body. I have such great memories of the whole affair that have lasted these 50 odd years.

I didn't see Grimek again until I moved to York in late 1944. I went to work for Hoffman and then I would see John five times a week, three of those times in the gym. They were interesting years. Visitors came from all over the USA and from quite a few foreign countries. Very memorable. John was a tremendous person physically, a unique example of outstanding development. And equally, or more so, a human being of warmth, kindness and friendliness.

Since I was a seaman for over 40 years, I did not see John very much but I would call him periodically for gab sessions, which I enjoyed and believe he did too. I will miss my friend of so many years. Perhaps we will get to work out in the Big Gym in the sky someday.

Pete Marozas
Watertown, CT

Dear IGH:

It was with great sadness that I read of the death of John Grimek. I have many fond memories of John going all the way back to the days of Bob Hoffman's birthday picnic parties at Brookside Park in Dover, Pennsylvania. Bob lived just across the road at that time.

John's picture first appeared in the old *Strength* magazine around 1928 or 1929. It is a Thinkerish type pose in which he is sitting on a tin bucket or something. I gave him my old copy as he had lost his and wanted a copy. However he still had the little medal he won for it. The very same picture appears in Roger Eels' *Vim* published much later. Should you wish to reproduce it the *Vim* picture is much sharper. It shouldn't be too hard to find as *Vim* didn't last long.

If we could take away all the steroids and enhancing drugs of today and bring back Grimek at his very best he would still stand out, head and shoulders above everyone else, or as Bob used to say, "like a sore thumb."

Charles Spencer
Snow Hill, MD

As mentioned above, the first published photo of Grimek appeared in Strength magazine in October 1929. The caption identifies Grimek as a silver medal winner in Strength's monthly posing contest. It is reproduced on page 16 of this issue.

**Dear IGH:**

I very much enjoyed watching your commentary on the History Channel's "Quest for Health/Quest for Muscle" episodes that appeared a few weeks ago on cable TV. As well, the last two issues of *IGH* have been incredible. Thank you both for all of your hard work. Please find my enclosed payment to continue my Fellowship Subscription status.

Regarding the recent passing of the great John

Grimek, I too was deeply saddened, having just enjoyed his presence at this year's Oldetime dinner. I am most grateful to Vic Boff for giving me and others the opportunity over the years to meet and spend time with this incredible man.

The effect of John Grimek's legacy on weight trainers of all ages has been enormous, more far-reaching than I ever imagined. It was August 1998 when my wife and I were produce shopping at a nearby farm when a gentleman, probably in his late 70's, approached me with a big smile on his face and commented with great enthusiasm about the York Barbell t-shirt that I was wearing. The first words that came out of his mouth were "John Grimek, he was my hero when I was a kid!" Right then and there, there was a common bond between this stranger and me as we spoke for quite a while about John Grimek and the glory days of lifting before steroids. I find it truly amazing when one human being has the ability to affect so many lives in a positive way. John Grimek was one of those rare individuals. My prayers go out to him and to his wonderful wife Angela and their family.

Lou Tortorelli
Howell, NJ

The television documentaries Lou is referring to were produced for a History Channel series called Modern Marvels. The first, "Quest for Health," discusses the early history of exercise and looks at people such as Bernarr Macfadden. The second show, "Quest for Muscle," is a history of the use of resistance exercise in both athletics and bodybuilding. The Todd-McLean Collection was the major source of images for the show and your editors are interviewed. Also interviewed/featured are Jack Lalanne, Joe Weider, Barbara Harris of Shape, Lou Ferrigno, Pudgy and Les Stockton, and exercise historians Jack Berryman and James C. Whorton of the University of Washington's Medical School.

The History Channel normally reruns its shows several times in a given year. Video copies can be purchased by calling 1-800-408-4842. They can also be ordered on-line at <http://store.historychannel.com>.



Dear IGH:

It is my pleasure to renew my patron subscription to *IGH*. I only wish the issues were published more frequently but I understand full well this is not possible. Every issue gets read cover to cover, is filed, and gets pulled out again and again for further review. There are only a handful of worthy magazines or journals put out these days about weight sports, and among them yours is unique in its academic and historical bent. I applaud your commitment to the journal and wish you further success with it. My compliments for the appearances of yourself and Jan on the History Channel special on physical culture. It was fascinating and a lot of the photos and film clips I had never seen before. I have already passed it around to others who have voiced similar compliments.

Regarding your request for anecdotes regarding the late John Grimek, I wish to contribute a few of my own. I first became aware of John Grimek when purchasing my first issues of *Strength & Health* and *Muscular Development* in the late sixties. Those shots of the 50-plus year old Grimek sitting at his desk reading letters, truly radiating “strength and health,” and possessing a powerful physique are forever etched in my mind. After that time I learned in bits and pieces that Grimek was a rare combination of physique, strength, and athletic ability, all achieved while *drug free*, which further elevates him in status above modern bodybuilding “champions.”

Many years passed until I got to see him in person at the Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen Dinner in New York City in 1994. I didn't know he would be there so was quite surprised by his presence. It was truly meeting a living legend. In fact, when I shook his hand I told him, “to me this is like meeting Babe Ruth.” I meant it then and I still feel that way now. I was impressed by his friendliness and easy accessibility. He was surrounded all night by well-wishers, or strangers like myself who wanted a little of his time. The smile never left his face as he greeted old friends and made new ones alike. He was the complete antithesis of the spoiled prima donna “superstars” of today who charge money for every second of their time and advice. As a joke he stood up and spread apart his suit jacket to allow for a photograph. He inhaled and one of the most impressive ribcages I've ever seen came rising up, and this on a man in his early eighties.

I attended the most recent Association of Oldetime Barbell and Strongmen dinner in October, 1998 and John Grimek was in attendance again. Little did I know that a few short weeks later he would not be with us, As luck would have it I had an old *Muscular Development* magazine with me, which had a training article featuring Grimek. I introduced myself along with a friend who had come to the dinner. He invited us to sit with him for a few minutes. He autographed his training article and once again displayed that friendliness and genuineness that so many hundreds of others have noted.

There was a photograph in another part of the magazine of him, Stanko, the Mighty Atom, and several other people I could not identify. John was able to tell me the exact date the picture was taken, the occasion and the identity of all the people in the photo. He spoke about York and Bob Hoffman and the apparent injustice done to him when Hoffman died and control of York bypassed him. He said, “I could have been worth millions but what would I have done with all that money anyway?” without any trace of bitterness.

Class tells. The legend of John Grimek will endure and inspire future generations of weight-men.

Robert Conciatori, MD.
Whitestone, NY

**Dear IGH:**

This is in regards to our phone conversation on yesterday about our dear friend John Grimek. As you can see, I've enclosed several letters from John that I think your readers might find of interest.

First let me introduce myself: the name is pronounced Fayjack. I was born in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania on May 23, 1916. So you can see that I am an old codger per the calendar, but actually going on 35 physically. This is due in large part to my oldest brother and Bernarr Macfadden. My brother John was a disciple of Macfadden (who I met in Florida in 1938. I was a guest of Dr. Frederick Tilney and we went to the air races at Miami Airport where Bernarr had box seats.) As a baby I remember crawling among John's barbells and dumbbells. Lead shot type. We used to run four to five miles mornings and also had a gym. We were clean livers, so consequently my liver is clean. Most of my family lived into the eighties due (in part) to my Mother's genes. She lived to be 90; her Mother died at 103. My brother John died at 84, sister Ann at 84, plus three of us boys are *still* living.

Mike Fajack
Manhattan Beach, CA

A Letter from John Grimek dated March 17, 1983
 Hi Mike. . .

Got your letter but have been tied up with a

number of things . . . shows, etc. But we gave Milo Steinborn a surprise party for his 90th birthday, which was on March 14.

Thanks for the news clipping of Reeves. We pushed his *Powerwalking* book, and hope he is doing well with it, but I don't hear too much about it otherwise. Not much pros and cons, so it may not be much of a seller.

You got quite a gang, too, eh?

We have, or should say, had, six children: three boys, three girls . . . the girls arrived first. One lives in San Jose, and the girl who lives in York is now visiting with her four children. The oldest girl was married, now divorced. The oldest boy was married, one child—girl, and he's divorced but has his girl every weekend and gets along with everyone. The second boy has three girls but wants a boy, so named his last girl "Stevie". . after himself. The youngest boy, a monster, weighing around 260, is 10 years younger than any of the others, and he's not even thinking about marriage—yet. Other than that, things are going along well and we're fairly busy.

Am hoping I can find the time to make the trip to LA for the Olympics, so may see you there. Doc Moss, whom you met (I think) when I was in Santa Monica, was just here for Milo's birthday and went back only yesterday . . . enjoyed his stay and is going back to all that rain and mud. You guys are sure having plenty of that, eh? Sorry. I know my daughter and her family must be ready to come back. They don't like that kind of vacation . . . Who does, eh?

—John Grimek

A Letter from John Grimek Dated January 15, 1985
 Hi Mike. . .

Thanks for the LaLanne clipping. We got several of them. He started that several years back and seems to continue it on his birthday . . . it gives him publicity, and that's what he wants . . . good for him.

I just got back from Calif. again (was out in Sept. too). Our daughter who lives in San Jose just lost her husband, and she was so depressed and needed company. We flew out to comfort her, and we just got back yesterday.

As a matter of fact they were visiting us over Christmas, and went back to a New Year's party in S.F. And shortly after that he died . . . so it was a shock to all of us because the guy was in fine shape around here. But that only proves one can't predict what will happen in spite of feeling tops.

Otherwise, things are running along well, and Bob comes in just about every day, stays for awhile then leaves. He looks well, is a bit bent over compared to what he used to be, but he looks better in the face than he did ten years ago . . . guess he's more relaxed. But his mind wanders. He doesn't get dizzy spells, but he does ramble mentally . . . and he can get mean. And when he's mean,

which isn't him, he's nasty. But that comes and goes. The truth is, he doesn't even know it. But that comes with age and though he's on medication, it doesn't do him any good in fact some of those medicines make him worse. He's better off without them, I think.

Excuse rush— am busy.

—John Grimek



Your article on John Grimek was a bell-ringer. In 1977 when my son Lance was 14, John and Angela invited him to stay at their home. John trained him, took him to movies and treated him like a member of their family. When Lance came home, I sent John a check for that wonderful experience which Lance will treasure as long as he lives. John sent the check back saying he and Angela enjoyed Lance's stay very much.

Until the Air Corps summoned me in 1942, I kept a full-length picture of John with the American flag on his trunks in my bedroom. John was my idol.

Bob Hoffman's articles were my inspiration to work on heavy Olympic lifting until Lance, my very talented son, had me change over to bodybuilding in September 1990. In 1992 I won the National Physique Contest for the 60 and over class spotting my age group nine years.

Yours for health and longevity,

Frank Stranahan
West Palm, FL

Dear IGH:

John was the bodybuilder who started my life-long career. I first saw his photo in a 1945 *Strength & Health* magazine and from that time on I was hooked on weights. I started a home gym in my garage which I later developed into a full-time business from 1950-1985 (Jake's Gym in Altoona, PA—which is still operating under my name although I sold it in 1985.)

In the late 1940s, I made my first of many

trips to the York Barbell Company. I was never lucky enough to hit at the right time to catch John working out, but my training buddy, Phil Wilt, was working in York as a lineman for the power company for a couple of weeks and he stopped by the old York Gym one evening and found John training alone. John asked him if he wanted to work out with him, which of course he did. John said he would welcome having him as a training partner as he didn't have anyone to train with, so for a couple of weeks my buddy trained with the most famous bodybuilder of the century and I died of envy.

I did meet John one day at his office and asked to take his picture but he kindly declined. Later, though, he sent me a letter and apologized for being so busy and sent me an autographed photo.

In 1968, I was given a special official's ribbon to get backstage at the Mr. America contest. John Terpak gave me the ribbon after I delivered a collection of several hundred exercise and health books for the Bob Hoffman Foundation Library. Grimek was very busy setting up most of the display backstage so we did not get to visit much.

Personal observation. At first, John's informal dress clothes always seemed oversized, his baggy pants and shirts not tight-fitting till he moved. Then, his enormous muscle size seemed to till up the slack. He was of average height and I never saw him pose at the many *Strength & Health* picnics unless someone managed to talk him into displaying his magnificent calves and forearms. His waist always seemed trim and with his large chest set him out from the crowd.

I did see one thing that surprised me. At one of the picnics at Dover, Pennsylvania, John and lifting champion Steve Stanko were smoking cigars as they served Hi Proteen to us. I was rather shocked as I was a dyed-in-the-wool physical culture nut and smoking, drinking and junk food were off limits. But, of course, I could forgive the great John for this kind of minor indiscretion. Even though my encounters with the greatest bodybuilder who ever lived were brief, I will always treasure them.

Ernest "Jake" Webb
Huntington, PA

Unfortunately, after Bob's death, John Terpak sold Bob's book collection. The collection remained at Bob's wife's (Alda's) home and Alda had been told by Terpak that if she would allow the books to be removed they would be placed in a "museum" dedicated to Bob's memory. Instead, the books were sold.

Dear IGH:

When I started lifting weights in the Thirties, people considered us strange and said we would be musclebound. There were no gyms like today so we worked in our backyards, cellars, garages or wherever we could find some space.

Our weights were made from balance weights that we "borrowed" from railway crossings. *Strength & Health* magazine was our bible and we looked forward to it each month. When it came, we read it from cover to cover and knew all about the York boys and their lifting records by heart.

His poses were like living sculpture, not like the guys of today who strain and contract every muscle just for the sake of bigness. It is probably best to describe him this way. He had muscular massiveness that tapered just right to his wrists, ankles and waist. When he posed, he either had knowledge of art principles or knew instinctively how to show the body in a meaningful action with the light featuring a particular muscle group just so. He was a true work of art.

A few years ago at one of the Oldetime Barbell Association get togethers I was fortunate enough to express these thoughts to him in a private conversation. It was like talking to an old friend.

Roger LaManna
Westlake Village, CA

Recent deaths in the iron game include that of Joe DiPietro, the former 123 pound world and 1948 Olympic champion in weightlifting. He was 84. Also, John Terlazzo, former gym owner and writer for *Muscular Development* magazine died in York at 83. Doyle Kenady, former world superheavyweight powerlifting champion, died in Oregon. He was only 50. Also, the photographer Artie Zeller died at 69.

