

Steve at age 17 on Stinson Beach.

# The Steve Reeves I Know and Remember

By Ed Yarick

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**Editors' Note:** This article appeared in the May 1976 issue of *Muscle Mag International*, as part of a 50th birthday tribute to Steve Reeves. We are grateful to *MMI* publisher Bob Kennedy for permission to reprint it for our *IGH* readers. As we prepared this issue, however, we discovered that substantial portions of Yarick's piece were taken virtually word for word from a longer, more detailed article in the August 1947 issue of *Your Physique*. The earlier article was written by Alyce Stagg, who later became Yarick's wife. Space did not permit us to run the earlier article.

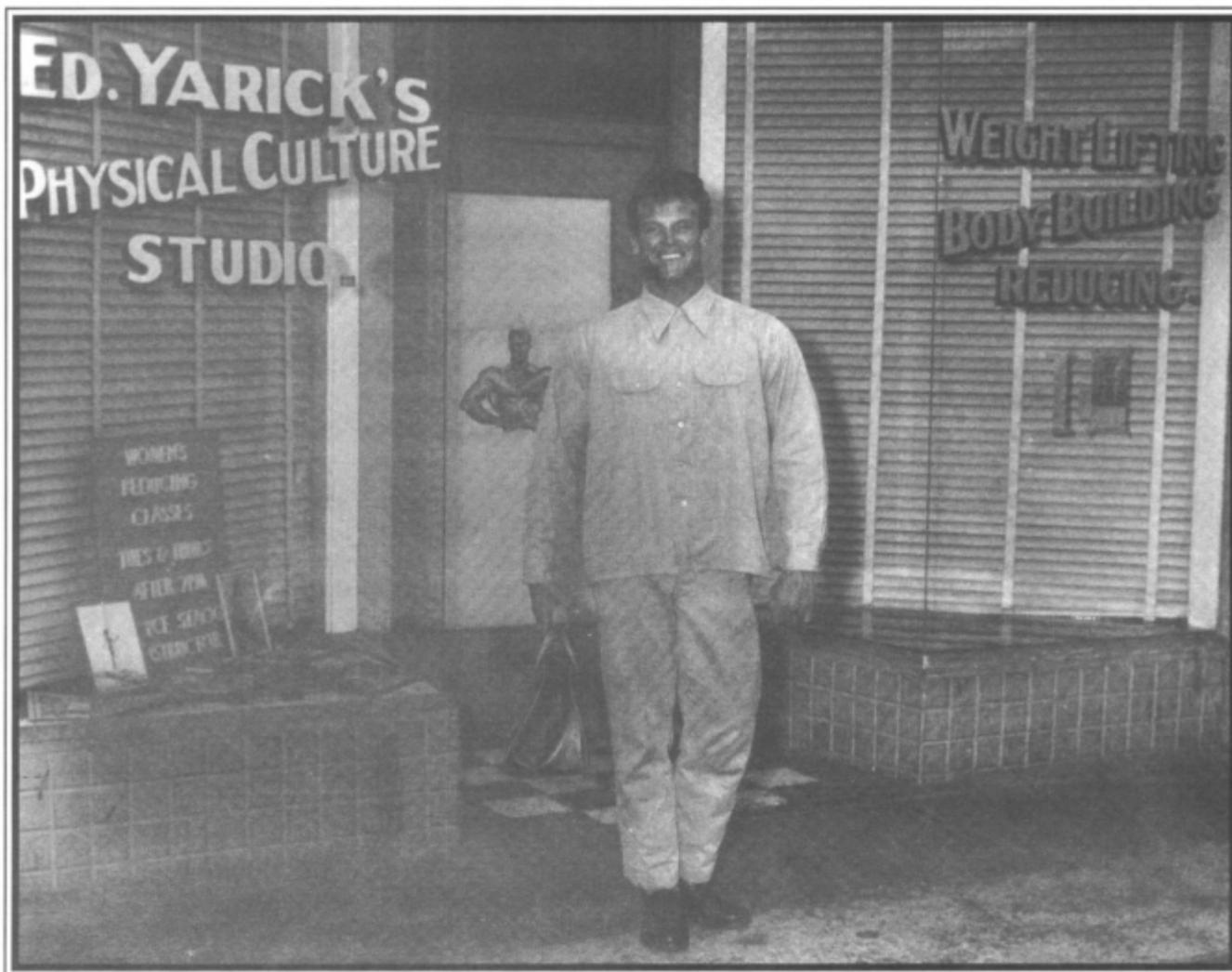
Steve Reeves is universally known as the Hercules of the movies. He won Mr. America, Mr. World and Mr. Universe titles, yet few know much about him as a person. Who was he? How did he get started in bodybuilding? How did he train?

My association with Steve goes back over thirty years. In the '40s my gym was located in Oakland, California, near three high schools—Oakland, Fremont and Castlemount. Reeves attended Castlemount, one of the few schools of that era to offer weight training instruction. He began working out at school and also at

home, but spent much of his free time touring the few local barbell gyms, namely Jack LaLanne's and my gym to obtain all possible information about bodybuilding. During this period he decided to train under my supervision, gaining 30 pounds of solid muscle in four months.

For two years Steve worked out under my instruction and encouragement. His progress continued to be outstanding and by the time he was eighteen, he weighed a solid 203 pounds. In the opinion of many experts, Reeves could have won the Mr. America contest that year had he entered. His physique was already showing signs of the fine shape and muscularity that would eventually make him the most famous bodybuilder of our time.

Steve graduated from Castlemount in 1944 at the height of World War II and promptly enlisted in the Army. At that time soldiers were being shipped overseas quickly and Reeves was no exception. After six short weeks of basic training, he was in on some of the fighting in the Philippines where he earned the Combat Infantryman's Badge and several other awards. While there, however, he contracted a severe case of malaria that required a long period of hospitalization and resulted in a weight loss of over 20 pounds. After several



A smiling Steve Reeves stands in the doorway of the building in which he became a finished bodybuilder—Ed Yarick's gym in Oakland, Steve's hometown. At first, Steve was Yarick's student. Then they became training partners and friends.

recurrences, Steve was finally transferred from combat duty to the quartermaster corp. He eventually ended up in Tokyo with General MacArthur's troops.

Steve was still recuperating from his malaria attacks in 1945 and was physically well below par. He had not had any bodybuilding workouts in over a year, and with no available equipment, it didn't look like he would be able to train. But in typical Reeves "take the bull by the horns" fashion, he located an interpreter and the two went to a local foundry. With the aid of sketches and much hand waving, Steve was able to have a 300-pound barbell set made up. With this crude equipment he began training again and it wasn't long before he had a regular gym set up and a number of other bodybuilders exercised with him. We kept in touch by mail and I was able to monitor his progress that way.

Finally, in the fall of 1946, he returned home and was discharged. Without delay he was back in my gym training, but this time he was no longer a pupil. Instead, we were workout partners, training diligently three times a week on a routine that included several exercises and trying for perfection on all muscles of the body. I invented the incline bench and Steve improvised another exercise for the bench by adding a bar on which curls could be done. [Ed Note: The incline bench predates 1946.] The bench for the incline press and incline curls became a very important piece of equipment in gyms all over the country. Our training sessions continued as regularly as clockwork and were something we both looked forward to. I was improving and I could see Steve growing rapidly in size and shape. We never missed workouts so I was surprised when Steve didn't show for one of our



A teenaged Steve Reeves at Sunny Cove Beach in Alameda is pictured here, second from the right, sitting with some of his friends, including his mentor and training partner, Ed Yarick, who is wearing the sailors' hat.

workout sessions on a Saturday in December. I was extremely puzzled because he was in such top condition that he simply could not have been ill. I found out the reason when he showed up on schedule the following Tuesday and he handed me two huge trophies inscribed "Mr. Pacific Coast of 1946" and said, "Merry Christmas, Ed."

Telling only his mother, Steve and another gym member, Bob Weidlick, had flown to Portland, Oregon. He left on Friday, won the title and returned late Monday. I was quite surprised by the unexpected manner in which Reeves entered this major physique contest, but certainly not startled by his victory. He was in great condition! That's how Steve is, though. He never sought publicity and didn't even desire any advanced build-up prior to his Mr. America victory.

Early in January of 1947, a Mr. California contest was held. Steve did not enter, even though he would have had an easy win. Having won the larger Mr. Pacific Coast title a month earlier, he did not think he would be eligible until it was too late to enter. He did, though, retain his title as Mr. Pacific Coast and copped trophies at that event for Best Arms, Best Legs and Best Chest. And, of course, he also won the Mr. America title at Chicago later that year.

Many bodybuilding fans have asked me about Steve Reeve's early years. He was born in Montana on January 21, 1926 and is of Welsh, Irish and German descent. His father died when Steve was a year-and-a-

half old, so Steve attended boarding schools and spent summers on an uncle's ranch in Montana. He learned to ride when he was three years old and is an excellent horseman. I believe that the great amount of riding Steve's done is unquestionably a factor that contributed to his small waist and trim hips. These characteristics are found in a majority of active cowboys.

Steve and his mother moved to Oakland when he was approaching his teens. To do his share in helping out his mother financially, Steve had a newspaper route. I would say that even as a boy Steve was physique conscious because he would pedal that bike in a manner designed to provide his calves with the greatest amount of stimulation.

One of Steve's greatest assets was his mother. She was an indispensable and invaluable aid to his bodybuilding progress. Not only did she encourage his athletic endeavors, but Goldie always cooperated with him in meals she prepared. They were always wholesome and nourishing. Steve is especially fond of steak, salads, vegetables and fresh fruit. He consumed more than a quart of milk a day when I knew him and he never smoked, drank alcoholic beverages, or ate any products containing devitalized white flour or refined white sugar. He substituted honey for sugar. As a result of his healthy diet, his teeth were a dental advertisement, totally free from cavities. Even today, I believe he only has one cavity.

Our training program was a very strenuous one.

We adhered to a three day a week schedule and had no favorite exercises. Instead, we employed a broad variety of exercises in an effort to arrive at a well-balanced program. Steve did not endeavor to specialize in competitive lifts, but the very heavy poundages that he employed in bodybuilding exercises with high repetitions provided plenty of evidence that he was exceptionally powerful.

Steve and I used a very strict type of exercise form in all our movements, We did each exercise from complete extension to complete contraction, no swinging, no bouncing and no cheating of any kind. We held to a golden rule, "If you cheat, you cheat yourself." It did not matter to us if we could only do five or six reps with our heaviest weights, so long as these were done in perfect style. Some of Steve's poundages might seem light to modern bodybuilders with sloppy form, but in 1947 and with strict style, the weights Steve used were considered phenomenal for his bodyweight.

I will briefly describe one of the routines Steve and I would use. We started with exercises for the deltoids of the shoulders to attain a wide look in that area and followed these with movements for the chest. Then we moved to the latissimus dorsi of the upper back (this gives a "V" shape and tapered appearance to the torso). The triceps and biceps of the upper arm, the thighs and calves of the legs and even the neck weren't omitted. As mentioned before, we always did a variety of all-around exercises to promote even development.

Steve and I had many good times together outside the gym too. During the warm summer months, many Bay area bodybuilders would gather at Sunny Cove Beach in Alameda, just a short distance from Oakland. There we would bask in the sun and swim either in the surf or in the adjacent pool. Jack LaLanne and I would handbalance a lot with my wife, Alyce. Steve and many of the local barbell enthusiasts talked and exchanged views on bodybuilding. Steve was always one of the most ardent in all of these discussions.

During the winter months we had a weekly Sunday gathering at the local ice skating rink. Wearing a ski sweater and with his wide shoulders, "V" shape and hips of less than 36 inches, Steve was always the main attraction of our group. The girls did double takes as they passed him, and after a while they seemed to pass him quite frequently. He was truly an All-American boy.

Reeves was always inclined to be a bit modest,

and he was also very cooperative, especially in the way he encouraged youngsters in bodybuilding. I knew there would be nothing to stop him from going on to bigger and better things, and of course, no one was more deserving of this than he. Steve was intelligent and had both big ideals and a conscientious nature. I was confident he would go on to accomplish a tremendous amount of good on behalf of the physical culture movement.

I knew that one day Steve would leave Oakland. The southern beaches had more to offer him. He no longer needed instruction, and opportunities in television and the film industry were more plentiful in Los Angeles. When the day came, I wished him well and he was off to find his fortune.

Alyce and I stayed in touch with his folks, and we often saw Steve in later years, when he would drop over to his folks' house or our house, with many of his friends. He liked to get into the kitchen to help with the broiling of steaks, or the making of a tossed salad, as these were his favorite foods. I remember how appreciative he was when we gave him a blender to mix high protein health drinks.

Steve went on to win the Mr. Universe, Mr. World and other titles, and later toured with the stage play "Kismet." His first movie break came in "Athena" with Jane Powell and Debbie Reynolds, and he went on to star in 16 films, his most popular being "Hercules." Steve once had his own bodybuilding studio and later raised Red Angus cattle on a ranch in Oregon. He currently breeds and trains Morgan horses on his ranch near San Diego.

The last contact I had with Steve was when I called him and told him our son Bart was driving his way via motorcycle and would stop by his place in Oregon. Bart spent ten days there and to this day he talks of it as being some experience to stay at Mr. Hercules' place.

I have always said that Steve's body was much like a drawing of Lil' Abner, the sort of All-American ideal physique admired by the general public. He has the healthy mind and body that made up a unique man. A man that smashed existing box office records with his portrayal of Hercules and a man who cast a spell over the bodybuilding fraternity that is as meaningful today as it was when he first came on the national scene almost thirty years ago. Presently, at fifty years of age, Reeves is alive and well and going places.