

# Starting Strength

## William Asel Starr

May He Rest in Peace

by

Dr Ken Leistner

Every other obituary about Bill Starr will begin with “He was born on...he was educated at...he served in the military from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_, he worked at \_\_\_, he passed away on \_\_\_.” In the case of Bill Starr, none of this information tells us much, and certainly could never tell enough about him. He was one of a kind, absolutely unique, and an undeniable force in the sport and “game” of Olympic weightlifting. He has earned and deserves more than a standard obituary.

On my birthday in 1981, I spent my break between patients very productively. I sat in my chiropractic office, not reflecting on “life” or the past year, but instead writing the introduction to the book *Defying Gravity*, Bill Starr’s follow-up publication to *The Strongest Shall Survive*. The opening line of that introduction said it all about that specific book and in a sense, much more regarding my perspective on Bill Starr. With the same sincerity I feel today, I wrote:

“I remember picking up my copy of *The Strongest Shall Survive*, reading it in one sitting, and having the sinking feeling that I had just read the book that I should have written.”

The book was great, and Bill Starr the author, as knowledgeable as they come. Unfortunately, the modern day lifters and trainees while reaping benefit from reading his almost myriad number of articles, see him as another “old school lifter and trainer.” But for those of us touched by Bill, he was so much more.

He started off conventionally as a dutiful high school student, an Air Force Medical Corpsman, a walk-on to the Southern Methodist University football team, a successful college and graduate school student with degrees in Sociology and Social Work, an ordained minister, a YMCA youth activities director and counselor, and a mentor and coach to an almost uncountable number of athletes.

Behind every step was his love and passion for lifting weights, the vehicle that had made him very large and very strong. He competed as a powerlifter and was very good. He competed as a physique contestant and won titles. He was however, first and foremost, an Olympic weightlifter, and more than being a national level competitor at his peak, he earned a legitimate shot at an Olympic berth. His real gift however, was coaching and teaching.

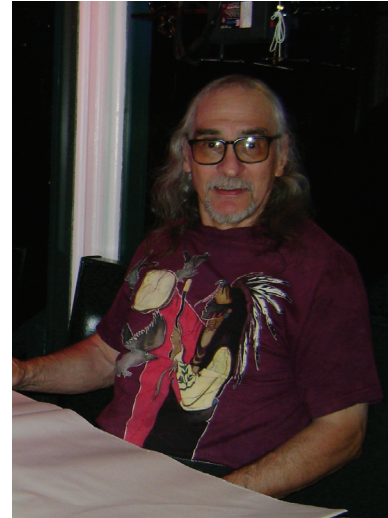
## *Bill Starr*

At heart, he was a teacher with a supreme ease in communicating. In 1966 this gift of teaching and touching others brought him to York, PA and the York Barbell Empire, where he served not only as associate editor of *Strength And Health* magazine, but the central force behind the Renaissance of Weightlifting in the United States. He was the de facto “Leader of the Band,” coaching, organizing, writing, lecturing, and redeveloping a high level of respect for a sport that had suffered through at least a decade of somnambulism. Olympic weightlifting again was exciting and newsworthy very much because of Bill’s contagious and unbridled passion.

With the times, Bill changed, with longer hair and a definite stroll to a drummer that was uniquely his own. Others will remember him by chronicling his life in the steps that took him from his adolescence through the military, college, graduate school, York, and many stops from there to serve as an official or unofficial strength coach for numerous colleges and at least two professional football teams.

Those of us who knew him best see more clearly the fabric of his devotion to lifting weights as a lifestyle, as a means of defining oneself, as a vehicle to learn lessons, and as a reflection of an enormous passion that resulted in the almost incalculable influence on literally thousands of men and women, athletes and non-athletes, super stars and Joe-Bag-O’-Doughnuts guys that were moved to improve because of Bill’s presence. It was his ability to motivate, inspire, and cajole significant change in those he met that will insure that he will not be forgotten.

William Asel Starr began his journey in Harford County Maryland on January 12, 1938, and seventy-seven years later, on April 7, 2015, despite a life that took him far and wide during his military service, a discharge in Wichita Falls, Texas where he more or less revolutionized the lifting scene there through his influence, Marion, Indiana, York, Pennsylvania, the Weider Headquarters in Woodland Hills, California, Hawaii, and many points in between all of those residences, ended in Harford County Maryland after succumbing to a protracted illness that resulted in pneumonia. Bill Starr was and will remain a singular bolt of energy that will be missed.



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