

Starting Strength

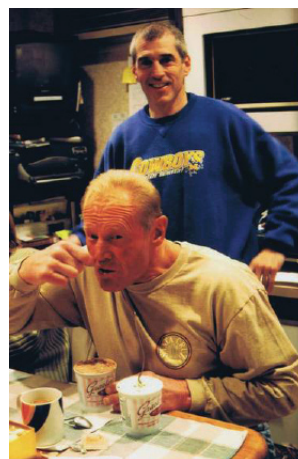
West Coast Impressions, A Random Journey: First, Nutrition of the Sixties, Part 2

by
Dr Ken Leistner

On the nutritional front, the 1960s brought some definite truths to the lifting community, at least these were “definite truths” to those of us involved in what was still a cult-like activity. In order to make maximal progress, a trainee “had to” take a protein supplement and more than ingesting vitamins, minerals, or anything else, huge amounts of protein remained the gauge of one’s dietary sensibility. If “more is better” and the goal was to take as much as possible, than it was common to read about or listen to lifters and bodybuilders relate their tales of what sounded like saber-tooth tiger like feedings. Three hundred grams of protein per day was standard fare and four hundred was common. Five hundred grams was not unheard of, taken in the form of meat, eggs, and protein powder mixed in a base of dairy, invariably in the form of whole milk.

I have often stated that if skim milk existed in the mid-1960s, I did not know it. I knew what “milk” was and this referred exclusively to whole milk containing the standard four percent fat content. I later learned that there definitely was skim milk on the supermarket shelves but perhaps because I never looked for it, I literally never saw it or recall seeing it. We utilized non-fat milk solids to mix with water when seeking a less expensive alternative to “real” milk, and I at times used the same powder as a protein supplement mixed in whole milk, but skim milk in a bottle or carton never entered any home I lived in until sometime in the late-1970s.

The push to reduced fat milk at two percent fat, low fat milk with one percent fat, and skim or non-fat milk came during World War II, when whole milk was at a premium. After The Second World War, baby boomers and their parents submerged themselves in everything good that was related to life after such a harrowing event and that included a lot of food. With milk viewed as a healthy source of nutrients, it was consumed in huge amounts and whole milk was at the absolute top of the market.



The great Dave Draper and Dr. Ken get their “milk” in the more enjoyable form of Graeter’s Ice Cream, eaten by the pint or quart. The author makes no claim that Dave achieved his Mr. America and Mr. Universe definition eating Graeters. Doc has been an unsolicited, unofficial, unpaid, and uncompensated “advertiser” of Cincinnati’s Graeter’s Ice Cream since the 1960s.

My goal of gaining muscular bodyweight was very much based upon the procedure of the era among weight training enthusiasts and it was one passed down and considered as “the blueprint” between the 1930s and 1970s. Very much born and built upon the results of Joseph Hise and other pioneers who were milk and squat advocates, my training programs were reliant upon high-repetition barbell squats and a lot of whole milk. As I progressed through high school and college, and admittedly continued to contribute to the solvency of the York Barbell Company and Weider Brothers financial empires with my intake of protein powder and other supplements, milk remained the staple of my diet. It was inexpensive, available on almost any street in the neighborhood, and as the advertising told us, chock full of all kinds of vitamins and minerals to boost its protein supply. I drank milk the same way I trained – progressively.

Those who know my wife Kathy long ago gave up seeking an answer to the obvious question of “Why did she marry this guy?” Intelligent, beautiful, gracious, warm, funny, competent, creative, caring, and an absolutely dedicated and wonderful mother make her the perfect package. In football terms, I out-kicked my coverage when I woke up next to her and I am reminded of that each morning. I mention this not as an excuse to publicly compliment my wife – she would be embarrassed reading my description of her – but to note that for everything she is, I am not, and wasn’t when younger.

As she said, when I long ago noted that I was not viewed as much of a “ladies’ man,” and with no argument on my part, “You’re just not the type of guy women would approach.” With that in mind, picture me leaving one of the cafeteria tables while in high school and cautiously sitting down in the midst of a table full of my female high school classmates during lunch time. Ever so smoothly, as most of the girls pointedly ignored my presence, I would ask, “Are you going to eat that half a sandwich?” or “Angela told me you’re on a diet because you think you’re fat. Do you mind if I take the crust you pulled off the bread?” Oh yes, as I fell further down the social ladder, I tried to boost my weight by scrounging leftovers from the girls, knowing that most wouldn’t finish their entire lunch.

Interestingly, it was a “technique” I passed on to a younger school chum and future NFL star Lyle Alzado, who was also seeking to gain weight, although the procedure seemed to work better for him. I should also admit that even with access to exaggerated quantities of training table food in college, I would at times wander over to the “civilian cafeteria” where the “regular students” ate, and put on my best Ricordo Montalban air of sophistication while approaching a table of young women picking at their lunchtime fare.

Searching for leftovers in this manner did result in one humorous incident as a few scheming training partners hid from my view as I tried to figure out which table might offer the most in potentially uneaten goodies. Without warning, a number of other students joined me in ducking out of the way of a dozen bananas that were sailing through the air in my direction. The cafeteria went silent immediately as my teammates popped into view, humming and whistling the theme song to “Mighty Joe Young,” the famous 1949 movie about a 2200 pound gorilla. Everyone within earshot fell into spasms of laughter and I wasn’t too embarrassed to pick up the bananas and begin to eat them as I congratulated the guys on what was understated commentary on my eating and weight-gain habits.

I ate and drank milk constantly and followed Bruce Randall’s dictum of “be progressive.” For those who have forgotten Bruce Randall’s place in training history, he began a systematic approach to gaining weight while in the U.S. Marine Corps where, as he noted, “the food was free.” In a fourteen month period, he increased his starting bodyweight of 203 pounds to 342 pounds! After his discharge from the Corps, he continued to gain weight, eating and drinking “just a little bit more” each day, each week, or each month, until he topped out at 403 pounds, all of that weight gained within a twenty-one month period of time.

What was just as mind-boggling was Randall's decision to enter a physique contest, and his weight reduction, also done progressively by literally reversing the gain-weight process, resulted in his winning the 1959 Mr. Universe Contest at a bodyweight of 223 pounds!

I began with a glass of milk at each meal and moved that up to a glass and two sips of another. That over time, was pushed to a glass and a half of milk at each sitting and then to two full glasses. When it was all said and done, there came a time when on any given day for approximately a year, I was drinking six to eight quarts of milk! Six to eight quarts computes to three-and-one-half to four gallons of milk every day. There were times I felt as if I was sloshing internally every time I moved, but as with everything else related to lifting weights, I was dedicated, compulsive, and fearless in attempting anything necessary to attain my clearly defined goals. Needless to add, drinking so much milk was not an original idea. This mimicked the published accounts of almost every successful lifter and bodybuilder of the 1950s and early '60s.



For those who doubt that this was the standard approach, a perusal of any of the popular muscle magazines of the day will uphold my statements. Very typical were the articles by regular Iron Man contributor Richard Simon, a New York City bodybuilder who gained quite a bit of attention because he was drinking copious amounts of reindeer milk in order to hasten his weight gains.

After so many decades, I can't recall what his source of reindeer milk was, especially as a resident of New York City, but his more standard approach was summed up in an article by an individual who had met him years later. Fascinated by Simon's success in gaining twenty-five pounds within a three week period, he wrote, "This guy went on a 21 day program of intense training and a stepped up daily calorie consumption. He increased his daily calorie consumption from 5,000 to 9,000. To do this he was downing six to nine quarts of milk per day, along with 3 lbs. of meat—mostly hamburger, but for the sake of variety he would also eat plenty of cheese, fish, and tuna. His protein consumption was a 250-390 grams per day, and to make sure that it was properly assimilated he would drink 1 quart of papaya juice daily. He took in plenty of vitamins and minerals in supplement form." So before looking at my typical daily nutritional intake and saying, "No way, Jose!", understand that this is how "we" did it.

At a starting bodyweight of approximately 120 pounds, "200-plus" was one of my "I gotta do this" goals, having arbitrarily chosen that weight because it seemed as if I would be big and strong by the time I attained that bodyweight and it was "a good football playing weight" according to everyone I spoke with. I drank a quart of milk with breakfast; I brought a thermos to school and surreptitiously sat in the back of each classroom, sipping one or two quarts of milk throughout the school day; I purchased and drank half-pint containers in the school lunchroom to insure I consumed at least a quart with lunch; I would purchase another quart when walking or hitchhiking home from practice after school; I downed a quart with dinner and often had a shake or another quart laced with chocolate syrup for dessert; I drank one or two quarts or made protein powder shakes throughout the evening. I had a method, I had a schedule, and I did what had to be done.

Needless to add, I was also constantly bloated and often physically uncomfortable because I ate in the same progressive manner that I had attacked my milk intake with. Lunch might be a sandwich to begin with but over the course of two or three weeks, it went from a sandwich and "two more bites" to a sandwich and a half. That was increased to two sandwiches, and as it was with the many quarts of

milk I “worked up to,” just as one would “work up to” a heavier squat or deadlift in weekly or monthly five-pound increments, I worked up to eating four or five sandwiches at a sitting, or a breakfast of a dozen eggs, a pound of bacon, and the ubiquitous quart of milk.

Once again, allow lifting history to back me up. Quoting from Dr. Randall Strossen’s book *Super Squats*, he offers the most obvious and acceptable explanation for what was the standard approach to gaining muscular bodyweight, circa the 1930s through the 1960s. He wrote, “As bodybuilders and lifters began to seriously pursue the development of muscular bulk, they naturally evolved towards a preference for high protein, high calorie diets...because muscle is built from protein, and calories are the basic unit of energy. From these two facts it was only a short step to the inference that if you wanted to build more muscle, you should increase your body’s supply of protein and calories.”

Regarding milk consumption, Strossen notes, “How much milk is enough? The general advice is to drink at least two quarts a day, which might sound like a lot if you’re new to this routine. Actually you should treat this as a bare minimum if you are serious about getting bigger, and a gallon a day should be your goal.” Of course, there is food to go along with the milk, and John McCallum, who was one of the most prolific and in my opinion, the best of the muscle-related writers of all time, brought this point home in one of his many articles: “If you want 19” arms and all that goes with them, then remember this – a high protein, muscle building diet for weight trainees should contain about one and one-half to two grams of first class protein per pound of body-weight per day, *based on what you want to weigh.*” While most science based nutritional advice computes protein needs based upon existing bodyweight, McCallum, and in truth, almost every lifter I knew, did their nutritional math based upon, “If I want to weigh this much, I need to eat this much.” I did it with milk, protein powder, bacon, eggs, and hamburger.

THE REAL FORMULA FOR GAINING MUSCULAR BODYWEIGHT:

1. A GARAGE FULL OF WEIGHTS AND RACKS



+

2. A GROUP OF GUYS AND GIRLS TO LIFT THE WEIGHTS



+

3. LOTS OF POST-WORKOUT FOOD



I can see the ab-conscious readers, even those who are dyed-in-the-wool devotees of Starting Strength methodology, thinking, “Geez, what about fat, cholesterol, and body fat? Where’s the fiber, the fruit, the good stuff?” From the start of the Baby Boom era following the Second World War to an arbitrarily chosen year in the middle of the 1970s, the “good stuff” among lifters and bodybuilders was protein, more protein, and if possible, an obscene amount of protein. The competitive lifters on the east coast that one read about or actually met, seemed to be “regular guys” who ate well, ate a lot of food, ate frequently, and put an emphasis on protein based foods like beef, chicken, and dairy products.

Once again I will make the point that the emphasis was on “standard” whole milk-based dairy products, not low fat or non-fat items. The west coast bodybuilders and powerlifters seemed to be a bit more systematic about their nutritional intake and put a greater emphasis on supplementation, or at least what seemed like a plan that had some sort of science behind it. I believe that most of the serious east coast trainees from my era would make a similar statement because we certainly used a lot of supplements but there was almost a haphazard, “take this vitamin with breakfast, these liver tablets with lunch, and three protein shakes a day” approach that on the surface seemed to be lagging far behind some sort of knowledge we attributed to the California crowd. The fact was, we lifted “big” and pushed as much weight as possible and that also applied to the very highly ranked bodybuilders, and we ate “big,” believing that a lot of food and a lot of protein would carry the day.

One of the best of the New York City bodybuilders was Chris Dickerson. Truly, if a man won a Mr. Olympia title, my comment about being “one of the best” is an understatement. Chris usually trained at Community Health Club in Queens, but would at times come over to the storefront in Valley Stream to visit or train. He was good enough to enter the AAU Mr. America Contest in 1967 and a group of us attended the 1969 Junior Mr. America Contest that was held in conjunction with the 1969 Junior National Olympic Weightlifting Championships in Islip, on Long Island, to cheer him on.



Even before he reached his best bodybuilding condition at the Olympia level in 1982, Chris was nothing short of great, with a physique that was muscular, symmetrical, and hard as stone. He was also relatively strong in the movements he regularly did, which was to be expected, again relating to the fact that the basic multi-joint movements were the standard backbone of every iron sport athlete’s program. Chris would disappear for one to three months at a time, traveling to California to train under the supervision of Bill Pearl and whenever he did, he of course improved tremendously.

Chris made a point about the differences between California/west coast bodybuilders and lifters and those of us on the east coast that made an impression upon me. After an evening’s training session, a group of us

were straightening up the storefront gym, eating, and talking about training. Chris was downing a second large container of rice pudding while in an admitted “bulking up phase.” He said, “The guys in California would never sit around like this eating rice pudding, the big hero sandwiches, all of the stuff we eat. Here, especially during the winter, we can pack around an extra thirty pounds and no one would even know it because we’re layered up with sweaters, sweatshirts, and lots of clothing. Out there, those guys are on display every day of the year, they’re in t-shirts, tank tops, or on the beach walking around in bathing suits. They can’t eat like us because they have to stay sharp every day.” That was a conversation that became stamped into my consciousness and further reinforced “the fact” that the lifters on the west coast knew things we just did not know but needed to.

One other thing I knew nothing about was the concept of caloric control. I did not once hear the word “calorie” mentioned in any weight training conversation from the time I was first exposed to training in 1959, until the 1970s. The type of legitimate science that would in fact broach a discussion about calories as it related to weight gain or loss was available, but not offered within the pages of the muscle magazines. In our universe, that meant it did not exist. Of course, caloric control is a key factor of bodyweight management, but we bought the Weider-Hoffman-Iron Man truths of nutrition which translated to eggs, bacon, steak, hamburger, milk, cottage cheese, and a stray piece of cheese cake when bulking up or “just maintaining,” and eggs, steak, hamburger, chicken, fish, milk, and cottage cheese when “cutting up.” If one needed 2800 calories per day to maintain their bodyweight, we would not have known that, but we would know that we needed to squeeze in or pound down two more burgers or three extra cans of tuna if we had to go up!

“Abs” were something one pursued only if you were a competitive bodybuilder, and we all were convinced and often proved that we could “always run fat off” when needed. Of course we ran constantly for football preparation, but “abs” were not the measure of the man, so to speak, or the measure of fitness it seems to be in today’s lifting culture, and yes, that is inclusive of the “bodybuilding, lifting, and general fitness, man-in-the-street fitness” culture. The entire “deal” was: how strong are you, how much can you lift, how big are you? Those were the only standards of judgment, and we ate and trained accordingly. I realized that the protein shakes allowed me to reduce my total volume of milk intake, but the light went on as well as it was able to, after a particularly hard and frustrating workout in our local storefront gym.

Almost all of my training was done at home, but I would wander out and hitchhike to the storefront gym a few towns away when needing a shot of motivation or if they installed some new, exotic piece of equipment. I trained in the basement at first, and eventually moved up into the garage. This certainly caused some inconvenience and problems because my parents just didn’t understand the passion, dedication, or sheer lunacy I radiated over my weight training activities. My homemade power rack and the one that followed from York had to be placed “just so” in order to allow the car to be parked inside the garage where the doors could actually open fully and any vehicle occupants could exit. The barbell plates had to be stored against the wall on one side and kept off of the washing machine or dryer. The bench I made in the iron shop, as heavy as it was, had to be hoisted and stored within the confines of the power rack.

Those who know the history of the south shore of Long Island’s Nassau County understand that much of it was built on salt marshes and sand dunes. Modern construction materials and techniques have prevented most of it from collapsing, but I can recall few homes or buildings that did not “settle,” with resultant minor and visible cracking in some parts of the foundation or lower part of walls. This is just a fact of life in our area. Our house, built in what I always referred to as a “former swamp,” was typical, and over time developed a few minor cracks in the concrete walls of the garage. My mother

of course bemoaned the fact that I was “sinking the house with all of the weights” or “breaking the foundation because the weights are leaning against the walls.” When I patiently noted that the garage housed an automobile that weighed thousands of pounds, and the car – rather than fifty pound plates leaning on the base of the wall – would “sink the garage” long before my weights would, Polish logic took over as she told me, “No, the garage was built to hold the car, not the weights, its your weights that are sinking the garage and cracking the walls.”

At times I would travel a few towns over to Tony Pandolfo’s Bodybuilding Incorporated Gym, not that it had a sign identifying it as such. This was no more than an old fashioned storefront gym, a small space that housed a desk and a few chairs in front, and a partial sheetrock wall and curtain dividing it from the actual lifting area. The business was a very loosely run “key club” gym, where each fellow paid a few dollars a month to cover the cost of utilities and rent, and some of the more trusted members were given a key to the front door. Everyone knew who trained on what days and at what specific times, so if they did not have a key, they still knew when the door would be open.

This was very typical for the era, and glitz was not one of the operative words. We had a tile floor with some scattered rubber mats to dump heavy barbells and dumbbells on, a collection of store-bought and homemade equipment including a few pieces I had welded in my father’s shop and donated to the cause, and a hodgepodge of mismatched barbell plates and dumbbells. Yet, the atmosphere was always energetic, upbeat, and often electric with big time bodybuilding contest competitors and winners such as Joe Abbenda, Chris Dickerson, Steve Michalik, and Dennis Tinerino training there for stretches of time, and out-of-towners like Boyer Coe stopping in for a workout when he was in the New York City area. Very strong lifters, like Bob Meyers, one of the first men to bench press five hundred pounds, would bring their buddies with them, so despite what any current day trainee would consider to be a limited, small, and unattractive training facility, it was a fantastic place to train and improve.

In the cramped desk area, Tony had placed a wood and glass display case, and this too was typical for the time. Within it were cans of Irvin Johnson’s protein powder and a number of his specialized nutritional supplements. I began to pay very close attention to the display only after reading Johnson’s ads in the March 1965 issue of Iron Man Magazine, but the price was an obstacle I could not overcome. From the inception of my weight training activities at the age of twelve until the end of high school, the dedication, time, and effort put into the activity may have seemed to be overvalued. My bodyweight had increased from 120 pounds to 152.

I found that if I spent an entire weekend working with my uncle the chef, I would often go into work on Friday afternoon, when I was done with school, and join him for what seemed to be non-stop labor until 3 AM. Remaining on site at a number of major restaurants or night clubs in the Manhattan area, we would get an early start on the prep work for the next day’s onslaught, especially if headliners like Sammy Davis, Jr., a rising Don Rickles, or established band leader Tito Puente were appearing for two to three separate seatings.

As I worked, I constantly ate and drank milk. Even behind a broiler with forty steaks simultaneously cooking and needing to go out at exact temperature, I consumed tidbits of sliced up steak and prime rib and washed it down with pint containers of milk or half and half. There were Sunday afternoons that found my already pushed-to-the-limit 152 jerking the scale upward to 165, at least for a day. This of course gave me license to tell the guys, “Yeah, I’m up to about 170 now” which while not quite accurate, still was an accomplishment relative to my starting point.

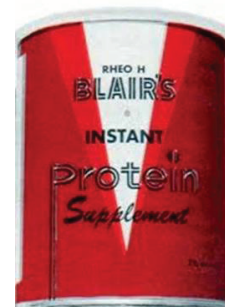
More than actual bodyweight, the consistent weight training had made me strong, especially in conjunction with the regular bouts of working in the iron shop or on the truck with my father.

Although he felt it important to expose me to what he believed to be the basic “life skills,” or those he believed to be necessary from what I will term his rock-head-Polack-immigrant perspective, he did not necessarily trust me to utilize what I had learned. I was hot-rodding a twenty four-foot flatbed truck from downtown Manhattan to the Bronx at the age of fifteen in order to pick up structural steel, but he would relegate my welding to window guards, gates, and whatever weight training equipment I made for myself or training partners. He never allowed me to weld fire escapes or staircases, even into my early twenties, citing his concern that I “shouldn’t be allowed to build anything that someone’s life might depend on.”

Thus, the majority of my work in the shop was “hump work,” serving as the mule who cut and then carried sections of beam and plate to other areas of the shop. On an outside job, I carried buckets of rivets in early Farmers Walk style, or heavy sections of beam, often weighing over 150 pounds apiece, from the truck, up flights of stairs, and across roof tops. As some of the older men used to remark, “The kid is like a piece of wire.”

The weight training had certainly provided a great foundation for building strength and endurance. Though it does not sound like much relative to what are now common lifts done by high school athletes who are in full-time, supervised training programs, I could squat close to 400 and bench press 275 before I left high school and did so on a truck axle utilizing sewer covers, flywheels and gears for plates or with my York Big 555 set. I fully understood however, that it was still a lack of muscular bodyweight holding me from my goals.

As I began college, I had added Iron Man to my regular reading list and was always riveted by the ads about Blair’s protein, as Johnson had officially changed his name and followed with the packaging on his products. I had seen older issues of Iron Man and was fascinated and in total belief of the advertising copy that told me that “Mike Henry of the Los Angeles Rams uses and endorses Johnson’s Protein for its High Biological Value.” Wow, this carried a lot more influence with me than any of the bodybuilding endorsements. If a football player used the powder, whether it was called Johnson’s or Blair’s at the time, I was all in for it.



One of the most effective campaigns Johnson/Blair brought forward, one that lasted a few years, was the Open Letter to Bodybuilders from Larry Scott. Though “only a bodybuilder and not a lifter,” Scott still had everyone’s respect because of the tales of his work ethic, willingness to train through a lot of self-induced workout pain, and of course because he had magnetic good looks and the physique to match. The “Open Letter” contained information that included “I use Johnson’s Protein Food drinks...” and this was a revelation because Scott was “Weider’s boy,” always featured prominently in Joe’s ad copy and many magazine articles. Scott also said “Sometimes I make Johnson’s Instant Protein Ice Cream and this is really a treat!” Yeah man, ice cream made from protein powder, wow, what could be better?

Prominently stated, after a description of Scott’s eight-hour work day that was followed by college classes and of course, his rigorous training, was “Many times I don’t have time to eat so I drink a Johnson’s Protein Supplement drink.” Well, if Scott’s time was limited, my qualifications in that area at least matched his, so this seemed to be the answer to a prayer. I faded out with the semi-scientific jargon, even as a Biology major, and did not at that point need a description of the production methods nor the grams of calcium in each serving. I was hooked and was now ready to take the plunge into a “scientific approach” to weight training nutrition.

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