

## The Big Scoop

Shawn Perine, writer-at-large for [Flex magazine](#) and creator of the informative and entertaining website, [IronAge](#), requested a telephone interview for an upcoming article. We would set up a date for the conversation; Shawn would ask a series of exciting questions to which I would respond with equally exciting answers, all to be completed in 90 exciting minutes. Any sane person would have said, "Sure." Not me. Instead, I sent the following letter.

Dear Shawn,

It's a compliment to be interviewed and I appreciate the exposure and attention and the thought that someone might be interested in what I have to say. Truth is I've read too many over-the-phone taped dialogues in which I sound as provocative and enlightening and entertaining as an old plowhorse snortin' in the barn. Try as I might, no expression or passion is conveyed without voice inflection, gestures or the use of the right words. Bright spontaneity is what you hope for and redundancy is what you get. "That's what I said, yeah, but that's not what I meant to say" is my agitated reaction to statements I throw out on tape. The truth hurts, I guess, and my on-the-spot articulation is for the birds. Plus, I am not fond of the phone and the anticipation of phone calls -- gives me hives, very itchy. Jeez, alright already, Bomber. With this in mind, let me mess with my keyboard instead.

Hardcore muscle-builders are a strange lot. Excuse me, time to light the incense and chant... DD

Shawn is a very cool guy, knows how to deal with the mentally disadvantaged and emotionally challenged, and said, "Whatever."

This is part one of the interview; next week's newsletter will be the second part, the final of two. When the article in its edited form will be published we do not know. Be sure you'll be the first to hear.

Part One:

The short background you requested: Born in Secaucus, N.J., in April of '42; moved to Santa Monica in early summer of '63, 21 years later. Worked for Weider Barbell Co. during that time till '69 and also did some work in Hollywood and began working in heavy wood. I won Jersey in '63, America in '65, Universe in '66 and World in '70, generally competing at 230, plus or minus, at six feet.

Q) Dave, you and Governor Schwarzenegger were friends and training partners during his first few years in America. How did that come about?

- a) What was your early impression of him?
- b) Are you surprised by his latest achievement?

I met Arnold in Miami a week after he arrived in the New York area in the fall of '68. He was competing in the Mr. Universe contest, which Frank Zane won and in which I was appearing as a guest poser. We met backstage amid the mass of busy contenders as we prepared for the evening show. Dimly lit, crowded, confusing, oily and hot, I made the best of the introduction. Arnold was bright-eyed, smiling broadly, at ease with the excitement, eager to please, child-like -- a very large and pulsating sponge soaking up every bit of his surroundings. I noticed immediately this tall and muscular fellow was aware, astute, a step ahead and to the right of the guy next to him and, indeed, very clever. I noted, too, thank God, that he was lovable.

He is the governor of California and I am not surprised. In the '80s when there were early signs of his political interests, I thought, "But, of course. That's what Arnold does best. He governs." The race was interesting, fun, nuts and I hoped he'd win, thought he would, glad he did and trust he'll do a good job, better than anyone else could do.

Q) How did you first come to meet Joe Weider? So there was no Gold's when you first came over? What was it like training at the Dungeon?

My first set of weights consisted of a 16" bar and four 10s, 7 1/2s, 5s, 3 1/2s and 1 1/4s. They sat on the sidewalk in front of our house, my father and brothers peering over my shoulder as I tried to make sense of them. I was 10, the iron weighed a ton and the family fan club quickly lost interest. Who remembers the details of discovery, but I pushed and pulled and rolled that iron in all directions over the years, in the basement on an old mattress, in the corner of a bedroom occupied by me and two bigger brothers and in the yard under a rotting maple. Over time by accident and luck and the grace of God, I grew, and my high school gym teacher began calling me "Arms." Time for more weight and another bar or two.

Oddly enough, or wouldn't-ya-know-it, the weights were made by Weider and his offices, foldout couch and shower, showroom, research clinic (an imaginary space) and warehouse -- the whole catastrophe -- was in Union City, only a bus ride and long walk from where I lived. I found myself on the doorstep of Weider Barbell Co. making purchases with my teenage fortune. Leroy Colbert, slick as a panther, made sure I got what I needed -- bars, collars and plates -- and gave me a heart full of inspiration based on a knowing grin and huge and powerful muscles. I measured his arms at 20 and a half, cold as ice.

One day while struggling toward a bulky 220 pounds or whatever and adding a pair of 35s to my collection, I met Joe Weider at the loading platform who asked me how he looked -- what can ya say? -- and did I want a part-time job. The answer to the second question was easy. Sure; it's me and Leroy and seated dumbbell alternate curls in the stockroom. Six months later after winning Mr. N.J., I transferred to the other side of the world, California. The Beach Boys were singing "Surfer Girl."

California has a bad rap today because the world is full of dumb people, but remains the land of wonder and plenty. Santa Monica was the Garden of Eden after 21 years in the

Garden State and pig farms and swamps and dirty rivers. The Dungeon was a palace where the original kings and princes and knights and warriors met to play noble games -- my gym and I'm proud of it, bub. It was also dark and dank and crumbling; it was broken down and fixed and broken again. It was a large, awful space dug out of the ground on the corner of 4th and Broadway upon which sat a century-old hotel and its faulty plumbing. But, oh, the atmosphere oozed from every rusty bent-bar and pair of rattling dumbbells, every clang of steel, every heated set and burning rep. The 2x4s held together by carpenter's nails to suggest a bench supported the back of George Eiferman as he slowly did his perfect reps with 425. Peanuts West moved mucho iron from that power rack of oversized beams in the middle of the puddle of diluted beer dripping from the upstairs time-warped tavern, a watering hole for the old and inebriated.

Atmosphere doesn't come from a paint brush or a wall decoration or an expensive carpet, it comes from the passing of time over a place or a thing, the heavy impression of memory, the lingering breath and experience of original characters who live once and forever: Reeves, Eiferman, Gene Shuey, Zabo, Joe Gold, Artie Zeller, Chuck Collras, Chuck Pendleton, Dick Dubois, John Tristram, Hugo Labra, Danny Vafiadis, Steve Merjanean, Chuck Ahrens. Environment can supercharge the air or it can bury you alive. The Dungeon, once the Muscle Beach of sand and sea and finally displaced to the Muscle Beach Gym on 4th, became the launching pad of the greatest era of bodybuilding for the world's greatest bodies.

In the middle of the '60s the Dungeon ironically offered itself up as a sacrifice to the growing population and man's hungry needs; as Joni Mitchell predicted, "They put up a parking lot." The subterranean castle became a five-story parking garage.

Enter Joe Gold's Gym. Talk about solid, bold and mighty.

Q) What was it like training in Gold's back then?

a) Who else was training there with you?

b) Is it true that you were its first member? If so, how did that happen?

I don't know how it is for you, but changing gyms in the middle of life is like trading your faithful old dog for a new one. No way, no thanks; I like the way he drools. I sat there on ground level with the bright light of day pouring through the windows and skylights of Joe's first muscle emporium, surrounded by walls of mirrors and Olympic bars that weren't bent and dumbbells that weren't cracked and steel machinery that purred and hummed. I sat there and stood and walked in a circle and sat. I didn't know what to do. The mirrors were immediate enemies and that I couldn't hide in dark, shadowy corners was uncomfortable, almost miserable. But there's a clean and working toilet at the top of the stairs -- the relief, you have no idea -- and there's a huge spotless shower. I lay down and proceeded to knock out reps with a straight, well-knurled and rust-free bar without picking up a splinter in the backside. I can get used to this.

Joe put together a first-class hardcore gym with rugged steel benches of varying dimensions and degrees of incline, oversized pulleys for smoothness, sturdy racks for

curling, pressing and squatting and platforms for powerlifting and Olympic lifting. The place was charmed. No crowds, no music, no hustle, no hassle, long hours and Joe said, "It's free, Draper." I had no money so I agreed.

The year was 1966 and it was the beginning of The Golden Era of Bodybuilding. Frank and Christine Zane and Arnold and Franco and Giuliani and Chet Yorton and big Mike Katz showed up in those months throughout '65, '66, '67 and '68. The fever had begun in '62 with Larry Scott and Don Howorth and Bill McArdle out of Vince Gironda's gym and coincided with Bill Pearl at his gym in East LA and Chuck Sipes bending spikes in Northern California, Boyer Coe in Louisiana dueling it out with Casey Viator over the new-age Nautilus contraptions, Sergio in Chicago spreading his wings like an eagle, Dennis Tinnerino and Chris Dickerson in NYC with more to come from under rocks and out of trees. And, you know what was weird? They all trained like animals, they all liked each other and they all looked different.

Different bodies with different minds, chemistry, genes and motives groped about with differing results. Some trained harder than others; some cruised, many were good and a few were great. I hooked up with a Mr. California Muscle Beach original who pointed me in the right direction and I haven't veered more than five degrees since: straight ahead, around the strains and hurts, with intensity, volume, focus and form. Superset and keep your eye on power, use common sense and depend on your intuition, rest only when you're certain you're fatigued, and watch out for the devils of procrastination, laziness, carelessness and disorder. I adopted the precepts as my credo, chiseled them onto my forehead, the blood dried and the scars remain.

Q) So what was your training split like back then (late '60s)? The current vogue is less frequency, more rest between workouts. But you guys weren't so concerned with overtraining back then, were you?

a) Arnold has said that you were an intense trainer, which is why he liked you for a partner. What was your experience training with him like?

b) Did you ever partner up with any other big names?

One thing has changed over the years: I'm older. I've altered my training a bit here and there to accommodate for recuperation (same intensity, but down from six days a week to four) and injury (groove modifications, exercise substitutions, abbreviated ROM). But the supersets and volume in sets and reps remains high and intense and the same bodypart groupings follow me everywhere: chest, shoulders and back, bis and tris, and legs. I always include squats and deadlifts in my schemes, midsection every day and aerobics in emergency only.

I'm old-fashioned like the wheel. I don't believe in the training philosophy and techniques distributed today. They match the times and are suitable for the new-age mentality and are better than nothing. Train hard has become train hardly. One bodypart a day, once a week works okay for the intermediate guy or gal trainee, but not for the beginner. Overtraining has frightened the pants off most under-muscled athletes and they

take layoffs in search of growth. The secret patch, lotion, pill, drink, powder or stack for leanness and might is sought like the winning Lotto ticket or the Holy Grail.

It's the gym; it's the hard work, the smart eating and the right attitude, stupid. (Sorry, I couldn't help myself.) There is no philosophy in today's bodybuilding community; and the deep information comes from researchers and pseudo-researchers, schooled page-turners with pencil necks, the advertising world with dollar signs in their eyes, heavily certified yet lightly muscled personal trainers and knurly guys loading up their system on this and that from the skull-and-crossbones pharmaceutical underground.

I had three training partnerships in the dungeon days each enduring a year. They were strong, reliable and complementary -- we motivated and learned from each other. You wouldn't know them; I don't know where they are today and I miss them. Arnold and I hooked up together frequently, but not regularly. We would meet at Joe's in the early evening and collaborate, merge our routines where and when they accented one another and encouraged and motivated each other as we pushed the iron. This became a favorite method of training as there was no obligation or dependency or disappointment. Give me freedom or give me death. Our strength and motives were corresponding and we blasted it side by side when the time was right, thus assuring super energy and enthusiasm. Arnold trained like a workhorse and I lifted like a crane, nothing fancy, nothing pretty, and not short n' sweet.

Frank Zane and I met at the original Gold's Gym as the sun came up during 1970 to guarantee consistent and rigorous midsection and calf training in preparation for the many events to follow in the fall of that year. A solemn team, we were, on a mission with compulsion in our blood. Every evening, as the summer weeks rolled by, a gang of us would convene to gorge ourselves on the iron and steel: Arnold, Franco, Zane, Big Mike Katz, Corney, Waller, Padilla and me. In the fall off that year Arnold won the Olympia, Zane the Universe in London, Katz the Mr. America in NY, Franco the Universe in NY and me, the World title. Artie Zeller, the world's greatest candid physique photographer, caught us in action in a series of almost-alive black and whites that remind us why we train, should we forget. I'll bet one or two of his picture stories are displayed in the nearby pages to accompany this article. Thanks, Artie.

Q) What was your knowledge of nutrition back then?

a) How was your diet comprised?

b) Did you use Rheo Blair products? Were they as amazing as many claimed?

Though I wrestled with the iron for years growing up in Jersey, I didn't really learn anything till I moved to Muscle Beach. It was there in all its unconstrained simplicity that lifting weights and building muscle was clearly understood. The basics in nutrition and exercise were discovered, established and practiced. Why fix what works and ain't broke, it was agreed; train hard, eat right and grow.

The diet information I acquired in the early '60s, the basic bodybuilder's diet being restored today for all of mankind, came from the struggling Muscle Beach/Screen Actor's

Guild members who didn't work much beyond studio calls and made every penny count: high protein, low carbs and medium fat -- meat, milk, eggs, fruit and salad, and don't forget your vitamin and mineral supplements and your protein powder. They knew this menu built muscle and provided energy and kept the bodyfat low. Why? 'Cuz, that's why. Ask anyone. Try it. Today, 40 to 50 years later, there are stacks of books that have made the subject of nutrition no clearer or more appealing; just lots of research, study, facts, data and confusion. What are we, nuts?

One fine spring afternoon I hopped on the 405 freeway and sped merrily to Long Beach to visit with Rheo H Blair, my friend through my good friend Larry Scott. The vehicle was my hopped-up jewel-blue dune-buggy and the passenger was my hopped-up in spirit, muscle and might 21-year-old Austrian companion in a torn T-shirt, the governor. Zoom Zoom. Rheo, a self-made nutritionist whose specialty was building lean mass, considered it a life-or-death matter to meet Arnold and offer him a basket of his popular food supplements as a welcome-to-America gift. How could I refuse?

"Thanks, Rheo," in broken English, "You are American champion. We must go."

The fiberglass dune buggy was topless and reminded me of a freeway surfboard. It skidded about as I weaved my way home through traffic at what seemed like incredibly high speeds; nothing was in focus but the setting sun. Arnold sat in the back seat, which was raised like a throne to accommodate the screaming engine below, clutching a chrome roll bar for support. More than once he stood up and roared at the cars to the left and the right with a clenched hand raised high punching the air, his hair straight out, eyes squinted and tearing and a grin as big as his biceps pumping up his face -- a warrior commanding his chariot. A generous supply of Blair's protein, choline and inositol sat on the floor beside us, our booty, the secret stuff of muscles in a box. Thank God life is made up of moments such as these. Let someone else govern California, the lad's busy. We made it home unscathed in time for squats.

Q) You were known for having a great back before having a great back was required. Did you put extra emphasis on back? There was a heroic aspect to physiques back in the '60s and '70s that included a huge upper body tapering down to a slim waist and muscular, but streamlined legs. Was this part of the plan?

The field was less crowded in those days and each guy stood out. The iron was applied vigorously, the protein consumed generously and the muscle grew according to an internal blueprint. Katz had the ribcage and chest, Zane the perfect symmetry, Arnold stood tall with magnificent arms, Franco had awesome rock-hard power and muscularity, Sergio contrasted a wasp-waist and with incredible thickness, Tinnerino was a large chiseled stone, Pearl displayed mass and might with perfection, Rick Wayne was flowing hot lava, Howorth brought on the shoulders, Scott was and still is a pile of rocks and I, some say, had a back. Heavy bent-over barbell rows, dumbbell rows, wide-grip chins and pulldowns, seated lat rows, pullovers and deadlifts will do that to a guy, if he keeps it up. Back power and vitality serves a lot of good purposes for a long time, I always thought, and pulling is just plain fun. We're all crazy, ya know.

My first training partner -- a slick Mr. California in '64 -- and I looked at Reeves and said, "He da man." Taper was sought by most early bodybuilders and legs were trained enough to serve as platforms for the lean V-shaped upper body -- the sweet look. The "sweet look" has left the building.

Q) What are your thoughts on the development and balance of today's physiques?

b) If you had a say, what would be a change you would like to see in today's version of the sport?

I'm awestruck, but not jealous. I'm largely impressed, slightly intimidated and sufficiently understanding. The grand size and bursting muscularity has exceeded the bounds of the eye and human comprehension. Thus, I suggest pro bodybuilding has become an extreme sport, like spiraling off cliffs on snow boards, dirt bikes or skateboards: daring, not forgettable, but not inspiring either. Who among the crowd can identify with or strive for the proportions of the creatures on the stage or magazine covers before them? Like the Terminator, Isis and Batman, they are heroes, but how does a young man or woman live with them in their heart?

The XXX-extreme culture will live on, as long as it draws the crowd and provides the buck. The rest of us will look on, shake our heads and curl our clunky dumbbells hoping for some muscles from our blood, sweat and tears. There's real gold in that body of yours, not the fool's gold we see glittering in the mountains.

Q) What is your training like today?

Like yesterday's, only I love it more. Briefly, the same fundamental techniques (supersets mixed with power and singles, five sets of this or that x12,10,8,6,4 reps, max intensity based on risk and abuse factors, modifications in groove to accommodate limitations from 60 pushy years on a rocky planet). And oddly, or not so oddly, the same motivations: be strong, have big muscles and good shape and lift the iron repeatedly. Smart as ever, never learn.

12. If you could go back in time and tell yourself do's and don'ts based on your bodybuilding perspective today, what might they be?

Honestly, Shawn, I'd do it the same, mistakes, injuries and wasting of time. Bodybuilding, or muscle building, as I prefer to call it, is specifically but not solely about building muscle. It's about building your life and character and person... your body, mind and soul. You want to learn? Pay attention to your mistakes, be willing to make them and don't punish yourself or feel guilty because of them. Are you seeking growth? Waste some time. Need a crash course in character building? Embrace the injury and listen to the pain. Impatient? Persevere! Bored? Persist! Doubtful and lack confidence? Be strong and courageous; it's there and a whole lot more to come. Lost direction, in the gym, at home, on the job, in relationships -- go back to the gym, now. Things get worse if you don't and better when you do.

It would be a cool world if everyone trained hard and ate less sugar.

Above all, go with God.

The End

Or is it just the beginning?

The Bomber

<http://davedraper.com>