

Where Are They Now?

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JACK LONG : PHYSICAL CULTURIST—PHYSICIAN

The most impressive athletic feat is growing old strong — growing strongly into old age with one's physical vigor and mental acuity intact. The touchstone of a great training system is the degree to which it enhances the power and joy of its practitioner's "daily labor of living": an adventure and a labor which, with certain accommodations to time, should be no less joyful and vigorous in age than it had been in youth.

Nearly a half century ago, Jack Long was one of the best built men in America and the possessor of a national middleweight record in the "two arm lying press," the bench press. Today Jack Long, the fine physique--athlete and strong man of the 1930's, is John C. Long, M.D., F.A.C.S. (Fellow of the American College of Surgeons), of Plainview, Texas, a magnificent legatee of sane and healthful strength- and body-building: "Thanks to regular workouts, I am still in excellent health and actively practicing surgery at the age of 78." Amazing: near the close of his eighth decade, Dr. Long is still "in active practice" as part of one of the most demanding and stressful of all professions: surgery.

At a lifting meet, years ago, I had a long conversation between lifts with Ray Van Cleef, who had come East from California to testify in a court proceeding for Bob Hoffman. Ray spoke of his old days as a "pupil" in Sieg Klein's great gym ("physical culture studio," that is) at 717 7th Avenue. As an aside, is there a 90's-type gym in which the relationship between member and owner is that of pupil and teacher (even "professor": as with Sieg's father-in-law, "Professor" Attila)? That the answer is so obviously NO accounts in part for what has gone-out of the wonderful relationship that used to exist between pupil and teacher in a gym: the best example being that between Sieg Klein and his "pupils," who came to him to learn—and then stayed as members of the Klein-ian family.

Ray talked lovingly about this ne plus ultra of gyms; about the great fondness that the pupils had for their occasionally irascible, but

basically kind-hearted, cigar-twirling mentor; and about the pupils themselves: himself of course, Bob Marley, Frank Garbino, Frank Leight, and the subject of this column, Jack Long, whom Ray recalled as possessing the handsomeness of a movie matinee idol and a classically muscular physique second to very few. (Ultimately, Jack's photos were to grace the pages of many publications, among them *Klein's Bell* (1932), *La Culture Physique*

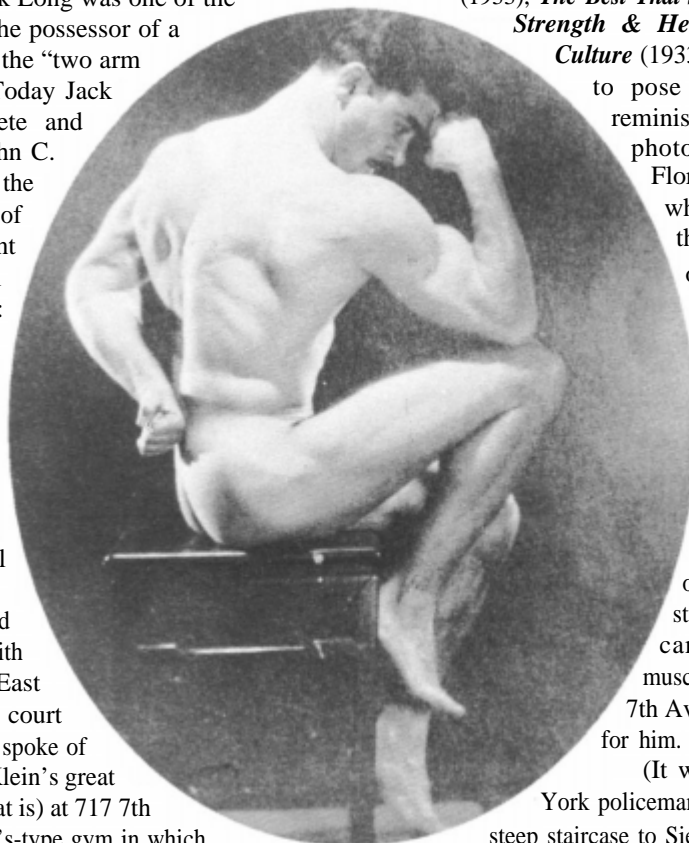
(1933), *The Best That's in You* (1934) by Joe Bonomo, *Strength & Health* (1933-35), and *Physical Culture* (1933-35), which paid him ten dollars

to pose for exercise articles.)¹ Ray reminisced about Sieg's sending out photos of the impressively built Floridian as part of a campaign in which long was to be groomed as the maestro's "prize pupil" (an opinion in which Leo Murdock, for one, later concurred).

But as Bobby Burns has assured us, the best-laid plans of mice and men "gang aft agley," and Sieg's were no exception. For all Jack's high spirits and grand promise as a physique- and strength-athlete, he found himself being drawn to the groves of academic, more specifically the study of medicine, which gradually came to take precedence over muscle, strength, and the world of 717 7th Ave., along with his mentor's hopes for him.

(It was about this time that a New York policeman led a husky young friend up the steep staircase to Sieg's Studio; the young friend was Frank Leight, and in a brief time, the mighty Leight was to become not just one of the strongest men, but the best physique-man, in New York, indeed one of the best physiques in the world. The role of Sieg's "prize pupil," it seemed, hadn't been destined to remain without a player, at least not for very long.)

When Jack arrived in New York, he had worked for Consolidated Edison and attended college at night, but medicine had come to be his life's focus: and in 1941, he was graduated from New York University Medical School. Then, during the War years, he served



in the Army Medical Corps in the China-Burma Theatre and, upon his return, was granted a fellowship and surgical residency in oncology (cancer) at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York (1945-1950). It was clear that the physique- and strength-world's loss was to be medicine's gain, though weight training was to remain a staple of Jack's exercise regimen.

His physician wife, Dorothy (M.D., F.A.A.P.), attests to this when she sums up the role of weights, not only in his, but their, life: "I found early in my married life what the future held when I was taken to a wrestling match and a weightlifting meet on my honeymoon! In my mind, I view the influence of Jack's interest in, and dedication to, physical fitness and weightlifting in two general areas: It has influenced our family, in that our son, also a physician, is an avid marathoner, and among our grandchildren, we have a grandson in weightlifting, one in karate, another in soccer, and a granddaughter also in soccer. It has also been an influence in the community, where Jack has had a strong influence in helping build and support the local Y.M.C.A., and in encouraging a weightlifting program. He has also encouraged several young weightlifters who have gone into competition."³ (Speaking of quantum leaps, one would be hard-pressed to devise a better example of 'prize-pupil-ness' than Dr. Jack's carrying "Professor' Klein's—and Attila's—"Greco-Germanic System of Physical Development" if not exactly to the ends of the world, at least as far south-westward as the great State of Texas.)

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, on January 28, 1913, Jack spent his high school days in Jacksonville, Florida. His father, a fine athlete, was a good hockey player and a world class sprinter, who (as an aside) later came to be associated with the research institute which developed "muzak." Young Jack junior's training began in 1927, in Jacksonville, under the tutelage of John Piombo and Al Berkowitz, who operated the "Health School" located in the Jacksonville Y.M.C.A. Jack's father joined Sieg's gym in 1930, and shortly after that, young Jack, who had moved to New York by that time, was training at the West Side Y.M.C.A. and of course with his father at Klein's, where he blossomed, Jack's arrival at 717 7th Ave. is documented inimitably by Sieg in his delightful little publication *Klein's Bell* (August, 1932): Jack's father "would often

remark about what a cinch the exercises would be for his big, strong son. Coming from a man whose almost every phrase was subject to interpretation in the light of joking, we pictured this marvel of a son as a puny, skinny child. ...And then one day, daddy Long brought the boy along. Even before he had removed his coat, we were aware that the lad had a splendid physique. Stripped, he was something to marvel at. ...Naturally, we all wanted to know 'how he got that way.'" It was clear, of course, that he had "inherited a certain amount of his physical foundation along with his humor," but "as a small boy he [had been] interested in various sports and, as he grew older, turned to ways and means to further develop the splendid start he had toward a magnificent physique.

...After enrolling here at the gym, he became very interested in the two arm military press, more or less specializing on this lift, but by no means neglecting the training necessary to build a beautifully well balanced [body]. When he first joined our ranks, he was able to do a fair lift in the two arm military press...today he will lift 205 pounds with ease and good form. ...here at the studio we have never been able to call him anything but Jack...he is Jack Long to everyone, for you cannot know him for more than five minutes without feeling that you have known him for a long time. Jack is a member of our well known 'Fifteen Inch Arm Club'...and is one of the best-proportioned men among our members, ...one of the most effervescent. He has an unsuppressible humor."⁴ (Evident in these few, too-severely edited lines are the generosity, the openness, the good humor—in short, the manliness and magnanimity—that characterized both



Klein, the man, and Klein, the writer, throughout his long career in the Game.)

Jack's youth was the era of the strength-affidavit, the witnessed (often notarized) quasi-legal testimony to a lifter's records and personal bests. For instance, this one is dated October 28, 1933: "We, the undersigned, hereby certify that on this day, after weighing the weights on a scale tested and sealed by the Mayor's Bureau of Weights and Measures, City of New York, [we] saw J.C. Long, Jr., who on this day weighed 153 1/4 lbs. stripped, perform the following records." And, you ask, who were the "We" (of We, the undersigned)? The Who's Who of strengthdom in the 30's, that's who. No less than Olympic coach, Mark Berry (the referee); Dietrich Wortmann (A.A.U. Chairman); Adolph Nordquest (professional strongman); Siegmund Klein; Carl E. Williams (Editor

of *Physical Culture*, as averred in the affidavit); and Samuel Olmstead. All gathered one fine autumn evening to witness Jack's two arm curl (military position): 149 1/4 lbs., right arm curl (military position): 72 1/2 lbs., and left arm curl (military position): 70 1/4 lbs. (Having one's feet held to the fire by a panel of such martinetes surely put a crimp into his Saturday afternoon locker room brags. Can you imagine how rapidly the curling poundages quoted in the current muscle magazines would deflate if the curlers had to assume the "military position," as opposed to the 90's "modified inclined bench press, reverse-grip clean position" affected by "curlers" these days?)

The hullabaloo and affidavit-making attendant upon Jack's setting the new national middleweight record in the bench press ("two arm lying press") at Jacksonville's Coliseum was captured in this newspaper "teaser" on the day of the big event: "The record [in the bench press] is now held by Sigmund [sic] Klein and is recorded officially at 288 pounds. Every detail is being complied with here for Long's attempt to break the record. The scales will be inspected and certified by the city scale inspector. Three well-known school coaches will officiate as judges and will record the actual lift that Long will attempt. A Paramount News Reel cameraman will be present and will film the exhibition. Mayor Alsop will officiate as honorary judge, and according



to the advance sale of tickets, a packed house will greet the opening of the mammoth show." (The account quoted here, a copy, did not bear the newspaper's name, but Jack ventured that it was the *Jacksonville Times Union* for that date: August 13, 1934.) Rising to this rather frenetic occasion, as a small middleweight (156 3/4 lbs), Jack set a new national record of 294. He then asked for 300, but "it wouldn't quite go." (When weighed, it was actually 302. Jack's best in-gym bench was 300.) His best military press at this weight was 220, and his best at 161 was 235.⁵

Jack's earliest heroes in the Game were Bernarr Macfadden and Charles Atlas and, later on, Sieg Klein, John Grimek, and the remembered subject of this anecdote: "The world record in the abdominal raise (the sit-up with weight-behind-neck) was held by a middleweight at 110 lbs., but this was also the heavyweight record.

I was determined to try to break it and had gotten to 100 lbs., until one day at Seig's Gym I saw Frank Leight doing repetition sit-ups with 130 lbs.—I abandoned my efforts!"⁶

Today, Jack's training consists basically of racquetball and light weight training; his diet (as one might expect of a cancer surgeon), basically low fat and high fiber. [The accompanying 1990 photo of Dr. Long aptly illustrates the extraordinary physical development he still maintains.]

Dr. Jack Long is proof that, except for the very few, success in our sport is a springboard to similar success in the "real world." The muscles built are not just the bulging sort that contract to lift weights: more than in most sports, success in our Game is predicated upon system, discipline, the "day-to-dayness" of it all: in a word, "character" (a cliché, of course, but no less true for being one). A force in his community, a surgeon still in active practice well into his 79th year of life, the husband of a physician, the father of a son who is a physician, and of three daughters (respectively, a nurse, an attorney, and a school teacher), Jack Long embodies the best of both worlds. Well into his eighth decade, he is respected in the realm of iron and in his chosen profession, surgery. The two worlds, however, can't really be separated. In the wonderfully talented and promising physique-athlete and strongman of the 30's, the fine surgeon-to-be was being shaped. Today, beneath the well-ordered and doctorly surface of the healer (far from Seventh Avenue in the panhandle of Texas) still resides the irrepressibly good-humored young muscleman who in his youthful vigor, long ago (yet not really so long ago), flew-up that long flight of steps at 717 to take his place among Sieg's

boys, destined (as we now can see) to become lifting's "Boys of Summer," boy-men who remain (for all their titles and authority in the "real world") Sieg's boys. In those precious moments of reverie and reminiscence (dear even to an all-conquering Alexander in his battle tent), still and forever—Sieg's boys. Just for the moment (just for the fun of it all)—Sieg's boys. And Jack Long was, Jack Long is, one of the best of them—one of the best of Sieg's boys.

¹ Letter from Dr. Jack Long to Al Thomas, dated 10 June 1990.

² Ibid. Dated 11 July 1990.

³ Letter from Dr. Dorothy Long to Al Thomas, dated 10 June 1990.

⁴ *Klein's Bell* 2(3), August, 1932.

⁵ Letter from Dr. Jack Long to Al Thomas, dated 10 June 1990.

⁶ Ibid., dated 11 July 1990.