

Bullied migrant built his muscles and an empire

TROY LENNON
HISTORY EDITOR

It has become a well-worn cliché. A skinny guy at the beach has sand kicked in his face by a bully. Determined to avoid a replay of this situation the skinny guy works out and returns to get his revenge, showing off his new physique, biffing the bully and walking off with the girl.

This is almost exactly what happened to young Angelo Scilliano. When he was a teenager, weighing only about 44kg, a lifeguard at Coney Island kicked sand in his face. But he developed a way of working out that didn't involve a lot of costly equipment and, rippling with muscles, he went back to Coney Island and gave the bully what for. Adopting the name Charles Atlas he then built a successful business based on sharing his secrets with other weaklings looking for a way to bulk up.

In an era before steroid abuse and body-image disorders became epidemic, this Italian immigrant introduced the world to "dynamic tension" and inspired millions of others to go from gangly to godlike.

He was born Angelo Scilliano, 126 years ago today, on October 30, 1892, near Acri in Calabria, Italy. His family migrated to the US about 1903, the bewildered young boy arriving at Ellis Island without a word of English. Skinny, often sickly and learning English but speaking it with a thick accent, he was picked on by bullies in his neighbourhood in Brooklyn. After seeing sculptures of mythical classical heroes like Hercules at the Brooklyn Museum, he decided to remake himself in their image.

He tried all kinds of methods of working out, using homemade weights and devising ropes and elastic-stretching devices, trying to become strong enough to fend for himself.

For inspiration he also put up a picture of the famous Prussian strongman Eugen Sandow, who performed muscle-bulging displays in



Charles Atlas impresses boxer Joe Louis in 1938, and (inset) Atlas in 1920

vaudeville, promoted by theatre impresario Florenz Ziegfeld.

But for Scilliano nothing seemed to work.

Still scrawny after his exertions, the final indignity was the encounter with the Coney Island bully. Then, during a visit to a zoo, he had an idea. He saw a muscular lion stretching, and said to himself: "Does this old gentleman have any barbells, any exercisers?"

He concluded that all a person needed was to pit one muscle against another, an exercise style now known as isometrics. He got rid of his makeshift gym equipment and began tensing his muscles against each other.

Within a relatively short space of time his friends began to notice the difference. One told him he looked like a statue of Atlas, the mythical figure carrying the world on his shoulders, atop the Atlas Hotel. It became a nickname, but he later had his name

legally changed to Charles Atlas. He gave up a leather-working job that had been paying the bills and took work at Coney Island posing as a strongman at a sideshow, filling the rest of his hours as a janitor. While posing on a beach he was spotted by artist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney who got him work as a model. Earning good money, his image plastered all over town and in 1921 and 1922 he entered and won the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man contest.

People wanted to know his secrets so, with help from naturopath Frederick Tilney, he set up a mail order business to help others gain his kind of physique. The business faltered until, in 1928, Charles Roman designed a new advertising campaign for Atlas. He coined the term "Dynamic Tension" for the muscle-pitting regimen and devised a comic strip showing a "97-pound weakling" getting sand kicked in his face before discovering Atlas's methods and transforming himself into a superman.

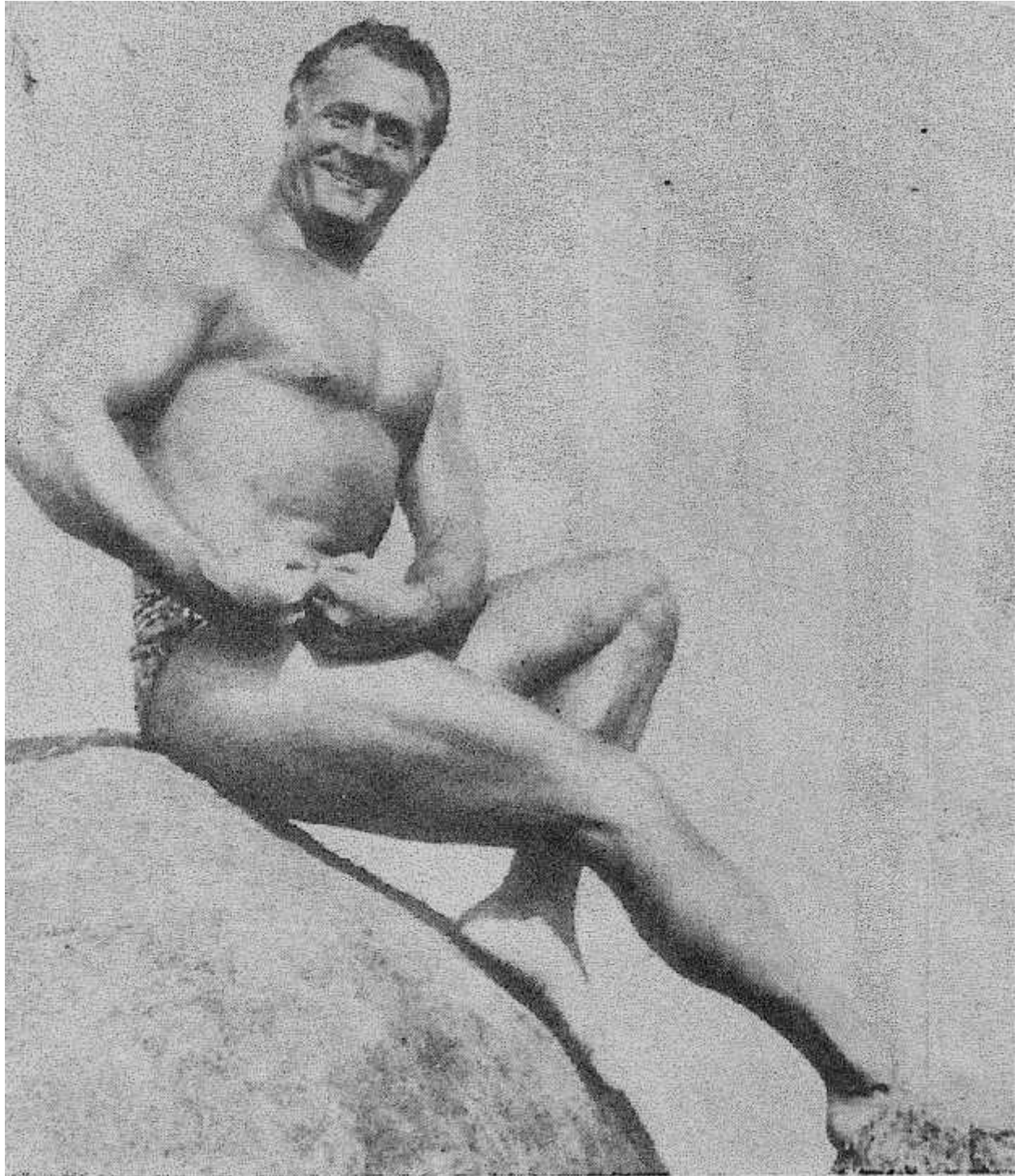
After the Wall St Crash of 1929 many men were feeling their manhood was at a low ebb and sent off for Atlas program to restore their self-esteem. The popularity of comic books in the 1930s also resulted in a flood of young boys reading about the Atlas fitness program and wanting to become big men. One of the most appealing aspects of the program was that people could do it at home without having to feel embarrassed at a gym.

Atlas constantly improved the regimen and enjoyed performing stunts such as lifting women or celebrities on his shoulders, tearing phone books in half or bending steel bars. The business continued to thrive in the 50s and 60s. It was translated into other languages and reached a million customers worldwide. Atlas continued to keep himself fit and was active in the business even after the death of his wife, Margaret, in 1965 prompted him to sell his half of the company to Roman.

He died of a heart attack at the age of 80 in 1972.

1892

DIED THIS WEEK



THE LATE CHARLES ATLAS

Nice pix of a mature Atlas whose obit I wrote way back in
'Health and Strength' = David Gentle

itor, Peary Rader, when he mentioned we should take care to consider each man's life separately. For instance, a lifter may have trained well in his younger days but become sadly out of shape at 40. Or a man could work out steadily but neglect his diet or sleep, which may have proved the health destroying factor.

Nevertheless, I resolve to seek an answer to the riddle by keeping a careful record of all the muscle men who have passed away, due to natural causes, in my strong man files. It should be noted that all classes of strong men, body builders, weight lifters, athletes who train with weights, and physical culturists were included. These were all under the general classification term of what we might call muscle men.

A highly significant factor throughout was my determination to be absolutely objective, and thoroughly honest. Positively no attempt was made to slant the list or the findings in any manner, as my whole purpose was to discern the truth. Who should I fool, if not myself, if I attempted to slant the findings in one way or another? I merely gathered all the data possible, and let the chips fall where they may.

Of necessity, several years elapsed until sufficient data was collected on the strong man. It is a well established fact that about 70 years of age is the average length of life for civilized man, or as the Bible says, three score and ten. I therefore reasoned that anyone dying within the range of 65 to 75 years may be said to have lived an average life span. It follows then that those who die below 65 lived a shorter life than normal. While on the other hand, to live beyond 75 years is to have lived longer than average. Now we have some standard to follow. Thus, the muscle men were divided into three categories of early death (65 and under); average life (65 to 75), and those who lived a long life (75 on up).

The reader should be aware that information of this type is only secured with difficulty. However the author has purposely eliminated all guesswork to a minimum. In cases where it is written, for example, "over 85," etc., this means the individual, when last heard of, was 85, but he may be over 90 today. Of course, this does not cover all the possible strong men that could be listed, but only those that I could find information on. However, this should prove enough of a

sampling to give us perhaps the first general picture of strong man longevity.

After a sufficient number of athletes' statistics were secured, my next step was to obtain information on a like number of our non-exercising men. For only by taking a group of strong men taken at random on the one hand and comparing them with a similar group of average men on the other, could we resolve the question as to which of the two has the greater longevity. My statistics for the average man were furnished thru the courtesy of a Prudential Insurance Co. of America representative.

Now that we have a sufficient background, let us without further adieu, view the findings of what perhaps is the first survey of strong man longevity.

A STUDY OF MUSCLEMAN LONGEVITY

(70 strong men, body builders, weight lifters, and physical culturists, taken at random)

A — Early Death

Cause	Name	Age
Heart attack	Floyd Page	37
Heart attack	Ray Van Cleef	54
	Karl Moerke	52
	Alois Sebos	38
Apoplexy	Dr. Krajewski	63
	Eugene Sandow	58
	Arthur Saxon	43
Heart attack	Roger Eells	54
Cancer	Robert Walker	40
Kidney dis.	Louis Cyr	49
Heart att.	Wally Zagurski	50
Heart att.	Vic Nicolette	50
Heart att.	Harry Paschall	58
Heart att.	Tony Terlazzo	53
Heart att.	Karl Swoboda	50 (?)
Heart att.	Charles Regoulot	59
Heart att.	Jack Kent	52
	Bobby Pandour	38
	Wm. Oliphant	60

B — Average

Warren Lincoln	Travis	65
Charles Poire	"The Biceps"	69
Sig Klein		over 67
Bob Hoffman		over 72
Albert Tauscher		over 73
W. C. Pullam		about 73
Cannon Ball	Richards	over 73
Henry Blackman		over 70
Sam Kramer		about 75
Hector Decarie		70
Charles Atlas		about 77
Antone Matysek		71
Alan Calvert		69
Paul Von Boeckmann		73
The Great Batta		73
Prof. Hermann		over 70
Win Franklin		over 72
Dr. Frederick Tilney		over 73
Sanford Bennet		over 70



George Hackenschmidt, called the Russian Lion, held many world records in his time in various lifts, as well as being the greatest wrestler of his time. He tapered off in his training in later years, as do most sensible trainers, and lived to a vigorous, alert 90 years. His exercise in recent years was mostly running.

C — Long Life

Geo. Hackenschmidt	90
Oscar Mathes	over 86
Prof. Attila	about 80
Lou Poulton	over 81
Prof. Anthony Baker	over 103
Frank Jerson	over 81
Paul Bragg	over 88
Wilf Diamond	86
The Mighty Atom	over 85
Thomas Inch	over 81
Otley Coulter	about 80
Lionel Strongfort	over 91
Bernarr Macfadden	88
Father Lange	over 82
Buermeyer	83
Earl E. Liederman	over 83
Geo. F. Jowett	79
Maxick	79
Al Treloar	86
Otto Arco	82
The Great Zbyzcho	88
John Y. Smith	over 83
Adolph Nordquest	80
Otis Lambert	87
Roy White	over 108
Prof. Siebert	95
Herman Saxon	around 80
Tom Aston	about 80
Carl Busch	over 80
Jim Jeffreys	over 80
Carl Norberg	over 78

(Continued on page 7#)

Old times death / [Signature]

immigrant introduced the world to "dynamic tension" and inspired millions of others to go from gangly to godlike.

He was born Angelo Siciliano, 126 years ago today, on October 30, 1892, near Acri in Calabria, Italy. His family migrated to the US about 1903, the bewildered young boy arriving at Ellis Island without a word of English. Skinny, often sickly and learning English but speaking it with a thick accent, he was picked on by bullies in his neighbourhood in Brooklyn. After seeing sculptures of mythical classical heroes like Hercules at the Brooklyn Museum, he decided to remake himself in their image.

He tried all kinds of methods of working out, using homemade weights and devising ropes and elastic-stretching devices, trying to become strong enough to fend for himself.

For inspiration he also put up a picture of the famous Prussian strongman Eugen Sandow, who performed muscle-bulging displays in



vaudeville, promoted by theatre impresario Florenz Ziegfeld.

But for Siciliano nothing seemed to work.

Still scrawny after his exertions, the final indignity was the encounter with the Coney Island bully. Then, during a visit to a zoo, he had an idea. He saw a muscular lion stretching, and said to himself; "Does this old gentleman have any barbells, any exercisers?"

He concluded that all a person needed was to pit one muscle against another, an exercise style now known as isometrics. He got rid of his makeshift gym equipment and began tensing his muscles against each other.

Within a relatively short space of time his friends began to notice the difference. One told him he looked like a statue of Atlas, the mythical figure carrying the world on his shoulders, atop the Atlas Hotel. It became a nickname, but he later had his name

legally changed to Charles Atlas. He gave up a leather-working job that had been paying the bills and took work at Coney Island posing as a strongman at a sideshow, filling the rest of his hours as a janitor. While posing on a beach he was spotted by artist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney who got him work as a model. Earning good money, his image plastered all over town and in 1921 and 1922 he entered and won the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man contest.

People wanted to know his secrets so, with help from naturopath Frederick Tilney, he set up a mail order business to help others gain his kind of physique. The business faltered until, in 1928, Charles Roman designed a new advertising campaign for Atlas. He coined the term "Dynamic Tension" for the muscle-pitting regimen and devised a comic strip showing a "97-pound weakling" getting sand kicked in his face before discovering Atlas's methods and transforming himself into a superman.

1892

After the Wall St Crash of 1929 many men were feeling their man was at a low ebb and sent off for a program to restore their self-esteem. The popularity of comic books in the 1930s also resulted in a flood of young boys reading about the At as fitness program and wanting to become like men. One of the most appealing aspects of the program was that you could do it at home without having to feel embarrassed at a gym.

Atlas constantly improved the regimen and enjoyed performing stunts such as lifting women or celebrities on his shoulders, tearing phone books in half or bending steel bars. The business continued to thrive in the 50s and 60s. It was translated into other languages and reached a million customers worldwide. Atlas continued to keep himself fit and active in the business even after the death of his wife, Margaret, in 1965 prompted him to sell his half of the company to Roman.

He died of a heart attack at the age of 80 in 1972.

Atlas was around 80 when he died, just a few years after his wife. He came over to UK in the 50s invited to Health and Strength events.
-David Gentle