

Physically**FIT**

# The SUNSET SCRIBE

By Charles Peeples



If you're a Boomer, particularly an active one, perhaps you can relate to this. If that activity includes regular bouts with the weights, you'll definitely relate.

My elbow and shoulder joints are protesting, not just about the indignities they've endured in the gym this morning, but possibly against decades of similar abuse, not to mention the mere toll of decades themselves. Conventional wisdom dictates that I stop or back off. So does the orthopedic doc, who says my days of overhead lifts (not that they were ever considerable) are over. So I back off, sort of, and I seek reassurance, guidance. But not from these nay-saying emaciated wisps in white tunics. No, it's from someone who's been there - a guy with a light, a limp, and a legend. And he'd been hoisting barbells in the early sixties, long before it was cool.

*"I was just a kid and virtually nobody was pushing iron. Weightlifting and muscle building didn't have wide public appeal or approval and ninety-nine out of a hundred athletic coaches gave it the thumbs down. There wasn't a whole bunch of encouragement or inspiration from a society that considered*

*you either stupid or egotistical, and probably a sissy."*

It was in August of 1967, in the Cape May Theater, as a scrawny runt of thirteen, that I first saw real muscle, in the form of Dave Draper. The film was minor, a "forgettable" Tony Curtis vehicle called *Don't Make Waves*, and Dave had a minor role as the bodybuilding boyfriend of a beach-beauty played by Sharon Tate (whose unfortunate demise at the hands of the Manson family would be enshrined in *Helter Skelter*). Blond, tanned and outrageously muscled for that era, Dave could've been scary, but he wasn't. He had a gentle boyish face, and when he spoke, the voice was the shy kid, not the bulging behemoth. The audience giggled audibly at the disparity. But in that moment when Sharon, insanely desirable in her bikini, launched herself from the trampoline and into his huge casually, waiting arms... if you were a guy, he was where you wanted to be, and there were forces at work to exploit that."



A decade before Ahhhnold became the face of muscledom, it was this big kid with surf-dude blond hair and tan, "The Blonde Bomber" posing with the requisite southern California props, a pair of beach-babes and a Bear board who spelled it out. The more important props, the protein shake and the exercise device, were his real reason for being in that photo, suggesting to us that they were the ticket to the fun he was having. What was different then- like in much else of the world- was the pure innocence, the sense of fun, the complete lack of menace. Dave and his smile were shy and happy, not like the oversized, veiny,



lab experiments glaring and grimacing joylessly in today's muscle-magazines, trying to out-bad-ass each other.

But he'd be eclipsed, forgotten even, in the wave launched by the soon-to be Governor, having already become disenchanted with and abandoning the competitive aspect of bodybuilding just as it was emerging from the netherworld.

Dave lived solely for the life, the process. And decades later, into the new millennium when the functionalistas, kettlebellers and crossfitters decreed the whole bodybuilding thing passé, Dave would still be living the life, and extolling its virtues in his bulletins with self-deprecating wit that assures us that it's ok to be struggling with weights we'd have snickered at in younger years, or completely avoiding some of those gym-stud rituals like the big bench press if it means saving your joints. Do what you can do, do it hard, but above all, be there: Lift weights for fame, glory and money and you miss the point entirely. Those of us long in the tooth, feeling those same aches, but yearning for more of the lore and celebration of newly-discovered self that attracted us to the gym in the first place, can handle that. Conditioning for some competitive sport has nothing to do with it.

“You’ve heard enough about this sanctuary in recent Bomber stories: endless cracks in wide floors, high ceilings and tall walls; long narrow wooden staircases condemned by the unseen management, yet frequently negotiated by brutes; rusting iron and splintered wood equipment in the dim light of night and day; passion and knowledge and understanding dripping down the walls and from the ceiling like the warm beer escaping the taps of the bar overhead; entry doors hanging askew by their remaining twisted hinges. The place was perfect in every way.” The great irony here is that Dave’s wife Laree runs a publishing business specializing in media not about bodybuilding, but about that very functional strength and conditioning realm whose denizens ridicule Dave’s craft. And these are heavy hitters, mind you -gurus like Michael Boyle, Dan John, and Gray Cook, whose wisdom and innovation have made them absolute demigods in the strength and conditioning (S & C) world. I can’t help but wonder how this dichotomy works out domestically. But in all fairness, while they share mostly the same tools, there’s no overlap of purpose between bodybuilding and sports conditioning (a bodybuilder might counter the functionalista’s scorn by paraphrasing an old song: “Don’t care what you do... wouldn’t wanna look like you!”). I was never much of an athlete, and now, only a year or two from the big sixty, I’m kinda glad about that; more and more it’s evident that the odd forces and shocks of most competitive sports manifest themselves with a vengeance later on. A knee or elbow, for instance, is like a hinge, meant to bend in one plane only, but not many sports will make that allowance. Bodybuilding is one of the few

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that does (you read that here first!), and done properly, it's one of the few you can do until the end. As a lifestyle it provides an anchor of constancy, of satisfaction, connecting us to rituals, childish even, to contend with the deadly, ever-encroaching virus of inertia:

"It's a sad thing to witness folks in decline due to lack of will, discipline and courage. Ignorance is an unkind companion. Irresponsibility and disrespect reside where understanding and gratitude, joy and love do not. Alas! Gee, I hate missing a workout, don't you? I miss the stupid workout and feel like crap till my next bout with the iron, which becomes some sort of monster battle between my miserable self and the stinkin' metal. How is it possible? All that precious, hard-earned muscle and strength lost in one frigging forgone workout... if for no other reason, this is why I train unfailingly after nearly sixty years: to escape the callous self-inflicted pain and personal ridicule I merciless heap upon myself for having spinelessly evaded a brutal match with the ever-ready iron."

If there's nothing especially revolutionary in Dave's philosophical exhortations, delivered in Jami-like unabashed bearing of the soul, we can take delight in their cheerful resoluteness, connecting the man in the sunset to the boy in the sunshine. "It was the doing it that was good. And it's the doing it that continues to be good. None of us would change much if we were to do it all again. The smiles came when they weren't expected, and they've lasted a long, long time."

Be sure to check out Dave's site and newsletter:  
<http://www.davedraper.com>

*Charles Peeples, LMT, CSCS, NSCA-CPT, NCTMB, whose articles have appeared in numerous fitness and bodybuilding magazines, is a well-known proponent for girls' and women's physical advancement (www.teamvalkyries.org). In addition to being a nationally Certified Personal Trainer, he is a nationally Certified Massage Therapist (www.chesterspringsmassage.com). Contact him at Charles@phillyfitmagazine.com*

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