Bill Pearl (1930-)

William Arnold Pearl was born in Prineville on October 31, 1930. While he was still a young boy, the family moved to Yakima, Washington, where his father opened a restaurant. From a young age, Bill Pearl identified with the skinny, weak character portrayed in Charles Atlas commercials, which boasted the benefits of weight lifting and bodybuilding. Inspired by sibling rivalry and the desire to become like Charles Atlas, Bill lifted gallon cans of vegetables and gunnysacks of potatoes while working in the restaurant.

In 1953, at the age of twenty-three, Pearl won the first of several major bodybuilding contests, including the Amateur Athletic Union's Mr. California and Mr. America. The same year, he captured his first Amateur Mr. Universe title at the National Amateur Bodybuilder's Association (NABBA) tournament. In 1956, he won his first NABBA Professional Mr. USA tournament. Subsequently, his professional international tour earned him NABBA Professional Mr. Universe titles in 1961, 1967, and 1971. His competitive bodybuilding career spanned nineteen years.

Complementing his interest in weight training and bodybuilding, Pearl became a leader in the fitness industry. He owned and managed several gyms on the West Coast from the 1950s through the 1970s. In 1962, Pearl acquired a gym in central Los Angeles that became one of the first co-ed facilities in the United States. The gym attracted national and Olympic track athletes, professional baseball players, and world-class power-lifters and bodybuilders. During his career, Pearl trained and coached nine Mr. America winners and fourteen Mr. Universe champions. In the 1960s, he contracted with North American Rockwell's Aerospace Program to guide training protocols for Rockwell executives and astronauts.

With his fame as a world-class bodybuilder came opportunities to speak about fitness, weight training, and bodybuilding. During the 1960s, Pearl traveled to more countries than any other Mr. America before him. Spreading advice about fitness, weight training, and bodybuilding became a lifetime commitment for Pearl, and he wrote three best-selling books, including *Keys to the Inner Universe* (1978), *Getting Stronger* (1986), and *Beyond the Universe: The Bill Pearl Story* (2003).

Pearl retired from bodybuilding and settled in Phoenix, Oregon, in 1978, where he operates Bill Pearl Enterprises. His workout facility is housed in a barn on his property, and people come from all over the world to work out with him.

Written by Jamie Vener

Further Reading:

Pearl, Bill and Shott, Kim. *Beyond the Universe: The Bill Pearl Story.* Jamaica, NY: Bill Pearl Enterprises, Inc., AGNI Press, 2003.

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