



**François Gay**  
Natural Mr. Universe

# MIND OVER MATTER

**Genuine, raw, powerful...**

**"An inspiring journey into the world of bodybuilding and beyond..."**

*“Mind Over Matter” is, simply put, the use of willpower to overcome obstacles. Sometimes the only thing stopping us from achieving our goals or pushing past struggles is our mind. Our mind can be either our best friend or our worst enemy. When we truly put our mind to something, it’s amazing what we can achieve!*

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## **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this book to my beloved mother, who unconditionally supported me in the pursuit of my dream, to my father, to my treasured sister Isabelle, to my brother Christian and his son Raphaël, as well as to the love of my life, Valeria and her son Leandro. Without her constant motivation and support throughout the writing process, this book would never have seen the light of day.

### **Special acknowledgements are due to:**

Casey Viator R.I.P. (1953-2013) for winning the AAU Mr. America at 19 years old and making it onto the cover of the magazine that changed my life.

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## **Foreword by Jean-Pierre Fux**

My name is Jean-Pierre Fux. I was the overall winner of the 1994 IFBB Mr. Universe, and it is a great honor for me to write this foreword for the bodybuilding legend and Natural Mr. Universe François Gay. François and I go back a long way, even though he didn't know then that our first encounter would change my life forever.

Growing up in the mountains of Switzerland, there was not a lot to do as a teenager, and we spent most of our time skiing and drinking—probably with more emphasis on the drinking! It would be an understatement to say that I lacked purpose, so when I saw a poster about an event in my hometown of Brig showcasing the best bodybuilder in Switzerland, I didn't think much of it. Craving any form of entertainment available, I went to see what this bodybuilder looked like. Sitting near the entrance, I suddenly saw the biggest human being ever, the guest of honor François Gay, who had just arrived. At that moment, I knew what I was going to do with my life: I was going to do everything in my power to become a bodybuilder.

As a member of the local gym, I had seen quite a few bodybuilders before, but no one like François. This monster of a man with such a powerful body had incredible charisma, and even more impressive was how nicely and respectfully he treated everybody around him. I'm sure I'm not the only one whose life he influenced. One of my first trainers would visit François from time to time. I would ask countless questions about the trip and about my new hero each time he returned.

Over the next few years, François competed many times at the IFBB Mr. Universe even winning the runner-up title, with a very controversial result against the German bodybuilding legend Ralph Moeller. What made this gentle giant remarkably successful goes far deeper than great results on stage. In every bodybuilder's life, there comes a time when he is pressured into using performance-enhancing drugs. This is unfortunately widespread, and most competitors would use them. François was different: He stayed natural all the years he competed, promoting a healthy lifestyle and staying true to his principles. He went on to become one of the best natural bodybuilders on the planet. The highlights of his career were winning the Natural Mr. Universe in 1992 and the Natural Mr. Olympia in 1999.

We both retired about the same time and when we reunited a few years later, both of our lives had changed. What had not changed was François's incredible charisma and his commitment to a healthy lifestyle. For decades, he promoted natural bodybuilding all over the world as a gym owner and as president of the SNBF

(Swiss Natural Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation), which he founded in 1997. He is, without a doubt, a role model for many young athletes, as well as for his clients.

Like me, Francois now lives in California. I am delighted to know that, through my social media site, he met the next great passion of his life, his wife Valeria. At last, I was able to change his life just as he changed mine 37 years ago. Enjoy reading the journey of an exceptional man. One of extreme mental toughness, which made him one of the best in the world. A man I proudly call a great friend.

Jean-Pierre Fux  
IFBB Mr. Universe

## **Foreword by Berend Breitenstein**

In the spring of 1997, I was promoting my first book entitled Natural Bodybuilding at the FIBO, Europe's biggest fitness expo. The visitors' response was great, and I got a lot of positive feedback from people who had never heard of the natural bodybuilding movement before.

While I was chatting with some visitors, I saw a guy walking over to me. He looked very athletic, and every move he made gave the impression of strength and power. No doubt about it, this guy was a serious bodybuilder! I had no idea that I was about to meet François Gay, one of the best natural bodybuilders to ever set foot on a bodybuilding stage.

Before I could say a word, he introduced himself in a friendly way.

"Hey what's going on? I've seen your booth, your pictures, and the posters advertising your book. Congrats, it's quite impressive! Have you by chance heard of the new natural bodybuilding federation that was launched in the US a few years ago?"

I told him that I had no clue what he was talking about, but I was definitely curious to learn more. Little did I know that the conversation I had with François that morning would have a huge impact on my life.

"Listen, it's called the WNBF (World Natural Bodybuilding Federation) and I just signed on to become an affiliate in Switzerland. The SNBF (Swiss Natural Bodybuilding Federation) will promote our sport, fight drug use in



bodybuilding, and organize a national championship every year.”

That was amazing news. Since day one, I had dreamed about becoming a successful natural bodybuilder. After entering my first contest in my hometown of Hamburg at the age of 15, I quickly realized that many athletes were using forbidden substances to become more competitive. That was a route I was not willing to take. I had made a commitment never to take anabolic steroids or other performance-enhancing substances that could harm my body or, eventually, even alter my mind. Seeing no other alternative, I decided to stop competing. After listening to my story, François continued:

“If you’d like, I could send some of your pictures to the WNBf board and ask them if they would invite you to compete in the US.”

I was totally thrilled about his proposal, and dreams of competing in America with the best natural athletes in the world started filling my mind.

Just a few weeks later, I got my WNBf membership card and made my pro debut at the WNBf Pro Mr. International in New York, an incredible experience that I will never forget.

I competed for many years as a pro and met some wonderful people and athletes along the way. I ended my career as a natural bodybuilder in 2014, placing in the top five at the INBA World Championships in the masters category.

François Gay was not only the person who gave me the opportunity to compete internationally as a natural bodybuilder, but also the man who inspired me to promote natural bodybuilding in Germany. In 2003, the GNBf

(German Natural Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation) was born and now, 18 years later, it is one of the most renowned natural bodybuilding federations in the world.

Without exaggerating, that meeting with François Gay almost 25 years ago not only gave my life a new vision and allowed me to experience countless amazing moments as a drug-free athlete, but also made the birth of the GNBFF possible.

I can truly say that only a handful of people have had such a meaningful and positive influence on my life as François Gay. He is not only a great human being, but also a highly respected ambassador in the natural bodybuilding world.

His book Mind over Matter is a masterpiece. It will supply every athlete striving to live a healthy lifestyle and become successful with all the necessary tools. From the best and safest training methods to sound nutrition, without forgetting mental well-being, François's book will provide you with well-founded, useful information. Most importantly, it will inspire you to become a better version of yourself!

If you put into practice the extremely valuable suggestions you'll find within these pages, I have no doubt that you'll be able to fulfill the goals you've set for yourself.

All the best and train hard!

Berend Breitenstein  
Lifetime Natural Bodybuilder  
Former WNBFF Pro  
GNBFF Founder and President  
Author of 21 books on natural bodybuilding  
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## **Foreword by Jon Jon Park**

I was most honored when François asked me to write a foreword for his book, considering I have never achieved anything like what he has in bodybuilding. I first met François in the late eighties in Los Angeles. He was there to see Reg Park, my father, who had come from South Africa to visit. We all trained at World Gym in Venice and in my personal training facility near Hollywood. François and Reg had met in 1984 at the Mr. Universe in Las Vegas, so I knew a lot about him. My dad had told me only positive things about François, not only as bodybuilder but more importantly as a person of great character and integrity.

Later, in 1987, my dad guest posed at the Mr. Switzerland contest where he met up with François again and offered to train him for his final few weeks of preparation for the Mr. Universe in Madrid. During that time, he stayed at François' home in Lucerne, while they trained at his gym and held seminars throughout Switzerland. After the Mr. Universe, they toured the UK together and stayed at my late grandmother's house in Leeds, after which François visited South Africa for one month and trained with my dad.

I was most impressed by François's complete physique, with no apparent weaknesses, and his dense muscularity. His back was one of the best I'd seen, and his full arms were a sight to behold. He was as strong as he looked, training with high intensity, moving heavy poundages with very strict technique. But what impressed me the most was that he achieved all this while staying completely natural.

His competitive career lasted almost twenty years during which he won the IFBB Swiss Championships five times (1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1990). He competed in the IFBB Mr. Universe several times placing as high as second to Ralf Moeller in 1986 which, quite frankly judging by the photographs in my opinion, I firmly believe he should have won. In 1989, he was runner-up in the World Games, and a year later he won the bronze medal in the European Championships in Leningrad. The fact that the majority of these contests were not drug tested makes Francois' achievements even more impressive. Not only did he hold his own against competitors who mostly weren't natural, but he matched them in size and muscularity, and was as strong if not stronger than any of them.

François had the courage of his convictions, sticking to his principles and refusing to succumb to steroid use on any level. This meant a great deal to me, as I knew how my dad abhorred steroids and how he too had the courage of his convictions, competing against athletes who were openly taking them as they became more prevalent towards the end of his career.

It is no surprise to me that François and my dad hit it off: They were two peas in a pod and both men of tremendous physical strength, character, and integrity.

François went on to compete in natural contests, placing third in the Mr. Universe in 1991 and then winning it in 1992. Then, after a seven-year hiatus, he competed in the 1999 Masters Mr. Olympia, which he won. It was a great way to end his career, as he went out on a high.

I can only recommend reading Mind over Matter. I believe it is a must for anyone who wants to gain knowledge and

insight into how to train healthily, intelligently, and safely for years to come.

Hats off to you, François. You're a TRUE Champion!

Jon Jon Park  
Celebrity personal trainer  
Former Olympic swimmer

## **Foreword by Franco Carlotto**

I first met Francois in 1989, when I was 16 years old. He did a guest appearance at the first gym I ever worked out in my hometown Oberuzwil back in Switzerland. To say I was impressed is an understatement. He personified everything a true champion stands for. Not just his physique was impressive, but also his character and how he communicated with everybody, not just me. He is genuine, friendly, passionate, supportive, and strong!

I've met many champions in my life, but nobody has personified the true bodybuilding lifestyle, like Francois did and still does to this very day! Reading his book took me back in time to my own beginnings in this wonderful sport. It embodies what really matters above all else in an ever increasing shallow and confusing industry: living and breathing bodybuilding naturally and without any pretense.

There are many champions-but few are true "Life Champions," and François would be a record-holder if such a title existed. Read his book and listen to his story, which he is now sharing in full for the first time ever, a story which even to me is surprising and moving. I know you will be tremendously inspired, however old you are and whatever your bodybuilding aspirations.

Most importantly, his story and "code of bodybuilding and life" will teach you how to be a champion in life as well. We desperately need more Earthlings like François, now than ever before in our evolution.

I am proud to have stayed close friends with François for over 30 years and still look up to him like that 16-year-old kid meeting him for the first time, at the beginnings of my own journey in the fitness and bodybuilding world.

Franco Carlotto  
Natural for Life Athlete  
Three-time Junior Mr. Switzerland  
Six-time Mr. World Fitness WFF

## **Foreword by Ralf Moeller**

I met François Gay in the early eighties, when we were both chasing the Mr. Universe crown year after year. In 1986, in Tokyo, I finally won the title while François took the runner-up spot.

Once fierce competitors, we later became friends, which we've remained ever since. We followed each other's careers and continually supported each other. François lives and breathes bodybuilding, and I am thrilled that he is now sharing his expertise in his first-ever book.

Reading *Mind Over Matter*, will not only teach you firsthand what to do to adhere to a healthy, fulfilling lifestyle but it will also inspire you to believe in yourself and to achieve whatever you've dreamed of".

Ralf Moeller  
Actor and Mr. Universe



## Introduction

Dear reader,

First of all, I would like to thank you for showing an interest in this book! Like a tattoo idea that matures in your mind for some time before your skin is marked with indelible ink, the idea of writing this book was present in my mind for years, until it reached the point where I felt that it had to materialize! My dearest wish is that you will have as much fun reading it as I did writing it!

There are hundreds of great books about training and nutrition out there, not to mention the incredible volume of information available on the internet. You don't know something? Just google it! Be aware though that not everything you read on the World Wide Web is written by real experts. Often it is rather the work of self-proclaimed gurus. Although I'll treat these two interesting subjects in two dedicated chapters, I had something else in mind that I considered far more important than my thoughts about the bench press or the perfect recipe for Bircher muesli, the famous Swiss breakfast. My goal was to share with you the story of my journey through the world of bodybuilding, from the early years through my victory at the Natural Mr. Universe up until today.

After only two years of training, at the age of 21, I dreamed about becoming the world's best natural bodybuilder. I dared to dream big, even though I had a severe back problem, my genetic potential was average, and I had no clue whatsoever about muscle building. All I had was the burning desire to succeed. No matter what people around

me thought or said, I felt unstoppable! The road to the title wasn't always as smooth as silk, and at times I had moments of doubt. I had to deal with obstacles and setbacks along the way, but I always found the inner strength to get back on my feet and to keep moving forward. Except for one incident that occurred in 1991, the thought of giving up never crossed my mind.

What I want you to take away from this book is to be found between the lines. It is about unleashing your potential and living your dreams. No matter what your passion and goal might be, or how crazy people think you are, dare to make your own path, work hard, never lose focus, and, whatever stands in your way, never, ever give up! Know that there are no limits to what you can achieve if you believe in yourself and are willing to put in the hard work!

I ignored those who laughed at me and said I would never make it, that I was just a dreamer! Instead, I put my heart and soul into it! Twelve years later, as I was holding my Mr. Universe trophy, it was me who had the last laugh!

When you turn the last page of this book, I want you to feel inspired to follow your dreams and to start your own journey. We have one life and only one chance to make it worthwhile. Grab it by the horns and make sure that one day, YOU too will have the last laugh!

Now buckle up and enjoy the ride!

***When the going gets tough, first your body will want to give up; then your mind will say “I can't do this!” At that point, the only thing that can keep you going is your heart.***

François Gay

## **Chapter 01: A Quiet Youth and Turbulent Teens**

I grew up together with my older brother Christian and my younger sister Isabelle in Coppet, a small town in the French part of Switzerland, on the shores of Lake Geneva. Luckily, my parents' home was on the water, so I could swim or fish whenever I wanted. I have a very special relationship with my sister Isabelle, who is affected by Down syndrome. Since the very first day I laid eyes on her in February 1969, I felt that we shared a very special bond. I knew right away that I would do whatever was possible to be the best brother I could be and to protect her in every way I could.

Switzerland is a beautiful place to live. The countryside is breathtaking, the economy is thriving, and it has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. One particularity of Switzerland is that we have four national languages: The most widely spoken is Swiss German, followed by French in the west, Italian in the south, and Romansh in a very small region in the east of the country. As a little kid, I studied hard and stayed out of trouble, spending most of my free time on my uncle's farm, located not far from our home. But at 13, I turned into a wild teenager. I was hungry for adventure and fascinated by everything that was forbidden—from shoplifting with my buddies, to “borrowing” my mom's scooter without her permission, to skipping school and smoking in the woods. You name it, I did it!

I couldn't wait to finally turn 14. Fourteen was a magical age, because, in Switzerland, it was the legal age for riding a scooter of max. 50 cc (just a little over 3 c.i.) at a speed limit of 30 km/h (20 mph). In the meantime, I was spending all my free time riding my bicycle with my best friends. We stuck playing cards onto the rear frame with clothespins, so

that whenever a spoke hit the card, it would make the sound of a motorcycle engine. This made riding our bicycles much cooler, giving us the feeling that they were the real thing.

Shortly after I turned 14, my mother started letting me use her little scooter from time to time. It was a red Italian two-wheeler called "Ciao," with a 49 cc engine, which she used to get to the local school, where she taught typing and stenography. My brother and I decided that it was bit too slow, however, so one night, while our parents were out for dinner, we tuned up the little engine, by modifying the carburetor and the piston. This power enhancement gave the little Italian scooter a nice boost.

At lunch the next day, my mom wondered out loud what had happened to her scooter and why it was suddenly running so well. She looked at me very suspiciously, while I did my best to look innocent.

As soon as I reached the legal age to ride, I wanted a little bike of my own. With money saved up from my summer jobs-not to mention a little help from my parents-I bought a little, red two-speed scooter. To me, my mini-bike meant freedom: the freedom to go wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Now I could get to "The Beach" in 10 minutes. The Beach was a bar down on the waterfront and our favorite hang-out. There we would swim in the lake, play pinball for hours on end, meet girls, smoke, and drink bière panachée (beer mixed with Sprite).

It was around that time that I had my first encounter with bodybuilding. Although I didn't know it at the time, it was a moment that would change the course of my life completely. One hot summer afternoon, I was waiting with my mother at the train station for my cousin, who was going to spend the weekend at our place. The train was a bit late, so we had some time to kill. Browsing the titles at the local newsstand, the cover of a French muscle magazine caught my

attention. On the front page was an extremely muscular man striking a pose and showing off his amazing, bulging muscles. I had no clue who the guy on the cover was, but his physique impressed me so much that I couldn't tear my eyes away from the picture. My mother asked me what I was staring at, so I showed her the “muscleman” in green posing trunks on the magazine cover.

My mom wasn't impressed: “I hope you don't think that looks good, François. It's gross, unnatural, and totally exaggerated!” I answered: “I think he looks amazing, Mom... Just look at the size of his arms!!!”

I can't really say that I thought it looked good, but I did find it extremely impressive. Only the superheroes in my comic books looked like that! My favorite was Rahan, an extremely muscular, prehistoric warrior. But the ripped bodybuilder on that magazine cover wasn't a fictional character. He was made of flesh, and warm human blood ran through his veins. He was undeniably human—and yet, to me, he looked superhuman. I had never thought it possible for someone to look anything like that. His name, as it turned out, was Casey Viator, and he was the youngest man to ever win the prestigious AAU Mr. America title, at the age of 19. If someone had told me at the time that I would go on to meet him in person in California 10 years later, I would have thought they were crazy.

My little red scooter was in stock condition and looked kind of boring. What bothered me most of all was that it just wasn't fast enough. Luckily, it didn't take long for me to customize the scooter and tune up the small engine. First, I changed the carburetor jet and mounted a bigger sprocket. Then, I modified the piston and the exhaust system. Now we were talking! It was about 10 mph faster and much louder than before!

After upgrading the engine, I wanted to make it look cooler, like “Captain America,” Fonda’s chopper in the movie Easy Rider. So I replaced the original seat with a more streamlined version, added in some chrome parts, mounted an “ape hanger” (a high handlebar), and raised the front end by changing the fork tube springs, in order to give it the finishing touch. Needless to say, all these changes were totally illegal, and it didn’t take long for the local police to get on my tail big time. One day, when I was riding full-throttle, I could see two police bikes in my rearview mirror following me—and, this time, there was no way I could get away. The cops pulled me over and checked every damn screw on my scooter. When they were done examining all the little details, one of the policemen went for a test ride. When he came back, I saw the look on his face and knew I was in deep trouble. In addition to all the illegal parts I had installed, my scooter was way too fast, with a top speed of more than 60 km/h! The police escorted me back to the precinct and I had to walk home from there. A few weeks later, I received a letter telling me that I could pick up what was left of my pride and joy. Sadly, all I got back was the frame and a handful of parts.

The local police parked their big BMW motorcycles right next to our house and I remember spending hours looking at them, in awe of the incredible 750 cc (45 c.i.) engine displacement, which was quite impressive for the time. There was something about those bikes that I didn’t like though. Besides the letter “P” on the gas tank, they had big, ugly rubber seats that made them look very clunky. Nevertheless, my fascination for big bikes was starting to grow.

Soon enough, I acquired my first real motorcycle—an old, tuned-up 125 cc Suzuki dirt bike. Of course, I didn’t have a driver’s license and the bike didn’t have a license plate, but that didn’t stop me from taking my younger sister Isabelle

along for night rides whenever my parents were out. One morning, my mother asked me out of the blue if I owned a motorcycle. What I didn't know was that our neighbor had called my mother to tell her that she had seen me riding at high speed the night before, with Isabelle sitting on the gas tank of my bike and neither of us wearing helmets. I denied everything for at least 10 minutes, before finally giving in and confessing. I promised my mom that I would sell the bike, but in the back of my mind, I knew that it would not be my last motorcycle.

Although I didn't take particularly good care of my health, I was in pretty good shape, weighing around 150 pounds with low body fat. My abs were showing, and I guess I started to be a little body conscious. I remember seeing a photo taken by my uncle at the pool. It showed me shirtless from behind. It was the first time I had ever seen my back in a photo, and I remember being a bit proud of the tiny muscles that were visible under my skin.

There was a strange guy in our village who didn't talk to anyone and who everybody considered a bit of a weirdo. I would see him once in a while on my way home from school. He had very good posture, usually only wore shorts, and always went barefoot from spring to fall. He looked old to me, with his long, thick, black beard—but thinking back, he must only have been around 50. To be honest, he scared me a little, but I was fascinated by his physique. He was lean and extremely muscular, with thick veins bulging out from his arms. Those thick, sinewy veins made his forearms look like a road map. When I walked past him, I was too shy to say hi, so I just stared at his impressive upper body. One day, I saw him standing in front of an old wooden door, under the arches of our village's main street, and I finally worked up the courage to say hello. I imagine we must have had a short conversation, but I was way too impressed by his presence and muscular body to remember anything.



Around the age of 16, my favorite sports were downhill skiing, tennis, and scuba diving. During the winter and over the Easter holidays, my brother Christian and I worked as ski instructors in Crans-Montana, a ski resort in the Swiss Alps. In addition to making some pocket money, we got to wear the highly sought-after red jacket with a white stripe, which was great for a number of reasons: There was no more waiting in line on the way to the ski slopes and, most importantly, we received a lot of attention from girls. During the summer months, I loved to play tennis with my cousins and, when nobody was available, I practiced alone for hours against a concrete wall. I never took a single lesson, but the practice alone gave me quite a good feel for the ball.

Another thing that fascinated me was the underwater world. My interest began as a kid with snorkeling, which was followed by a spearfishing phase, and finally my diving certification. I even wrote a letter to the famous oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, asking him how to become a marine biologist. To my parents' surprise- and mine too!-it didn't take long for me to receive a letter from Monaco in which Commandant Cousteau gave me tips on how to pursue a career in that field.

The only problem was that my grades were, to say the least, not particularly promising. There was good reason for this: I just went to the classes I was interested in and didn't do too much homework. Instead, I was out partying, looking for trouble, and smoking and drinking way too much with my buddies, especially on weekends. I didn't like the taste of alcohol, but, for me, it was more about reaching a state of euphoria. Drinking relaxed and disinhibited me, so that it was easier to hit the dance floor and flirt with girls. More than once, I took things too far and ended up doing stupid stuff. I remember once knocking on our front door at 4 am, wearing only my pants and barely able to walk. Hours earlier I had stolen a scooter in Geneva and somehow

managed to ride 15 miles home without a headlight. It was my father who opened the door. To put it mildly, he wasn't very happy.

On another occasion, I was involved in a bad accident while driving a car that a friend had "borrowed" from his father, without a driver's license. I was very lucky not to be severely injured. I crashed into a tree, and the car was very badly damaged. We took it to a local body shop to get fixed. I had no money, so I worked the whole summer just to pay off the bill. I got a job at our favorite hangout, The Beach, which was perfect for making some money, while at the same time having fun. The upside was that my buddies no longer needed to pay for their drinks! While cleaning up the restaurant's terrace shirtless on a hot summer day, a guy I had never seen before said to me: "You look pretty strong. I've got a better job for you. I own a moving company and I'll pay you 100 dollars a day if you work for me!"

I accepted his offer right away and was actually pleasantly surprised that somebody had even noticed my physique. I was still kind of skinny, so it was probably my low body fat that made me look a little more muscular than I actually was.

My best buddy at school, René, was originally from Panama. He was good-looking and very athletic, despite the fact that he smoked 40 cigarettes a day! He was also known for drinking heavily. I've seen him drink a whole bottle of rum in just one shot. Very often, René and I would leave school and spend the whole day in pool halls perfecting our trick shots. René was a very talented player and taught me eight-ball pool. He was also a bit older than me and owned a 125 cc motorcycle. He was a highly skilled rider and rarely used the brake lever. One day, we were riding his blue Yamaha pretty fast through downtown Geneva. René maneuvered his bike to overtake a car in front of us, but

there just wasn't enough space between the car and the sidewalk. I was sitting at the back and saw the inevitable crash coming, so I instinctively jumped off the bike, which was traveling at around 35 miles an hour. By some miracle, I was okay except for some bruises, but René was in bad shape. He had an open leg fracture—to this day, I can still see in my mind the white bone jutting out of his front leg. He lay on the street with his lower leg twisted around the gear shifter, but he was still smiling with his usual coolness and asked me for a smoke. René was a great guy who lived life in the fast lane, in every sense of the word. Unfortunately, he died a few years later, after crashing his sports car head-on into an oncoming truck. We hadn't seen each other much the year before the accident, but his tragic death hit me very hard.

By this stage, my parents were quite worried about me, so one day they decided that the time had come to do something about the situation. And what could be better than a religious boarding school to teach me some discipline? I was definitely not enthusiastic about the idea—to say the least—but this time my opinion didn't count for much. Before I knew it, my father had scheduled an appointment with the principal.

When we got to the school, my stomach started cramping up. The place looked more like a jail than an abbey to me. The building was built right beside the mountain face and was made of stone. It reminded me of a medieval fortress. Everything was gray and dark, and even though it was a beautiful, sunny day, it got colder as we approached the building. Dressed all in black, the principal explained to us for about an hour in a monotone voice what the rules were and what my daily life would be like, if I were to enter the abbey as a resident. I don't think I said a word during the whole meeting, but just hoped that we could get out of there as soon as possible and never come back.

On the way home, I didn't even have to convince my parents that we should consider other options. My dad showed some mercy and discussed other possibilities with my mom. A few weeks later, we found a business school in Geneva that was willing to accept me. I just had to learn how to use a typewriter and I could sit the entry exam. I spent the whole summer attending a typing course. I was the only guy in a classroom of around 30 girls so "studying" turned out to be a lot of fun. Nevertheless, in the fall of 1977, I successfully passed the exam and was admitted to the school.

In early 1978, my back started giving me trouble. Once, when I was taking a bath, a sharp pain, like a bolt of lightning, suddenly paralyzed my whole body. I was unable to make the slightest movement and had to call my mother for help. My lumbar area was in constant pain and it was clear that I needed medical care. This was an entirely new experience for me. I had never before been sick or had health issues of any kind. The diagnosis was clear: I was suffering from a pinched nerve due to scoliosis. Scoliosis is a medical condition in which the spine curves sideways. Several members of my family had the same issue with their backs, and it is known to be genetically transmitted from one generation to the next. The doctor said that there was not much I could do at my age to correct it, except to build up my back and core muscles in order to relieve the symptoms. Building muscle sounded like music to my ears. Was it possible that I had just found a way to join a gym and get my parents to pay for it?

***“Find your passion and have a clear vision of what you want. Put your heart and soul into it and you will be rewarded no matter what!”***

## **Chapter 02: Discovering My Passion**

Without wasting a minute, I started to look for a gym. One of my classmates told me about the fitness center where he trained and asked if I was interested in checking it out. The gym was located in downtown Geneva near the Pont du Mont-Blanc, one of the city’s greatest landmarks. When I entered the premises, I noticed right away that it was more of a “fitness palace” than a standard gym. A staff member showed me around the facility, which definitely confirmed my first impression. There was quite a large wellness area, with a beautiful pool, jacuzzi, sauna, and even a restaurant serving health food. But all I really wanted to see was the workout area. I wasn’t disappointed: It was very spacious, with loads of chromed weight machines and quite an impressive dumbbell rack. After the guided tour, the saleswoman did a great job of convincing me, in only a few minutes, to become a member. The next thing I knew, I had an appointment with a coach!

The next day, I met Marie-Lou, a warm and friendly fitness instructor. Marie-Lou was extremely fit, slim, and muscular, in addition to displaying amazing flexibility. She examined my back, asked me a few preliminary questions and took my measurements. After leading me in a short warm-up, she proceeded to show me a few exercises using the machines, as well as free weights. She chose weights that I could easily handle and told me to focus above all on using proper form while executing the movements.

Right from the start, I loved the feeling of my muscles contracting against the resistance. Although it might look pretty boring from the outside, it was the most exhilarating thing I had ever experienced! With each additional repetition, more blood rushed into the muscle groups I was targeting, engorging them and slightly increasing their size. That satisfying sensation of muscular tightness that is so difficult to describe is called “the pump.” It is, without a doubt, one of the things that makes “pumping iron” so unique.

Sitting on the train on the way home, I remember feeling on top of the world. I was still unaware of it, but I’d been bitten by the “iron bug”-big time! I remember thinking: “This is it! This is what I want to do!” The next day I was back in the gym, doing set after set of the exercises Marie-Lou had taught me the day before.

Marie-Lou was married to a famous French bodybuilder called Bernard Lambert. Bernard had won both national French titles in every division and the European Championships. He had competed on the same stage as the legendary Arnold Schwarzenegger, along with other greats, such as the actor and Mr. Universe Serge Nubret, aka “The Black Panther.”

One morning, while I was getting ready for my workout, Bernard walked into the locker room. He was the first bodybuilder I had ever seen in the flesh! He had broad, muscular shoulders, pecs that reminded me of a gladiator’s body armor, and mind-blowing arms. Not only did he look great-he also looked incredibly strong, as if no weight was too heavy for him to lift. As I stared at him, lost for words, he smiled back at me and spontaneously introduced himself. Bernard and I connected right away. We chatted a little and after a while he asked me what my goal was. I answered: “A