

A weight lifted

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One morning in January 2005, Roach awoke in a darkened world. His vision had been impaired since infancy due to the effects of a rare, potentially fatal disease called Stevens-Johnson Syndrome.

He had learned how to cope with an extreme sensitivity to light that would cause his corneas to blister and his vision to cloud.

But on this January morning nearly four years ago something was profoundly wrong.

A dark fog had enshrouded Roach's world and it wouldn't lift. He could still see vague shapes around his Waterloo home, but barely.

By the end of that day, the fog had become a permanent, impenetrable blackness.

Within that blackness he faced a choice: either quit writing the book or learn an entirely new way of writing. He chose the latter.

Through trial and error—frequent, infuriating error—Roach learned how to read and write with his ears, using computer software that intones aloud every letter as he types it.

Roach has never seen the cover of his own book, though a framed, enlarged version hangs on the wall above his computer monitor.

Nor has he read, in the traditional sense, any of the positive reviews the book has garnered. But he has heard them, spoken in his computer's robotic monotone:

"Unbelievably extensive research," praises David Epstein of *Sports Illustrated*.

"It's a seminal work in our world," raves John Balik, publisher of *Iron Man* magazine.

Such reviews have been the encouragement 49-year-old Roach has needed to embark on the next stage of his writing career: Volume 2 of *Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors*.

By the time Roach finishes the next volume, he will have penned more than 1,200 pages on the complete history of bodybuilding and fitness culture, from the turn of the 20th century through Schwarzenegger and beyond.

Writing the next instalment of *Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors* will require Roach to spend countless hours at his computer, listening to the robotic monotone read his words back to him.

But Roach isn't in his office right now.

He's in his basement, putting the principles of fitness and bodybuilding into practice.

And he's helping someone else navigate the darkness.

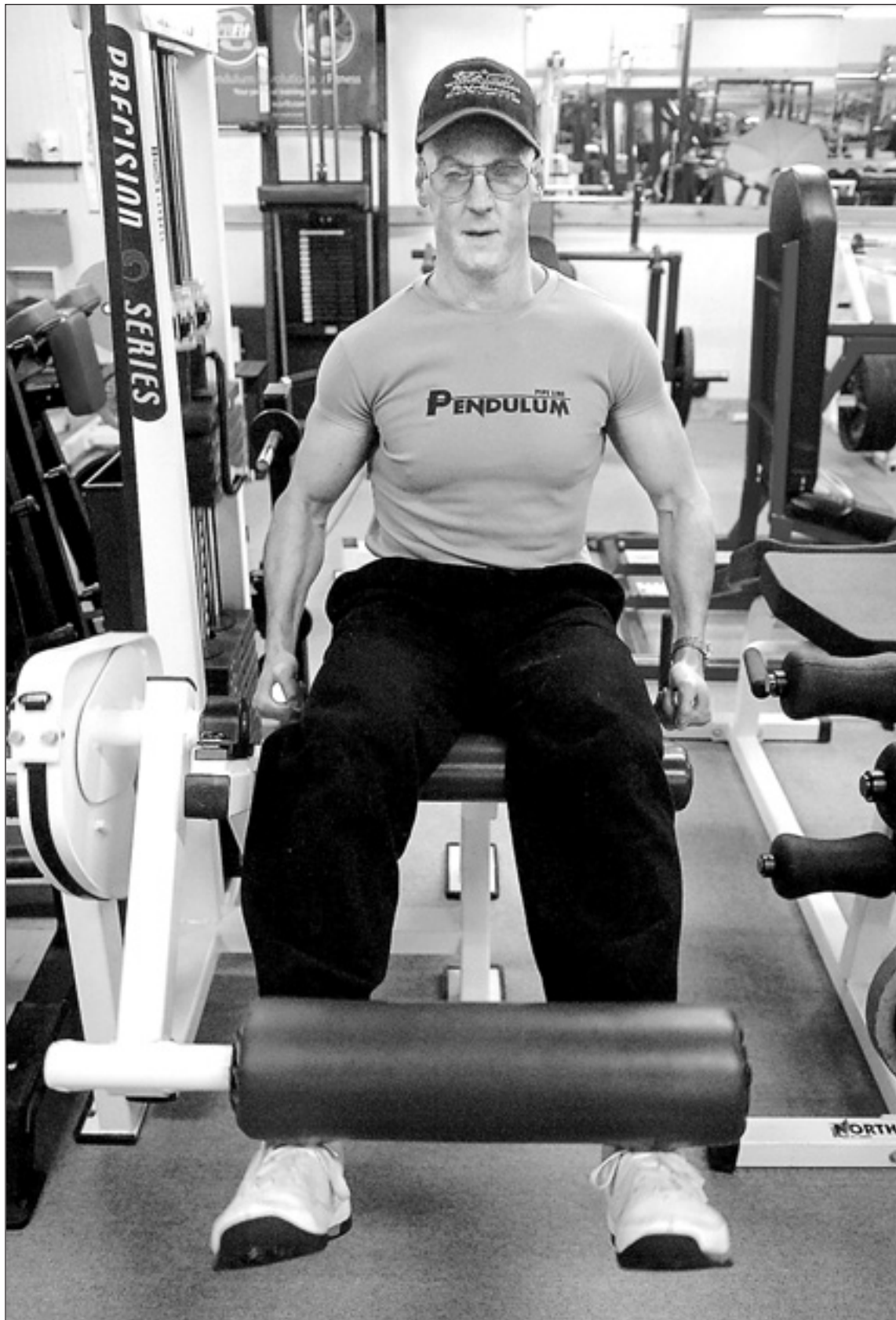
They stand in front of a mirror, trainer and trainee, though they cannot see their reflections.

"Come on," encourages Roach. "Five more reps. Four, three. . ."

Nadine Vertes is bent forward at the waist, raising and lowering a dumbbell with her right arm, as if slowly pulling a lawn mower starter cord.

Roach places his hand on Vertes' upper back, touching a spot on her

When Randy Roach lost his sight completely, he chose not to give up — neither his writing nor his work. 'I'm actually a better trainer now that I'm blind.'



Randy Roach works out in his basement gym where he also helps others as a personal fitness trainer.

sweatshirt near her right shoulder blade.

"I'm feeling the way her latissimus muscle rises and falls beneath her skin," he explains. "I can tell if the right muscles are being worked. I think I'm actually a better trainer now that I'm blind."

Vertes transfers the dumbbell to her left hand and repeats the motion. Roach slides his hand a few centimetres to the left on Vertes' sweatshirt.

"Good," Roach tells her. "Keep going. I can feel the muscle under my thumb."

On the basement floor, just beside where Roach and Vertes are standing, lie two white canes.

Without the canes, manoeuvring around the basement gym would be treacherous, especially for Vertes, who hasn't yet memorized the locations of the three dozen exercise machines Roach has accumulated over the past 20 years.

"This is a world-class gym," Roach says with obvious pride.

His body is evidence enough of this claim. He has six-pack abs, a barrel chest and bulging biceps he affectionately refers to as "the guns."

Roach has hosted several top bodybuilders in his home gym, as well as a small film crew who worked on a video with a bevy of

female fitness models.

"That's when I was really ticked off to be blind," he says. "I really would have liked to see that video shoot!"

When Roach lost his vision completely in 2005, his gym became a minefield of painful obstacles. He stopped offering personal training sessions to clients while he learned how to navigate the gym with a cane.

"I took a beating down here," he recalls. "I had big bruises all over me. I got so frustrated I threw a weight bench across the room."

Eventually he learned how to visualize the gym like a clock: the latissimus row machine is at 12

o'clock, the squat bar is at 6 o'clock, the triceps extension is at 3 o'clock and so on.

That's how he taught his newest student, 31-year-old Vertes, how to move through a workout.

Vertes has been blind since birth, born three months premature.

She has never seen her own reflection, but she knew she wanted to shed a few pounds for her own sense of well-being. She had signed up at conventional health clubs in the past but never stuck with it. The clubs were all too big, too noisy and too impersonal.

Then she heard about Roach, a blind personal trainer, and enrolled for one-on-one sessions.

"Because he can't see, he understands what I need," Vertes says between a set of biceps curls.

"This is a journey for me, and I can work through it with someone who understands what it's like."

Roach began bodybuilding as a teenager, mostly by default.

"I loved hockey as a kid," he recalls, "but I couldn't see the puck anymore."

He was an avid cyclist as well, but the pastime became too dangerous each time his vision took a downturn.

As his eyesight got progressively weaker, Roach decided to make the rest of his body stronger. He and his father, a welder by trade, built barbells and weight benches in their home.

Roach studied nutrition and adhered to a strict diet, partly to build muscle, and partly in the faint hope that the right nutrients would slow the deterioration of his eyes.

Shortly after his 40th birthday he achieved a 500-pound deadlift, a monstrous achievement for a weightlifter of any age.

A few years after that, Roach got a freelance writing assignment from a nutritional magazine—to write a brief history of "the iron game," as bodybuilding is known.

As a computer programmer by trade, he hadn't done much journalistic writing but began researching the topic out of curiosity.

"I had no idea what I was getting into," he recalls. "Nobody had written a definitive book on the subject."

Five years and hundreds of interviews later, Roach has now written that definitive volume.

And he did it after facing what many would consider an insurmountable hurdle—the loss of his vision.

"There was anger, frustration and stubbornness, but I knew I had to finish the book," Roach says.

"I had to learn how to work as a blind guy, and I did. Even if my sight comes back tomorrow, I'll continue to work as a blind guy. I've made it work for me."

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To learn more about *Muscle, Smoke & Mirrors* or to contact Randy Roach, visit www.randyroach.ca

Fear running deep for investors who trusted arrested trader

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According to his lawyers, Madoff was released on a \$10 million bond.

"Bernie Madoff is a long-standing leader in the financial services industry," said Daniel Horwitz, one of his lawyers. "He will fight to get through this unfortunate set of events."

The collapse of Madoff's company came just hours before his arrest. Vasilescu said a court-appointed receiver would secure the assets, funds and location of Madoff's businesses and "determine the scope of the misconduct."

Madoff's firm was one of five broker-dealers closely involved in developing the Nasdaq Stock Market, where he served as a member of the board of governors. At one point the firm was the largest market maker on the electronic market, regularly operating as both a buyer and seller. It employed hundreds of traders. Marc Powers, a former SEC enforcement branch chief and head of the securities practice at Baker Hostetler, said Madoff was "a very well-respected, highly regarded



RUBY WASHINGTON FILE PHOTO, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/NEW YORK TIMES

Trader Bernard L. Madoff was arrested on a securities fraud charge Thursday.

person" on Wall Street.

"Everybody heard of him," he said, noting his firm had received calls from investors yesterday worried about their future.

"There's a shell shock that's going on now. This ruins people's lives. It destroys whatever they built

up over 40 years at the hands of a person they trusted."

The Madoff funds attracted investors with the promise of high returns with low fees. One of his more prominent funds, the Fairfield Sentry fund, reported having \$7.3 billion in assets in October and claimed to have paid more than 11 per cent interest per year through its 15-year track record. One investor, Lawrence Velvel, 69, dean of the Massachusetts School of Law, said he and a friend may have lost millions of dollars between them.

Velvel said he listened to Madoff's employees explain how the firm made profits in good times and bad through computerized trading on blue-chip stocks and options, enabling small and steady profits on scores of trades.

"It made all the bloody sense in the world," he said. "The way we understood, they never went for the big hits. If you take a per cent here, a half per cent there, this can add up to what Madoff was saying."

Fear is running deep for investors, said Stephen A. Weiss, who said he had spoken to at least 30 of them.

Some of them had entrusted all of their savings to Madoff, who had delivered steady returns for decades.

"They were living comfortable lives and serene retirements, and by the late afternoon their lives were thrown into a spiral of horror," he said.

"These people are panicked. These people are sorrowful. These people are angry. And many are now destitute," Weiss said.

Competing hedge fund managers have wondered privately for years how Madoff generated such high returns, in bull markets and bear; given the generally low-yielding investment strategies he described to his clients.

"The numbers were too good to be true, for too long," said Girish Reddy, a managing director at Prisma Partners, an investment firm that invests in hedge funds. "And the supporting infrastructure was weak."

He said his firm had looked at the Madoff funds and decided against investing in them because their performance was too consistently positive, even in times when the market

was incredibly volatile.

But the essential drama is a personal one—one laid out in the dry language of a criminal complaint by Lev L. Dassin, the acting U.S. attorney in Manhattan, and a regulatory lawsuit filed by the SEC.

According to those documents, the first alarm bells rang at the firm on Tuesday, when Madoff told a senior executive he wanted to pay his employees their annual bonuses in December, two months early.

Just days earlier, he had told another senior executive he was struggling to raise cash to cover about \$7 billion in requested withdrawals from his clients, and he had appeared "to have been under great stress in the prior weeks," according to the SEC complaint.

So on Wednesday, the senior executive visited Madoff's office, maintained on a separate floor with records kept under lock and key, and asked for an explanation.

Instead, Madoff invited the two executives to his Manhattan apartment that evening. When they joined him there, he told them that

his money-management business was "all just one big lie" and "basically, a giant Ponzi scheme."

The senior employees understood him to be saying that he had for years been paying returns to certain investors out of the cash received from other investors.

In that conversation, according to the criminal complaint, Madoff "stated that he was 'finished,' that he had 'absolutely nothing.'"

By this account, Madoff told the executives he intended to surrender to the authorities in about a week but first wanted to distribute approximately \$200 million to \$300 million to "certain selected employees, family and friends."

On Thursday morning, however, he was arrested on a single count of securities fraud, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$5 million. According to the SEC, Madoff confessed to an FBI agent that there was "no innocent explanation" for his behaviour and said he expected to go to jail.

New York Times news service with files from The Associated Press