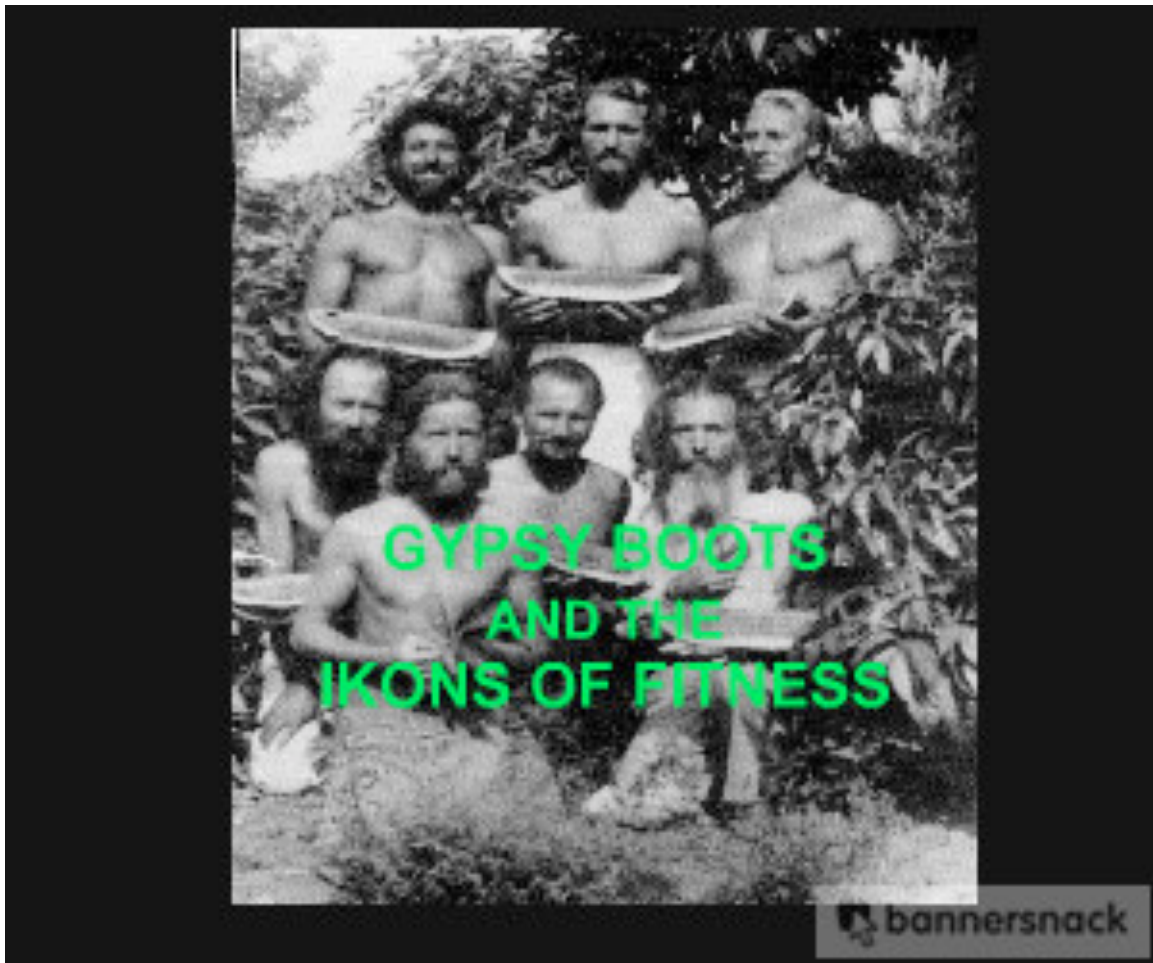


WRITING SAMPLE



This article was published as the cover story in *Mature Living* in Palm Springs, a magazine devoted to the mature life style. A photographic montage of Gypsy Boots and other ikons of fitness were featured on the cover.

**GYPSY BOOTS
AND
THE IKONS OF FITNESS**
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They play polo. They go swimming in packs in frigid oceans and lakes. They fly and jump out of airplanes. They throw footballs so hard it hurts when a non-professional dares to catch it. They have vigorous daily exercise routines. When they are sick, they fast; if not, they run or walk for miles. Who are they and what do they have in common? They are a small group of men, who, in their eighties or beyond, lived or live a fabulously healthy lifestyle. They were the founders of the physical culture and health movements in the United States, a movement that has touched many parts of the world and gave birth to many types of health and fitness industries. They are the icons of fitness.

Take this man. He is now in his nineties. He has white hair and a white beard but still throws a football like a bullet. His name is Gypsy Boots and he tours the country, as an icon of fitness, with his cousin, Charlie Fox, selling his autobiography and promoting Wakunaga of America (odor-less garlic) products, whose flagship product is Kyolic Garlic. He is one of a small group of men who created the health, nutrition and fitness industry. He was a co-creator and contributor to the work of Paul Bragg, Dick Gregory, Bernarr Macfadden, Jack LaLanne- the pioneers of a physical culture movement whose constituents were icons of longevity, strength and health. James F. Scheer, editor of "Health Freedom News," has written this riveting description of Gypsy, "You have to look at least twice, because you can't believe what you saw the first time! Spare as Jack Sprat, crackling-with-electric energy, sun browned with long wild, white hair and a beard bristly enough to scour a burnt-on cooking pan, legendary."

Gypsy has come to the Desert many times, particularly to promote his products at Nature's RX. He is the product of an era that re-discovered nature at a time when food products were being consumed by chemicals and technology. And, probably as much as any other part of this new physical culture movement, he tried to live this way of life to the fullest, actually living outside and picking and growing his own wild food. He was a prototype for the song, "Nature Boy," and, in his youth, hung out with a band of friends, dedicated to this raw and wild lifestyle.

Patricia Bragg, whose father was Paul Bragg, is one of Gypsy's sponsors. Patricia continues her father's work throughout the world. Paul Bragg, whose work has had perhaps one of the greatest impacts of all the icons of fitness, was playing polo in his eighties and still attending Polar Bear Clubs, where men would tempt fate and support their circulation by taking freezing

cold dips in the icy Pacific during the winter. Paul Bragg made many contributions to the physical culture movement. In a way, you could say he made many contributions to modern civilization.

For instance, Paul Bragg developed the first Health Food store in America and initiated an industry that has never stopped growing. When you see Mrs. Gooches, GNC or local health food stores like Nature's RX or Oasis, you are seeing the result of Paul Bragg's work. He also opened the first health-oriented restaurants, during the depression in New York City. He opened the first health spa here with Bernarr Macfadden, whose legendary contributions including the first bodybuilding magazines and contests. Bragg imported the first juicers from Germany and launched juicing in America. When you see Jay Kordich the Juiceman's ads, you are seeing the inspiration of Paul Bragg.

Besides all these projects, Bragg was a great health crusader and inspired many through his lectures and crusades. One of the most famous is Jack LaLanne, currently an advisor to the gerontology department of John F. Kennedy Hospital in Indio. As Jack says in his official website, (<http://www.jacklalanne.com>) "As a kid," Jack flatly states, "I was a sugarholic. I was a junk food junkie! It made me weak and it made me mean. It made me sick. I had boils, pimples, and I was nearsighted. Little girls used to beat me up! Mom prayed...the church prayed. At the age of 15 when I heard pioneer nutritionist Paul Bragg speak at the Oakland City Womens' Club in the San Francisco bay area, I finally realized that I was addicted to sugar." Bragg promised him a new body and a new life if he would stop eating sugar and begin to exercise.

Jack LaLanne opened the first prototype of the modern gym in 1936. He says, "People thought I was a charlatan and a nut," Jack says. "The doctors were against me - they said that working out with weights would give people heart attacks and they would lose their sex drive; women would look like men. Even the coaches predicted that athletes would get muscle bound and didn't want them to work out with weights. I had to give them keys so they could come in at night and work out." In addition to opening the gym and teaching people in his new methods, LaLanne helped develop some of the early technology of modern fitness including the first weight selectors, the first leg extension machine, the first pulley machines using cables.

Another man inspired by Paul Bragg was the comedian and committed civil rights activist, Dick Gregory. I saw Dick Gregory at the “hungry i” in San Francisco where his confrontational racist humor unnerved me, a burgeoning activist soon to be inspired by the work of the then Robert Moses and the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee and Martin Luther King. But in many ways, Gregory, a big overweight man, continually puffing on an equally overweight cigar, was ahead of his time. Eventually, Gregory wound up in jail, where he stumbled on a book called “The Miracle of Fasting,” a book which changed his life. This book, which inspired many people, became the basis of a change of diet and lifestyle, which startled those who knew him. Gregory utilized his fasting and new nutrition to lose dozens of pounds and become known as a thin, determined marathon runner, activist and founder of a health dynasty in his own right, the Bahamian diet.

Although what LaLanne did was ground-breaking, he and Paul Bragg were undoubtedly inspired by another icon of fitness, the controversial, Bernarr Macfadden, who like them, started out as a poorly nourished, weak child and became one of the legends of fitness. Overhearing a relative’s comment that he looked so sickly, he would probably die soon, Bernarr launched a private campaign for fitness that would impact on thousands, if not millions of people. He began taking long walks and began to work out with dumbbells. Soon, he started to work out as a gymnast and became attracted to wrestling, where, although small in stature, proceeded to win matches with heavyweight wrestlers, exhibiting his newly found showmanship, a trait which helped him launch many large scale projects. Around 1887, long before LaLanne, he started his first fitness studio, where he titled himself, "Bernarr Mcfadden - Kinestherapist - Teacher of Higher Physical Culture."

Desiring to improve his literacy, he began to work at a military academy in Bunker Hill, Illinois as a football and wrestling coach in exchange for tuition. During this time, he had a novel published, “The Athlete’s Conquest,” the first of many successful publishing efforts. At this time, he started to promote wrestling and boxing matches and to develop his special therapies, like the other icons of fitness in this article. This included diets and fasts, hydrotherapy, massages, even a form of bone manipulation.

After this, he went to New York and began the most significant part of his career. He set himself up as a physical culture specialist and trainer and began to publish small booklets on his ideas and his art. He began to promote wrestling again and to compete as a wrestler. Ever bolder, he went

on a tour of Europe, where he solicited subscriptions for what became the first physical culture magazine. This magazine, called "Physical Culture" was begun in March 1999, originally selling for a nickel and was published for fifty years. He eventually developed a woman's magazine, as well, called "Beauty and Health."

Macfadden ultimately became the first promoter of body building exhibitions and contests, in which both men and women participated. Macfadden went on to develop a whole community, Physical Culture City, devoted to his way of life. In Battle Creek, Michigan, he formed a sanitarium, which he later moved to Chicago. He formed the "Bernarr Macfadden Institute" where he trained future coaches, trainers and therapists in his methods of physical culture. He developed a chain of "healthy" restaurants and had at least twenty restaurants active at one time.

Unfortunately, during this time, Macfadden had to absorb the cost of a few expensive lawsuits, resulting from one of his exhibitions, which was deemed as potentially lewd. . In 1907, he was arrested for publishing "obscene material" in his magazine, an article that dared to openly discuss venereal disease. Incensed by his arrest, he campaigned for his cause and managed to get a Presidential pardon from Taft two years later.

But Macfadden never gave up. His trip to Europe procured him a wife and ultimately a large family, which he proceeded to promote on radio and in print as the icons of physical culture. But true to the challenges he faced in all things, his English wife, Mary, ultimately divorced him, taking his authoritarianism to task in her book, "Dumbbells and Carrot Strips." But despite his family difficulties and some other business difficulties, Macfadden was still riding the wave of fortune and as a spin-off of some stories regarding readers who had overcome difficulties, he published a new magazine called, "True Story," the first in a series of magazines, slightly off the physical culture track, like "True Detective," "Midnight" and "Photoplay," which created a massive circulation that even overtook that of William Randolph Hearst's. Besides publishing magazines, Macfadden wrote books throughout his life, taking on problems such as diabetes, hair growth, natural sexuality, strengthening the spine, preventing eye damage.

When he was eighty-one, somewhat after his fourth marriage to a lady who was forty-four, he decided to celebrate with a parachute jump. He did this for a few birthdays after that. After all, he had gotten his airplane license at

61 and flying around in his airplane had probably gotten a little boring over the last twenty years. He kept up his physical exercise during this time, especially his favorite of standing on his head for prolonged periods of time. Macfadden was a true pioneer and, in some way, his is probably the inspiration for many of the icons of fitness that I have mentioned in this article.

This article does not attempt to collate all the stories, all the history or all the names of the men and women who have contributed to this movement. But it should allow one to question some of the assumptions one might make about what aging really means and the hidden potential that exists in all of us.