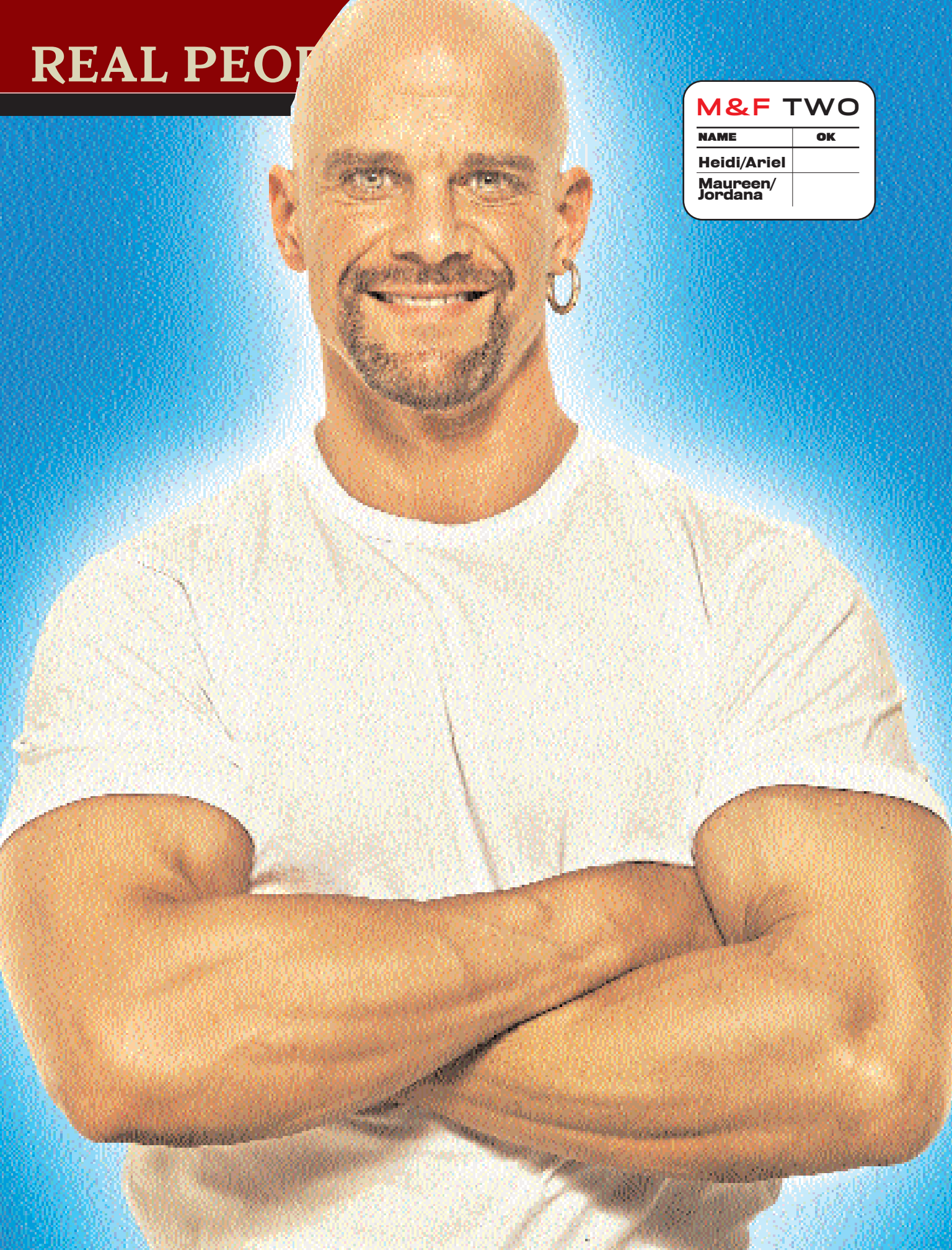


REAL PEOPLE



M&F TWO	
NAME	OK
Heidi/Ariel	
Maureen/Jordana	

**Industrial
Strength**

Mr. Clean

PHOTO BY
SACHA WALDMAN

WORDS BY (JEFF O'CONNELL)

CAUTION:
A GARBAGE MAN,
A PREACHER, AND A
BODYBUILDER – THIS
IS NOT THE START OF A
BARROOM JOKE, IT'S
JOE ALLEGRO'S RESUME

REVEREND JOE ALLEGRO has hoisted more tonnage than Lee Haney, Dorian Yates and Ronnie Coleman combined, many times over. That's not counting the weight he manhandles in the gym, where the holy terror benches and squats 315 for reps.

No miracles here — the 43-year-old is a 14-year veteran of the New York City Department of Sanitation. This morning, though, he's supervising trash collection as he maneuvers a standard-issue Ford Taurus around a neighborhood in Flushing, Queens, on the lookout for one of his trucks. Dressed in a green uniform, with a single earring punctuating his shaved head, the sanitation supervisor is a dead ringer, ironically, for none other than Mr. Clean, America's favorite household-products icon, not to mention one of the "Sexiest Men Alive" (or so said *People* magazine back in '98).

Allegro may be called upon to ticket an abandoned vehicle or serve a summons for an improper disposal, but his main responsibility is making sure the two-man crews on his watch complete their routes, leaving no trash-can lid unturned. His is one small square in a multilayered chess match that unfolds every weekday across the five boroughs of New York City, involving an armada of trash and recycling trucks, 5,000 or so uniformed sanitation workers, mountains of refuse, and unexpected obstacles like traffic jams and bad weather.

Driving down the street, Allegro nods toward the line of lids before him. "I love empty pails," he says, smiling.

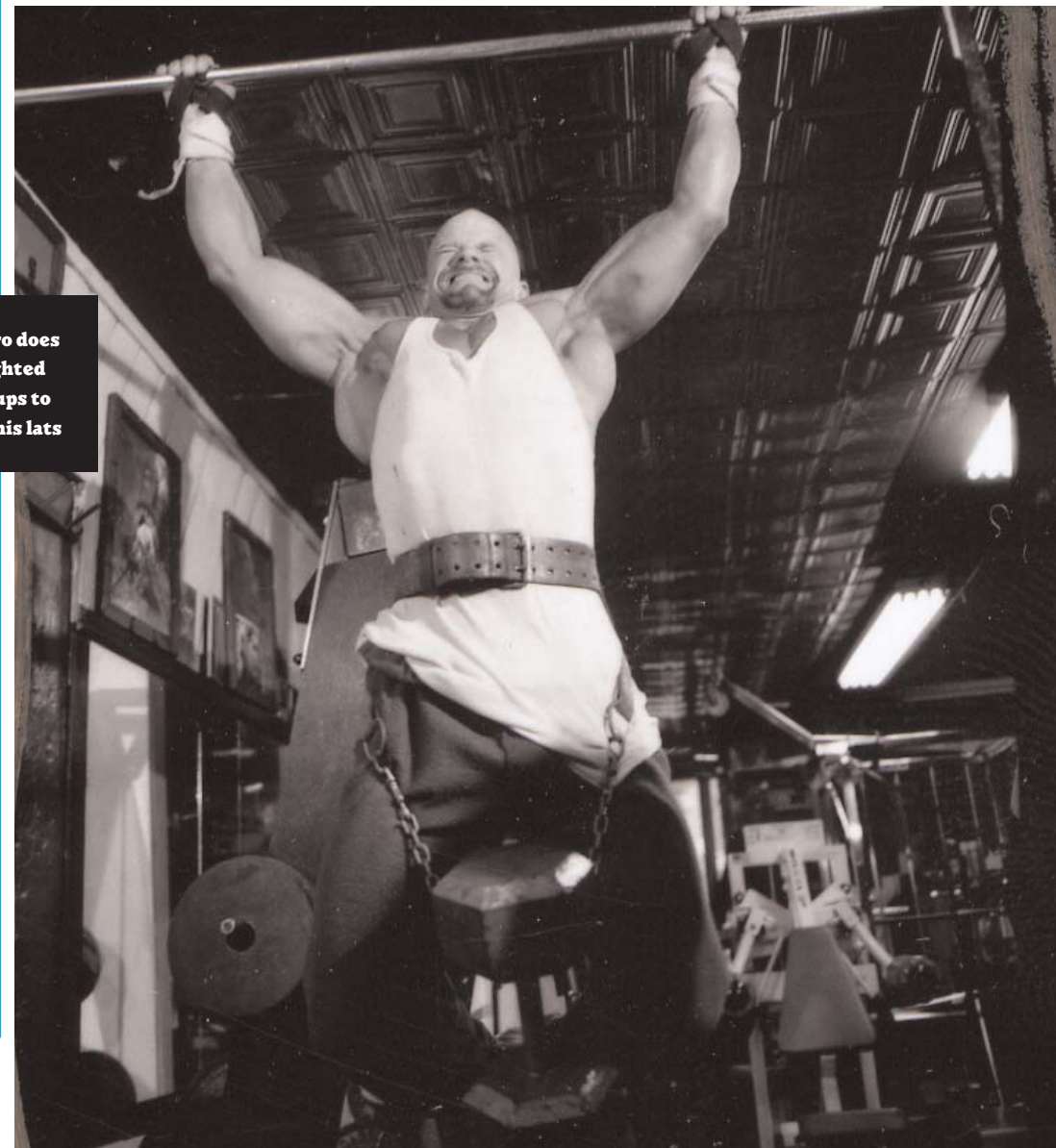
PICK-UP ARTISTS

He and his colleagues do this because you and I never stop producing garbage. That makes trash collection — er, sanitation — the most Sisyphian endeavor imaginable. While the grime washes off

with a shower, lifting all that waste eventually trashes a body's connective tissues and joints. Police officers and firefighters may suffer more fatalities, but sanitation workers get banged up the

most among public servants.

"I loved working on the truck, but I wanted to get off because it beats the shit out of your body," says Allegro, who joined the department back in 1989. "On



Allegro does weighted pull-ups to trash his lats

average, two guys are picking up maybe 10 tons a day, five or six days a week. My first month off the truck, my weights went up at the gym, I was sleeping better, and the aches and pains were gone."

All that heavy lifting also burned a ton of calories and left his muscles perpetually overtrained, stunting their growth. After he received the aforementioned promotion off the truck to supervisor in 1995, Allegro's relieved 5'11" body went from 185 pounds to 200, he says, in just two months.

It's not just the sheer weight that makes trash hard to handle, he insists: "When you're picking up a pail or a bag or a piece of furniture, you don't have much control over it, so it's not like lifting in the gym. You don't know how much it weighs, or the motion it's going to take or whether it's balanced. It inflicts a lot of wear and tear on the body."

(Then there are the *really* chance, unexpected encounters. Several years back, one Brooklyn sanitation worker died when he was splashed by acid. Cut glass and diabetic needles routinely stick through trash bags, piercing collectors' skin. A bag of cash of mysterious origin might appear, or perhaps a dead body. Allegro assures me that it's considerably less funny in actuality than it was in the 1990 movie *Men at Work*, starring Charlie Sheen. Workers who encounter cadavers usually require time off and counseling.)

Knowing that a formerly sedentary recruit is a blown disc waiting to happen, the department suggests preventive maintenance in the form of some basic exercises. Having already pushed weight seriously for five years, Allegro needed no such phys-ed primer. He's asked if joining a crew as a bodybuilder made him a marked man whenever the truck came upon a household appliance waiting by the side of the road.

"They'd all look at me, but I'd be like, 'Dude, these muscles are for other things, too,'" he says, laughing. "They're not just for picking up refrigerators."

TRASH TALKING

Back when Brooklyn native Joseph Anthony Allegro was in his early 20s, working at a shoe store in Greenwich Village, the only oversized features on the scrawny 160-pounder were his mouth, and maybe the chip on his shoulder, until a disgruntled customer knocked that off one day. Humbled by the realization that he couldn't back up his trash talk, the angry young shoe clerk sulked off to the local sporting-goods store, where he purchased a home weight set.

Training would eventually change him in ways he could never have imagined then, but the immediate payoff was a mellowing that created room for intro-



spection and a sharpening of focus. He grew physically, too, and decided to take his physique onstage in the summer of 1990, finishing third in a natural show.

He continued competing, always single-minded in purpose: to come in better than he had the show before, regardless of where judges placed him. By the mid-90s, this struggle with self had led to some intense soul-searching, which would become particularly sharp whenever he'd diet for a show. As he ate his five or six meals a day, all prepared to exacting calorie counts and macronutrients, usually by his own hand for quality assurance, he became extremely

THE PUMPIN' PREACHER

M&F: After 20 years of training and competing, do you feel like you know what works best for you?

ALLEGRO: Yes, without a doubt. I lift five days a week, and that pretty much stays the same even through competition. I do one major bodypart a day, whether it's back, chest or something else, along with smaller stuff, like abs or forearms. And I do quads and hamstrings separately, because those are big muscles, and if I do my quads hard for 45 minutes to an hour, I won't have anything left for hamstrings. The only two [majors] I work together are shoulders and triceps, because they're both relatively small muscles and neither requires a lot of weight.

M&F: What kind of volume for those big bodyparts?

ALLEGRO: Usually 14 sets, split among three or four exercises. I find that after that I'm exhausted and fighting the weight too much. I like to concentrate on form more than the number of pounds I'm lifting. Especially as I get into my 40s, I'm definitely feeling less injury-prone by keeping the form strict.

M&F: Over those four sets per exercise, how do you treat them?

ALLEGRO: Usually I pyramid. I might do a set of 8-10, a set of eight, two sets of six. And if I'm feeling really strong, maybe once a month, I'll just throw some heavier weight on the chest press and see if I can bang out a couple of reps.

M&F: Do you do any high-rep cycles?

ALLEGRO: I pretty much keep it within that moderate-to-heavy range. But if I'm really tired, I don't have a problem with taking 10%-15% off of my weights. What I have done recently — which my lovely wife has been telling me to do for years — is take a week off from weights every 10-11 weeks of training, just to let my joints rest. I'll go in and do some cardio, but no weights. I find that I can go back to the gym the next week and pick up right where I left off.

cognizant of food's effects on his body.

Such dieting often leads to self-absorption, but while Allegro went deep down inside, he somehow managed to turn the laser inside out. "Dieting for shows made me acutely aware of hunger," he says. "I suddenly couldn't imagine a person getting along on only one or two meals a day, especially when there's enough food to go around." So he began, and has continued, volunteering his time every other Friday to City Harvest, a New York-based nonprofit organization that picks up excess food from restaurants, caterers, cafeterias and other suppliers, and then delivers it to emergency food programs.

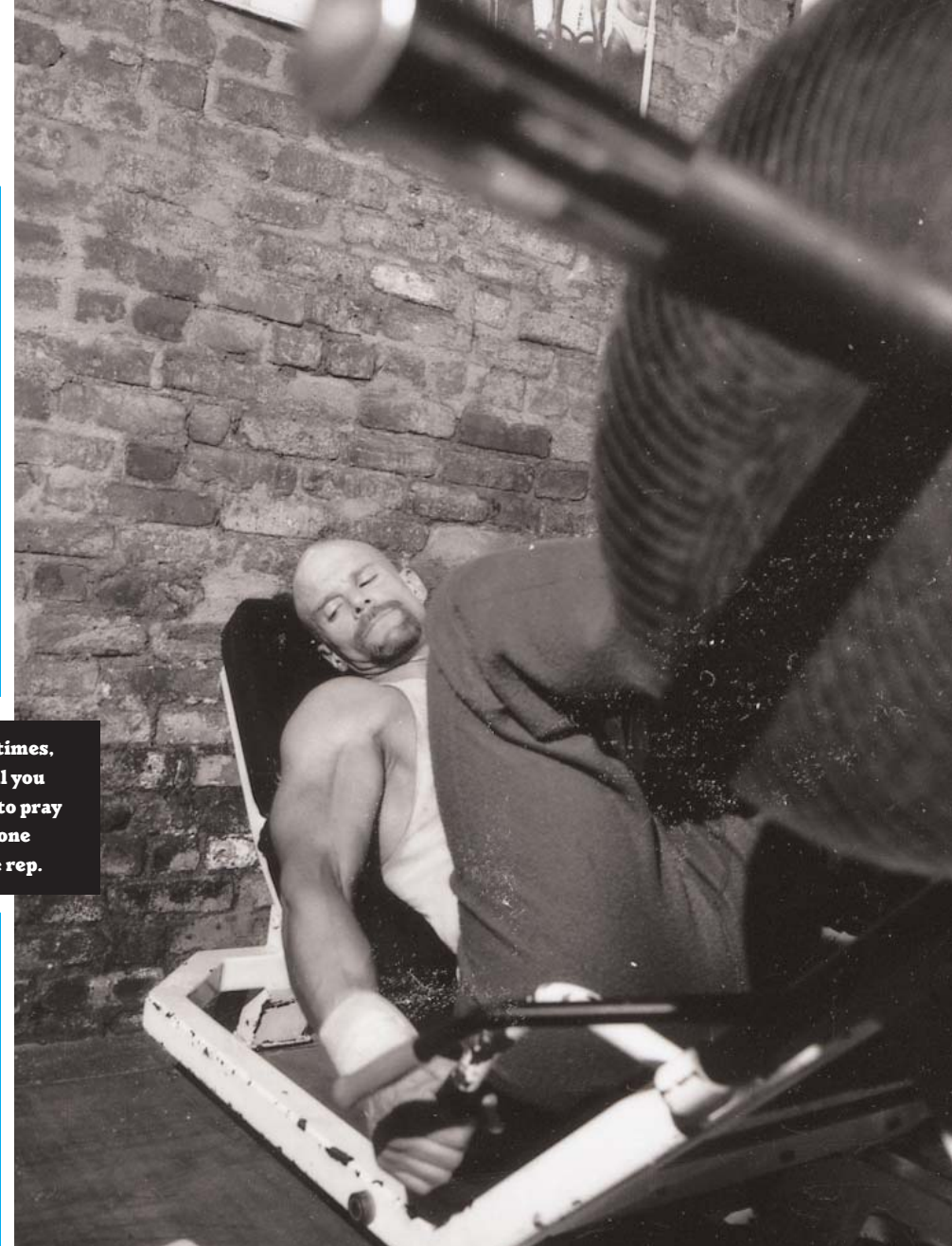
Two-thirds into another contest diet, Allegro experienced a more intense epiphany, this time while watching New Age author Gary Zukav discuss his book *The Seat of the Soul* on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. That tome would whet his appetite for other spiritual works, by everyone from Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. to self-help author Debbie Ford, and the universality of their messages filled a void left by his growing estrangement from organized religion, namely Catholicism.

**Sometimes,
it's all you
can do to pray
for one
more rep.**

LIFTED UP

Seeing firsthand how Allegro's spiritual explorations had transformed him, his second wife, IFBB fitness pro and personal trainer Marie Allegro, encouraged his growing desire to study for the ministry when he wasn't working sanitation or working out. Under the guidance of a local reverend, he took correspondence courses from Pathways of Light, a Wisconsin spiritual college. It ordained him in January 2003.

If you want a pair of 17-inch guns on your side when dealing with higher powers, this is your man. He's now licensed to officiate at baptisms and weddings in New York City — his first ceremony was a same-sex civil union — and he counsels people on matters of the spirit. He thinks having a physical structure to house the ministry he belongs to, Church of the Living Waters, would be nice, but unnecessary: "I feel that this car



is every bit as much a church as a building, and all ground is holy, and every moment is sacred, so you don't need a particular holiday or a particular place to worship God or do special things."

Nor does he even consider himself a "preacher," at least in the sense of actively spreading "the word" and seeking converts. "I consider myself more of a facilitator — a bridge to different things, rather than this fire-and-brimstone thing where if you don't do things a particular way, you're eternally damned. I'm like a signpost on a highway. If you're interested in exploring it, it's there. If not, that's fine, too."

Unless something changes, Allegro's most recent contest, in 2001, will have been his last. He can no longer devote

the time to competitive bodybuilding it would take to continue improving show to show, he says. But as a man of the cloth who has also donned posing trunks, he hopes to help guide other bodybuilders toward a deeper appreciation of many things — including the validity of their own efforts.

"I've told every guy I've ever helped going into a competition that whatever the final result is, he's a winner for going through the whole process to get onstage," he says. "I don't care if you win the show; that's not the game. The game is what you did to get here." **M&F**

To learn more about the Rev. Joe Allegro, visit cosmosconnection.com. He can be e-mailed through the website.

BRIAN MOSS