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WOMEN

Suzie Lapierre: Canada to California

BY ARMAND TANNY

Photos by Mike Neveux

Among the many attractions, from surfing to movies, that draw people with a dream to California one of the biggest is bodybuilding. After Suzie Lapierre first experienced the iron-pumping scene in Southern California on a trip from her Montreal home, she was never the same. With only a few days left of her vacation before she had to head back home, she worked out at both World Gym and Gold's. She had been in bodybuilding for two years at the time, and she remembers what a thrill it was when Mr. World, Mike Christian, turned to her and said, "You look terrific!"

It was not an exaggeration. At 5'3" and 105 pounds, the pretty brown-eyed blonde had the look of a seasoned bodybuilder. How she got that way is an odyssey common to the forward echelon of successful female bodybuilders.

Suzie was just another mouseburger, as Helen Gurley Brown would describe any teen-age girl leaving home to make her way in the big world. In those days she spoke only French. Presently Suzie got nailed down to office work. For exercise she took ballet, learned how not to smile and dance on her toes. She wore conservative clothes, conformed and generally did what was expected of Montreal office girls, but the dream

was taking shape.

One day in 1983 Suzie discovered weights. At the same time a young publicist named Stephen Hercy discovered Suzie, and they began to train together. The dark cloud of uncertainty about her new activity began to settle on Suzie when other women in the gym arched their eyebrows at the fervor with which she attacked the weights. Ask any Ms. Olympia about peer attitudes.

"Say, 'Fromage!'" When Suzie Lapierre was in her native Montreal, she learned to dance on her toes and not to smile. Now that she's come south of the border to concentrate on her bodybuilding, she smiles all the time.

Hercy came to the rescue. He insisted that she read Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The Education of a Bodybuilder*. For several weeks Suzie refused, but Hercy — by now her steady boyfriend — bought the book and put it firmly in her hands. Reluctantly she began to read it. Then with each chapter, she got more excited. By the end she was enchanted. "If I ever become a famous bodybuilder," she says with her charming French accent, "I must tell Arnold it was his story that inspired me to keep going."

"Suzie is a ferocious trainer," says Hercy. "I never saw anyone with so much drive. She was strong so I showed

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