

at this moment foregoing coffee and donuts for morning exercise—can attest.

But this isn't why Lyle loves his show.

Lyle's fascination stems from the stories he's heard about Mr. LaLanne, such as his swim across the Golden Gate channel while towing a 2,500-pound cabin cruiser, and another from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf which he accomplished while handcuffed. In Lyle's eyes, these are feats which would challenge even the characters in his favorite comic books.

More importantly, Lyle feels a strange kinship with Mr. LaLanne, possibly because he promotes many of the same lifestyle choices Lyle is familiar with through his mom's rules: no sugar, lots of exercise, regular sleep, and healthy food.

If this was just some boring old guy who crusades against junk food, Lyle would be down the street faster than you could say "Twinkie." But in Lyle's mind, Jack LaLanne is a true-life hero, a living, breathing example of How Anything Is Possible. As Lyle listens, he thinks of what happened yesterday in school.

"If you want a miracle, you have to have the intestinal fortitude and willpower to do the right thing. But you have to do it. I promise if you will just dedicate a few minutes a day, you will get results. A few minutes. That's all I ask.

"And please, please remember, if you're going to improve yourself there's only one time that's important. You know when that is? It's not Christmas. It's not New Year's. It's NOW! N-O-W! Are you with me? All right.

"And I want you to remember this, too. When you set a goal for yourself, get that picture in your mind and focus on it every single day when you get up and every night when you go to sleep. You let your mind

and your body know that's the picture you want for yourself. That's what you want to be able to do. That's who you are going to become."

"Lyle, I'm not writing a note," Mrs. Hatcher prods, focusing on her leg-lifts. "Inhale . . . exhale . . . inhale . . . exhale."

"Get going!" Mr. Hatcher's voice orders from the kitchen.

Lyle snatches his books and the grocery bag containing his rather large lunch, and sprints out the door.

"**E**veryone pay attention, now. I have some very important news!" Mrs. Stewart announces, pausing to view the pond of faces staring back at her.

When they're all listening, she moves through the room, passing out sheets of paper, laying one on each child's desk.

"All right, then. Once again, it's the time of year when we begin our Science Fair projects."

A unanimous buzz of favorable responses percolates through the class.

"Please read this carefully! These are the rules. You need to be aware of them, because there are some very important ones, such as . . . number five: no flammable materials allowed!"

"What's flammable mean?" Jimmy asks, at once raising his hand and blurting out the question.

"It means it burns, you dork," Leon whispers at him.

"The correct term is 'inflammable' and it does not actually mean it burns, it means it's combustible," Melvin Schmeck pipes up from the back of the room. "There is a difference!"

"Children! Please!" Mrs. Stewart interrupts. "This is not an excuse to talk out of turn. And there will be no name-calling. Is that clear? Now apologize to your classmates."

"I'm sorry, class," Melvin immediately pronounces.

"Sorry," Jimmy and Leon both mumble.

"Much better," Mrs. Stewart says sternly.