

ALION'S TALE

Around
the World in
Spandex

CHRIS JERICHO

WITH PETER THOMAS FORNATALE

FOREWORD BY JIM ROSS

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REQUIEM

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DEDICATION

For Eddy
Friend, Colleague, Brother, Inspiration

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I started working on this book in August of 2005 and finished it in May of 2007. It was a long process and a labor of love, and when the final manuscript was handed in I was convinced that it was exactly the way I wanted it to be.

The book was typeset and put into galley form (industry talk for pretty much finished, with no more changes allowed), and that was to be it.

But a horrible additional chapter unfolded.

One of the main characters in this book is Chris Benoit. He was a huge influence on my career and on my life, and he is a very important part of this story.

The majority of the events within this book focus on my life from 1990 to 1999. The Chris Benoit in this book is the one I knew within that same time frame. The man that I knew and loved exists within these pages, not the man that existed during the final days of his life.

Due to the tremendous understanding of the people at Grand Central Publishing, I was allowed to break the rules. I was able to make a few changes to the book and to write this message, and I thank them for that.

I just wish to God that I didn't have to, and I pray for the souls of the departed.

COAUTHOR'S NOTE

First, I want to say that this book is *not* an “as told to” autobiography. My role was to brainstorm ideas and help with organization and structure. The voice is 100 percent Chris Jericho.

Also, we chose to refer to Vince McMahon’s wrestling company as the WWF in most places throughout the book, because that’s what it was called when the events being described took place. It has since been renamed the WWE.

Peter Thomas Fornata
Brooklyn, New York

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Jesus Christ for allowing me to live my dream. Thank you sir!

To Jessica my princess and the love of my life, for her belief and tolerance of me. To our children Ash, Cheyenne, and Sierra, for teaching me how to be a man. Love is too small a word.

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To the Palko Family—Jerry, Bev, Brad, and Tyler. Without your love and support this journey never would've taken place.

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To Pete Fornatale for your advice and assistance as I was writing this masterpiece. I couldn't have chosen a better collaborator.

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To Marc Gerald, Seth Rappaport, and Jason Pinter for putting this idea into my head and helping me realize there was something interesting to write about after all.

To all of the promoters who enabled me to turn this fantasy into reality: Vince McMahon, Ernie Bischoff, Vince Russo, Paul Heyman, Genichiro Tenryu, Antonio Inoki, Atsushi Onita, Paco Alonso, Carlos Elizondo, Jim Cornette, Rene Lasartesse, Ed Langley, Bob Puppets, Fred Jung, Tony Condell, and Bob Holliday. This is all your fault!

To Owen Hart, Ricky Steamboat, and Shawn Michaels for capturing my imagination and being heroes.

To Jim Ross for writing (as only he can) the perfect Foreword.

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CJ

www.chrisjericho.com

Phil. 4:13

FOREWORD

Are you a dreamer?

Because dreams still do come true and this fascinating book of one young man's dream becoming reality proves it.

As the son of a former National Hockey League player, when young Chris Jericho was growing up in Winnipeg, Canada, he always wanted to be one of two things when he became an adult. With conventional wisdom tossed aside, Chris dreamed of being either a wrestler or rock star and active started working toward those goals when he was fourteen years old. Rasser or Rock Star...Mom and Dad must have been thrilled!

One distinguishing trait of successful people is that they have the ability to dream and the desire to make those dreams come true no matter the challenges. This book is both a colorful blueprint of how to set one's goals and accomplish them and a story about a young man's adventures on multiple continents seeking the fame and fortune that had been tugging at his heartstrings his entire life.

I had the privilege of recruiting and signing Chris Jericho to his WWE contract in 1999. I still remember the meeting that Gerald Brisco and I had with Chris at the Bombay Bicycle Club in Clearwater, Florida, one weekday afternoon. For several hours we talked about the biz, told road stories, and worked on convincing Chris to come to the WWE for half the money that WWC was offering him to stay in Atlanta. Luckily we succeeded, as Chris made the decision to continue with his journey, to live his dream, and to run with the opportunity to finally become a superstar in the WWE.

Being active in the wrestling business for over four decades now, I can honestly say that there will never be another professional journey by any wrestler that will remotely compare with Chris Jericho's odyssey to make it to the WWE. Many of today's wrestlers have not been a product of the wrestling territorial system like Chris was, because the territorial wrestling promotions have died. Few wrestlers today would even consider traveling abroad so frequently and to literally be challenged to survive in order to learn their craft. Chris Jericho did.

This may be the first-ever autobiographical, action-adventure, how-to-achieve-success book ever written. Chris Jericho is one of the most driven, focused, and talented individuals I have ever known and this unpredictable and offbeat story of one of the most amazing decades of any individual's life will keep you turning the pages from start to finish.

Chris Jericho is the last of a dying breed of unique individuals, the likes of which we will never see again.

Dreams do come true. Happy endings still exist. This book proves it.

Jim "J.R." Ross

www.jrsbarbq.com

THE COUNT DOWN

15... 14... 13...

The crowd was buzzing like a fistful of bees, each one of them counting down with the clock. The Rock, one of the biggest names in WWF history, stopped his promo mid-sentence as the Countdown the New Millennium graphic ticked down from 15 seconds toward zero.

Sixteen thousand fans in the Allstate Arena in Chicago knew something huge was about to happen. The countdown continued...

12... 11... 10...

Standing backstage in the darkness behind the curtain of the massive *Raw* set, I knew that nothing I'd accomplished before this moment meant a dang thing now.

9... 8...

Vince McMahon didn't care about any of the successes I'd achieved or about any of the countries I'd traveled to in my quest to make it to the WWF.

He didn't care that I'd been a heartthrob in Mexico or a champion in Japan. All he cared about was what I could do when the clock struck zero and I walked out into the arena to verbally joust with The Rock. If I hit a home run, I'd be on my way to superstardom. But if I struck out, there would be no second chance.

7... 6...

It was hard to concentrate as the roar of the crowd grew to a deafening crescendo, but I tried to forget about the Jericho Curse and focus on what was about to happen. When the clock hit zero, the double pyro display would explode and my new entrance video and ring music would begin to play.

5... 4...

Trying to calm the pounding of my heart and the nerves that were running rampant, my mental Rolodex shuffled through all of the experiences that had led me to this moment: Vince McMahon's house, Brian Hildebrand's tribute match in Knoxville, the feud with Goldberg in WCW, Super Liger in Japan, the ECW Arena in Philly, the Super J Cup—Second Stage, the match with Ultimo Dragón in Ryogoku, pickpocketing Christopher Lloyd in Roppongi, wrestling with a broken arm in Tennessee, hanging out with strippers on the Reeperbahn in Germany, getting held up at gunpoint in Mexico City, playing bass with los Leones, my mom's crippling injury, meeting Lance Storm on my first day at the

Hart Brothers Pro Wrestling Camp in Okotoks, PummelMania, watching wrestling at my grandma house in Winnipeg...

PART ONE WINNIPEG



CHAPTER 1

SHUT UP, KID, OR I'LL SLAP YOUR FACE

The first time I ever watched pro wrestling was with my grandma in her basement in Winnipeg when I was seven. She was a quiet lady but whenever the AWA was on TV, she would freak out and start yelling and screaming. AWA stood for American Wrestling Association and was one of three major wrestling companies in North America, along with the WWF (World Wrestling Federation) and NWA (National Wrestling Alliance).

My grandma's name was Jesse and the wrestler who most drew her ire was a do-ragged-sporting Elton John–sunglasses–wearing bad guy named Jesse “The Body” Ventura. Ventura, who sported a fashionable jewel in the dimple of his chin, was part of a tag team with the biker-looking Adrian Adonis. Jesse was a flamboyant loudmouth and I couldn't get enough of him. My grandma couldn't stand the Body or his antics.

My family went to my grandparents' house every Saturday night to watch the Holy Trinity of Childhood Television™, which began with the *Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner Hour* at five, followed by the AWA at six, and ending with *Hockey Night in Canada* at seven. My dad's name was Ted Irvine, and he played hockey in the NHL for ten years with the Los Angeles Kings (where he assisted on the very first power play goal in Kings history), the New York Rangers (where he went all the way to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final in 1972, only to lose to Bobby Orr and his Boston Bruins), and the St. Louis Blues (where he ended his career in 1977). He was known as the Baby-Faced Assassin and was one of the most feared players in the league. Legendary tough guys like Dave Shultz and Keith Magnuson would challenge him to try and make a name for themselves. But he could also score and ended up with a total of 170 NHL goals and with his combination of skill and strength he was one of the original power forwards. So hockey was a big part of our family, but pro wrestling was beginning to become an even bigger part.

My grandma smoked a lot, which gave her a raspy voice which got raspier when she yelled at the TV, “Come on! Hit him!” I wholeheartedly joined my grandma in cheering our favorites and jeering the guys we hated...although I stayed neutral when the Body was on. Whenever my aunts or my dad said anything to her about wrestling being staged, she refused to acknowledge it. She also refused to acknowledge it years earlier when my dad had his first ever close-up on the nationally televised *Hockey Night in Canada* after missing a breakaway and greeting the nation with a resounding

“FUCK!” “He never said that,” she said. “He would never say that.”

The first wrestler to become my hero was Hulk Hogan. The Hulkster was in the AWA before he became a national star with the World Wrestling Federation, and I loved his huge mustache and long blond hair. He had the biggest muscles I'd ever seen and his charisma was off the charts. To me, the combination of all these qualities made him cooler than the Fonz. He was also the first wrestler that I became emotionally attached to because of a story line, when champion Nick Bockwinkel and his evildoers injured Hulk's arm and put him out of action. I couldn't wait for him to return and exact his revenge.

Eventually, my dad took me to the matches at the Winnipeg Arena. The old barn was big and dark and I was so excited when we got to our seats. All of my eight-year-old dreams and thoughts of what seeing wrestling would be like in person were about to be realized! Only the lights above the ring were illuminated, creating a mystical atmosphere, accentuated by the thick clouds of cigarette smoke that hung in the air underneath the lights. The place was packed. I had never before experienced such a range of emotions from a group of people watching the same event. There was cheering, booin', taunting, happiness, anger, elation, and disappointment.

All of the wrestlers seemed larger than life and I had a list of favorites. The High Flyers: a good-guy tag team made up of Jumpin' Jimmy Brunzell and Greg Gagne, who was AWA promoter Vern Gagne's son. I watched their match with intense concentration, cheering them on, begging for Greg to make the tag to Jimmy after being beaten on for what seemed like an hour and absolutely *exploding* off my seat when he finally did. King Tonga, a 300-pound Islander, who had a huge scar on his arm that was apparently caused by a shark attack on his native island...a shark that the King was forced to kill with his bare hands! Jerry Blackwell was a short, disgustingly obese guy the crowd tortured by chanting “Fatwell” during his match. After he threatened to “slap the shit out” of me when I yelled at him timidly as he passed by me on his way to the ring, I joined in the chant with extra vim and vigor (what the hell does vim mean anyway?). Then there was Baron Von Raschke, a bald, strange-looking dude who resembled one of the mutants from *The Hills Have Eyes* and spoke in a thick, hard-to-plateau Eastern European accent. But he was a Winnipeg favorite and I went nuts for him as he paraded around in his black tights and red cape, threatening to administer his devastating finishing move, the Claw, to his hapless opponent.

There was also Gorgeous Jimmy Garvin, who was accompanied to the ring by his valet, Precious, a very attractive blonde in a tight spandex shirt and hot pants. I was *shocked* when the crowd began to chant “Show Your Tits!” I was double-shocked when the crowd began to chant “Asshole!” at Garvin when he covered Precious with his jacket. I sat there thinking, “You can't say tits and you sure as heck can't say asshole! When my dad hears that, he is not going to be happy.” But he just laughed it off. That was when I figured out that the normal rules of conduct for a hockey or football game didn't apply at the wrestling matches. I liked this rowdy crowd.

At the intermission, the company would sell tickets for the next month's card and my dad and I always bought them. The ring announcer, Mean Gene Okerlund, would say “Get your tickets now...doncha dare miss it!” and we didn't. Wrestling became me and my dad's thing. No matter what was going on, we always knew that once a month, we'd be able to spend time together at the matches.

Since my dad had retired from the NHL years before, he had taken a side job as a radio commentator for the Winnipeg Jets. That job helped him make some major connections for his day job as a financial planner. Because of that he was able to get me autographs from some of the top wrestlers like Black Jack Lanza and Nick Bockwinkel. The fringe benefits continued as my dad scored us front-row tickets to one of the biggest cards in Winnipeg history, featuring the main event of new champion Rick Martel against the evil Russian Boris Zukoff in a steel cage match. John Ferguson, the GM of the Jets, was the special referee. Sitting so close to the action opened a whole new world for me.

as fans and as observers. You could see and hear things that you couldn't see on TV. You could feel the force of the blows...or lack thereof. The reactions of the guys in the ring were more pronounced well. A newcomer named Scott Hall gave a guy a back drop and said to his partner in disbelief, "He did you see how high he went?" My dad and I both heard it and shot each other an astonished look.

A true conflict arose one month when a famous hypnotist known as the Man They Call Raveen came to town. I had to see Raveen...I needed to see Raveen...I begged my mom to take me to see Raveen! She finally agreed to take me to see damn Raveen but what I didn't know was that Raveen had the audacity to schedule his show the same night as the AWA. At this point after all the begging and the pleading that I had laid onto my mom, I couldn't back out. So my mom and I went to see the amazing mind controller hypnotist, and my dad and my aunts went to see the amazing mind controller wrestlers. As soon as I got to the Raveen show I realized I had made a huge mistake. After a few minutes of watching the Wolfman Jack look-alike in a velvet jacket making people bark like dogs, and like babies, and smell nonexistent farts, all I could think about was how Hogan was getting revenge on Bockwinkel only a few miles away at that very moment...and I was *missing* it!

The first thing I did after Raveen had restored everyone back to normal with a simple snap of his amazing fingers was to call my dad to find out what had happened at the Arena. I was pretty pissed off that I'd made the wrong decision and chosen something lame instead of the sure bet of wrestling. It never happened again.

Then one month when I went to the AWA show, I was surprised when the ring announcer welcomed us to the debut of a new wrestling league at the Winnipeg Arena. With no warning, the AWA had been replaced by the World Wrestling Federation. Vince McMahon, the head honcho of this new company had muscled his way into taking over the Winnipeg wrestling scene, replacing Gagne's show with his own. It didn't take long to realize that the WWF show was all that the AWA was and a whole lot more. These guys had glitzier names—like Jake the Snake, Macho Man Savage, and Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat—and they were *huge*, massively built muscleheads who were the complete opposites of the skinny or beer-bellied athletes the AWA was offering. But the real kicker came when the WWF's new champion walked through the curtain on his way to the ring: Hulk Hogan was back! If the Hulkster was down with the new boss, then so was I. I instantly turned traitor on the AWA and embraced my new favorite wrestling league.

When I entered my teens, I started to expand my wrestling fanaticism, as just going to the matches and watching them on TV wasn't enough. Someone found out that all the wrestlers stayed at the Polo Park Inn, adjacent to the Winnipeg Arena, when they were in the Peg and worked out at the Gold Gym across the street. So when the matches came to town, I'd take the bus down to the Arena after school, watch the guys work out at the gym, then go hang out in the lobby of the Polo Park Inn hoping to catch another glimpse. When I got a little bit older, I started sneaking into the Polo Park Inn by using a fake ID that my friend Warren and I made. Inside the bar, I stared as all the wrestlers hung around talking to girls and drinking Labatt's Blue. I couldn't believe the size of them, especially when I stood next to Andre The Giant. His hand was as big as my head. A few minutes later I saw the Hulkster himself, so I summoned all my courage and asked if I could shake his hand. Not only did he say yes but he asked me my name as well. I flipped out. The Hulkster knew my name! "We're friends!" I thought as I began to skip and dance around like Ed Grimley after he met Pat Sajak.

I always felt more comfortable approaching the smaller guys. Shawn Michaels was a member of the Rockers, my favorite tag team, and wasn't much taller than I was. After seeing him do a back flip off the top rope on TV, I decided I had to do one. When I saw him at the gym I asked him how and he said, "You just have to go up there and do it, brother." While the advice made sense, the fact that he called me brother didn't. To the best of my knowledge we weren't related. I didn't know that I had just been exposed to *the* most frequently used word in pro wrestling vernacular.

It was even easier for me to talk to a lower level guy named Koko B. Ware. Not only was he shorter than me but he also had the goofy gimmick of walking to the ring with his pet bird, Frankie. He barely ever won as it was but after I saw him wrestle in dress pants and dress shoes (his gear bag had been lost by the airline), his intimidation factor was lost to me forever. So anytime I had a question about wrestling, I just asked Koko.

“Hey Koko, I wanna gain weight. What’s the best way to do it?”

“You have to drink a lot of beer.”

Words to live by for aspiring athletes, street urchins, and chubby, parrot-packing grapplers. The conversation with Koko also started my tradition of asking wrestlers very stupid questions upon meeting them.

“Hey Koko, how do you plan on beating the Warlord? He’s so much bigger than you.”

“I’ll just try to duck and dip around him.” Also great advice...for dodgeball players.

When he proceeded to lose to the Warlord that night in like three minutes, I thought to myself with pure sincerity, “Damn, I guess dodging and ducking just didn’t pan out for him.”

The WWF had just released a record album (remember those?) called *Piledriver* which featured wrestlers, including Koko, singing. I brought my copy to the bar for Koko to sign, telling him that not only was he a great wrestler but a great singer as well. He looked at me quizzically as he signed, like even he didn’t believe my statement.

I befriended Craig Wallace, aka Wallass, in gym class when we discovered that we both knew how to do a DDT (hands down, the most popular wrestling move for fans from my generation). He was just as fanatical about wrestling as I was and we devised a plan to get our pictures with the wrestlers. Since neither one of us had the guts to simply ask them, one of us would stand by a wall in the hotel while the other stood nearby with a camera. When a wrestler walked into the frame of the guy standing near the wall, the camera guy would say the wrestler’s name. “Hey, One Man Gang!” “Hey Outback Jack!” or whatever. When the wrestler turned to look, the cameraman would snap a quick picture and shazam...instant personal portrait.

When I took pictures for Wallass, they always came out perfect. But whenever he took pictures for me, the wrestler wouldn’t be looking or there’d only be half of me in the shot. It happened so many times that when my picture of Wallass and Bushwhacker Luke was perfect and his picture of me and the Honky Tonk Man was butchered, we got into a fistfight.

The first time I ever got an inkling that wrestling might not be completely legit was when I saw Sika, half of the Wild Samoans, at the hotel. On television, he spoke no English and had a manager who did the talking for the team. I wanted to get his autograph but he was alone, so I approached him gingerly with pen and paper in hand and spoke slowly and simply. “Mr. Sika,” I said, pointing at the paper with my pen. “Autograph. Please. You sign. Here,” I explained while pantomiming signing motions with my pen.

He looked at the pen and paper in my hand and then looked straight in my eyes and said in perfect English...

“Fuck off, kid.”

I was shocked! I was agog! And not because he told me to fuck off. Oh no dear readers, I was shocked because I had discovered that Sika *could actually speak English!* “Oh my gosh! He speaks English! Did anybody else hear that?” I shouted to no one in particular. But alas, it was like seeing the head of the monster rising from the depths of Loch Ness with nobody else on the boat. I alone had discovered the savage Samoan’s secret.

The dissing continued when I saw the Dynamite Kid sitting in the bar, pecs bursting out of an open dress shirt, drinking beer. When he saw me approaching with my pen, he glared at me and said in his thick Cockney accent, “Don’t even fookin’ try it.” I turned on my heels and walked straight out of the

bar without missing a beat.

~~My mission to be assaulted by a wrestler continued when Wallace and I decided to follow the Four Horsemen's limousine in my mom's car after we saw them buying beer at a vendor. After a thirty minute cat-and-mouse session, they simply put the limo into reverse at a red light and began to chase us backward on and off the curb. We were desperately trying to escape, all the while envisioning the horrible fate that awaited should they catch us. Satisfied that their message had been delivered, they drove away laughing and taunting us all the way down the street. Tully Blanchard stuck his head out the window and yelled, "You little fuckheads need to get girlfriends." Girlfriends? I had no time for girlfriends...I was too busy obsessing about wrestling.~~

I was a model WWF fan, the perfect sheep that could be manipulated into liking or hating whoever the TV show told me to. I was a huge fan of all the good guys and I hated all the bad guys. Before each match, I made my way down through the crowd to boo them as they came to the ring. I antagonized the Honky Tonk Man so much once, that he said to me in his thick Southern accent, "Shut up, kid, or I'll slap your face!" This time I was no timid amateur like I was when Fatwell threatened me. The time I challenged Honky Tonk to a fight. He just walked away and I'm lucky he didn't stab me with his sideburns.

Even as I got older, I was a firm believer that wrestling was one hundred percent legit. There was no Internet back then giving away the secrets of the matches, no insider newsletters discussing every last detail about the business. Of course some people said it wasn't real and there were moments—like my encounter with Sika—that made me wonder. But no one in my circle knew for sure. It was like Santa Claus. You believed in him because everyone told you to. It was that blind faith that made being a wrestling fan a truly magical experience. Sadly, the magic of those days is long gone and being a true wrestling fan in the year 2007 is an entirely different animal than being a true wrestling fan in the year 1987...and I'm not sure that's a good thing.

CHAPTER 2

GROTTO VALLEY DEATH MATCH

People always asked me, “Are you going to be a hockey player like your dad?” The truth of the matter was even though I’d been playing hockey since I was four, I really wasn’t very good. Of course I was a hockey fanatic; there wasn’t much to do in Peg in the winter other than play hockey, drink beer, and fight, and at four years old I was too young to fight. I enjoyed playing sports but it was my creativity that really fueled me. I was a huge comic book collector (with Batman and Archie being my favorites) and a voracious reader with the Hardy Boys (the death-defying mystery-solving brothers) and the death-defying acrobatic wrestling brothers) and Stephen King leading the way. I loved *Star Wars* (I waited in line for twelve hours to see the first showing of *Return of the Jedi*), James Bond, *Star Trek* (I sent away for a Chekov autograph), and horror movies. My addiction to horror probably started when I awoke one night with my parents searching through my hair, looking for a 666 on my head after they’d just seen *The Omen*. Each week I perused the *TV Guide* and circled the late night horror movies that I wanted to see. My mom allowed me to watch them, but I had to go to bed at my normal time of 10 P.M. and set my alarm to wake up at midnight if I wanted to check out Lon Chaney Jr. as the Wolfman or Boris Karloff in *The Mummy*. Oh the days before TIVO, my children... But along with wrestling it was rock ‘n’ roll that really captured my imagination. I had every Beatles record by the time I was ten and read every book about them I could get my hands on by the time I was twelve. I was fascinated by their music, the details of their lives, how they shaped the entire destiny of pop culture. But in the early 1980s the Beatles’ popularity had been usurped (great word) by Martha and the Muffins and Rocky Burnette. “You don’t like Loverboy?” my friends would ask. “What’s wrong with you? Forget the Beatles; the Little River Band is where it’s at.” I’m happy to say that when I’m walking in the park and reminiscing, I’m quite proud that I stuck with listening to the legendary Beatles instead of the not so legendary Little River Band.

In addition to my burgeoning interest in the Beatles, the Who, the Beach Boys, and Rick DeLoe (“Disco Duck,” which for some reason was my favorite song for a time), I was also a very creative kid. So much so, that my Auntie Joan, who was the dean of the University of Manitoba, used me as an example of a highly imaginative child when she gave lectures to teachers. I wrote my own songs, tried to teach myself how to play guitar, and made my own tape-recorded radio shows. I acted out battle adventures, and odysseys for hours with the most impressive collection of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*

dolls this side of Mos Eisley. I was obsessed with *Dungeons and Dragons* and was convinced that the Loch Ness monster actually existed...I still am. I liked to draw my own comic book movies—which were basically just comic books done in movie storyboard fashion, complete with opening and closing credits. A lot of these movies starred the Mr. Rogers Band, a Beatles-influenced rock group that I created. I'd storyboard their movies, and draw their album covers and included every detail: the song titles, lyrics, credits, even clocking the song times. I'd cut a circle of black construction paper to represent the actual LP and slide it between the stapled front and back covers.

When I started high school, I had the attitude and look of a rocker, including a sweet mullet that I made worse by using a crimping iron to straighten the back. It fried my hair and earned me the nickname Steel Wool. But I also played hockey and was an all-star water polo goalie, the master of the egg beater (don't ask), so I had a lot of jock friends too. I had the same combination of athleticism and creativity that had originally attracted me to wrestling.

Meanwhile, wrestling was becoming a bigger part of my life. I missed the original WrestleMania—the WWF's version of the Super Bowl, but when it was time for WrestleMania 2 I took the bus down to the Winnipeg Arena and watched the show on closed circuit television, the archaic version of PPV. You paid for a ticket, which gave you the privilege of going to the Arena to watch the damn thing on a giant out-of-focus movie screen.

The glitz and excitement that surrounded WrestleMania took wrestling to a different level for me and I realized that the business was a hell of a lot bigger than what I saw in the Winnipeg Arena every month. I started to dream that maybe someday I could become a wrestler. The problem was that most of the guys in the WWF were huge and I was not. Another friend, Dave Fellowes, was also incredibly into wrestling and we had this crazy idea: Maybe if we hung out together at the Arena in muscle shirts, the British Bulldogs would see our muscularity and decide to take us under their wing and train us to be the Winnipeg Bulldogs. Of course they could just as easily have taken us to the basement, put baggys in our mouths, and given us to the Gimp, but we'll never know now will we?

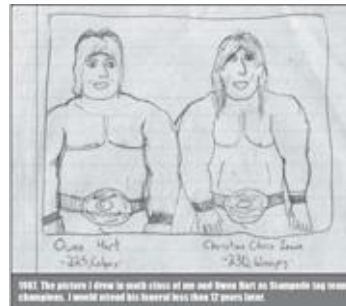
In 1986, Winnipeg started getting broadcasts of Stampede Wrestling out of Calgary. This new company looked cheap and was broadcast out of a livestock field house but the wrestling was off the charts. It was fast, hard-hitting, action-packed, and completely ahead of its time. It was a melting pot of styles, exciting to watch, and I realized that the WWF wasn't the only game in town.

There were a couple of other wrestling shows on the tube as well, and I watched them all. We had the local WFWA based out of Winnipeg, the UWF based out of Oklahoma, and the IWA based out of Montreal. The IWA featured all these guys with thick French accents who could hardly speak English and the show was even cheaper-looking than Stampede. But they had some great characters. There was a guy called Floyd Creachman who managed the Man of 1,000 Holds, Leo Burke. Creachman was doing an interview and said that Burke was the Man of 1,002 Holds, to which the interviewer butted in, "But I thought he was the Man of 1,000 Holds?" Creachman deadpanned, "He learned two more." That to me was the greatest line ever—a line so good I ripped it off a decade later.

Then came the day when my life's path became written in stone. I was watching my weekly dose of Stampede Wrestling when a music video of Bryan Adams's "Hearts on Fire" began to air. But instead of featuring clips of a pockmarked, greasy-haired rock star, the video featured clips of a blond-haired, solidly built wrestler performing the most mind-blowing, acrobatic moves I had ever seen...and I was completely blown away. The video continued and I watched in total astonishment as this guy who couldn't have been more than five years older than me executed moonsaults, back flips off the top rope, back flips off other wrestlers' backs, and the grand finale where he grabbed a guy's hand, leaped straight to the top rope, sat down on the top rope and flipped onto his feet, only to throw the other wrestler halfway across the ring! I was always more into the high-flying guys in the WWF like the British Bulldogs and Randy Savage, but they didn't have *anybody* there who could do this type

stuff. When the video ended, the name that appeared on the screen was Owen Hart, and he instantly became my new hero. He was the youngest son of the promoter of Stampede, Stu Hart, and the brother of another one of my WWF faves, Bret “The Hitman” Hart. When I saw Owen do his thing, I was struck by a feeling of desire so strong that it might as well have been a bolt of lightning sent straight from the heavens above. I didn’t just *want* to be a wrestler... I *had* to be a wrestler.

Owen wasn’t 6 foot 8 and 300 pounds like most of the wrestlers in the WWF seemed to be. He was my height and had the kind of muscle that I could have if I trained hard and ate right. Plus, Calgary was in my universe. It was a city I’d been to and seen with my own eyes. It wasn’t like the faraway places where the WWF toured, places I couldn’t just get on a bus and visit. I decided that somehow, somehow, I was going to go to Calgary and have Owen Hart teach me how to wrestle.



1987. The picture I drew in sixth class of me and Steve Hart in Stampede tag team championships. I would spend his career less than 12 years later.

All my friends and I could think about was wrestling, and during class we drew pictures called *Classic Wrestling Moments*. I drew a picture of Owen and me holding the Stampede tag team championships and Wallass drew a picture of King Bundy dropping an elbow on the midget Little Beaver, during WrestleMania 3. Fellowes drew a picture of Roddy Piper destroying Adorable Adrian Adonis’s Flower Shop talk show set (Adonis had gone from being a tough biker to a sissy). I drew another picture of Andre the Giant pinning Hulk Hogan, while a corrupt referee counted to three, which was inspired by the craziest wrestling angle we’d ever seen.

It was one of the most important matches ever in wrestling: Hogan vs. Andre the Giant for the WWF title on prime-time TV. I had a job at a deli and that night I had to work so I was going to have to miss the show. I told Wallass with a tear in my eye, “I have to miss the Hulkster’s match, so as soon as it’s over, you have to come straight here, do not pass Go, do not collect \$200 (Canadian), and tell me what happened!” A few hours later, Wallass staggered breathlessly into the deli. “Oh my God! Oh my God! There were two referees!” He stuttered and stammered, barely making any sense. “And one got plastic surgery to look like the other one . . . and he had money in his pocket . . . and Hogan lost the belt.”

I stopped him right there in disbelief and shook my head. “What did you say?”

“The Million Dollar Man paid off an evil look-alike referee to cheat,” Wallass continued, “...and...and...and Hogan lost the belt.”

I felt my stomach drop. Hogan had been the champ since I became a fan of the WWF four years earlier. He had been the victim of the ultimate double cross, when the official of the match had been kidnapped and replaced by his evil paid-off twin brother who fast-counted the Hulkster’s shoulders on the mat, causing him to lose the World Wrestling Federation heavyweight championship to Andre the Giant! Then Andre turned around and, in his words, sold “the World World Wrestling tag team title” to his boss, the Million Dollar Man, Ted DiBiase. You couldn’t write stuff this good!

Finally it sunk in that Hogan had lost the title. I was devastated and it was just about the worst night of my life. I felt like, “Hogan lost. What are we going to do? Where are we going to go? Who’s gonna save the free world from the evil commies now?”

In order to boost our flagging spirits, Wallass and I had an idea. We began going to our high school

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