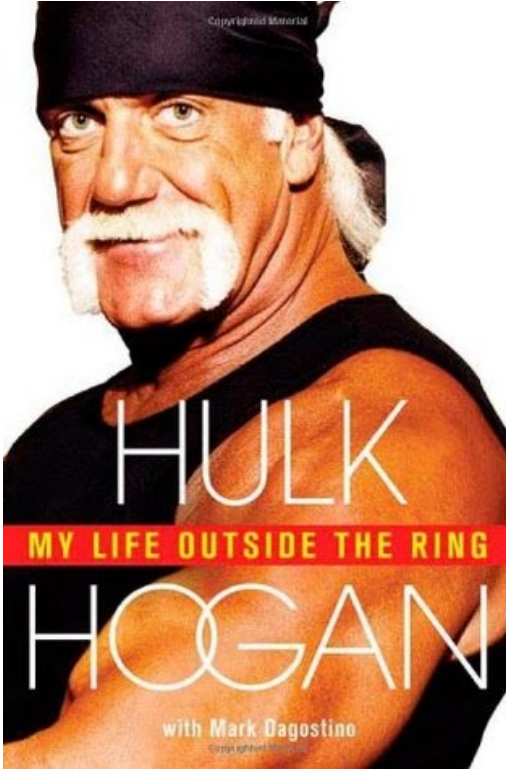


Wrestlers' Book Club #1:

My Life Outside The Ring by Hulk Hogan (with Mark Dagostino)



Terry Bollea - better known as the America loving, leg dropping, former face of the wrestling business Hulk Hogan - released his second autobiography in 2009. The Hulkster had lived through a couple of *anni horribiles*, with legal troubles, a jail sentence for his son, and an acrimonious divorce giving him plenty of material to write about.

Five years later, Hogan would experience more scandal still when, in a real double whammy of a blunder, a sex tape featuring the ex-WWE champ and the estranged wife of his pal Bubba the Love Sponge (who gets a glowing write up in Hogan's book) emerged. To top it all off, Hogan can be heard using the N word repeatedly, as any one of us might in the throes of passion.

The WWE, a business which can rarely if ever be accused of racial sensitivity, decided that Hogan's outbursts crossed a line, and the man was banished, essentially wiped from the history books. He was out of the hall of fame, deleted from the video games, gone. This lasted just under three years, and the man who declared himself "a racist, to a point" was

welcomed back into the fold.

Sadly, none of this is documented in Hogan's memoir, and the odds of him putting it to paper after somehow emerging with something resembling a career are minimal. Still, the Hulkster's is a life well lived, and he is not afraid of airing his dirty laundry, in exhaustive (and often downright tedious) detail.

Writing style

Hogan begins *in media res* with a startling image: the great man, now a mere husk, sat in his bathroom with a revolver in his mouth. This is Hogan at his lowest ebb, and he's quick to let us know why: legal, marital, and family troubles.

The Hulkster doesn't revisit this particularly gloomy scene; neither does he utilise any other daring narrative techniques, taking a largely casual tone for the remainder of the book. He ends a lot of his sentences with "you know?", and in classic Hulk fashion refers to the reader as "brother" frequently.

The focus is heavily weighted towards the latter, far less interesting part of Hogan's life. He goes into exhaustive detail about the many houses his family lived in at the behest of nomadic ex-wife Linda. While this was no doubt a pain, it's not quite as interesting as grappling with billionaire WWE owner Vince McMahon at WrestleMania.

The tale sinks deeper into the mire after the author's teenage son Nick gets into a car wreck, badly injuring the boy's friend. Hogan's concern for his lad (who is later incarcerated) is palpable and it's understandable that he'd want to document this experience, but it goes on for an awfully long time, and ends up akin to a pity party. The family of the injured friend end up launching legal action against the Hogans, and wouldn't you know it - the Hulkster couldn't be more magnanimous about the whole thing.

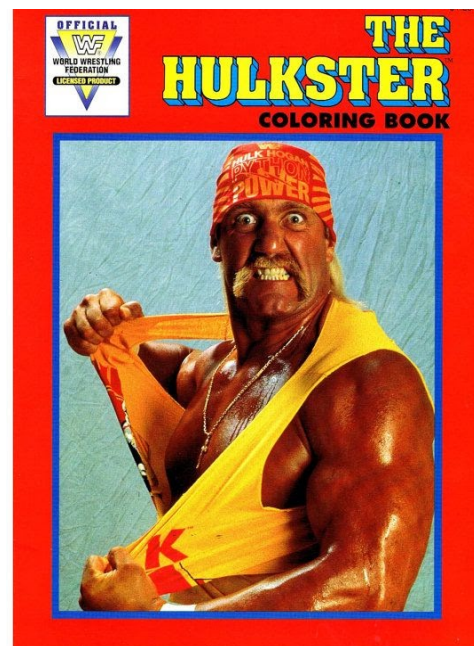
While Hogan can't tell us enough about this trial, though, he's somewhat more cagey on a sexual assault trial between 1994 and 1996. Citing confidentiality agreements, Bollea can only tell us that there was a lawsuit which was eventually settled in 1996 (with "great success", per a boastful Bollea). The plaintiff, Kate Kennedy, was associated with Pastamania, Hogan's unsuccessful Italian eatery which, tragically, gets its sole mention here.

Anecdotes

A bizarrely small amount of this book is dedicated to Hulk Hogan the professional wrestler. Terry Bollea has always given the impression of a man who wanted to transcend the industry (see: his various abortive attempts at an acting career; his more successful time as a reality TV star), but as a businessman he must know that the primary audience for this book would be wrestling fans.

It's a shame, because the world of pro wrestling is objectively interesting, and few have seen the things Hogan has in the business. But the best anecdote we get about his grappling career is a quick tale about Pat Patterson convincing the young Hulk that he was going to get raped in the showers after his match ("a big goof at my expense", per Hogan). He also notes that his first trainer deliberately broke a young Terry's leg to test his mettle, which the author seems to think is fair enough.

Elsewhere Hogan recalls, from his childhood in Florida, "stuffing rocks up my nose". He claims he would "stuff [his] nose full of them" until his parents interjected. He correctly concludes: "it's weird the stuff you remember".



He's also not afraid to hit his readers with a scoop: "you heard it here first: Hulk Hogan used to be a bowler". The pre-adolescent Terry Bollea was state bowling champion with his pal Vic (who Hogan concedes was the real talent of the team, having bowled three back to back perfect games; a cursory Google of bowling records would suggest this probably isn't true).

By and large, Hogan's tales fit into two modes: boasting and complaining, which he treats with equal weight, often lurching between the two on the same page. He tells us about his brother's death by drug overdose. In the next paragraph he makes it clear that his late sibling borrowed the Hulkster's money for the purchase, and surmises that his "big-time wrestling career and big fat wallet" were linked to the death. He concludes that his parents loved his tearaway brother more than him, on the basis his aging mother and father sometimes refer to him by the wrong forename.

Scores settled

Hogan's swipes are directed primarily at his ex-wife Linda - tellingly, the index notes 14 entries "personality of", and a further four for "alcohol". Ever the politicker, he is careful to temper his criticism with his assurances that he wishes her nothing but the best, even throwing her a dedication (in fourth priority, after his kids and new squeeze), in which he prays that she finds peace and joy.

The negatives of the relationship, though, are laid bare, and laid thick. It's no exaggeration to say that the second half of this book is almost totally given over to an exploration of how difficult Linda made life for him. She torpedoed professional opportunities; she chewed through his bank balance, and scored handouts for her family; she was perpetually drunk, angry, and paranoid.

Hogan makes little effort to examine his own failings in this marriage. He acknowledges early on that his constant travelling for work can't have been easy to deal with exactly once, a chapter-ending line copping to his lack of consideration. Outside of that he presents himself as the cowed husband who simply absorbed his wife's abuse until one day he could take no more.

He also launches wild jabs at his childhood pals, detailing the blue collar jobs that they hold down, then thanking God he didn't suffer the same fate. Most bizarrely, he has a dig at, of all people, Jessica Simpson, whose 2003 career he describes needlessly as "floundering (at best)" in a dull rumination on reality TV. Whether there was bad blood between the two or the consummate wrestling pro was simply working an angle, we'll never know.

Truth stretching

The Hulkster deceives through half truths more than outright lies, but he's sure to sprinkle his memoirs with the odd fib, including claims that can quite easily be disproved or

disputed. There's the aforementioned story about his prodigious young bowler pal which, while not beyond the realms of possibility, certainly sounds like Hogan embellishing an otherwise dull tale about a kid he knew who was good at bowling.

Then there's his claim that Andre The Giant, who Hogan famously bodyslammed at WrestleMania III, was "pushing seven hundred pounds" that night. Andre was billed at 520lb, and it's safe to assume the WWE is being typically liberal there, so unless Hulk operates on a bizarre rounding up system, it seems he's telling porkies.



He later goes out of his way to make The Rock sound like a rube in detailing their iconic match at WrestleMania X8. With the crowd unexpectedly pro-Hogan, the match was changed on the fly to make the villainous Hulk the good guy. Per Terry, "The Rock was freaking out" at the audience reception. Thankfully, Hogan reassured him: "Just go with it, bro. I'll fix it!", and the rest was history. The Rock, as recently as April 2020, has told a quite different version of the story, taking his share of credit for freestyling through the match.

Ultimately it's one word against the other, and it's hard to know who'd have more to gain: the billionaire box office draw movie star, or the increasingly irrelevant old man who had to beg his way back into a business that has little use for him.

Most egregiously, he claims that he essentially taught Vince McMahon - the man whose wrestling company has been top of the heap for nearly 40 years, who literally grew up in the business - about wrestling. Hogan states: "in a way, I became his teacher. I walked him through Wrestling 101".

That just isn't true, is it? Perhaps Hogan, here at his most juiced up, cornered his new boss and jabbered on about his ideas for the business (in brief: ensuring Hulk Hogan is the most prominent and well paid performer), but to suggest that he taught the astonishingly successful Vince McMahon about the industry he's been around his entire life is simply daft.

Self servitude

Hogan sets out his stall in the acknowledgements, letting the reader know that this is "one hell of a book" (he couches this as a thanks to his co-writer Mark Dagostino, who in fairness gets a credit on the front cover). He makes it clear that he expects readers to take significant life lessons from the book, and while "if you want to read this book for the sheer entertainment value... that's fine by me", that would certainly *not* be his recommendation.

During a chapter titled “Livin’ The High Life”, Hogan discusses his catchphrase “Say your prayers and take your vitamins”. He concludes: “putting that kind of positive message out there... is one of the least self-centred things I did”. It’s hard to fathom the mental gymnastics required to convince yourself that utilising a catchphrase is in some way a selfless act. It’s barely even an act. He puts it up there with his work for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which functions as simultaneous self deprecation and bragging.

Even more bizarrely, he acknowledges the contrast between the message he was spouting and the steroids he was using at this time, a dichotomy he describes as “just a little bit hypocritical”. You could certainly take that view; if you were so inclined, you could suggest that the squeaky clean image conjured by the slogan served to keep Hogan from FDA scrutiny. But this wouldn’t be quite so selfless.

One of the more peculiar elements of the book is the stuff Hogan *doesn’t* talk about – namely, anything other than himself and the people who have wronged him. The Hulkster makes it clear that the book was written at a dark time of his life, and accordingly the majority of the content seems to come from a deeply negative place. He mentions in brief his friend Ed Lesie, and his relationship with Vince, but these are fleeting references, and generally as a comparison to him (all he really says about Vince is that he was almost as ambitious and focussed as – that’s right! – Hulk Hogan).

Even with his children, Hogan can’t find an awful lot to say. He tells us about their passions – music and cars, for Brooke and Nick respectively – but he gets bogged down in some pretty dull details, the producers they worked with, the specific cars they drove, without telling us much about them as people.

It strikes the reader that Hogan is none too interested in talking about anything other than himself and his gripes, and it makes the book in turn dull and spiteful.