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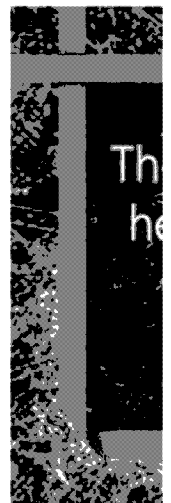
By DAVE ITZKOFF
 Published November 5, 2009

Listen up, Hulkamaniacs. Suppose you were writing the life story of Hulk Hogan, the musclebound star of the World Wrestling Federation, whose raspy, bombastic voice and finger-pointing, chest-beating flair made him an emblem of 1980s-era self-assurance — Ronald Reagan with a horseshoe mustache and 24-inch biceps. What scene would you start with? Would you open on his 1984 victory over the Iron Sheik, which won him his championship belt? His hereulean body-slamming of André the Giant at WrestleMania III? The fateful phone call he received from Sylvester Stallone, inviting him to play a supporting role in a sequel to “Rocky”?

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Hulk Hogan

MY LIFE OUTSIDE THE RING

By Hulk Hogan with Mark Dagostino

It may surprise you to learn that when the real Hulk Hogan, born Terry Gene Bollea, begins his latest work of autobiography, he is contemplating suicide as he reflects on an event from 2007, when his teenage son, Nick, and a friend, John Graziano, were badly injured in a souped-up Toyota Supra that Nick was driving. The accident left Graziano brain-damaged, got Nick a five-month jail sentence for reckless driving, strained Hogan’s already collapsing marriage, and got the wrestler sued by the Graziano family and chased relentlessly by the tabloids. That he considers this a pivotal moment in his life is possibly your first indication that “My Life Outside the Ring” is going to be a story of good guys and bad guys, though not necessarily one in which Rowdy Roddy Piper and King Kong Bundy will be the central villains.

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Illustrated. 310 pp. St. Martin's Press. \$25.99

When he focuses on his wrestling career, Hogan (who wrote the book with Mark Dagostino) can be a lively, breezy narrator. Born in Augusta, Ga., in 1953 and raised in Port Tampa, Fla., he tried playing guitar and bass in local bands (including one called Ruckus), running a club and opening a gym in Cocoa Beach before vaulting from local wrestling circuits in the South to the big time in New York. (Along the way, a Memphis talk-show appearance on which Hogan outbulged Lou Ferrigno of "The Incredible Hulk" earned him his enduring nickname.)

Characters like Ed Leslie, a Hogan protégé better known as Brutus the Barber Beefcake, and Vince McMahon Jr., the crafty mastermind behind the W.W.F. (now called the W.W.E.), are introduced and tossed aside like folding

chairs. But Hogan displays a charming ingenuousness throughout the journey, whether he is playing bass alongside a guitarist who toured with Todd Rundgren ("the guy who wrote that song 'Hello, It's Me'? Like a huge hit!") or learning that the outcomes of professional wrestling matches are fixed. "Wrestling isn't fake," he writes with Zen-like simplicity. "It's predetermined. So what?"

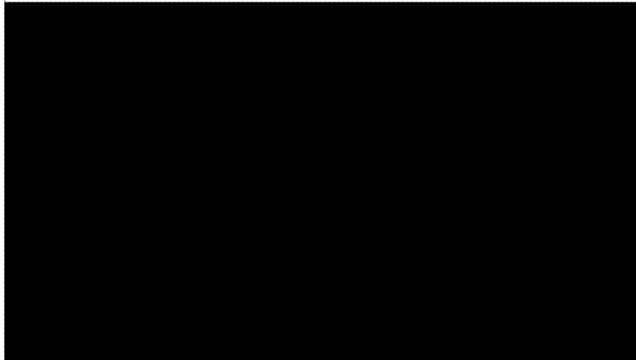
He is honest, too, about his past use of recreational drugs as well as steroids, and about how a federal indictment brought in 1993 against McMahon, who was accused of distributing steroids to his wrestlers, nearly ended Hogan's career. (McMahon was acquitted the following year, and Hogan unequivocally denies that McMahon was distributing steroids.)

That same candor, however, all but overwhelms the second half of the book, in which Hogan admits to marital infidelity, chronicles what he says was abusive behavior he suffered at the hands of his former wife, Linda, and meticulously documents his efforts to care for the injured John Graziano. Maybe it's a trait Hogan picked up from his VH1 reality series, "Hogan Knows Best," but his compulsive confessing feels more like an effort to pre-empt the Us Weeklys and TMZs of the world than an authentic attempt at soul-searching.

It won't spoil your reading to learn that at the end of the book Hogan and his son sit down together to watch "The Wrestler," the 2008 film that starred Mickey Rourke as a

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BOOKS

A Conversation With Hulk Hogan
The Times's Dave Itzkoff talks with Hulk Hogan about his new book and his life in wrestling.

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once-great but washed-up professional grappler. Hogan doesn't see much kinship between himself and Rourke's character, but the story he has told suggests otherwise: success, in its own way, is every bit as scarring as failure.

Dave Itzkoff is a culture reporter for The Times.

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