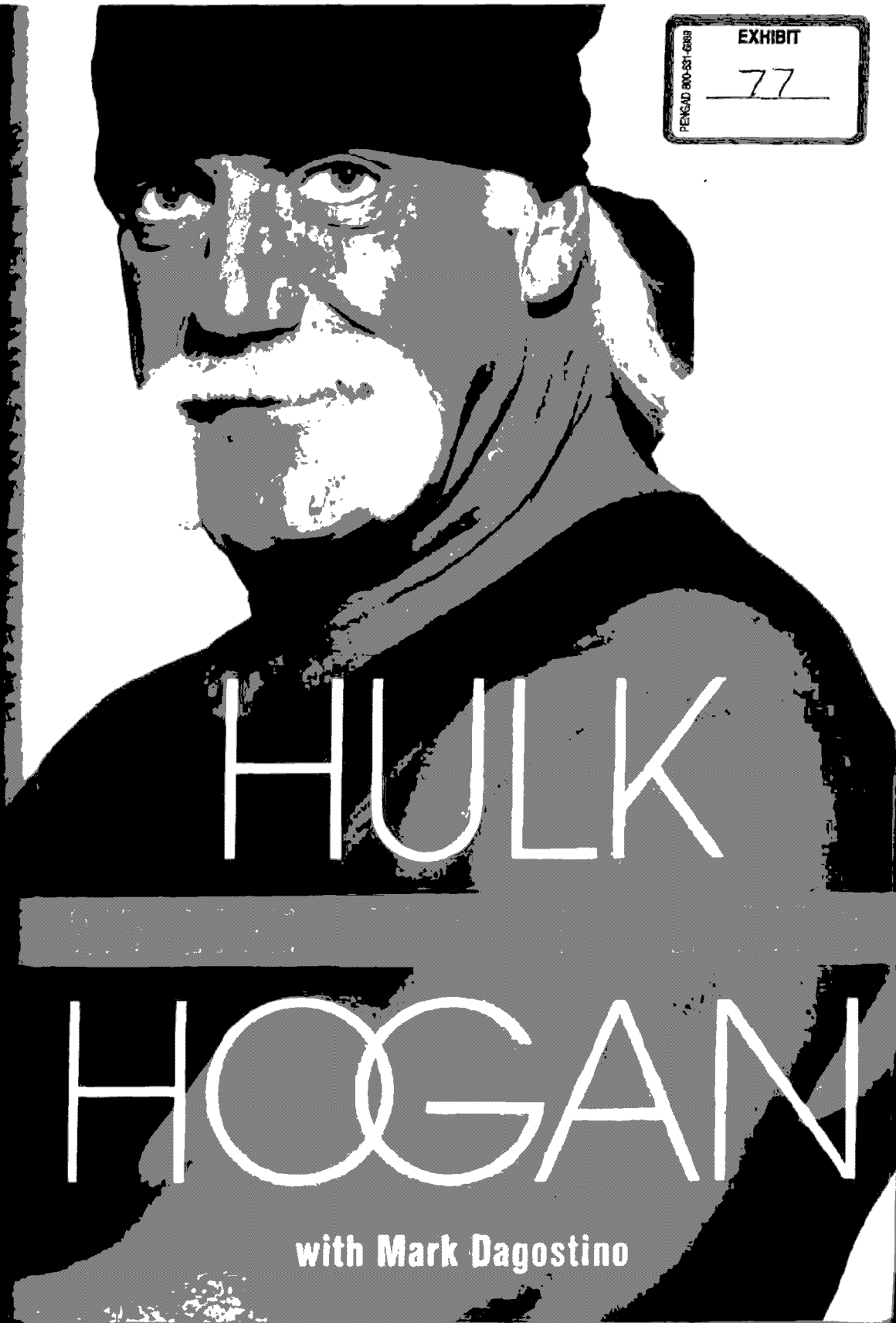


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HULK


HOGAN

with Mark Dagostino

MY LIFE OUTSIDE THE RING

HULK HOGAN

with MARK DAGOSTINO

St. Martin's Press  New York

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INTRODUCTION

Three pounds. I remember thinking, *Three pounds of pressure is all it takes to pull this thing.* Do you know how easy that would've been? I'd been staring at myself in the bathroom mirror for two days straight. *Two days.* A gun was in my hand and my finger was on the trigger and I was thinking, *It would just be so easy.* I felt like a snake charmer. I was headed down this dark road convincing myself it was a road I wanted to take. The weird thing was, I didn't even remember bringing that gun into the bathroom. *When did I pick this up? Was it in the safe? Did I have it in the car with me the other night?* I bought that gun years ago to protect my family. A last resort. Was I really gonna use it for this?

I popped half a Xanax and took another swig from the big bottle of Captain Morgan's I'd set on the counter.

The house was empty. Too quiet. I don't do well alone. My kids were gone. My wife was gone. She had left before, but this was different. She didn't want to fix things. She'd filed for divorce—actually went to a lawyer and filed papers after twenty-three years. My mind kept running through it all, over and over. *My daughter thinks I'm the reason Linda left. There's so much I want her to understand, but she won't talk to me. She won't hear my side of the story.*

My thoughts drifted to my son, Nick. Nearly four months had passed since he got into that terrible car accident. And every day

since, the details of that August night played over and over in my mind.

It's not often that a man can pinpoint the moment when life as he knew it began to unravel. For me, it was just after seven thirty on the night of August 26, 2007.

After a long day out on the boat, I'd grabbed a quick shower and hopped in my black Mercedes to head to dinner. Nick and his three buddies had gone just ahead of me to grab a table at Arigato, this Japanese steak house a few miles away. I assumed they'd all gone together in my yellow pickup.

I was wrong.

The fast-moving thunderheads that passed through that afternoon left the roads soaking wet. I remember my tires splashing through puddles as I left the big house on Willadel Drive. Just as I left, Nick's friend Danny drove up in my silver Viper with his pal Barry in the passenger seat. Their windows were down, and they looked a little panicky as they pulled up beside me.

"Nick got in an accident!" they said.

Great, I thought. *This is all I need*, thinking that it was just a fender bender.

"Where?" I asked.

They told me on Court Street near Missouri Boulevard—not much more than a mile from where we were.

For some reason it didn't occur to me that it might be a life-threatening situation. With all the stoplights on that road, I thought they meant that Nick had rear-ended someone, or maybe someone rear-ended Nick. I was a little confused as to why Danny was driving my Viper, but I still thought Nick was in my yellow truck.

So off we went. I turned east and headed down Court Street with the sun getting ready to set behind me. All the lights were green, so I was cruising along when all of a sudden I saw flashing red-and-blues up ahead.

divorce into a second year. Hell, she's spending time with a nineteen-year-old boyfriend—in the house that I pay for. Not to mention I'm facing a civil suit from the Graziano family that seeks more money than I've made in my whole career. So no, not everything is perfect. The difference now is how I handle this stuff; how I look past those things to see the bigger picture; how I'm actually grateful that these things are happening because I know that something greater is right around the corner. If that doesn't make a lot of sense to you right now, I'm hoping it will by the end of this book.

The main thing I want you to take away from this is simple: If I can get through everything I've been through in the last couple of years and be happier and stronger than ever, then you can get through whatever terrible things might happen in your life, too.

Despite what some people might think, I'm not writing this book to make excuses for anything I've done or to try to change anyone's opinion of me or my family. All I want to do is tell the truth and clear the air so you'll be able to understand where I'm coming from, and where I'm headed. 'Cause believe me, once you breathe clean air, you never want to go back to breathing anything else. That's how I'm living now, and that's why I want to use the lessons I've learned to help other people. I hope that doesn't scare you off. In fact, I hope that you'll be one of the people I help—even if it's just in some small, unexpected way.

If not? Well, that's okay, too. I'm ready to open up about everything in my life. And there's plenty to tell! So I promise to be as open and honest in these pages as I possibly can—occasionally about some heavy stuff that I'm sure you never expected to hear from the Hulkster. I don't know, maybe you'll laugh at me. Or maybe you'll see a little bit of yourself in me. Either way, if you want to read this book for the sheer entertainment value of it, that's fine by me, too. Let's face it, brother: My life's been one hell of a trip, and I'm more than happy to take you along for the ride.

After one of the WCW's big *Monday Nitro* matches in Minneapolis, Kate Kennedy and her fiancé, a local police officer, came out partying with a bunch of us. We went to a bar, and I sat in with a local band and played a few tunes. (I still play guitar and bass now and then.) After a while we turned it into a typical wrestler's night—hitting the hotel for some beers.

Some time in the wee hours of the morning, Kate and her Minneapolis police officer fiancé called it a night and left. I said good-bye to both of them.

I remember noticing that we only had about three hours to sleep before we had to catch a flight that morning, so I went back to my hotel room to start packing.

That's when Kate showed up again.

Her lawsuit against me was eventually settled, and part of that settlement involved the signing of confidentiality agreements.

I can't get into the details of what happened.

All I can tell you about is the fallout.

When I first received that letter from Kate Kennedy's attorney, I was so scared about how Linda would react that I didn't tell her. I went for a whole year without telling her. Two Christmases passed. After I went through the second Christmas without smiling, Linda saw how down in the dumps I was and she started pressing me for answers.

A man can only keep something from his wife for so long. So I finally broke down and told her exactly what happened. I didn't hold anything back. I let her hear it all.

At first, Linda was really, really angry with Kate Kennedy. This was a woman Linda had befriended and personally approved to work for Pastamania. She couldn't believe she was about to put our family through this ordeal, and she encouraged me to fight back—which I did, with great success, in 1996.

Eventually, though, the inevitable happened, and Linda got really angry with me. She threw the word "divorce" around, loud and often, for months on end, and even though Linda didn't follow through with her threat, not a week went by for the whole rest

of our marriage that she didn't bring up the Kate Kennedy fiasco at least once.

I don't blame Linda for being angry. There is no excuse for my getting into a situation like that—no matter what happened in that hotel room.

But the problem in Linda's eyes was much bigger than just that incident. When this happened, Linda finally had the proof she had been after for years: proof, at least in her eyes, that all of her long-standing suspicions about me cheating must be true.

Almost from the outset of our marriage Linda was sure that I was cheating with some girl or another. It never made any sense to me. I'm just not the cheating kind.

In the early days I met Drew Barrymore in passing at a party once—I think Drew was still a teenager at that point—and Linda accused me of having an affair with her. Can you imagine? Another time in the '80s, Vince threw a gigantic birthday party for Pat Patterson at the Twin Towers, and right in the middle of dinner someone came up and told me that Cher had sent a limo for me; she was throwing her own big party in Manhattan that night, and she wanted Hulk Hogan to join her. I had never even met Cher, but rather than laughing about how bizarre it was, Linda accused me right then and there of carrying on an affair with Cher. *Cher!*

The suspicion and jealousy even affected my career. She got so crazy over this stuff, I was actually afraid to leave home for four or five months to make a movie. I feared that Linda might be gone when I got back. So I turned down some major stuff: the lead in *Highlander*, the role of Little John in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, and through the *Baywatch* guys I had an offer to make a movie with Pamela Anderson, when she was just red-hot. I really messed that one up. I had gone out and bought a copy of the *Playboy* magazine she posed in. Before I even had a chance to look at it,

that my wife and kids might not fully understand what kind of a commitment they were making.

One night, I sat them all down at the dinner table at the big house and I laid it all out for them. "It's a ton of work," I warned them, "and there'll be no more privacy." I tried to explain the depths of what that could mean, based on some of the bad press and negative things I'd been through in my own life and career—most of which happened when the kids were too young to remember.

"In some ways, doing this show might make you feel like you're in prison. It might be a nice day outside and you just want to go hit the beach, but you can't, because you're stuck in the house filming from sunup till sundown, or later. You might want to run off to the mall, but you can't, because you're filming."

At the end of my speech, I asked who wanted to do it—and everyone in the family raised their hands, enthusiastically.

As for me? I raised my hand, too. The fact that my wife and kids were all sitting there on the same page about something gave me hope. The idea that we would all be working together was heartwarming to me.

I actually remember thinking to myself, *Maybe this show will be the glue that puts my family back together.*

WHO KNOWS BEST?

I remember when I first watched *The Osbournes*, I assumed that they must've had cameras in their house 24/7 and camera people following them everywhere they went just waiting for that magic to happen. How else could they have captured all that crazy material?

Of course, that isn't the case with reality TV at all. Just like anything else in Hollywood, there are unions and crews and budgets to deal with. A production company (in our case an organization that called itself Pink Sneakers) isn't going to pay the crew

overtime and double time just to sit around when nothing's happening. That's why reality TV shows are soft-scripted.

In other words, they give you a scenario—hopefully something close to what you might encounter in your real life, or at least a pumped-up version of your real life—and they tell you the potential outcome, and some possible beats in between, and then you improvise and see what happens.

Sound familiar?

I'd been doing versions of this in the ring my whole career. Now I just had to do it with my Hulk Hogan personality toned down to somewhere just above the real Terry Bollea—so the familiar elements of Hulk Hogan would be there for the viewers, but the “reality” of my off-screen self would shine through.

A lot of people have a hard time with this stuff. It is a form of acting, in a way. As we started the first season, we all had to find our footing.

Brooke was no problem. She was the extrovert, the actress, the singer, from the moment she popped out of the womb. She'd go with the flow and always looked great on camera. The only thing the producers forced on her was to act all boy crazy. Brooke was more of a slow starter, like me, and she wasn't boy crazy at sixteen at all. They needed that to make the show more interesting, though, and she went along with it.

It all came natural to Nick. He was quiet on camera but had a real natural instinct when it came to the “acting” part of reality TV. It got to the point where the producers knew they could rely on him to do things that were way outside of his character just to try to make some magic happen on screen. Like when he was up in his room one day, just sitting at his computer while Linda and I filmed a scene downstairs in the kitchen. The producers asked him to go to the window and toss water balloons at the neighbors. They wanted to show him exhibiting that typical rich, spoiled-brat, obnoxious-little-brother behavior. Nick would never do that in real life. He was actually a much more serious and focused kid than anyone ever saw on TV. But it created scenes that the producers could work with in the editing room.

As for Linda? This was her moment to shine. It's like she had been waiting twenty years for the cameras to be pointed her way instead of mine. She only wanted to be seen with full-blown makeup and perfect hair—and she put some of that attitude on Brooke as well. "Put on a different dress. Make sure your hair's blown out!" She was right, in a way. We were trying to build Brooke's career, and you wanted her to be as appealing as possible. But Linda just went over the top when it came to herself.

There were times when I'd give the producers the keys to the house, so they could come in super early in the morning and shoot us in bed while we were still sleeping. I didn't care if my butt was hanging out or I had drool on my pillow. That was part of the appeal of the show—to let people into the Hogans' "real life." Linda wouldn't have it. On those days, she would set her alarm really early and get up and brush her hair and her teeth and get some basic makeup on before the camera people ever arrived.

In fact, on the very first day, the very first scene we shot in the kitchen—the camera's wife, and Linda caught a glimpse of her reflection in the window—and noticed that her hair was messed up.

"Turn the camera off!" she said. The director, Scott Bennett, who liked to keep the cameras rolling so he wouldn't risk missing any great new scenes, didn't turn off the camera right away. Linda just tore his head off. "I told you to turn that fucking camera off!" she yelled. The studio was laughing at him like a dog. The poor guy went scrambling out of the house with his tail between his legs trying to find some support from the producers. He thought he blew the whole show in the very first setup.

But that was just Linda. The whole crew would get to know that over the coming weeks.

Just as I suspected might happen, Linda got bored and fed up with the whole process real quick. She wanted the fame and the glamour of being on TV. She just didn't want to put in the hard work and long hours that go along with it. Before long, I was spending my entire morning trying to get her to come downstairs so we could start filming. "I don't want to come down today," she'd complain. "Just tell them to shoot something else!"

CHAPTER 14

Season of Change

By the time season four of *Hogan Knows Best* came around, Brooke's music career was really heating up. It should have been a really happy time, but Brooke had so many problems with her mom that she kept breaking down and crying at the recording studio and before her performances out on the road.

The fact is, Linda's rage and fury kept crossing into her managerial role. When Brooke was hired to sing the national anthem at the Daytona 500, in front of 125,000 people, Linda made Brooke so upset she barely got through the performance. When she opened for this real hot group, My Chemical Romance, same thing. She would get on her about her clothes and her outfits and how fat she looked, her hairstyle. She'd yell at her for missing notes, not sounding good. It was affecting Brooke's ability to get the job done, in a real big way.

So the record company tried to keep friends and handlers around Brooke all the time—just to take care of her and make sure she was all right.

One of those handlers the record company brought in was a woman named Christiane Plante. Christiane was so great with Brooke. She did everything she could to look after her, and I loved seeing someone take care of my daughter that way. She was just

so positive and caring. She was thirty-four, but she and Brooke became really close. Almost like best friends, in a way.

Linda was disappearing on a regular basis by January and February of 2007. If she wasn't flying out to California, she was driving all the way back to Tampa. I never knew why, and half the time I didn't know where she was. The F-yous were just out of control, and now always coupled with her threatening to move to California and file for divorce. It's like she was taunting me, trying to get me to pull the trigger and leave her first. There was no back and forth anymore. No give and take. I don't think you can even call it a marriage. It wasn't a partnership, either. It wasn't a friendship. It was nothing but awful.

On the first day of filming for season four, Linda just didn't show up. The production crew was all set up, and the whole staff was there and ready to go, and no Linda. We missed the whole first day. We missed the whole second day. Suddenly the producers and the VH1 guys are threatening to sue me. "Don't sue me! I'm here! It's Linda," I kept telling them.

At first I didn't know where she was. I was just worried sick. I got real depressed about it. I was worried something had happened to her. When she finally called from California she didn't even have an excuse. She just kept telling me to have them start without her. I told her she needed to get on a plane, and she refused. It was awful. It took almost two weeks before we got Linda back and actually started shooting. I was just a wreck. The fact that our personal problems were spilling over into Brooke's career, and now this show? I was embarrassed, and I didn't know what to do.

None of this is an excuse for what happened next. I just want you to understand the state of my relationship, and how fragile my emotions were.

One day in the middle of all of that, Christiane Plante called. Brooke had broken down again, and she wanted to ask me what I thought she should do to help her, but as soon as she heard the sound of my voice she said, "Oh my God. What's wrong?"

She turned that caring attention she had given Brooke on me. So I told her. "I'm just real worried about Linda," I replied.

Christiane knew what Linda had been pulling. She heard about it all from Brooke, and witnessed plenty of Linda's behavior firsthand. She knew how much trouble Brooke had been having, and she sympathized with my situation. "I don't know why she's doing this to you and Brooke."

Over the phone that day, Christiane gave me a shoulder to lean on, at least verbally. I can't tell you how much I needed that.

Maybe a month or so later, Brooke made an appearance up in New York City, and I went along to introduce her from the stage. Christiane was along for that trip, and the three of us—she, Brooke, and I—went out to dinner afterward. Back at the hotel that night, Christiane and I both stopped by Brooke's room to check on her at the same time. I eventually left the two of them there and went downstairs to my room. A half hour or so later, because I'm always over the top and have to check one more time, I called Brooke's room again just to make sure she was okay.

Christiane answered the phone. She said Brooke was going to bed and she was just leaving. Then she asked me what I was doing.

"I'm probably gonna drink a glass of wine and just hang out," I said. Then words came from my mouth that I didn't expect. "Why don't you come down and join me?"

It felt like two seconds later we were in a room together. We were both drinking a glass of wine, just talking, but I felt like she wanted to do more than that, you know? I was real attracted to her, for so many reasons—and my wife and I hadn't been intimate in so long that I can't even tell you how long it had been.

All of a sudden, Christiane reached her arm over to put her hand on my back—and I ducked. It was a weird instinct. I ducked the way a dog that's been hit too many times would cower when someone raises a hand.

"Are you okay?" Christiane asked. Apparently it surprised her, too.

"Yeah, yeah. You just caught me off guard there," I said.

Next thing I know, the two of us started kissing. Not to sound perverted or anything, but it was fantastic. Here I am in my fifties now, and this was a really attractive thirty-four-year-old woman,

with dark hair and a curvaceous body. And just to have some affection and genuine caring mixed in with that kind of physical attraction? It felt good. It was such an emotional and physical release.

We didn't have sex that night, but it opened the door. Over the course of the next two months we did have sex, maybe five different times. That was it.

Linda had no idea. For a while it had that sort of naughty appeal, like a kid sneaking some chocolate that he's not supposed to have. Just seeing Christiane during the course of a normal business day with Brooke became this real exciting thing. It was an entirely new experience for me. Like I said, I had never done anything like this in twenty-two years of marriage.

In a way, that Christiane excitement kept me going for a couple of months. It helped me just to get through the days.

It was no coincidence that the very first episode of the final season of our reality show was called "Wedlock Headlock." I think the crew filming our visit to a marriage counselor was as much for their benefit as it was ours.

Yes, Linda and I kissed and made up on TV, but things went right back to the way they'd been whenever the cameras stopped rolling. Heck, even when the cameras *were* rolling. We couldn't hide it anymore. But the really bad stuff hit the editing room floor.

They call it "reality," but I guess the real inner workings of the Hogan family's married life didn't make for good TV.

To get away from all of the headaches, the scripts seemed to go further out on a limb to put us in funny situations. They sent us to a dude ranch in Wyoming for vacation. We went up to Universal Studios in Orlando, where we figured the only way we could ever have a normal day of family fun without being mobbed by fans was to wear all this prosthetic makeup and go into that park in disguise.

I'm still new to this stuff. It's hard for me not to bitch and moan about everything. Like any great coach, though, she keeps me in line—and I'm not so easy to keep in line!

That whole idea of being grateful for possibilities, grateful for things you don't even have yet—let alone being grateful for the gifts we have in our lives, and the gift of simply *being* alive—that was the second part of this spiritual awakening of mine. Being grateful is one of the big keys to leading a happy life. I should have realized that all on my own. Whenever I was grateful in my life, I was happy. After Brooke and Nick were born, I was as grateful as I'd ever been, and my life was *filled* with happiness—but I was never consciously aware of that fact.

Now Jennifer was there to help me understand that, and to embrace it, consciously, so I could bring about that kind of happiness in my life more often.

The thing about the law of attraction is it doesn't happen overnight. You reap what you sow in life. Call it karma, call it whatever you want, but the negativity that you put into the world will come back around to bite you one way or the other. That's exactly what started to happen in February of 2008.

One day, out of the blue, I got a panicked phone call from Christiane Plante. She and I hadn't really spoken at all since the summer of 2007, so you can imagine how surprised I was to hear from her. The news she had was not good.

"I got a message from Brooke," she told me.

Apparently, a friend of Brooke's who worked at the record company with Christiane just casually decided over lunch to inform her that Christiane had been having an affair with her father. Brooke was incensed. So she called Christiane looking for answers.

I told her, "Christiane, just tell her the truth."

I had already come far enough in my new way of thinking to know that lying would only make it worse. Lying would postpone

the inevitable: the heartbreak, the pain that was about to be unleashed.

Christiane was real nervous about it, of course, and she didn't think she could keep it together and make sense of it all in a phone call. So rather than call Brooke back, Christiane decided to send Brooke a letter—a letter in which she admitted the affair and apologized for letting it happen.

At this point, Brooke was just about 100 percent in Linda's camp as far as this divorce was concerned. I couldn't understand why, and I wouldn't understand until much later. What happened next made the whole situation a lot worse.

First, Brooke confronted me. She wanted to know if it was true. She wanted to know why I'd done it. I told her the truth. "There's two sides to every story, Brooke," is what I said. I tried to explain that her mother and I were so broken, and I was so lonely and hurt, that when this thing with Christiane presented itself, I almost couldn't help myself. I wasn't making excuses, I was just trying to explain where I was coming from, and how I found myself in that situation.

Brooke wouldn't hear it. "There aren't two sides, Dad. There's right and wrong." My daughter, who had barely been speaking to me anyway for months, suddenly stopped communicating with me at all.

Two days after Brooke received that letter, a reporter from the *National Enquirer* knocked on Christiane's door. Her personal letter to Brooke had somehow found its way into that tabloid's hands. They cornered Christiane and left her no choice but to respond. So on February 28, my affair became national news. I don't think there's a blog or entertainment show in America that didn't run with the story of Hulk Hogan cheating on his wife.

I was humiliated. I was angry. I didn't know what to do. There was no one to sue—the story was true. I couldn't even figure out who to be angry with, except for myself for letting it happen in the first place.

Then something remarkable happened. After about a day's worth of wallowing in all this self-pity and frustration, I stopped.

I took a deep breath. I realized nothing positive could possibly come from my being angry about this. And I put it aside.

I made a choice right then and there to take the high road on this thing. I didn't want to stoop to the level of whoever gave the *Enquirer* that letter—so I decided not to respond.

Eventually I learned that Brooke had shown that letter to Linda, and Linda had turned around and faxed it off to her attorney. Do you see where I'm going with this train of thought on how that letter made it over to the *Enquirer*?

As far as I was concerned, this was the first volley in what was sure to be a giant battle of a divorce with Linda. There would be many more shots to come, and when it came to talking about my private life to the press, I knew I would have to pick my battles carefully. So I decided not to fire back.

I'm not sure if Linda was frustrated by my lack of response or what, but months later she hired a publicist and sent out a statement to the media claiming that the Christiane affair was the reason she filed for divorce. But she had no idea until Brooke showed her that letter. I couldn't believe it. From everything I've ever seen, if Linda had known about Christiane, she would've gone ballistic. She wouldn't have kept it quiet for all those months. She would have shouted it from the rooftops, just as she was doing now.

The thing I couldn't figure out was why Linda would want to drag this divorce out and turn it into a battle in the first place. Florida is a no-fault state. Even if the affair were the reason she filed for divorce, it wouldn't have any bearing on a judge's ruling on how much money or support Linda should get. So why would she want to make a big deal out of it again and drag it all out into the public eye?

Oddly enough, I would eventually find explanations for all of Linda's behavior in the middle of all of that spiritual reading I was doing. Answers that would allow me to understand that behavior, and finally learn to move past it.

thinking he was going to die, and I raised the question of whether or not that might have been part of what caused John's injuries. I did anything and everything I could just to alleviate my son's suffering. Just to relieve some of the guilt and pressure he was putting on himself. I was willing to say almost anything, no matter what it was, to get him through these seemingly endless days in that solitary cell.

TALE OF THE TAPES

As we entered the third week of this nonstop struggle, my third week sitting in that chair, I suddenly received a flurry of worried calls from attorneys and friends describing something I just couldn't believe was real.

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Department released tapes of Nick's jailhouse phone conversations to the media. His conversations with me. His conversations with his mother. Even conversations with his grandmother, my mom, Ruth Bollea. Private conversations that were recorded in my son's darkest hours.

That tabloid trash Web site TMZ sifted through these twenty-six hours of tapes, found the most potentially inflammatory ten-second sound bites, cut them out of context, and pasted them on the Internet for the whole world to hear.

I knew all of our conversations were monitored and recorded. There was a reminder that came on and told me so every two minutes we were on that phone. I interpreted that the same way every other person with a family member in jail interprets that message. You can't have murderers and thieves having conversations about planning their escape or putting hits on people. The reason to monitor jailhouse conversations is safety. We all get that. Nowhere is it ever said or written or even implied that these tapes could be released for public consumption.

Have you ever heard Charles Manson's jailhouse tapes? Have you ever heard Ted Bundy's jailhouse tapes? Have you heard O.J.'s jail-

house tapes? A lot of people would find it pretty fascinating to hear those tapes, but they've never been made available. Come to think of it, have you even heard Paris Hilton's jailhouse tapes? Or any other celebrity's jailhouse tapes? No! Never before, to my knowledge, have *anyone's* jailhouse tapes been released to the media except ours down here in the hillbilly circus. It is a violation of privacy at someone's most vulnerable point, and I pray that no other parent with a child in jail is ever forced to go through something like this. The release of those tapes was unconscionable. Now all of us would have to face the music when it came to the things we said.

The most inflammatory statement of all of those sound bites was one that came out of my mouth. I was talking about the law of attraction, and I made the suggestion that God laid some "heavy shit" on John. Then Nick responded, in the spirit of talking about the law of attraction and the idea that there could be some explanation for why this accident happened to both of them that night, that John was a "negative person." We weren't just talking about the accident, of course. The "heavy shit" that was laid on John was also the horrible situation in his home life.

I've apologized for making that statement, and I'll apologize again here. Even in complete privacy, it is not for me to judge how John lived his life. I shouldn't have said it, and I'm sorry. I hope that after reading this book, people will understand that my words weren't said with any kind of malice.

Before and after that moment on that tape, we spent all kinds of time talking about the good things about John, and how much we were praying for his complete recovery. Those twenty-six hours of tapes are filled with positive, life-affirming messages that were meant to help my son survive his ordeal, but the media didn't play them, or the long passages I read from the Bible. That's just the way the media works. I accept that.

You want to know what? After we had a chance to digest it and talk about it, Nick and I were both grateful that those tapes were released. We were grateful because it woke us up. It made us realize that even as we discussed our spirituality in private, it was important to be mindful of our words.

Words are powerful things. The words I used to distract Nick from his misery, combined with the motivational words and spiritual words I used in those phone calls, helped my son to survive the cruel and unusual punishment of his confinement.

We stayed on the path of positivity—and something good actually came out of that whole ordeal. At the end of May, my friend Duane “Dog” Chapman read what I was going through with Nick and those tapes, and he had his lawyer, David Houston, give me a call. The last thing I wanted to do was explain Nick’s case to yet another lawyer, but David heard me out and did something none of those other lawyers did: He hopped on a plane and flew into Tampa to take care of this thing firsthand.

First he filed a lawsuit against the sheriff’s office for releasing those jailhouse tapes, asking a judge to bar them from releasing any more tapes in the future. Then David Houston came up with a way to file a motion that even Linda wouldn’t object to: We asked that Nick be removed from solitary and allowed to serve his jail sentence at home with an ankle bracelet until he turned eighteen, at which time he would go back into the adult minimum-security jail as expected. It was less than two months that Nick would be on house arrest. It seemed like a very reasonable solution.

On June 3, Judge Federico held a hearing and denied the request.

After all the press attention, I think he simply didn’t want to lose face. He didn’t want to look like he was giving in to the Hogans. That’s my opinion. He also must have realized that it was time to do the right thing, though, because two days later, in what sources at the jail told the press was a “routine review,” Nick was suddenly moved out of solitary and allowed to mingle with two other juveniles who were brought into a segregated area of the adult minimum-security prison. Nick suddenly had some human contact. He had access to a television. He had access to an outdoor courtyard.

“Dad, I can even go outside at night and see the stars!” he said. My son was elated. My son was grateful beyond belief. His voice finally regained some sense of normalcy.

I knew I was choosing to move in a more positive direction by not speaking out to the media throughout the demise of the marriage, and Nick's ordeal, and the release of those tapes. The problem was nobody else knew it.

My fans were left to come to their own conclusions about what I had become based only on the words of others. The only message the public heard about Hulk Hogan for almost an entire year had come from Linda and her attorneys, the Grazianos and their attorneys, bloggers, DJs, and Nancy Grace—the CNN *Headline News* personality who took up Hogan-bashing as a full-time job in the wake of Nick's accident.

By June of 2008, I was operating on such a different plane and acting in such a calmer, more rational fashion than I ever had before, some of my friends in the wrestling business said they didn't even recognize me. I stopped complaining all the time. I stopped bashing Linda's antics. It's like I exhaled all that bad energy and let my shoulders relax for the first time in years. Maybe the first time ever in my adult life.

"You're like a whole different person," Eric Bischoff said to me as we started working together on *Celebrity Championship Wrestling*.

"That might be true," I said, "but this is the real me."

Brutus Beefcake was so surprised by my change in demeanor that he went out and started reading *The Secret* and all these other books, too.

The public didn't know any of that. They had no clue. In fact, if you added up all the horrible things that were being said about me, you'd have thought I was nothing more than a cheating husband who stalked Linda, encouraged his kids to drink and drive, and blamed John Graziano for his own condition!

For a long time I didn't care how the public perceived me. Honestly, I knew I needed to get my head on straight before I could deal with anything outside of my own life and family situation. Then all of a sudden Eric and my publicist Elizabeth Rosenthal and Brutus and every one of my attorneys, including David

Houston—all of the people I trust to look after my image, my career, and even my family's well-being—came at me simultaneously with the very same message: "You need to respond or you won't have a career to come back to."

So finally, in early June, I decided it was time to come out of my little spiritual cocoon.

Talking about all of this, especially my son's accident, would not be easy. This was delicate territory, and the last thing I could afford to do was to make another mistake like I had on Arsenio's show in 1991. My image had already suffered too much without my direct involvement.

What I said was almost as important as where I said it. I didn't want anything to seem sensational. I didn't want to make it seem like I was somehow trying to promote myself, when all I wanted to do at this point was let my fans hear my side of the story firsthand.

I worked closely with Elizabeth, who stuck by me through this entire ordeal and somehow saved me from having to answer every tabloid headline. I also hired a crisis management PR firm in Los Angeles, just as backup in case anything got worse. It cost me a fortune, but I didn't want to take any risks this time.

In the end, I think the only thing I needed was the biggest weapon I already had in my arsenal: honesty.

I had crossed that bridge in my personal life once and for all. True open honesty was it for me now. With my kids. With my ex. In my business dealings. Everything. I knew it wouldn't be any different when it came to talking in public.

Within a couple of weeks we decided on two press outlets known for their fairness and journalistic integrity: *People* magazine and Larry King. That was it. I wouldn't go on a media tour. I wouldn't appear on late-night talk shows or early-morning broadcasts. I would let my words speak for themselves. I would give my fans the chance to make up their minds who *they* wanted to believe—the naysayers and haters who were trying to burn me at the stake, or me, the man they'd grown up with and

watched and embraced both in and out of the ring for the last thirty years.

It actually felt good to talk about it all. It was cathartic in a way to finally speak out and just tell someone outside of my immediate circle what I'd been through, and what I was still going through. Plus, I felt it was so important that I shift some of the focus back to John Graziano, so the public would be thinking about his healing and sending positive thoughts and prayers his way after reading or listening to what I had to say.

I answered Larry King's questions as honestly as I possibly could. There was no acting or putting on airs. I just spoke to him, from the heart, and I think people could tell. I answered *People* magazine's questions the same way. Once I had said my piece, I went back to my life. I went back to Jennifer. I went back to making my new TV show. I went back to spending time with Brooke; we finally saw eye to eye after all we'd been through, and she even moved back in with me for a while. I went back to visiting my son every hour I possibly could for the remainder of his time in bed.

It felt good. I somehow felt like I had completed a big step in my journey. It was out of my hands now. I was grateful that those big media outlets still embraced me in a way that allowed me to say what I had to say.

In fact, the only downside to it was the effect it seemed to have on Linda. It put her on the defensive, even though I did my best not to say anything too negative about her at all in those interviews.

Right in the middle of it, her lawyer stood up and proclaimed to the world that this divorce was going to be a war. He was actually quoted saying that to *People* magazine, in a rebuttal quote they included in my story.

A war? I remember thinking what a terrible thing that was. For the two of us. For our kids. Linda already knew I was willing to give her half of everything at that point. I was happy to give her whatever a judge deemed was her share. She deserved it. We had

been married twenty-three years. That wasn't enough for her. It seemed like she wanted to try to destroy me. And that just made me sad for her.

I kept asking myself, *What kind of a person wants to turn their divorce into a war?*