



**FOREWORD BY STING**

# **WRESTLING WITH THE DEVIL**

# **LEX LUGER**

**WITH JOHN D. HOLLIS**

**THE TRUE STORY OF A WORLD CHAMPION PROFESSIONAL WRESTLER—  
HIS REIGN, RUIN, AND REDEMPTION**

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*Wrestling with the Devil: The True Story of a World Champion Professional Wrestler—His Reign, Ruin, and Redemption*

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## FOREWORD

When I first met Lex Luger, I didn't like him at all. The guy may have been "The Total Package"—famous for having the greatest physique of anyone in pro wrestling—but I thought he was a rude and arrogant jerk. While I was still an unknown in the sport at the time, Lex was already a headliner and earning big bucks. I'd often see him at the gym when I arrived for my early-morning workout, but we didn't say much to each other at first. Neither of us was there to make friends. All we cared about was getting to be number one in the ring—no matter what it took.

But over the years, I got to know Lex well as we wrestled as both partners and foes. His bodybuilder's physique wasn't merely for show; he had genuine freakish strength. We developed a strong mutual respect and a close personal friendship. In our extremely competitive and risk-filled industry, you needed someone you could count on to watch your back. Lex became that person for me, and I for him.

I remember rushing to the hospital after Lex was in a motorcycle accident that could have killed him. Even though I was there to reassure him that everything was going to be okay, I was deeply concerned. His arm was so mangled that I couldn't imagine any doctor being able to put it back together. But in the end, it was okay. We were there for each other, like brothers. I figured that was the way it was always going to be.

But things got rocky. Lex and I, like many pro wrestlers, were living secret lives on the road that we never wanted our families to know

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about. We were facing (and falling into) every temptation imaginable. Drugs, alcohol, women, you name it. The world grew so dark that everything else fell apart—including our friendship.

In 1998, after finally losing the biggest wrestling match of my life against God, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. He began transforming me from the inside out. When I tried to reconnect with Lex then, he wasn't interested. But I never stopped trying to reach out. The only time he called me was when Elizabeth Hulette died from an overdose of alcohol and pills—a tragic event that rocked not just the wrestling community but Lex's own world.

Lex Luger—one of the toughest and most powerful pro wrestlers—was wrecked and shattered. To the world, it seemed like his story was over. But God was just getting started with Lex.

This book is about how Lex Luger got from where he was then—a convicted felon, a womanizer, a drug user, a worshiper of self and money and fame—to a man who experienced one of the most dramatic and miraculous transformations I've ever seen. *Wrestling with the Devil* is a wild ride, a behind-the-scenes look at Lex's glory days of wrestling, the tragic crash that followed, and his remarkable journey of discovering true strength.

Today, the once-Herculean body is battered and frail. He may have lost his physical power, but spiritually he's a giant for God. He's a perfect example of what the Bible refers to as a "new creation." As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV), "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

I have never known anybody stronger than Lex Luger—in or outside the ring. He has truly wrestled with the devil. This book is his story of victory.

**STEVE BORDEN, AKA STING**  
MARCH 2013

## PROLOGUE

The pain was excruciating and sudden, jolting me awake in the early morning hours.

It felt like someone was gashing me with a butcher knife or searing me with a branding iron. *What's happening? How did someone get in my room? Is this for real, or am I dreaming?*

I was no stranger to pain. I had sustained plenty of nasty injuries throughout my life. Some were particularly unique to wrestling. Like the time the Big Show snatched me with his massive hands, lifted me ten feet in the air, and choke-slammed me through a table onto the concrete floor. Or the many times I was battered and bloodied with a steel chair.

But this was different, an intense agony unlike anything I'd ever experienced. I had learned to push through pain, but this . . . I had to squeeze my eyes shut to hold back the tears.

*Maybe if I just change position, the sharpness will be less acute or the burning will subside. Did I lie down wrong?* I'd had twinges over the previous weeks, but the pain that was now shooting down my neck between my shoulder blades was a hundred times worse. So I tried to adjust.

And then the unthinkable reality hit me: I couldn't move.

It felt as if there were giant suction cups on my back, pulling me down, down, through the sheets, through the mattress, through the bed frame. My body was heavier than a dead weight, like someone had played a malicious prank while I was sleeping and encased me in cast iron.

*What the—?* I gritted my teeth and winced. I needed to try shifting positions again. *Yes.* I could move my head and shoulders somewhat, but nothing else. If I could just roll off the side of the bed and get on my knees, I figured I might be able to reach the phone. Then I could call for help. I didn't know what else to do.

I began to rock cautiously, slowly inching my way to the edge of the queen-size bed, thankful for even this extremely limited movement. *I can catch myself with my left arm and break my fall.*

My plan worked, kinda. But I forgot my left arm was useless.

I plummeted to the floor like a rock, landing on my back between the two beds in my room with my head pinned against the nightstand. The imaginary, powerful suction cups were intact, now pulling me down, down, through the carpet, through the floor.

When I tried to get up, nothing happened. I couldn't pivot my head or move a muscle, other than blinking my eyes and opening my mouth. The irony of the situation didn't escape me: My life had been based on physical prowess, but now I couldn't even lift a finger.

I was terrified; I had never felt so helpless.

Crumpled against the nightstand, with my head twisted at an awkward angle and my chin pressed into my chest, I could barely breathe. *I'm in serious trouble. Is this how I'm going to die, alone on a hotel room floor?* My breaths grew more shallow.

"Help! Please, help me!" I pushed out the cry with all my might, but it merely brushed my lips in a faint whisper. Even if someone had been lying right next to me, my words would have been barely audible.

The telephone sitting twenty inches above me on the nightstand seemed miles away. *Is this really how it's going to end? That will make a great headline: "The Total Package' Returned to Sender."*

*Why is this happening? What is going on?* I implored the darkness. I waited for an answer, my mind starting to drift, rewinding and fast-forwarding through my life, piecing it together. There had to be clues.



1

# BUFFALO BOY

“You’ll never catch me!”

From the time I was a small boy growing up in Buffalo, New York, I loved to run. I’d race up and down the sidewalk as fast as I could for hours. It probably looked strange to passersby, but the way the wind felt on my face when I accelerated gave me a deep sense of joy. Maybe, in reality, I was releasing pent-up energy. But whatever the reason, I didn’t stop. Mom would say that I was like “greased lightning.” It definitely was an asset in neighborhood games of tag—no one could get their hands on me. If anyone got close, I’d swerve at the last second and watch my pursuer stumble and fall. I prided myself on never being tagged “it”—unless I wanted to be. And if I did, I would run circles around everyone else. When I was old enough for a bike, I’d speed around the block, pedaling so hard I should have been airborne.

In the 1950s, Buffalo was still a blue-collar steel town, known

for its proximity to Niagara Falls and what would become its world-famous Buffalo wings. But my family was defined by something different: music.

Roger Pfohl and Marion Monteith were both students at the University of Buffalo when they met. My dad was a brilliant musician, with his sights set on becoming a concert pianist. My mom was brilliant academically—she had been valedictorian of her high school class, with the added distinction of carrying the highest grade point average (nothing but As) of all the students in the Buffalo school system throughout her entire education. She would go on to excel in college, both as an undergrad and while getting her master's degree.

My parents met their first year in college. Mom was singing in the choir, and Dad was the accompanist for the Christmas concert. After one particular practice, all the girls gathered around the piano while my dad played a few bars of various songs, challenging the girls to “name that tune.” He began with popular melodies, which were readily guessed. But then he decided to throw in something classical—an obscure piece by Chopin called “Revolutionary Étude”—to stump the group. His plan to outwit the girls almost worked, but with her rich classical music background, my mom recognized the piece immediately. Dad couldn't help but be impressed.

The two started talking and discovered how much they had in common. My dad had been a child prodigy on the piano, while my mom's father, William Monteith, who played tuba in the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, was gifted with natural musical talent and taught himself to play nine instruments. Mom and Dad began to spend more time together, and before too long they fell in love and got married. When my brother, Barry, was born, Dad dropped out of school and began working as a security guard at the Trico factory, where windshield wipers were made. Three years later my sister, Barbara, came along. And while she was still a toddler, I arrived on June 2, 1958.

At this point my dad was still working at Trico. I remember thinking his uniform was cool because it made him look like a policeman. But it wasn't long before my parents launched their own small business directly tied to their passion for music.

My dad had learned how to tune pianos and was making extra money by working part-time for other people. With his skill in demand, it made perfect sense for my parents to start their own business. They began buying old pianos for next to nothing, then restoring and reselling them. Every instrument was perfectly tuned, fitted with new keys and strings, and refinished until the cosmetic flaws vanished. Before long, they had more pianos than space to work on them. They opened a small storefront called Roger's Quality Pianos and Organs, located on Main Street in Buffalo. Dad's uniform was now a suit and tie, and he slicked his hair back with Brylcreem. I wanted to be just like my dad, so I insisted on wearing a suit to kindergarten every day. Eventually, the kindergarten teacher called my mom.

"Mrs. Pfohl, it's really difficult for the class to finger paint when Larry is always wearing a suit." By first grade, I had outgrown my suit phase.



My parents' enterprise grew rapidly as satisfied customers spread the word. Soon everything was moved to a bigger space across the street. Mom and Dad made a dynamic team. I believe that their honesty and integrity fueled their success. And it certainly helped that my dad could play—the pianos practically walked out the door after he sat down and touched the keys. It didn't matter whether it was an upright, spinet, or concert grand; the sound he created was magical and profitable.

When business picked up, Dad added Sunday hours—now the store was open seven days a week. Before the store opened on weekends, Barry, Barbara, and I had various tasks to complete. As the youngest, I mopped the floors, cleaned the windows and bathroom,

and dusted the pianos and organs. After my dad paid me for a job well done, I'd celebrate with a lunch of a burger, fries, and a vanilla milk shake at Charlie's, the soda fountain across the street. On other occasions, I'd stroll over to the drugstore next door and pick up the latest Superman comic book and all the candy my remaining money would buy. (I've always loved my sweets.)

The store required a lot of my parents' time, so after school we kids were left on our own until Mom came home to make dinner. I took full advantage of that liberty. My brother and sister were probably supposed to keep an eye on me, but they were doing their own thing with their friends. I'd get home from grade school, change clothes, search for something to eat, then head out to explore for the rest of the afternoon—free as a bird.

The neighborhood we lived in looked like the opening scene of the movie *Rudy*—lots of concrete, chain-link fences, and a plaza with a Woolworth's, a barbershop, a drugstore, and other places to hang out. I became a regular there. The more I was on my own, the happier I was. I liked being able to do what I wanted, when I wanted.

But because I came from a musically talented family, there were still expectations placed on me. All of us kids took piano lessons. Barry began with piano then switched to guitar, while Barbara became accomplished at the keyboard and also sang. But me? It was like being marched to my execution when the piano teacher, Mrs. Feldmann, came to our house once a week.

I was ten years old and determined to make my piano lessons miserable for everyone. I vowed to wear down my teacher—and my parents—until they all backed down and surrendered to my demands. Mrs. Feldmann was old. I figured she was probably born when dinosaurs were alive. She wore thick glasses and smelled like mothballs. I scooted as far away from her on the bench as I could, trying not to fall off the end.

In hindsight, I have to give Mrs. Feldmann credit. She patiently

encouraged me, going over the same things, week after week. “C’mon, Larry,” she’d say. “Be patient, and you’ll see some progress. Just stay with it. Let’s begin again.”

*Bam! Bam! Bam!*

I banged the keys violently and screamed, “Leave me alone. I hate this!” My outbursts must have pierced my mother’s heart as she waited for the half-hour lesson to be over, embarrassed at my behavior and stunned by my declaration. But it was true. I hated anything I didn’t excel at, and I was terrible at playing piano. What did I need piano lessons for? Were they going to help me run faster or jump higher? That’s all that mattered to me.



One day in third-grade gym class, my athletic abilities became public. We lined up by grades, five or six kids per heat, on the pavement behind the school for five different fitness activities. I took off like a shot in the fifty-yard dash, my closest competitor twenty yards behind me. I’ll never forget the look on my gym teacher’s face when I finished. His mouth had dropped open, his eyes riveted on his stopwatch. *Something must have happened*, I thought. *Well, I’ll be happy to do it again*. I got my wish.

After the second heat, my teacher went over to the table where the official times were being recorded. A few minutes later, I learned why everyone was so excited: my time had blown the competition away—breaking the school record for the third grade and beating out all the fourth and fifth graders as well. I knew I was fast, but I had no idea I was *that* fast. I marveled at my ability and how easy it was for me.

Not only did I have lightning speed, I soared over the high jump—breaking the third-grade school record handily. I excelled in every fitness test, scoring above 100 percent across the board. My playground cred skyrocketed; everyone began treating me differently. I often heard my closest friends defending me to older kids.

“Larry is the fastest kid in the whole school, and he’s only in the third grade.” “Yeah, and he can jump the highest too!”

I would smile like a king, holding court while sitting on the monkey bars at recess, showing off my skills from time to time. *I really am talented. Different from the rest of my family, but still the best at what I do.*

My parents’ reaction to my achievements didn’t surprise me. Sports was foreign territory to them, light-years away from their world of music and art. They were happy for me, but with no point of reference, it seemed to me that the significance of my abilities was lost on them. That was okay. My natural talent didn’t match any of my family’s. But I was exceptional at something, and I’d stand out on my own.

During the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, I was glued to the TV. I loved every minute of it, especially the track-and-field events. My parents were at the store during most of the two-week broadcast, but my brother and sister would occasionally watch with me.

We were together when Bob Beamon obliterated the world long jump record with a distance of 29 feet 2-½ inches, so far that it exceeded the optical measuring device. People called it the “Leap of the Century,” convinced it would stand until the millennium. When Beamon collapsed on the track after hearing his final distance, I sprang off the couch and announced to my siblings, “I’m going to break his world record someday!”

But that wasn’t the only record I wanted to break. I concentrated on every stride that American runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos took in the 200-meter sprint. When they raised their black-gloved fists to the sky as our national anthem was played, I didn’t realize what it meant or what all the fuss was about afterward. I simply admired how fast they ran and wanted to break their records too.

So I ran and ran and jumped and jumped, an enjoyable regimen. If anyone asked me what I was doing, I would quickly reply: “Training.”

I didn’t get a pass from playing music, though. In the next year, the piano lessons had been abandoned, but Grandpa Monteith

attempted to teach me to play the trombone for band. I flat-out refused to practice but was still expected to play in a school parade when I was in fourth grade. I couldn't play a single note of the songs, but I had an ingenious plan.

Watching the musicians on either side of me, I raised my trombone, pressed my lips against the mouthpiece, puffed out my cheeks, and moved the brass slide. March, puff, slide—perfectly synchronized. I smiled to myself. *I'm good.* No one was the wiser. My “Milli Vanilli” performance would have fooled even my grandfather if he had been there.



At school, I enjoyed the sports in gym class but never chose to play on any organized team in the summer like most of my classmates. I was so focused on my track-and-field goals that I became oblivious to most other sports. One day in sixth grade I happened to see some boys shooting hoops in the neighborhood. *Looks like fun and pretty easy. I can do that.* So I asked if I could try a few shots. I dribbled a few times to get a feel for the ball. I didn't make any baskets on my first attempts, but I was hooked. From that point on, I spent hours at my friends' houses playing basketball. It made sense to switch to an indoor sport because Buffalo winters are cold, and it's hard to run in the snow and ice. I played basketball in an after-school recreation league. By the end of the season, I had proved myself to be one of the best players, if not the best.

I asked my parents for a basketball hoop at home so I could practice anytime. At first my dad said no, but he eventually came around. I would shoot for hours and never tire of it. Sometimes my brother would join me in a lively game. A good athlete, Barry could give me a workout. Inside the house, I worked on perfecting my vertical leap, aggravating my mother when she'd find fresh smudge marks from my hands on the white ceiling.

Fortunately, there was always a pickup game going on somewhere nearby. And being good at sports made it easier for me to make friends when we moved to a new neighborhood in Buffalo. As my parents' business grew, my dad relocated us several times. As soon as kids found out what I could do, everyone wanted me to be on their team.

Being good at sports really expanded my influence. I could rally kids around me to do just about anything I asked them to do—good or bad.



The shoplifting started small—a few things pocketed here and there at the mall. My middle school friends and I hung out there a lot. We'd spend hours in the stores, trying on the newest athletic wear, jewelry, and clothes. The first time I successfully swiped a pair of Converse tennis shoes (this was before security scanners at store exits), I was pumped. The thrill of defying the authorities, especially pulling off something right under their noses, was exhilarating. Before long, we were taking orders from our classmates, stealing the merchandise, and selling it. To us, it was a game.

This went on for weeks. One night, a friend and I were caught. After the security guard called my friend's parents, I gave him the number for my parents' store.

"I have your son in my office. He was caught stealing," the guard said into the phone. "Would you like to come get him?"

The guard seemed taken aback by the response. He hung up the phone and looked at me. "He said to lock you up and throw away the key."

"You must have talked to my dad," I said. "Call back and ask for my mom."

Fortunately for me, the mall didn't file charges, believing it was my first offense. My mom eventually picked me up, barely saying a word

to me. When we got home, I immediately went to my room. I heard Dad come home later that evening and braced myself for a beating with his belt. “Lawrence, I’m beyond disappointed with you,” he said. “I don’t even recognize you as my son. No son of mine would steal something that wasn’t his. I didn’t raise my children that way.”

His words were chilling and hurt me more than any physical punishment from him. I was grounded for a month.

My parents seemed stunned by this latest development and probably wondered where my total disregard for everything they had taught me came from. Were sports to blame? The people I hung out with?



My passion for sports seemed to remain a mystery to my parents. Initially, I think they liked the idea of me being supervised by adults in some activity, but it was still a challenge to get them to agree to everything I asked. When I entered ninth grade, my friends convinced me to go out for football in the fall. Since I wanted to spend time with my friends, I brought home the parental permission slip for my dad to sign. He refused.

“That isn’t a sport! They’re like gladiators out there. What’s sporting about putting on pads and running into other people? What good could possibly come of that?”

I knew he didn’t want any feedback from me. When Dad spoke, we all listened. Everything was pretty much black-and-white for him; he was serious about everything, including my name. Everybody called me “Lar,” including my mom and siblings. It made perfect sense to my father why he never used it.

“Look at your birth certificate,” Dad would explain. “I did not name you Lar, and I did not name you Larry. I named you Lawrence. That’s the name we chose for you.” To this day, I’m Lawrence to him—always have been, always will be.

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I forged my dad's name on the permission slip. For a while, he didn't even know I was playing, but my mom did. She tried to come to as many of my games as possible when she could get away from the store.