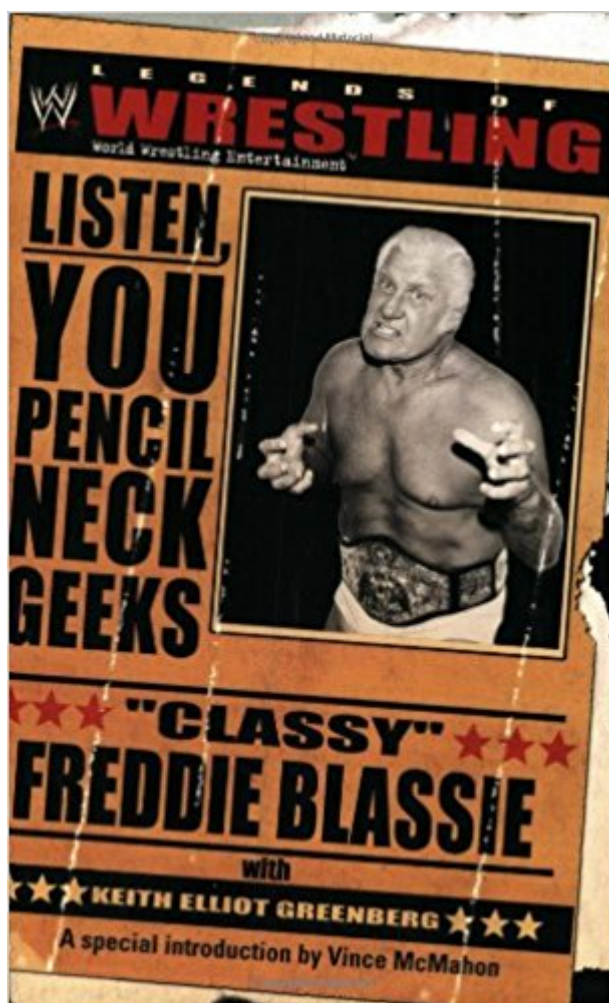


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# The Legends Of Wrestling - "Classy" Freddie Blassie: Listen, You Pencil Neck Geeks (Wwe S)



## Synopsis

"Classy" Freddie Blassie was universally acknowledged as one of the most hated heels in wrestling history. Freddie really knew how to antagonize the fans -- how to "get heat." Death threats were frequent, enraged fans stabbed him twenty-one times, and he was even doused with acid. Undeterred, Blassie just took the action up a level. He reveled in being the heel. It was commonplace to see him biting his opponents and then spitting out their blood. Blassie would routinely "file" his teeth during interviews. His matches in Los Angeles' Olympic Stadium brought him to the attention of Hollywood. Freddie's style and unpredictability made him a natural for the medium, and he became one of the biggest draws in the wrestling business. In the early '60s, he was invited to wrestle in Japan. Blassie both horrified and mesmerized sedate Japanese society. At seventeen, Freddie made his wrestling debut in a carnival. Unhappy with his choice of occupation, his family persuaded him to get a "real" job, and for a while he worked as a meatcutter. But after serving in the Navy in World War II, Freddie returned to wrestling. Here he picked up his catch phrase: "pencil neck geek." Early in his career, Blassie wrestled for Jess McMahon, and would later work for both his son, Vincent James McMahon, and his grandson, Vincent Kennedy McMahon, the current owner of World Wrestling Entertainment. ¶ When his days in the ring ended, "Classy" Freddie Blassie became the manager of heels, transferring to a whole new generation of wrestlers the style, moves, and ring knowledge that had made him a legend of wrestling. Released just prior to his death, *Legends of Wrestling: "Classy" Freddie Blassie* contains vibrant tales of his days in wrestling with the likes of Hulk Hogan, Killer Kowalski, and the Iron Sheik. He frankly chronicles his dealings with the wrestling fraternity and the promoters, even recounting the infamous "boxer vs. wrestler" match with Muhammad Ali, who was managed by Blassie. His out-of-the-ring stories are equally compelling. Freddie details his countless sexual exploits, and his three marriages. He reflects on the cult status that he gained after his song "Pencil Neck Geek" rocketed to the top of the Dr. Demento Show play list. He recounts his touching relationship with comedian Andy Kaufman, who cast him in *Breakfast with Blassie* -- an underground classic in which Blassie uttered: "What the hell ever happened to the human race?" Added to this edition is an epilogue, recounting Freddie's last days and his unforgettable funeral.

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## Customer Reviews

Keith Elliot Greenberg coauthored *Legends of Wrestling: Freddie Blassie -- Listen, You Pencil Neck Geeks* with wrestling icon "Classy" Freddie Blassie shortly before his death in 2003. A third-generation wrestling fan and senior writer for World Wrestling Entertainment publications, Greenberg is the author of more than thirty nonfiction children's books, and has written for *The New York Observer*, *USA Today* and *The European*, among others. He's also an award-winning television producer whose credits include *48 Hours*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Court TV*, *VH-1*, *PBS*, and *The History Channel*. He and his family live in Brooklyn, New York.

ONE: IT HAPPENED IN ST. LOUIS "Blassie, you ain't worth a bucket of cold piss!" I scowled at the crowd squeezed into Jersey City's Roosevelt Stadium, a decaying ballpark in a grimy city. Once, the Brooklyn Dodgers used to come across the Hudson River and play a couple of home games here every year. But that was a long time ago. Now, it was 1964, the Dodgers were in sunny California, and everything about Jersey City seemed hopeless. Unless you were Italian, and loved Bruno Sammartino. "Go back to California, you bleached blond piece of shit!" Bruno was a bear of a man with a busted nose and cauliflower ears. Like a lot of the crowd, he was from Italy, and even worked the same lousy jobs they did when he came to America. But Bruno wasn't hauling bricks or pouring concrete anymore. He was the champion of the World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWWF), the company that later became World Wrestling Federation and then World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). When Bruno won a match, the people in Roosevelt Stadium felt like champions, too. And when someone like me beat the shit out of him, they wanted to hang me upside down from a gas station, just like the Italian partisans did when they finally got their hands on Mussolini. "You're a

no-good bastard, Blassie!" I kicked at the ropes, and waved my arms forward, dismissing the crowd and everything they believed in. "Sit down, spaghetti bender!" I yelled at the entire front section. I was the heel, the bad guy in the match, and I was doing what a heel was supposed to do, "get heat" from the fans. Good heat was when they got engaged in the action, jumping up and booing. This was bad heat, the kind that could get you killed. I didn't care. I pounded on Bruno, but he got behind me, took me down, and had me in a sitting position on the mat, his knee digging into my spine, his fingers clamped around my face in a chinlock. Garbage was flying around everywhere, and there was no security that I could see. Fourteen thousand people swarmed forward, like the mosquitoes coming off Newark Bay. Then, some big fat Italian woman -- who was probably fifty but looked like she was eighty -- came running all the way up to the edge of the ring. She was straight off the boat, wearing a dress they wouldn't even sell you in America. "Bruno!" she yelled, beating on the ring apron. "Kill-a the son of a bitch! Kill-a the son of a bitch!" Sammartino was pulling my head back, but I looked down, over Bruno's stubby fingers, and blurted out the two words that summed up my attitude about her, and my philosophy about everything else in life. "Fuck you!" I had to wait eighty-five years before someone asked me to write a book, which is really incredible, since I've done things that no ordinary human would do. I was the most obnoxious wrestler who ever lived. That's why I was stabbed twenty-one times by crazy fans, and had acid thrown on me in Los Angeles. I used to bite my opponents 'til they bled, and file my teeth on interviews. When my knees gave out on me, and I began a second career as a manager in the World Wrestling Federation, I'd regularly break my cane over the head of whomever my protégé was wrestling. During my first tour of Japan, twenty-five people dropped dead from heart attacks, just watching me on TV. Over my entire career, ninety-two people died because of "Classy" Freddie Blassie. But I've always said that was a disappointment. My ambition in life was to get one hundred. Even now, women do a double-take when they walk by me on the street. And you should have seen me fifty years ago! I had thirty different ring robes, with sequins and everything. That's why I was called The Hollywood Fashion Plate. Even when I wasn't dressed up, I looked like I stepped out of the pages of Esquire. Women used to drag their pencil-neck husbands to the arena just to see what I'd be wearing that night. I used to enjoy teasing these women, calling them frustrated housewives, and reminding them that one second with Blassie was equivalent to two hours with an ordinary layman. I remember taking my mother to the arena once, after I'd become one of the most notorious heels in the business. "They hate you like this all over?" she asked me. "Yeah." "I don't understand it. Why do you have to call the fans names? Why don't you be nice like you used to be?" I told my mother to look at the kind of people sitting in the audience. "As far as these idiots are concerned, I'm not

nice and I don't want to be nice. Do you see anybody with any intelligence, any brains? They're not fit to travel in Freddie Blassie's company." My mother stared at me, a little bewildered. She wasn't sure if I was being myself, or living my gimmick. To tell you the truth, neither was I. In the town where my mother, Anna Sind, came from in what was then Austro-Hungary, you measured a person's wealth by how many geese he owned. Her father had a big flock of geese, but this one mischievous kid, this rotten bastard, would always trespass on the property. He'd run at the geese and chase them toward the edge of this cliff. Some of them couldn't stay airborne, and they'd hit the ground and die. Nobody could do anything to stop this kid. His father would beat his brains out, but the kid kept coming back and killing those geese. He was a mean son of a bitch. Looking back on it, I'd say my mother wasn't dealing with a full deck because she married this ding-a-ling. His name was Jacob Blassie -- or Yacob, as they said in German -- and he moved her across the Atlantic Ocean, from her little village to south St. Louis, Missouri. That was probably the only good thing he ever did. By the time I was born, on February 8, 1918, the Old Country was being torn apart by World War I. I didn't come into the world lightly. I weighed fifteen pounds. My mother would have had an easier time giving birth to an elephant, and she never had another kid again. I don't know if that was because her labor was so difficult or she simply realized that once you have a Freddie Blassie, there's no point in trying again. My mother had been a frail woman, but, once I was born, she began putting on weight. She got heavier and heavier until she hit the two-hundred-pound mark. Still, her bulk didn't slow her down. She worked in a cotton mill when I was a kid, operating a machine. I remember my grandmother taking me to visit her at the mill at lunchtime, and knowing that I was the reason she got up and worked so hard every day. If there ever was a god on earth, it was my mother. She was a magnificent woman. My father -- who was called "Jake" in America -- was a completely different story. He was a big, sturdy bastard who worked as a hod carrier, hauling around buckets of cement dangling from a stick over his shoulders, at construction sites. He did his job well enough. But when he got paid on Friday, he'd start drinking, and sometimes wouldn't come out of his idiotic stupor until Monday afternoon. What was even worse was the way he'd mistreat my mother. He'd call her terrible names, slap his hand across her flesh, and pound on her with his fists. I still hate him for doing that, and when the fighting started, I'd run a mile and a half to his parents' house, and tell them, "Dad hit Mom again." My grandfather would tell my grandmother to get dressed, and then they'd hurry to my parents' house, raging the whole way. "You're a bum," my grandfather would scream at my father. "You have a wonderful wife, and this is how you treat her? You don't deserve your wife and son! You don't deserve anything." But my father didn't care. My parents were always breaking up, and getting back together, and I'd stay with my grandparents for

long periods of time. Even when I was away from my father, I'd hear about his drunken calamities. He had this feud going with this other moron, a saloon owner, and they'd beat the hell out of each other whenever they could. Unfortunately for my family, and the rest of the city of St. Louis, they never killed each other. The police would come and lock them both up, and then they'd meet somewhere else the next week for a rematch. When I was about thirteen, I reached my limit. My father hit my mother, and I picked up a baseball bat, got behind him, and lifted it up. I wanted to smash it over his head as hard as I could, open his skull, and put an end to all the bullshit he'd done to our family. But he turned around, and gave me a look with those mean, drunken eyes, and I got scared. I dropped the bat and ran to my aunt's house and told her what happened. Even when I calmed down, she wouldn't let me go back. I lived there for about six months, until, finally, my mother came around and said, "There's no sense in me staying with him if you're not there. I'd rather be with you." Somewhere in the back of her mind, she'd thought that I would come home because I wanted to have a father. But he wasn't worth a damn. My mother and I now struggled together. At one point, we were living over a store, and felt so hungry that my mother rigged up some apparatus so she could pull potatoes into our apartment through a hole in the floor. No matter how bad it was, though, my grandparents always came through for us. Like my parents, my grandparents were named Anna and Jacob Blassie. They were decent, proud, honest people who would have gone to war for me. I remember when I first started wrestling, my grandfather came to the arena, and grabbed a chair when he saw my opponent torturing me on the mat. He was moving toward the ring when the security people grabbed him and threw him out into the street. My mother was there, and explained that the old man's grandson was one of the wrestlers. But when the security guards invited him back in, my grandfather said in his German accent, "The hell with you. You put me out, and I'm going to stay out." Once, while I was attending St. Peter and Paul Grammar School, we were taking a test and I accidentally broke the point of my pencil. I asked the nun whether I could sharpen the pencil again and, for some reason, she refused. So I went home and told my grandmother about it, and she flew into a frenzy. She was a stocky woman, built more or less like a man, and the next morning, she put on her shawls from the Old Country and marched into the school. "That's my number-one grandson," she told the nun. "The next time you don't let him sharpen his pencil, I'll pull your arms out of their sockets." Believe it or not, I sang in the church choir as a kid, and enjoyed it very much. I guess the priests saw something in me because they asked if I wanted to become an altar boy. That was a little too much for me, waking up earlier than everyone else, putting on a black cassock, getting the holy water and the wine ready, and standing there, looking serious, as I handed the chalices to the priest during mass. I guess I didn't want to

make that much of a commitment to my Catholic faith. I remember before I had my First Holy Communion, I was told to go up to the front of the church, kneel down, stick my tongue out, and receive the host. Now, the nuns impressed upon me that I couldn't touch the wafer with my fingers. But how the hell could I stop it from falling out of my mouth if I couldn't touch it? I felt like a jackass, with the priest standing in front of me while I stuck my tongue in and out to keep the host from falling, lapping at it like a fuckin' cat. At Christmastime, at St. Peter and Paul, they'd have St. Nicholas visit the school. But instead of giving out presents like a regular Santa Claus, this guy -- probably a demented priest in a costume -- would pick out all the boys who'd done something wrong -- playing hookey, hitting other kids -- and whip their asses. One year, I heard him coming up the stairs, in his red suit and fake beard, screaming, "Blassie! Blassie!" And I said, "Fuck, I don't have to put up with this," and darted out of the classroom. Then, he told the kids to run into the hall after me. "Get him! Get him!" St. Nicholas hollered. Swinging his strap, he chased after my so-called buddies, urging them to block my escape. "Watch the steps! Don't let him get down the steps! Or you'll receive his punishment instead!" Everyone was screaming and running and bumping into each other, and my friends grabbed me and threw me back at St. Nicholas. And he had a merry fuckin' Christmas that year, slapping my daylights out with his big strap. Occasionally, during my wrestling career, I told people that I'd graduated high school in St. Louis, and attended two years of college. I always made an effort to stay well read, so nobody really questioned me; it's not like I claimed to have a doctorate from Oxford or anything. But I was just blowing hot air. I enrolled at McKinley High School, went for a week or two, and dropped out. High school was a big deal back then, and I didn't feel comfortable going to classes in my old, ratty clothing. My grandparents were largely raising me at that point, and I didn't expect them to come up with the money for my lunches. They'd been taking care of me for too long. It was time for me to go to work and earn my own money. By then, my mother was no longer in the cotton mill. She was working in a restaurant, where she asked around to see if anyone could find me a job. The woman who ran the restaurant bought her meat from this place called the Lynn Meat Company, and she talked to the owner and found out that they needed a kid to help out. I'd clean up, trim all the bones, and do anything else the meatcutters wanted. I wasn't a cutter, though -- that's a trade in itself. At the end of the week, my salary was eight dollars. St. Louis was a wild town back then, full of pool halls and speakeasies and mayhem. In the north side, there were shoe factories. The south side was loaded with breweries. The biggest was Griesedieck Brothers, and it remained that way until the 1960s, when Anheuser-Busch overtook them. The kids played "bottle caps," a form of baseball with bottle caps and broomsticks, and a game called "cork ball" with barrel corks from the breweries. The St. Louis

Browns didn't make it to the World Series until 1944, so the city's motto for a long time was, "First in booze. First in shoes. Last in the American League." Criminals ran the show in the neighborhoods where I traveled. I remember walking to the movies with my mother, and seeing glass all over the place because some gangsters had pulled up in front of a saloon with machine guns blasting. If you drifted a few blocks in the wrong direction, you were in a fight. There were Italian gangs, German gangs, Irish gangs, Hungarian gangs, fighting with knives, brass knuckles, and, occasionally, guns. Because my father was so violent, I knew how to handle myself with my fists, and there were few fights I remember losing. My father saw me punching it out with some kid one time, then beat me up for fighting. I thought that was pretty strange, since he was getting locked up for doing the same thing almost every Saturday night. After a while, I got tired of fighting in the street, and thought about making a career out of it. I began boxing at the Seward Community Center, and earned a bit of a reputation for myself, even winning the Heavyweight Championship in one tournament there. But as natural as the sweet science came to me, wrestling was really my calling. I'd been sneaking into the matches since I was allowed to cross the street. It didn't matter if it was a big show at the Peerless Theatre or a rinky-dink card in a carnival tent. I couldn't get enough of the squared circle, and, by my teens, had seen some of the best wrestlers ever to pass through St. Louis. Ed "Strangler" Lewis held a version of the world championship four times, sometimes using a headlock as his finishing hold. Back then, most fans believed that wrestling was pure sport, and when Lewis clamped on a headlock, they thought the other guy's skull was going to crack. Lewis claimed that he'd perfected his headlock by practicing with a wooden head, squeezing until the thing burst. What I didn't know, of course, was how much clout Lewis enjoyed behind the scenes. He, his manager Billy Sandow, and Toots Mondt -- a sadistic wrestler, as well as a promoter who'd team up with WWE owner Vince McMahon's father, Vince, Sr., in the WWWF decades later -- were called the Goldust Trio. Lewis was the one who kept them in power. He didn't mind losing his championship when it was good for the promotion. But he was also a legitimate shooter -- a wrestler who could go at it for real when the situation warranted. If an opponent who was scheduled to lose tried going into business for himself and turning the match into a shoot -- or real contest -- the Strangler would stretch him until he repented. There was also Joe Stecher, Hook Nose Nelson, Joe Sanderson, and my idol, George Tragos. I never saw the tough Greek lose, and there was good reason for that. He was one of the most vicious "hookers" of all time. A hook was an excruciating, potentially crippling hold that could be applied when a match turned into a shoot. There were very few real hookers in the business, capable of positioning an opponent's body to break bones or cut off his breathing, and guys like Tragos were treated like grand masters in the dressing room. In one match, he supposedly



ripped an opponent's muscles, tendons, and ligaments with a top wristlock. Later on, the story goes, the separated bone became infected, and the poor guy had to have his arm amputated. It was Tragos who trained Lou Thesz, the son of a Hungarian shoemaker from another St. Louis neighborhood, into possibly the most respected hooker of the twentieth century, a six-time World Heavyweight Champion, and the Babe Ruth of the squared circle. Every time the bigger names visited St. Louis, they worked out at Harry Cook's Gym, at Sixth and Pine. The place would usually be packed with people, watching the guys spar on the mat. At first, I was a member of the peanut gallery, too. Eventually, though, I got up the nerve to ask some of the wrestlers to teach me a few moves. Today, there are wrestling schools all over North America, where students are taught how to take a bump -- or fall -- properly, deliver a moonsault off the top rope onto a crash mat, and cut a promo -- or interview. But in the 1930s, no one was that forthcoming about pro wrestling's show business aspect. You trained like you were training for the Olympics. If a guy was in a good mood at Harry Cook's, he'd show me a half nelson or an armbar. But usually, the experienced wrestlers just wanted to practice on you. They'd grind you into the mat and then, when you got up and couldn't move your neck, laugh about it to each other. After a while, I got to know some of the wrestlers, and when I went to the Wednesday night matches at St. Paul's Social Center in East St. Louis, the ticket taker would wave me in. One night in 1935, when I was seventeen years old, I was there with a girl, and someone came out and said that one of the wrestlers didn't show up. Well, I'd already told this girl I was a wrestler, so I kept up the act. "I'll take his place," I said. "The only problem is I didn't bring any gear." The promoter was willing to provide the ring attire for me. He gave me a pair of trunks, and shoes that were about two sizes too large. He also offered to lend me a jock strap -- someone else's jock strap -- but I passed. I was told my payoff was going to be a dollar, but I couldn't get into the ring until I paid five dollars for a wrestling license. So right away, I was four dollars in the hole. If anyone had asked me about the sport's authenticity, I would have argued its virtues with all my heart and soul. There was no meeting ahead of time to discuss the match's highlights -- or "high spots," as the wrestlers call them -- with my opponent, or arrange the finish. This was going to be a legitimate wrestling match, and I came to the ring to shoot. The ring was like a boxing ring, only smaller, and from the dressing room, the thing looked pretty frightening. I remember walking through the crowd, and having my name announced: "From South St. Louis -- Fred-die Bla-asiel!" It was a moment I'd anticipated for a long time, but now I was too nervous to feel any excitement. My opponent's name was Bill Scharbet, a curtain raiser who worked the second or third match every Wednesday at St. Paul's. There was nothing special about him; he had no color. But he still knew enough to batter me. Almost immediately after the bell rang, Scharbet put me

down on the mat. That's where I remained, while he tried out his arsenal: a wristlock, an armlock, a full nelson. I can't recall delivering any offense. I just tried to stay in the match, and make a respectable showing. After seven or eight minutes, I finally gave up. Scharbet got some polite applause from the crowd, and I walked back to the dressing room, almost invisible, got dressed, and tried to slink out of the building. Then, I remembered my date. I went back into the arena, and there she was, waiting for me. "You didn't do too good," she kind of mumbled. But she didn't say it in a haughty way. In fact, she was pretty impressed. After all, how many girls from the neighborhood could tell their friends that they went out on a date with a bona fide professional wrestler? She thought I was something. When I was nineteen, my mother remarried. Her husband, a steel foundry inspector, was a wonderful Croatian guy named Ilya Miletic, but we called him Eli. As soon as we met, I thought of him as a father; it was like he carried my mother in the palm of one hand, and me in the other. I sometimes wonder about the childhood I would have had if he'd come into my life earlier. Eli had a sickly daughter named Antoinette. She had terrible eyes, and would tilt her head back and peek up at me when we were talking. The time we decorated the Christmas tree together still stands out as one of my happiest memories. I bought these bulbs and ornaments and had them spread out all over the house. I was standing on a chair, and saying, "Okay, Antoinette, bring me those lights, bring me that tinsel." And she was running all over the place, with a big smile on her face. My mother was watching the whole thing, saying, "See how she listens to you. There's nobody like her brother, Fred. She thinks the sun rises and sets on you." After being an only child my entire life, I loved having a sister, particularly one as kindhearted as Antoinette. Then, before she was out of her teens, this frail, gentle girl died, and I lost the only sibling I ever had. I had graduated to working as a meatcutter at the A&P supermarket, while wrestling whenever I could. My mother was hoping I would get the wrestling out of my system, and pursue a dependable livelihood. See, we already had a star in my family, my cousin, Nick Blassie. He was president of the Meatcutters Union, Local 88 for twenty-five years, and a real political powerhouse. Later on, there were stories that he gave President Harry Truman the Oval Office plaque that said, THE BUCK STOPS HERE -- I know Nick had the same one in his office -- and coined the phrase, "Give 'em hell, Harry." The people called Nick "Colonel" because, somewhere along the line, he'd been made a Kentucky Colonel. He drove around the city in a brand-new Cadillac Coupe de Ville, to the Elks Club, the Variety Club, the Democratic Club, and started an organization called the Backstoppers of St. Louis, which ensured that cops and firemen killed in the line of duty went to their graves debt-free. In 1949, he tried running for mayor, but couldn't command the support he did at the union hall. When Nick campaigned for reelection at the Meatcutters Union, he called the other Blassie cousins to collect

the votes. We were all a bunch of roughnecks, and I guess that was pretty intimidating to anyone harboring thoughts of voting in the other direction. One night, I was driving past the Jefferson Hotel, when I saw this commotion spilling out into the street. It was Nick and another union guy, fighting some scabs. Well, I couldn't resist pulling over and joining in. The fight had been two against six. Now, it was three against six. And we gave those scabs a hell of a beating. I have to admit that I took great pleasure in participating in these kinds of after-hours union activities. But that didn't mean that I wanted to spend the rest of my life as a meatcutter. My family was bewildered, and had regular discussions about changing my mind. "Do something, Nick," my mother would yell at my cousin. "This wrestling is nothing but foolishness." "I don't know what's wrong with the guy," Nick used to answer. "If he listens to me, he'll have money in his pocket all the time. I can fix it so he'll be at the A&P for maybe a few more months. Then, he'll become manager of the meat market." But I didn't want to become manager of the meat market. I wanted to become a wrestler. I was starting to work the wrestling shows at the carnivals, walking past the hootchie-kootchie tent, the fortune-tellers, the fire eaters, carrying my little bag with my trunks and gym shoes and towel. I could see the way people looked at me, knowing that I was one of the performers. If anybody doubted who I was, I'd say, "Why, shit, watch me. I'm going to wrestle." The whole point of any carnival is keeping the "marks" in the dark about the techniques being used to separate them from their money. And I was as big a mark as anyone else there. Whenever I participated in a match in those days, I wrestled legit. Of course, my matches weren't the ones the people came to see. Every carnival had a routine that involved some kind of champ taking on all comers. The first couple of volunteers would be plants, dressed like housepainters or construction workers. The champ would beat them, but they'd get in enough offense for him to look vulnerable. Finally, some musclehead in the audience would take the bait, step forward, and say he'd like to try out the champion. Everyone in the tent would put up their money, sure the local yokel had what it took to get the victory. This match would be a shoot, and really challenge the champ's abilities. He had to have the skill to carry his opponent to an exciting contest -- you didn't want the fans to leave, feeling flimflammed -- but know enough secret torture holds to, ultimately, make the challenger submit. Some really strange things happened in the carnival. I was told that when Bruno Sammartino came over from the Old Country, he went to the carnival with a bunch of other Italian immigrants, all stonemasons and builders. One of his friends said, "Hey Bruno, I hear they'll give you a hundred bucks if you can stay in a cage five minutes with a monkey." "A monkey for a hundred dollars?" Bruno said. "What the hell can a monkey do? I'll kill him." Well, Bruno was as strong as they came, but he didn't know the difference between a monkey and an orangutan. When they faced off, the orangutan started ripping

off Bruno's clothes. Bruno was going bar to bar, with the orangutan grabbing his neck, hitting him in the balls. But he couldn't go anywhere because they were in a goddamn cage. By the time he got out, Bruno was practically naked. At one of the carnivals I worked, we had a guy named Toughy Trusdale, who'd wrestle an alligator. When the creature died, they didn't have a replacement, so Toughy went into the tank with the dead alligator to give the people their money's worth. He was rolling around, twisting the alligator's arms and head, and pretending that it was fighting back. It wasn't a spectacular performance by any means; there isn't too much you can do with a dead alligator. But Toughy is the only one who really knew the difference. After the carnival was over, Toughy threw the alligator in the Merrimack River. The next day, there was a big story in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: ALLIGATOR FOUND IN LOCAL RIVER. The reporter thought it had come from Florida or someplace, and managed to swim all the way to the Midwest. I may have been a mark, but I sensed that this stuff didn't go on in other professional sports. Yet, none of the older wrestlers was willing to smarten me up. In fact, they went out of their way to keep me confused. When they were talking to each other, they'd speak this language I'd never heard before, a kind of pig Latin punctuated by Zs. It wasn't until years later that I figured out that they were speaking "carny." This particular dialect was known as Z-talk. There was also a variety called bell talk, that involved peppering your words with "bees" and "bells" instead of "eez" and "zeez." I knew better than to ask anyone to translate; when the other wrestlers trusted me, I figured they'd tell me. Amazingly, some wrestlers continue to use Z-talk in the WWE dressing room today. And I still can't speak it. Despite all my years in the business, nobody ever bothered to teach me this mysterious vernacular. In the carnival, when I'd walk into a room where a bunch of older wrestlers were talking, they'd all say, "Kay fabe. Kay fabe." It meant, "Shut up. There's a mark listening." I've heard a couple of theories about the origin of the term. Some people say that there was a deaf and dumb wrestler named Kay Fabian, so "kay fabe" implied, "Go mute." There's another story that Kay Fabian could hear and speak, but he was a real gossip and pain in the ass, so nobody told him anything. Over the years, wrestlers would not only use "kay fabe" in front of outsiders, but "kay fabe" each other about news that wasn't meant to be shared. My friend Gorilla Monsoon, the late World Wrestling Entertainment Hall of Famer, had a New Jersey license plate "K-Fabe" on his Lincoln Continental. Other carnay elements have also carried over. The insider terms heel for villain, babyface for good guy, juice for blood, and spoon for dressing room instigator, all originated in the carnival. When I meet a wrestler married to a stripper -- and that's a pretty common combination -- I think about the hootchie-kootchie girls who hung around the wrestling tent, watching their husbands' matches. \* \* \* One afternoon, before I was scheduled to wrestle, the guy who ran the tent

suggested, "Why don't you go next door and watch the geek?" "What's so special about the geek?" "Oh, he's great. He bites the heads off chickens. He bites the heads off snakes." "Jesus Christ, that's fuckin' horrible," I said. But who wouldn't be curious? So I went into the geek's tent, and not only was he decapitating animals, but sticking pins in himself and driving nails through his hand. When I got back to the wrestling tent, my friend wanted to know what I thought of the show. I told him, "Did you see what that guy looks like? He's got a neck like a stack of dimes. He's what you'd call a real pencil neck geek." And that's how my most famous catchphrase originated. From time to time, when the carnival went on the road, I traveled along. The money was almost nonexistent. But I got laid so much, I could have contributed some of the pussy to charity. In a lot of ways, the carnival was the perfect place for a kid who barely knew a wristlock from a wristwatch. If you screwed up in the ring, it didn't make that much of a difference. The people who came to carnivals weren't all that versed in the fine points of wrestling. So I wasn't too concerned about them. I was concerned about myself. Would I succeed or wouldn't I? Even when I got out of the carnival, the venues weren't much more glamorous. A lot of the wrestlers had other jobs, and got in the ring for extra pocket money, and it showed in the way they performed. At different towns around Missouri, I'd occasionally wrestle in burlesque houses. A stripper would take her clothes off, before the wrestlers came out and twisted each other's bones out of joint. The mats in these places were filthy -- they hadn't been cleaned in years -- and guys would walk around with skin infections and eye diseases. If you came down with trachoma, something that could be contracted through having your face rubbed in another guy's armpit and wiping your eyes with a dirty towel, you could go blind. In time, I started working for the more established promoters, Tom Packs in St. Louis and George Simpson in Kansas City. I was still losing most of my matches, getting tiny payoffs, and sleeping in the car on road trips. If I had to use the bathroom, I went to the service station. My meals were a loaf of bread and fifteen cents of bologna. But I was no longer fearful when I stepped into the ring. I'd learned to ignore my feelings when the bell rang, and concentrate on what I needed to do to get ahead. The more time I spent hanging around, the more the older guys were willing to show me little tricks to use in the ring. That didn't mean that they gave away the true nature of the business. Everything was still "kay fabe." The veterans thought that if I knew that their matches were "worked" -- or predetermined -- I'd tell my neighbors, and they'd stop believing. And if they stopped believing, the logic went, they'd stop coming to the matches and paying their money. But the guys were enlightening me in other ways. If I had someone in a hammerlock, he'd reverse it on me and then let loose. I'd slip out, and shoulder block him, and he'd take a big bump on the canvas. No one sat me down and said, "Hey, Freddie, this is how the business works." But you'd have to be an idiot not to

start figuring it out. Then, one night in St. Louis, the booker -- the guy who matched you up with the other wrestlers -- came over to me and said, "Your opponent's going over tonight." I couldn't believe my ears. The booker was asking me to lose! In my wildest dreams, I never imagined holding back and letting another guy win. Then again, I'd never been all that capable of winning before. I guess I'd improved to the point where the booker had to guarantee that I wouldn't disrupt his long-term plans. So in a backhanded way, the request was a compliment. After working so hard to get established in the business, I wasn't about to do anything to set myself back. So I "did the job," just like I was supposed to. Now, I had another concern. I didn't want to get a reputation as a "jobber," or someone whose only purpose was to lose, and he'd take a big bump on the canvas. No one sat me down and said, "Hey, Freddie, this is how the business works." But you'd have to be an idiot not to start figuring it out. Then, one night in St. Louis, the booker -- the guy who matched you up with the other wrestlers -- came over to me and said, "Your opponent's going over tonight." I couldn't believe my ears. The booker was asking me to lose! In my wildest dreams, I never imagined holding back and letting another guy win. Then again, I'd never been all that capable of winning before. I guess I'd improved to the point where the booker had to guarantee that I wouldn't disrupt his long-term plans. So in a backhanded way, the request was a compliment. After working so hard to get established in the business, I wasn't about to do anything to set myself back. So I "did the job," just like I was supposed to. Now, I had another concern. I didn't want to get a reputation as a "jobber," or someone whose only purpose was losing week after week. As a result, I began to travel, hoping that I'd catch on in another part of the country. I went up to Nebraska to work for the Dusek Brothers. They were billed as Wrestling's Riot Squad, and were well respected throughout the business. Rudy, the promoter in Omaha, had been trained by Farmer Burns, a turn-of-the-century legend who used to challenge spectators to smash him in his rock-hard abs. Rudy's younger brothers, Emil and Ernie, main evented all over North America. The other brother, Joe, didn't like leaving Nebraska. He always had nets out in the Missouri River. The nets would be loaded with bait, and, after they were filled, Joe sold the fish. If the family hadn't been in the wrestling business, Joe probably would have been happy as a full-time fisherman. I think it was Emil Dusek who finally let down his guard and agreed to work out a match with me. He said, "This is what I'll do. This is what you'll do. I won't hurt you, and you won't hurt me. And this is what this game's about." From Nebraska, I stayed on the road. In Minnesota, the promoter Tony Stecher -- brother of former World Champion Joe Stecher -- took me out to a Greek restaurant. I'd never tried Greek food before, and couldn't believe anything tasted that good. I started to fall in love with Minnesota -- until I wrestled there in the winter. All my life, I hated cold weather, and in Minnesota,

you had months and months of it. Maybe the Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians who live there like it because it makes them nostalgic for home. But not me. Over the years, Minnesota became one of the country's most successful wrestling territories. Former NCAA Heavyweight Champion Verne Gagne would start American Wrestling Association (AWA) there and -- like many promoters who also wrestled -- award himself the championship. A lot of big names -- Reggie "Crusher" Lisowski, Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon, Nick Bockwinkel, Hulk Hogan, Jesse Ventura -- would get some of their best exposure in Minnesota. But I avoided it as much as I could. I'd rather work someplace where the snow melts once in a while. New York seemed like a great location to wrestle. St. Louis was a backwater compared to it. You had large, lively crowds, and decent payoffs. And when the matches ended, you could stay out 'til five in the morning, living it up. But one night after I wrestled, the promoter asked to have a talk with me in the dressing room. "Can I be honest with you?" I nodded. "I'm sure one of these days you're going to develop into a top talent. But this is a pretty big territory, and you're not qualified to work here yet. Keep traveling, learn the ropes, and come back when you're ready to be a star in New York." What could I say? I wasn't happy with his advice, but I couldn't take issue with the guy for telling me the truth. The promoter was Jess McMahon. If you're reading this book, I think you can guess the name of his grandson. Copyright © 2003 by World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Excellent book. Blassie doesn't fool around with non essential things like Angelo Mosca did about him being partially black or writing most of his wrestling book about his football days. Blassie was a wrestler's wrestler, through and through and gives insights about other wrestlers like the fact that hero wrestler Mil Mascaras only wanted to make himself look good at the expense of other wrestlers and that Igor Vodik, another hero or "babyface" was a pig who ate boiled egg whites and merely dropped the egg yolks to the arena floor. Although most of the wrestlers say Johnny Valentine was a great wrestler, Blassie says Valentine sucked because he liked to play practical jokes on other wrestlers that were way out of line.

Funny, fast-moving, potty-mouthed memoir by a brawler who loved life and good times, by turns egotistical and modest, a merry prankster and a grouch. Probably best for readers between 40 and 70 who remember the golden age of rasslin' -- many funny, some gross, anecdotes about the business, and fellow wrestlers with their sex lives, body parts and smells (Andre the Giant and Moose Cholak were especially stinky). Only one stretch was genuinely unpleasant, when Freddie chuckles over trolling for Japanese prostitutes with hosting gangsters. But despite the fact that I

liked Buddy Rogers and their inspiration, Gorgeous George more as blond villains (better moves, funnier actors in the ring), this really raised Blassie in my mind as a character. His love for his second wife is genuinely sweet, as was his generosity and protectiveness toward (some) other wrestlers. Sadder is the confessedly self-created loneliness that often shadows his fame and raucous joys--his estrangement from most of his children (he never met his grandchildren), his unsatisfied need for love and acknowledgment that led him to imagine Andy Kaufman of all people (!) as a surrogate son. But always there is the expansiveness, represented by great inserted testimonies from those in show biz and the wrestling biz who knew him and admired, or liked (or sort-of liked) him. And then there is wrestling biz itself, lurid and bizarre in its fiction-making, and the strange scenes of those he knew. My favorite, if trivial, anecdote was from a son, who as a young boy visited him when his dad was wrestling out of LA. He tells of Sunday mornings, when John Hamilton, TV's Perry White, would meet him at the newspaper stand and read to him from the funnies. Great Caesar's Ghost, what a life!

When I was first introduced to "Classy" Freddie Blassie it was 1983 .....as an avid wrestling fan I was amused by the platinum haired old man who would call all his "adoring" fans "pencil neck geeks". Then Vince McMahon took over the former WWF by 1985 and wrestling as I knew it would never be the same. I started watching wrestling in 1978 and I was able to watch hours on end of the NWA territories (Mid-Atlantic, World Class, Georgia,etc.) , to me they had the best wrestling action. The WWF was actually boring in that era and by 1984 when Hulk Hogan arrived (for the second time) to the WWF it really became too cartoonish for my taste (even though I was only an 11 year old kid). Yet Freddie Blassie stuck with me...he was actually entertaining and was a great mouth piece to all his proteges. Little did I know that Blassie was a wrestling legend, tougher than nails and a trendsetter in and out of the ring. I found this book fascinating...it does feel like you are in the porch of your house sitting comfortably in a rocking chair and listening to Mr. Blassie talk about the "Golden Era" of wrestling. Blassie's frank and outspoken manner makes it more believable. He lauds his success in the ring and with the opposite sex...as much as he regrets not having a good relationship with the children of his first marriage. His amazing tales of the lengths he went to to entertain his "fans" and his love/hate relationship with promoters and fellow wrestlers are on point. This is a book for all of those who enjoyed wrestling from the early days to the early 80s...Blassie remains grateful and fateful to the McMahon family so don't expect any dirt on them. But true to form, there is dirt on some wrestlers who Blassie thoroughly disliked (not that many though..lol). The book shows a very human side to Blassie...the story of how he convinced Nikolai Volkoff to



embrace the Russian Communist character is quite heartwarming. This book is hard to put down...you can almost hear Blassie's voice. A must read!!

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