S. Allen, Kit Kat Essay 2, April 16, 2018, Columbus, OH

**for whom the bell tolls…**

***by Sean Allen***

By the title one could assume this essay has to do with the writings of Ernest Hemingway.

But, if you know the room, you know that would be wrong. In fact, I was unable to make any sensible connection at all between Hemingway and tonight’s subject. The only tangent I can argue is that tonight’s subject has had a greater impact on **broad popular culture** than Hemingway, or any single literary work of the 20th Century and possibly any single artistic work, artist, musician, political or sport figure during the 20th Century.

Tonight’s subject is a phenomenal force hidden in plain sight that continues to have a significant impact. It is by any measure the most popular form of live theater that has ever existed.

And with all that it has the unique power to connect people on a global scale that is only rivaled by music in its universal appeal. And it makes those connections in surprisingly personal ways.

**PLAY Click this link** <https://youtu.be/oPT4wiqDn7o>

***VTR: VID ROLL IN- 90 SECONDS Montage (Undertaker Bells to O Fortuna)***

**PAUSE**

Absurd?

I would not blame you for thinking so. On the surface Professional Wrestling is often considered a base form of entertainment. After all what is to gained by an ongoing soap opera involving big men in little shorts?

You might be surprised.

Professional wrestling has a global cultural impact that is hard to overstate. It also brings people together in the most unlikely ways.

1. ***BUSINESS AND HISTORY***

Before getting to that let's consider the business of Sports Entertainment and Professional Wrestling history. What most people refer to as Professional Wrestling or WWE is properly known as Sports Entertainment. This is an adapt description. It is scripted-- that's the entertainment part. But there is sport and the wrestlers are trained athletes.

As for the clarion call that wresting is fake, to set the record straight: it's not. It is scripted and the participants are characters. This is not a contest in which the outcome is unknown. But then who among us isn’t some sort of character in an elaborate stage play?

But fake? Not exactly. There is little fake in nearly 1000 pounds of humanity dropping in a 10-foot free fall to collapse the ring. Nor is there anything fake about a miscalculated knee to the face that results in a nose turned 90 degrees. The performers, known in WWE as Superstars. work 300 days a year and can be in as many as 8 cities in 5 days. It’s real and it’s hard work.

There is little fake about a multibillion dollar business in which there is a single dominant player. World Wrestling Entertainment (now just known as WWE) is, despite its size and reach, a family-owned and operated business. For four generations, the McMahon Family has been in the sports promotion business. They hold 77% of the WWE stock and 96% of the voting power.

And what a business it is. WWE:

* Owns the two longest-running weekly episodic TV shows in history that incidentally take no offseason or hiatus.
* Broadcasts to more than 180 countries in 27 languages to 800 million television households worldwide each week.
* Holds more than 500 live events annually packing arenas in 26 countries
* Was the first 24/7 direct-to-consumer network ever
* Helped invent the Pay Per View concept
* Owns over 10,000 hours of content in its Video On Demand Network

WWE’s annually televised main event, WrestleMania is a phenomenon in the television, live entertainment and sports industries.

In 2017 Forbes named *WrestleMania* one of the world’s top 10 most valuable sports event brands for the fourth year in a row, alongside the Super Bowl, Olympics, FIFA World Cup and NCAA Men’s Final Four.

WrestleMania 33 generated $182 million in economic impact for Orlando last April. Preliminary numbers for WrestleMania 34 which was held last week in New Orleans could top a record $200 million marking the seventh consecutive year that WrestleMania brought in more than $100 million for its host region.

By contrast, hosting The Olympics has in recent years been an economic disaster for host cities. Huge investments are made that never show any tangible returns. The so-called “good will” recognition that goes with hosting The Olympics is increasingly marginal and not bankable at all in terms of actual currency.

WWE Pay Per View events are broadcast in 10 languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Russian, Mandarin, Hindi, French and Italian. Last Sunday’s WrestleMania 34 was broadcast live-live

(live with little to no delay and not live on tape) in 10 languages simultaneously. I can tell you from first-hand experience live-live broadcast is always a high-wire act at best. Doing that in 10 languages at once is hard to imagine.

In Digital and Social Media WWE is a juggernaut with 825 million followers across all platforms and more than a billion social media engagements. It’s the # 1 Sports Channel on YouTube ahead of ESPN, NBA, NFL, MLB and FIFA and 2nd most viewed channel in the world with 20+ billion lifetime video views.

*(First is T-Series, India’s largest music label)*

This does not account for the hundreds of thousands of videos posted by wrestling fans around the globe discussing, analyzing and acting out wrestling. Just stop-action videos made by fans with wrestling action figures number in the tens of thousands.

Speaking of action figures, WWE is the #1 action figure in the world far out pacing Marvel and Star Wars.

WWE Divisions include:

* [WWE Televised Entertainment](http://corporate.wwe.com/what-we-do/media/televised-entertainment)
* WWE Network
* [WWE Studios](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Studios), which released 8 new films last year.
* [Licensing](http://corporate.wwe.com/what-we-do/consumer-products/licensing), Digital Media, [Libraries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Libraries), [Books](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Books), [Music Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Music_Group)
* [NXT](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NXT_%28WWE_brand%29), which is the talent development league, [Performance Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Performance_Center), [Home Video](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWE_Home_Video) and WWE Shop

Additionally, there are 19 subsidiaries that include a 50% stake in one of the world’s largest sports apparel company, Tapout Inc., real estate development holdings, event planning and jet services.

Just one division alone, WWE Network, brings in more than $15,000,000 in cash per month. This is NOT the Televised Entertainment division that produces and airs the weekly programming. This is just the Direct-to-consumer business.

*(Similar to HBOnow, or CBS All Access)*

For any business large or small, these successes are amazing. General Electric operates on a corporate performance principle that if they enter a line of business, they will be number 1 or 2 in that category. WWE has taken that a step further to be number 1 in all core categories and subsequently nearly owns the entire vertical market.

There is an encyclopedia’s worth of history around Professional Wrestling and WWE occupies a good portion of that.

Pro Wrestling has its U.S. roots in circus, Vaudeville and travelling shows of the early 20th Century. But the origin of Professional Wrestling dates to 1830’s France when wrestlers such as Edward, the Steel Eater or BONE-NAY (Bonnet), the Ox of the Low Alps would challenge members of the public to knock them down for 500 francs.

Over the next century Pro Wrestling’s popularity would ebb and flow, finding geographical popularity a moving target.

Post-World War II saw a global rise in popularity for Professional Wrestling. From the mythical Luchadors in Mexico to France, Japan, Australia, the UK and the rest of Europe Wrestling became extremely popular as families gathered around TV sets nationwide to tune in to the drama. Live events were a constant sell out.

In the same manner that the unprecedented horrors of World War I gave rise to the Dadaist and Surrealist art movements in the 1920’s, the global weariness of constant war in the mid 1940’s gave rise to a form of entertainment that inherently required the suspension of disbelief. In the French documentary *Yes we Catch!* Director Julien Gaurichon (GAR-REE-SON) writes:

“In the ring the script is easy to follow; everything must be easy to understand. Regardless of how authentic the passion is, it is not the passion we want; it is the image of passion.

A wrestler can irritate or disgust- but they never disappoint. Because they do exactly what we expect of them.”

After purchasing the family business from his father in 1982, Vincent K. McMahon took the Pro Wrestling industry to a whole new level. Just like the concert promotion business, sports and sports entertainment promoters were all regionally-based players that co-existed on a series of handshake deals; an old boys club to be certain. For example, in the concert industry if Bill Graham from the Bay Area was approached to promote a show in Cleveland, he would decline to promote that show and instead advise contacting Jules Belkin. In the late 1990’s this all changed when Robert Sillerman’s SFX Entertainment bought up nearly every concert promoter across the country.

Sillerman copied the exact model that McMahon had built almost a decade earlier in the professional wrestling industry as explained in a 1991 interview with *Sports Illustrated*:

“In the old days, there were wrestling fiefdoms all over the country, each with its own little lord in charge. Each little lord respected the rights of his neighboring little lord. No takeovers or raids were allowed. There were maybe 30 of these tiny kingdoms in the U.S. and if I hadn't bought out my dad, there would still be 30 of them, fragmented and struggling. I, of course, had no allegiance to those little lords.**”**

In his letter to shareholders McMahon writes:

 *In 2017 WWE set new records for revenue, profitability and most importantly fan engagement. Fan engagement is at the heart of our success and is driven by our ability to interact with our fan base and create compelling content that reflects their evolving preferences.*

The WWE strategy is to optimize content value, continue to develop digital and technology platforms and expand the global presence. Last year each of these areas saw double digit growth by leveraging the direct-to-consumer network, traditional television distribution and digital/social channels.

1. ***A CULTURAL TOUCHSTONE***

In 1961 a 46-year-old George Raymond Wagner, better known as Gorgeous George, was doing promotional work at a Las Vegas radio station. Gorgeous George’s flamboyant self-promotion really broke the mold. His radio interview that day caught the attention of a 19-year-old boxer who would forever be influenced by Gorgeous’ manner of self-presentation. Gorgeous advised the boxer, "A lot of people will pay to see someone shut your mouth. So keep on bragging, keep on sassing and always be outrageous."

This boxer was Muhammad Ali. Throughout his life Ali always gave Gorgeous his due as his single greatest persona influencer.

Minnesota Singer songwriter Robert Allen Zimmerman, better known as Bob Dylan recalls in his autobiography:

 "[Gorgeous George] winked and seemed to mouth the phrase, 'You're making it come alive.' I never forgot it. It was all the recognition and encouragement I would need for years.”

In *I Feel Good: A Memoir in a Life of Soul*, [James Brown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Brown) said he used many of Gorgeous George's antics to "create the James Brown you see on stage.”

[Liberace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberace), [Little Richard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Richard), [Elton John](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elton_John), [Prince](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_%28musician%29) and Bugs Bunny cartoons all make more than a passing reference to Gorgeous George’s direct influence on their performance style. And he was just one in a cast of thousands that persistently influences popular culture.

One member of the WWE Hall of Fame who has taken pages if not entire scripts from the Professional Wresting playbook is the current President of the United States. I have no intention to turn this essay in a political direction but from the phrase “You’re fired” to his entrance at the Republican National Convention to his provocative manner of speech and presentation, there can be little doubt President Trump has taken cues from wrestling, for better or worse. And yes, that was Trump in the opening video taking the clippers to the head of Vince McMahon.

In 1982 a long-form gag that blurred the lines between comedy, performance art, theater, hoax and reality by self-described song and dance man Andy Kaufman used Professional Wrestling as the vehicle to create a tremendous work of public art.

The set up was Kaufman as an arrogant Hollywood star who was intent on helping the fan base of Professional Wrestling understand the concepts of personal hygiene and dental care among other insults. He declared himself the Inter-Gender Wrestling Champion of the World and would offer $1000 to any woman that could pin him. Later the prize changed: he would marry the woman who pinned him as well as shave his head. The core of this charade went on for months and the whole incident was a decade long performance that was only revealed as a hoax in 1995. Even Kaufman’s early death did not upend the ruse.

Wrestling had a profound impact on Kaufman at an early age. On the playground, Andy was usually picked last, but he was a decent athlete, once setting the Great Neck North Junior High School record for the most consecutive chin-ups (35) but painfully shy. It was Grandma Pearl who really piqued his interest in sports by taking Andy to pro wrestling matches at Madison Square Garden. Watching “Nature Boy” Buddy Rogers, Killer Kowalski and Bruno Sammartino shaped the shy kid’s life and gave him the material for what would become two of his most famous gigs: wrestling and Tony Clifton.

Professional wrestlers have always garnered fame within mainstream and marginalized society alike. A number of wrestlers extend their careers into the realms of music, acting, writing, business, politics or public speaking. Celebrities from other sports or pop culture have also become involved with wrestling. A prime example of this is [The Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1980s_professional_wrestling_boom) of the 1980s, which combined wrestling with a hot new cable channel called [MTV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MTV).

Captain Lou Albano frequently appeared on the network with Cindi Lauper. Hulk Hogan and Rowdy Roddy Piper were also a constant presence. Other notable figures who have bridged the gap are Andre the Giant, Jesse Ventura in politics and Mick Foley who has written four New York Times bestsellers.

Presently there is hardly a bigger, more charismatic presence than Duane “The Rock” Johnson; John Cena is quickly ascending to become an enormous media franchise as well.

*((SLOWLY))*

One might ask: has entertainment become more like wrestling or has wrestling adapted to the times and newly global sensibilities? In my researched opinion, it’s the latter. The Sports Entertainment industry and WWE in particular is amazingly nimble in its ability to respond to the demands of the fan base, known as the WWE Universe. Not only do they have a thumb firmly on the pulse of their fan base, that same thumb is constantly reading and responding to the cultural zeitgeist.

When concussive head trauma became an issue in sports from little league to the highest levels of professional athletics WWE chose to invest in preventative safety measures that put their Superstars health first. Besides being the right thing to do, it was the smart thing to do in the eyes of the WWE Universe and there for best for business. By contrast, the NFL has taken a posture more akin to the cigarette industry when faced with the prospect that their product caused lung cancer. Absurd denials and calls for more studies. Consequently, as Sport Entertainment grows annually by double digits, the NFL retracts by double. This is not to say there is a direct cause and effect, but it’s by no means a coincidence. If nothing else, it’s a lesson that the audience’s ability to perceive the truth of motive should not be underestimated. And again, this harkens back to McMahon’s words in the shareholder letter: “…most importantly fan engagement.”

I realize the irony that the “fake” contest seems to prevail over the “real” contest in terms of facing reality. When we take into account that fan engagement is considered the most valuable element in the enterprise, it’s easy to see why they seem to operate more honestly.

Wrestling terms such as “body slam” and “tag team” have entered the common vernacular. The term "smackdown", popularized by [The Rock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwayne_Johnson), has been in the [Merriam-Webster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merriam-Webster) dictionary since 2007.

On television Rod Serling’s *Requiem for a Heavyweight (1956)*, was the first teleplay to ever receive an Peabody Award.

Netflix series *GLOW*, about an unemployed actresses’ struggle to get work and finds 1980’s Professional Wrestling quickly became one of their most popular series.

Pro wrestling has been the backdrop for a number of films including the 2008 film [*The Wrestler*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wrestler_%282008_film%29), about a washed-up professional wrestler, which garnered several Oscar nominations and a comeback role for Mickey Rourke.

The documentary [*Beyond the Mat*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beyond_the_Mat) directed by Barry W. Blaustein is right up there with the Maysles (MAY-zel) Brother’s *Salesmen* or Barbra Koppel’s *Harlan County, U.S.A.* as one of the great examples of the genre.

The 2005 [*Lipstick and Dynamite, Piss and Vinegar: The First Ladies of Wrestling*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lipstick_and_Dynamite%2C_Piss_and_Vinegar%3A_The_First_Ladies_of_Wrestling) chronicled the development of women's wrestling, in which Columbus plays an important role.

Last Tuesday night HBO premiered their documentary *Andre the Giant* which was produced by HBO Sports and WWE. In the opening narration, the elements of fairy tales such as dragons, fair maidens, wizards and giants are outlined. And Andre is introduced as “…the living manifestation of our childhood dreams”

While a student at Rhode Island School of Design Artist Shepard Fairey co-opted Andre’s image and ended up conducting the largest global experiment in Phenomenology to date. For more than 5 years, -- millions of black and white of 2 inch by 3 inch stickers with Andre’s image and the words “Andre the Giant has a Posse 7’4” 520 lbs.” were plastered everywhere around the globe.

*(((Phenomenology: the*[*philosophical*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy)*study of the structures of experience and*[*consciousness*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness)*.)))*

Andy Warhol was an early member the WWE Universe. He was in the audience at the first WrestleMania and said it was like nothing he’d ever seen.

In the HBO documentary Hulk Hogan stated that there was no one on Earth that could keep up with Andre. This was backed up by Rob Reiner who shared a story of Andre downing 20 bottles of wine during a single day of shooting on *The Princess Bride* and Ric Flair who spent a night out with Andre and witnessed the Giant dispatch 106 beers. Andre once passed out in front of the elevator bank of an upscale hotel and since there was no way to move him without calling Triple A, the massive man spent the night on the lobby floor.

The subtext of the documentary considering how a man exists in a world not designed for him alludes to how critical universal acceptance of others is to the survival of humankind.

In his 1957 book [*Mythologies*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythologies_%28book%29) French theorist [Roland Barthes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes) wrote an essay entitled *"The World of Wrestling"* in which he argued that rather than looking at professional wrestling as a scamming of the ignorant, it should be seen as [spectacle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spectacle); a mode of theatric demands and immediate reading of the juxtaposed meanings. The logical conclusion is given least importance over the theatrical performers of the wrestlers and the referee. According to Barthes the function of a wrestler is not to win: it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him just like the warriors referenced in Warren Tyler’s essay, *The Samurai Had No Choice*. In Professional Wrestling the wrestler has a sworn duty to give the audience a theatrical spectacle. Barthes work is considered a foundation of all later study.

While pro wrestling is often described as a "[soap opera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soap_opera) for males,” or derided as cheap entertainment for the uneducated working class, it has also been cited as filling the role of past forms of [literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature) and [theatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre); a [synthesis](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/synthesis) of [classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classics) [heroics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero), comedy, [revenge tragedies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge_play), [morality plays](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality_play), and [burlesque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_burlesque). As nationally renowned Available Light Theatre Executive Director Matt Slaybaugh says, it is pure melodrama at its best and incredibly well executed. The characters and storylines are a clear reflection of the current [mood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mood_%28psychology%29) and concerns of the times.

Like anything of cultural significance, professional wrestling relies heavily on ritual. Slaybaugh writes about the rituals of great theater be it in the ring or on the stage. Among these rituals are the Ring Entrance. These ceremonies are a production unto themselves. The music, chorography, pacing, all the dramatic elements are there. They present the character in a carefully crafted way. The bells heard at the top of the clip are the opening salvo for the arrival of The Undertaker. Undertaker’s entrance can take up to 5 minutes but there is simply no rushing the character known as the Deadman. It would be tantamount to breaking a long silence by Brando in the middle of a monologue. It is simply not done and would be dramatic sacrilege.

Also, in both cases you might actually get beaten up.

Which speaking of an entrance, as I was writing this I remembered the entrance of Denny Griffith to this very room after he had been away for a while tending to an illness. That night he arrived late and received an impromptu sustained applause from us that no one would have dared cut short. Five thousand words could not have told our story better than that very moment.

Two Japanese wrestlers currently sit atop of the men’s and women’s WWE rosters. Shinsuke Nakamura (SHIN-Skay Nock-a-MORE-a) has been described as having the stage presence of Queen singer Freddie Mercury and Prince while Asuka (Oz-Ka) (billed as the Empress of Tomorrow) is mesmerizing in any language from the moment she enters the arena. Both were headliners at WrestleMania last week and the WWE Universe is crazy about them.

Be it Gorgeous George, The Undertaker, Asuka (OX-KA) or Denny Griffith, a hero’s entrance is a sacred dramatic element of the human story.

For decades performers were expected to keep the illusions of wrestling's legitimacy alive even while not performing, essentially acting in character any time they were in public. Veterans of pro wrestling speak of a "sickness" among them which is an inexplicable pull to remain active in the wrestling world despite the devastating effects the job can have on one's life and health. Andre the Giant clearly suffered from this as Hulk Hogan articulated in the documentary in just a few words:

“He never wanted to leave, I get it.” (sustained silence)

In *Principles of Psychology* author William James states: ‘A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him.” Realizing this, the true scripted nature of the performance is generally not discussed. This is not for audience deception but more as a means to sustain and promote the willing [suspension of disbelief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspension_of_disbelief) for the audience-- again pointing to the importance of fan engagement.

PAUSE, -- SLOWEST

At The [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_Institute_of_Technology) one can enroll in Comparative Media Topics: American Pro Wrestling.

PAUSE

I read a number of thesis from these classes and one in particular by Carolina Vargas entitled *Professional Wrestling: The Ultimate Story Telling Device* stuck with me. The author cites a litany of examples of how, with great precision, wrestling heightens the emotional experience offered by traditional sports and directs it toward a more specific vision of the social and moral order. I found one phrase particularly compelling:

“The reason [professional wrestling] is worth thorough analysis is that storytelling is the single most important part of making professional wrestling successful.”

To take that idea a few steps further, is storytelling not in fact what also makes a nation, a culture if not all of humanity successful? Without our stories one could argue we are a virus with shoes in a losing battle with an indifferent universe.

PAUSE

***III. A COMMON HUMAN LANGUAGE***

Professional Wrestling has the ability to transcend nations and cultures connecting people through age old mythology.

Fans attended WrestleMania 33 from all 50 states and 62 countries, all there for the same reason. In 2017, Sasha Banks and (Columbus’s own) Alexa Bliss competed in the first ever women’s match in Abu Dhabi establishing a cultural bridge between the West and a major Muslim city. WWE produces reality TV content in the form of Total Divas and Total Bellas, which, like Netflix *GLOW*, appeals to an audience pretty far from the more traditional sports entertainment audience.

Upon attending a live event some years ago, playwright Slaybaugh observed an incredibly diverse audience. As someone who spends his days and nights in theater, without the platform of wrestling there would be little chance of interaction with many who are fans just like him.

The successful business, colorful history, cultural impact and common language of a story well told are but an overview I hope you have found interesting. You might wonder why, of all things, Professional Wrestling?

Six or 7 years ago, I would have dismissed as absurd the idea of giving an essay on pro wrestling. I might even have scoffed at the idea of a semi-scholarly look at these sideshow antics as some sort of Kaufmanesque performance art joke.

**PLAY**

***QUE FADE UP OF NICK ON THE SCREEN***

***Nick at his first Live WWE event at age 4. Seven foot four inch, 450 lbs. Big Show (Paul Wright), enters the ring***



But that was before the arrival of my son, Nick.

Nick was born in 2009 with an incredibly rare genetic condition called P-5 Syndrome also known as Cri Du Chat which is French for Cry of the Cat. Named as such because the condition indicator in babies is usually a cry that apparently sounds like a cat. Nick did not have this odd cry therefore his diagnosis came very late at 2 years old. Because he was delayed in walking and fine motor skills, even before knowing why, he received Physical, Occupational and Speech therapies. Today he walks and runs with his peers but he remains rather delayed in vocal speech.

**PAUSE**

***PAUSE VTR***

 Likely he will eventually gain a speaking voice but he has always been highly communicative in a variety of ways both organically and with assistive technology.

One way he and I communicate and his face to the world is as a part of the WWE Universe. There is nearly nothing, not a physical item, a piece of clothing, food or even an abstract thought that he can’t immediately relate to WWE and in that he makes himself very clear.

((SLOWLY))

At this point it’s worth noting that Nicholas has a highly developed sense of humor and is described by his educators as phenomenally observant especially for minute details. He has empathy for others that is well beyond his years and no real comprehension of violence as an expression of ill-will.

He gets exactly where sports entertainment is coming from and is all in on the journey.

My son brought me an awareness of WWE that stands as an existential metaphor for the changed perspective that fatherhood has branded into my life. My prejudice around WWE as something otherworldly would have been sheer ignorance at best.

Like Marlon Brando’s use of silence to make a point or Warhol taking the everyday item and making it art, the great stories are all around us because they ARE us. Regardless of flawed social media platforms or news that is more concerned with speed than accuracy there will always be room for THE story. The mythology that is our story should, as John Soderberg elegantly pointed out last year, **PLAY** serve the purpose of ***Experiencing Awe***.

***PLAY VTR TO FADE***

Professional wresting is but one of the never-ending stories that makes us more empathetic to those great and small that are different than us and sets moral bedrock that builds civilizations.

For Whom the Bell Tolls… (WATER)

the phrase as written by John (DUNN) Donne and its use by Hemingway sets a subtext preoccupation with death.

But my essay as presented here tonight has a preoccupation with life.

For most of us our offspring change our perspective. However, I would have never guessed Nick’s fascination with festooned characters throwing each other around a ring would be critical to toning down my judgement and tuning in to the message and the music of a great story-- no matter origin, format or perceived fanbase. And for that lesson alone I am gratefully in awe of how much can be learned in a short amount of time.

I used to think being right mattered.

Of course, I still have my opinions which I am not afraid to share. The difference now: I look forward to the journey of finding out I am wrong and learning that fun for fun’s sake, just like our mythologies, is a deep human concept to be fully embraced—and it is everywhere.

#