

# Contents

Foreword xi

Prologue

**Searching for Avalon 1**

CHAPTER 1

**“Daniel Elsberg’s Psychiatrist”  
and “Negro Sneakers” 5**

CHAPTER 2

**Gone Like a Thief in the Night 9**

CHAPTER 3

**You Say It’s Your Birthday! 13**

CHAPTER 4

**Billy Bones Sings Dionne Warwick 16**

CHAPTER 5

**Stay-at-Home Mom 22**

CHAPTER 6

**Trust in Me 25**

CHAPTER 7

**Edges First 35**

CHAPTER 8

**Church 38**

CHAPTER 9

**The Glue That Binds: Terry, Bill, Skull  
& the Harris Boys 43**

CHAPTER 10

**Disco Doesn’t Suck 55**

CHAPTER 11

**Barry Bonds & Tom Glavine’s  
Brother 63**

CHAPTER 12

**The Sounds of Silence 70**

CHAPTER 13

**How Tank Abbott Cost Me My Job 75**

CHAPTER 14

**The Meeting That Never Was 79**

CHAPTER 15

**Heaven 88**

**CHAPTER 16**

**Back After 21 Months 90**

**CHAPTER 17**

**How WCW Killed Me 92**

**CHAPTER 18**

**A Recipe for Disaster 97**

**CHAPTER 19**

**Putting Myself Over 99**

**CHAPTER 20**

**Brainwashing the  
Nature Boy's Son 103**

**CHAPTER 21**

**There Is No Sick in Wrestling 107**

**CHAPTER 22**

**Why Does Bill Goldberg  
Want to Kill Me? 110**

**CHAPTER 23**

**Not the Same Guy 116**

**CHAPTER 24**

**Vertigo 119**

**CHAPTER 25**

**Not Only Is He Killing WCW —  
Now He's a Racist! 129**

**CHAPTER 26**

**Prelude to Bash at the Beach 133**

**CHAPTER 27**

**Bash at the Beach 138**

**CHAPTER 28**

**Broken 143**

**CHAPTER 29**

**Planes, Fantasy Baseball  
and J.J. Dillon 146**

**CHAPTER 30**

**Russo's Last Stand 152**

**CHAPTER 31**

**Turning Over the Keys 158**

**CHAPTER 32**

**David Arquette 161**

**CHAPTER 33**

**9/11 165**

**CHAPTER 34**

**BitchSlap 170**

**CHAPTER 35**

**Rocky Mountains  
= Rocky Marriage? 175**

**CHAPTER 36**

**The Dawgman Cometh 181**

**CHAPTER 37**

**An Old Friend Calling 185**

**CHAPTER 38**

**There Ain't No Going Home 188**

**CHAPTER 39**

**The Birth of TNA 195**

**CHAPTER 40**

**Sorry, Jack, Chrissy and Janet —  
Three Is a Crowd! 199**

**CHAPTER 41**

**SEX (Sports Entertainment  
Xtreme) 203**

**CHAPTER 42**

**Rock Bottom 212**

**CHAPTER 43**

**Saying Goodbye to TNA 218**

**CHAPTER 44**

**Ring of Glory 223**

**CHAPTER 45**

**The Return of David Arquette 229**

**CHAPTER 46**

**Jeff and Dixie: Two People,  
Two Philosophies 236**

**CHAPTER 47**

**Respect 239**

**CHAPTER 48**

**Things You'll Never Know . . .  
But Need to Know 241**

**CHAPTER 49**

**The Angels Go Home 243**

**CHAPTER 50**

**Movin' On 246**

**CHAPTER 51**

**Fire Russo! 249**

**CHAPTER 52**

**How Did Things Go  
So Terribly Wrong? 250**



## Foreword

Vince Russo: the first man to actually make men in tights appealing. For years now I have watched my father work day after day in crafting his unique job position. I remember when I was a kid, my peers would come up to me and ask what my father did. Some dads worked at the Coke factory, some were repairmen and some just sat on their butts for a living. Not mine! My response would always be the same: “My father is a writer for wrestling.” Then I would always hear the same reply: “They have writers for that?”

Say what you want about Vince’s work; love it or hate it. If there is one thing I understand about my father, it’s that he is dedicated to anything he puts his hands on. When he had his own business, his dedication was to have that place as clean as a five-star restaurant. His biggest commitment wasn’t to his work; it was to his family. My dad spent hours with me and my brother. Shooting hoops, playing catch — he was always happy just to be around us.

Some of the audience reading this might want to hear the war stories that went on at wcw, but I’m not aware of anything involving a fuming Goldberg or a grizzly old Hogan. The moments I know of Vince Russo were when he’d let me stay up late and watch *Saturday Night Live*. This was the man who watched Hanna-Barbera cartoons and quoted Scorsese films. Dad was the only father I knew who wouldn’t dress conservative. You could always find him wearing a baseball jersey and basketball shorts (he was ready for any sport). These are the moments and memories I have of Vince Russo, not him getting whaled on by the Nature Boy.

My dad was always the guy ready to do anything for his family. He always encouraged me to do whatever I was interested in and

never restricted me to following in his footsteps as a wrestling writer (every boy's fantasy!) Whenever I took an interest in something different, my dad was there to support me and I'll never forget how close he's been to me in my life.

There really isn't anyone else like Vince Russo. He takes pride in what he does and approaches it in a completely different fashion from other people. He's a loud Italian who loves to express his opinion and doesn't care what you're going to think about it. Vince Russo has taught me so much about this world without having to give me any of the bull\$%#@ that most fathers provide. Always sincere and always true to his word, this is a man you don't mind spending an evening with.

I am forever grateful to be Vince Russo's son; I couldn't see it being any different. He brought me into this world and for that I am grateful. To some people he's "the man who ruined wrestling." To me, he's just Dad: the guy who wants to hang with me whenever he's got the time.

Sincerely,

VJ

I was munching on a mouthful of Thanksgiving turkey when my dad initially approached me with the notion of writing the foreword to this book. To be honest, the idea struck me as kind of intimidating at first: Just what exactly do I write? How could I possibly capture all my thoughts and feelings about my father in a few neatly structured paragraphs? I'm sure any son could write an entire book about his father.

First off, what aspect of Vince Russo do I talk about? Do I talk about the guy in the San Francisco Giants jersey, with the thick "New Yawk" accent and baseball bat at his side? The "heel" on national television who everybody loved to hate? The unruly writer who single-handedly "destroyed wrestling"? No way. Because I don't know that guy. The only image I have of Vince Russo is as my dad. The guy who took me to my first rock concert — I believe it was the KISS '96–97 reunion tour (my mother was livid!). The guy who would take me to the movies every weekend. The same guy who would let me stay up late and watch *South Park* when I was still in elementary school (probably not the best idea for a fifth-grader). That's the guy I know and the guy I love.

In response to his work, there is one thing I can say about my dad: he is a man who always, always worked his butt off for his family and for that I will forever be grateful. I won't lie; it was tough those years I would spend at home with my mom and brother when my dad was away working. But as an older man now I fully realize and appreciate what he was doing. He was teaching me then what it was like to be a man. What it means to be a hard-working, providing and responsible man who has his priorities straight and refuses to take crap from anyone.

In my teenage years, I was lucky enough to spend time with my father as he was operating his own business when my family lived in Marietta, Georgia. It was called CD Warehouse and it was a small franchise that sold CDs and DVDs. It was the ideal job for a slacker teenager such as myself, but it was there I would spend days with my dad witnessing first-hand what it was like to really take pride in what it is you do. Every single day the guy would get up early and make sure the store was fully stocked and spotless! That's commitment. He treated that store like it was his little baby and I guess in a way it was. I still to this day remember him saying, "The only reason I want to own my own business is because I want to be my own boss." I loved that. And it's that attitude that he's passed on to me.

My dad has passed on many indispensable traits to my brother, my sister and me and I can't thank him enough. It's because of him I developed a love of great films and comedians. It's because of him I learned how to shoot a jump shot. And it's because of him I have come to love (and hate) the act of writing and learned to find the beauty and self-fulfillment that lies in being creative. There is so much I could say, but I'll keep it short and sweet.

Thank you, Dad. I love you and thank you for bringing me into this crazy world.

Your son,

Will

This book was written between the fall of 2006 and the fall of 2008. Vince Russo's life took many turns during that period and subsequently. Even though his views and opinions on individuals and circumstances may have changed, not a word was altered. The reason? It's simple. We are *all* on a never-ending journey.

## Prologue

# Searching for Avalon

A couple of years ago I went to see the house on Avalon. It was gone.

Not just the house, but the whole neighborhood. I went to see the ballroom where me and my brothers used to play. The whole place . . . gone.

Not just that – but the grocery store where we used to shop . . . gone . . . all gone. I went to see where Eva lived off Poplar Street . . . it wasn't there.

Not even the street . . . it isn't there . . . not even the street. And then, I went to see the nightclub I used to have. Thank God it was there, because for a minute I thought I never was. If I knew things would no longer be here, I would have tried to remember better.

– Sam Krichinsky, in Barry Levinson's *Avalon*

I'm back . . .

Saved or unsaved, I still hate the blank page just the same.

For the last few weeks I have been gearing myself up for “Forgiven II,” the book now known as *Rope Opera*. As each day passed, the thoughts began to gather until I knew it was time to begin to orchestrate them together on paper. But once more, the fear of that white, empty, agonizing, blank piece of paper made the trip from the sectional to the computer seem like an endless journey. Yes, some things do change — but not the ugliness of the naked page to the writer.

The truth is, I always knew there would be a second book. Since writing *Forgiven*, my thoughts and emotions have incubated, getting to the point of bursting from me much like Bruce Banner bursts from those hideous purple pants as he transforms into the Incredible Hulk.

By the way, have you ever come across anybody that wears, or has ever worn, purple pants? No, I mean anybody . . . *ever*? Okay, maybe Alan Sues on *Laugh-In*, but aside from him, who else? What was Mr. Banner thinking about when he got dressed in the morning? If Bill Bixby had ever donned purple pants as Eddie's father, he would never have been courted. Getting back to my thoughts . . . I could no longer be a prisoner of my own emotions. Feelings of pain, anger, hurt, disappointment, forgiveness and hope consumed me, a never-ending line of bumper-to-bumper traffic more horrifying than that of the Long Island Expressway. Without pausing for even a moment, my deepest thoughts tossed and turned, ping-ponging back and forth between my restless mind and my unsettled stomach. One way or another, they had to be unleashed — set free into the world to shape young minds and have an everlasting impact on the free world.

And well, here you are.

If you're reading these words, there's a good chance that you've already read *Forgiven*. If you have, first and foremost I'd like to thank you. Writing that book was my greatest accomplishment. Not because I was able to receive my medal of "authorship," but because I know that God Himself simply used me as a vessel to get His words across. There was a message from the Creator to each of you who read it. . . . I hope you received it. But if you didn't, that's okay. The good news is that the "Big Man" has more to say.

Even though God created a new creature in me some 27 months ago, the old one still rears his ugly head every now and then — not so much in my actions but sometimes in my thoughts. You see, no human being is going to be 100% perfect, 100% of the time. Only God is capable of that, and that's why . . . well, that's why he's God. But as I began to map out this book, the first street I strolled along the way was "Sensationalism Avenue." How do I start this book to reel you all in? Remember that in the last manuscript, I started with the short but powerful sentence of "I hate Jeff." Well, in plotting this bad boy, I thought what better place to start than at Bash at the Beach 2000? Let's face it; years later, that's still all everybody wants to talk about. Hey, why don't I start it with my infamous *scripted* promo on Hulk Hogan? Yeah . . . that will get them!

But you know what? Something didn't feel right about that. That's not

where the *real* author of this book wanted to start. No, that was simply a case of yours truly wanting once again to drive the car — just like old times.

So the writing process was stalled. I sat and I waited for God to speak. That's right . . . I waited. One thing you learn — and learn quickly — after becoming a Christian is that God works on His clock, not ours. God makes decisions when He's ready, not when we want Him to. Like the late, great Jim Croce once said, "You don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't spit into the wind, you don't pull the mask of the ol' Lone Ranger, and you don't mess around with Jim." Well, add to that: you don't force the hand of the Creator! *He's* the Clock King, not you (chalk up my first Caped Crusader reference). So, while biding my time, I decided to watch a DVD chosen from my personal collection. The movie is called *Avalon* and is no doubt on my all-time top-ten list. The film depicts a family of Polish immigrants, the Krichinskys, who make their way over to America in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and settle in Avalon, a small town near Baltimore. Through the handing off of one generation to the next, we can clearly see the breakdown and deterioration of the traditional family.

I have watched this film many, many times, and after each viewing my river of tears is deeper than the last. I could never understand my emotional connection to *Avalon* until God Himself broke me down at my very core to make me realize why the film had, and still has, such a traumatic impact on me. But that's all part of the process. Once we fall to the base of the cross, God becomes the tour guide of our very lives. In order to show us where we are going, He must first show us where we've been. The process can be painful, but through Him, we must know who we are.

In hindsight, I now understand that God began prepping me years before I ever turned myself over to Him. At the age of 40, I really began to re-evaluate my life — where I was, where I had been and where I was going. I began to examine my very existence under a magnifying glass. Who was I? What made me tick? Writing *Forgiven* was a huge part of that process. I learned so much about myself in those pages that came from my hand — meaning, ultimately, God's hand. My first realization came when for the first time I truly realized how much I miss the family. No, not my immediate one — Amy, Will, VJ and Annie — but the very foundation: the tradition that my grandparents and my great-grandparents before them built their lives on. We were the Krichinskys; nothing mattered back then but the family. That's how I grew up. That's what I knew. And that's what I miss.

But it all goes so much deeper than that. All of us are searching for Avalon

in one sense or another. That one place in a certain time in our lives where we felt secure, safe, loved. Years later in our adulthood we would realize that it was our closest taste of heaven, right here on earth. And we spend the rest of our years just trying to get back to that place . . . but we can't. As Sam Krichinsky himself said, "It's gone." What's simply amazing about this is that we can trace it all the way back to Adam and Eve. Through the grace of God, they experienced heaven right there in the Garden of Eden. God showed them His master plan; they witnessed it with their own eyes. "This is the way I meant it to be," He was saying. Then with one sin, they lost it — they lost all of it. They spent the rest of their lives trying to get it back, but they never could — not in this life, anyway. Ironically, we are no different than our fig leaf-clad ancestors.

As I sit here I can only wonder, did God take my grandparents' house at 21 Poplar Street (amazingly enough, Sam Krichinsky's wife, Eva, lived on the same street in Avalon . . . coincidence?) away from me because I, too, sinned and am a sinner? As a child did He show me, through that blessed house, "this is the way I meant it to be"? Did He give me a taste of heaven on earth only to take it away? In my very humble opinion, I believe He did. I believe it because some 35 years later it is still the very thing I chase . . . while chasing Him in the process. And at the end of the day, that's all God wants . . . for us to pick up our nets and follow Him.

## “Daniel Elberg’s Psychiatrist” and “Negro Sneakers”

At least at one point in all our lives, we sat at the perfect place. For me, I can remember three times where it was just *right*. Beyond Poplar Street, there were my childhood and teen years at 5 Melvin Court in Farmingville, Long Island. Those summers are so fresh in my mind that I can pull them out any place, at any time, and just replay them in my mind. It’s summer. It’s eight a.m. I can hear the sound of small stones (they had to be small enough not to break the window) raining upon my window. My crew of neighborhood friends would “quietly” toss the stones from the ground below in an attempt to wake me from my slumber so we could start the day with some baseball at St. Margaret’s of Scotland Church. The cast would vary some day to day as the younger kids from the neighborhood would occasionally show up (mainly Doug, Kenny, Jimmy and Bobby), often in a futile attempt to make the “show,” or the “big kids” game. But the core group was always there: Ralph, Duge, Mike and Chykirda, and what a diversified bunch they were.

Starting with the youngest and smallest, Ralph DeStephano was perhaps the best all-around athlete on the block. A rookie southpaw with great promise, Ralph had some nice pop in his bat as he loaded and cocked his Louisville Slugger with visions of impressing yours truly, who at a few years older was his idol. Now, even though Ralph showed tremendous potential as a kid trying to make the cut, there was one small thing that kept him back . . . his mother.

“Raaaal-pheee, Raaaal-pheee!”

Those were the echoes that “bing-bing-bing, ricochet-rabbited” throughout every street in the Barclay Meadows development, courtesy of Flora DeStephano, when it was time to call her

youngest son in to eat. And, unfortunately for Ralphie, that would just erase it all. No matter how many hits he got that day, or how many saves he made in street hockey guarding the pipes like his idol Ken Dryden, or how many touchdown passes he caught in the fat part of the court, Ralph would forever be known as a “momma’s boy.” And that’s where Mike never let up — *ever!*

No doubt the smartest of the bunch, Mike DelPio also had to be the meanest. Man, this guy would just flat out make Ralphie’s life miserable. I mean, the guy just never let up. I remember Mike and Ralph literally fist-fighting from Melvin Court all the way up Roberta Avenue. Some of the best brawls I ever saw took place during those summers. But the ironic thing was that the next day they’d be right there, together, throwing blue-gray pebbles at my window attempting to wake the veteran up. But Mike was my boy. Being that I lived in the court, and he right off it, we were always together. Mike and I would play *everything*, and not only your traditional games. We would also invent some of our own.

You see, all Mike and I needed was a ball. It didn’t even matter what size; it just needed to be round, and we would be set for the day. The truth is we invented two of the greatest games ever known to man: “Daniel Elsberg’s Psychiatrist” (even though we had no idea who he *or* his psychiatrist were — we were just hearing their names on TV every day) and “Negro Sneakers,” named after a hideous pair of black, green, red and yellow sneakers my mother bought me that we *thought* were the colors of the African flag. Okay, so they were both versions of boxball, but it really didn’t matter: they were *ours*. But that’s how it was back then; we played *everything*. From sun-up to sun-down, we were out there playing. Baseball, basketball, hockey, stickball, football, wiffleball, boxball, kickball, kick the can (remember that one?), “Daniel Elsberg’s Psychiatrist,” “Negro Sneakers” — it didn’t matter! What was a video game? Are you kidding me? We were *kids*. Honest to goodness *kids!*

Then there was Chykirda. One word, like Cher, or Madonna: Chykirda. And, Chykirda was an icon . . . in his own right, of course. One bandmate shy of a group, Chykirda wasn’t known for his brains, but the kid had a huge heart. But he was just a screw-up, plain and simple. I mean, we loved the kid, but he just came across like an imbecile. Looking back now, I can’t even tell you why, but he just was. Maybe it was that real bad haircut: thick, black, brillo hair over his eyebrows, just above his eyes. I mean I never saw anything like it . . . and I still haven’t! Napoleon Dynamite is Heath Ledger compared to this guy! And to boot, he always had acne — even before the age you were supposed to get it. Do the math: this kid had issues. But he was the greatest!

I loved Chykirda — there just wasn't another like him. I loved him despite all the baseballs he hit through the windows of St. Margaret's of Scotland Church. Oh, I haven't told you about that yet? Okay, I'm coming clean again. You see, in the back of St. Margaret's, there was a little league baseball field. No, I mean *little* league. You played there until you were 11, and then you moved up to the majors. I broke out as an all-star on that field, coming into my own as a catcher. But you see, we continued to play on that field well into our teens. I mean, I think the right field porch, where the sanctuary sat just beyond the chain-link fence, was about 150 feet away. We were *way* too big for the field. So what did we do? We hit everything over the *left* field fence. Only one problem with that theory: Chykirda was left-handed — with absolutely *no* bat control. Get the picture? At least once a week Chykirda would sail a baseball high above the right field fence, through the window into the church sanctuary. We would then proceed to hop on our bikes — without castrating ourselves on our banana seats — and peddle for our lives. Now do you see why the kid was one sock away from a pair?

A few months back I visited my old stomping grounds and one of my first stops was St. Margaret's. I had to laugh when the first thing I noticed was that they flipped the entire field around so that home plate was now where the right field porch used to be so you were now hitting *away* from the church. And it took them *how* many years to figure that out?

But I've got to tell you, in his defense, Chykirda was the only one who listened religiously to "*that*" rock music. I mean, he even put it before sports! He was all over it: Queen, Van Halen, Blue Oyster Cult . . . and KISS! Yup, Chykirda and I were generals in the KISS Army. I point that out for a very significant reason. There was an instance in my life when I was about 15 or 16 (the same age as Christine — KISS fans will get the reference) and I was home sick. Keep in mind, after admitting to being a full-fledged hypochondriac in my first book, it probably meant that I was I was on my deathbed. This was it — this time I was really going to join Elizabeth (for all you *Sanford and Son* buffs). Then, all of a sudden, there was a knock on the door. Who could that be? I wasn't expecting anyone. Everybody was in school. It was just me lying here, dying, watching *Sigmund and the Sea Monsters*. So, I answered the door — and keep in mind, this is sometime in the middle of winter — and before me was a sight that I'll never forget. In full Gene Simmons makeup, Chykirda stood, ever so proudly, on my stoop. Shirtless, and with his hair pulled up in the middle, looking somewhat like a Gene ponytail anyway, Chykirda looked at me with those wide-eyed Gene eyes — if you're a KISS fan you know the ones that I'm

talking about. Then, with one mighty strum of his guitar that wasn't there, Gene — I mean Chykirda — proceeded to spit ketchup, in lieu of blood, all over himself. Then, standing there smelling like a cold tomato with a hint of B.O., he said nothing; he just turned around and walked back up Roberta Avenue. Now that is a true friend.

Last, but not least, rounding out the crew was Frank Dugnan, or “the Duge” for short. There were two unique things about the Duge; one was that he could hit a ton. I mean he would hit *everything* over the fence at St. Margaret's, and that was important when we played our neighborhood rivals “College Hills.” Duge could flat hit, man. I wouldn't admit it then, but I'll admit it now: he was a better hitter than me . . . maybe. But the second thing that stood out about the Duge was his head. The guy had the longest head I ever saw — I mean, it just went on and on and on. You remember back in the old days when your parents would take you to an amusement park and you would look into that mirror that distorted everything? Well, that was Duge's head . . . all the time! And Chykirda was all over this. He never let up on the Duge's melon. So, on the right-hand side of the street you'd have Mike and Ralph whaling on each other, while on the left you had Chykirda and Duge hammering it out. As the great Archie and Edith Bunker would say as they sat at the living room piano, “Those were the days.”

I know, I know, I have to get to the rasslin' stuff, and I will — in a minute. Just one more stop.

The last place I experienced Avalon was in college. My days at Indiana State University, Evansville Campus, were the last of my best days for a very long while. The relationships I made in only three short years were some of the best relationships I ever experienced. In a sense I left home and found another home. My early days with my wife, Amy, just can't be repeated. I can remember winning a huge stuffed animal at the Fall Festival and dropping by the Delta Zeta booth where she was working to give it to her. I didn't even know her at the time, but I knew in my heart that I wanted to. Then came our first date, the movie *Arthur*: I remember dropping her off at her house at the end of the date and *not* kissing her goodnight. I didn't want her to think I was like all the other guys, because I wasn't. I remember her cooking for me at her house when I had little or no money for food. I remember the feeling of starting to get jealous over other guys who I thought might be interested in her. I remember the excitement and anticipation when she would come at to see me at Campus Apartments. It was Avalon . . . it was simply Avalon.

We must savor those moments . . . and we must never forget them.