

Story By: TONY YEP

Date: September 2021

KILLER KOWALSKI

Do you remember Killer Kowalski? Also known as Wladyslaw Spulnik? He was a famous wrestler of his era. But unlike Hulk Hogan and Dwayne Johnson, he never became a “real” actor nor did he ever make any movies. If you do recall, then you must be an old person like myself. You must have liked watching wrestling, even if you would never openly admit this to anyone! My father liked to watch wrestling and I watched it a few times with him. That’s my excuse! Wrestling was easy to understand and it was always energetic and athletic with lots of acrobatic action and stunts. It was also very loud with “over the top” acting following a set script! There was always a good guy getting beat up by the bad guy who wrestled using dirty and illegal tactics. But most often, the good guys would prevail and win and everyone in the audience would feel happy, except maybe the villain wrestler who lost.

Killer Kowalski was supposedly a “bad guy”, but people liked him because he would hop around in the ring like a kangaroo. He had this infamous submission claw hold which I called “Killer Kowalski’s Kangaroo Klutch”. The four K’s were hard to forget. He would wear down and pin his opponent on the mat. Then with his steely fingers, he would grab and twist his opponent’s gut area, squeezing very hard. This was supposed to exact so much excruciating pain that invariably all his opponents would give up and lose the match. Or so the script went as everyone knew that the wrestlers were really “acting” and they never seriously tried to hurt each other. It was nevertheless very convincing to watch and their exuberant acting was sometimes worthy of an academy award!

I remember first showing my sons, Ted and Tim, who were six and four years old then, what this “Kangaroo Klutch” was all about. We were playing Incredible Hulk, bare chested and stripped to the waist. We were wrestling on the ground, growling and howling and rolling over each other. The only thing we didn’t do was to paint ourselves green! Then I showed my sons Killer Kowalski’s signature submission hold, yelling out loud, “I’m going to squeeze the juice out of you!” Of course, with my young boys, it was much less extreme, more like grabbing their round little bellies and tickling the heck out of them! It was fun.

My wife would hear this ruckus and come running in to see what was the matter, only to see the three of us rolling on the floor on top of each other, laughing and grunting like wild animals. I looked up and told her that I was bonding with my sons. Seeing our flushed and beaming faces, she just smiled, shook her head and walked away. I’ve since wondered how mothers bonded with their sons. I also wonder whether my sons remember any of this, as fondly as I do, whenever the name Killer Kowalski is mentioned.