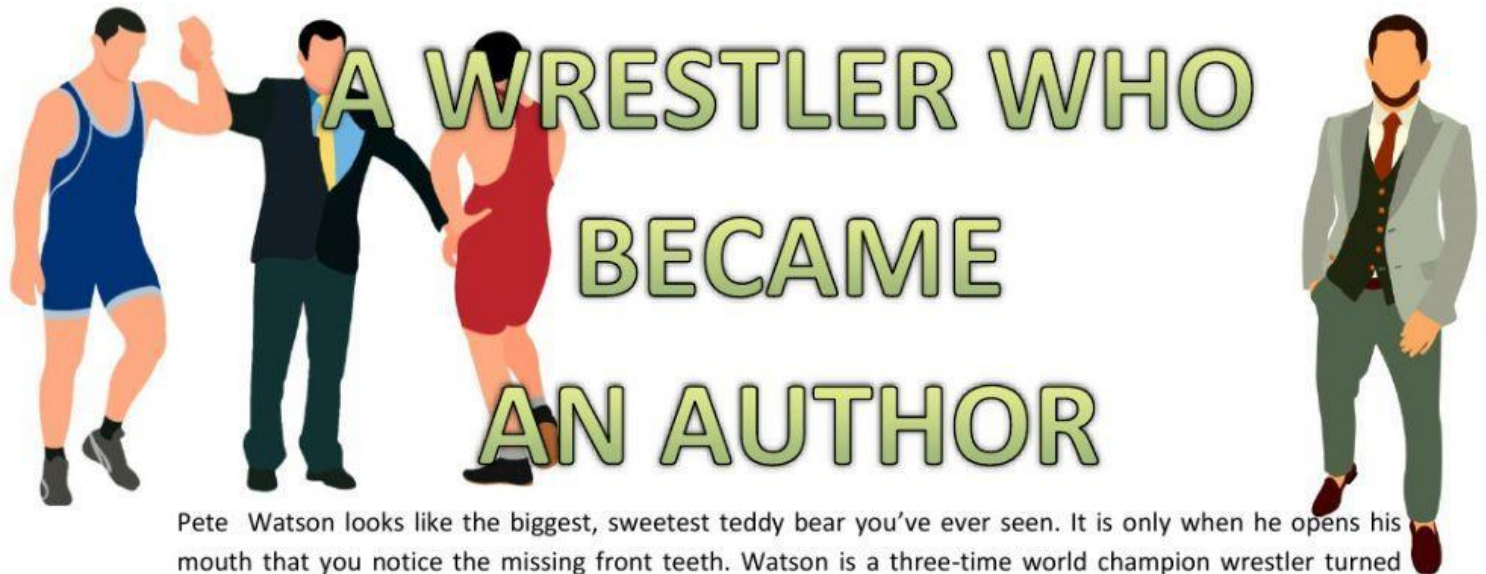




Pete Watson looks like the biggest, sweetest teddy bear you've ever seen. It is only when he opens his mouth that you notice the missing front teeth. Watson is a three-time world champion wrestler turned author. He was adored by fans because he was different: while other wrestlers were supreme athletes, he was just a hulk who knew how to take a hit. You could throw as many chairs as you liked at Pete Watson, you could smack him repeatedly, but he wouldn't go down.

After two autobiographies and a series of children's stories, he has just written a brilliant first novel: a work of immense power and subtlety, likely to gain a wide readership. At its simplest, it is about a boy and his dad getting together after a lifetime apart, though there is far more to it than that. Was he inspired by anyone he knew? The father, he says, is based on guys he met on the road, wrestlers, friends of his, who appeared to be leading exciting lives, but deep down were pretty miserable.

Watson does not come from traditional wrestling stock. He grew up in Long Island, New York. His father was an athletics director with a PhD, his mother a physical education teacher with two master's degrees — one in literature, the other in Russian history. He was a big boy, bullied for his size. One day his neighbour had a go at him, and for the first time Watson realised he could use his weight and size instead of feeling awkward about it. It was a turning point.

At college, he did a degree in communication studies. Meanwhile, he was learning the ropes of professional wrestling. Did his parents try to dissuade him? *'No. They were just really insistent that I finished college. I am pretty sure they thought I'd get hurt and quit wrestling.'* But he didn't.

He is in remarkably good condition for someone who spent 20 years in the ring. His skin is smooth and firm; there are few visible scars. *'It's amazing what retirement can do for you. I looked really rough five years ago, and now I think I look a good deal younger.'* he says. People are surprised by the softness of his handshake. *'Yeah, that's the wrestler's handshake,'* he says.

Do you have to be a good actor to be a good wrestler? *'I used to really hate the acting label, but it is acting. When it's really good, when you're feeling it and letting that real emotion fly, it comes closer to being real.'* What did his children think when they saw him getting hurt? *'Well, they used to think I never got hurt because that's what I told them. When they got old enough to realise I did, they stopped enjoying it. That was, in part, what led to my decision to get out.'*

Nowadays, his time is dedicated to family and books — his next novel is about boy wrestlers living on the same block, and he is also writing more children's stories. He does not think this life is so different from wrestling. *'Wrestling is all about characters,'* he says. *'So when my fans hear I've written a novel, I don't get the sense that they feel I've abandoned them.'*



1. What impression do we get of Pete Watson's skills as a wrestler?

- A He frequently lost because he was not very aggressive.
- B He was too gentle and friendly to be a good wrestler.
- C He was injured a lot because he didn't fight back.
- D His speciality was letting his opponent hit him.

2. It is suggested that Watson's first novel

- A is based on his own autobiography.
- B will be popular with readers.
- C will not only appeal to his fans.
- D is not much more than a simple story.

3. What does 'traditional wrestling stock' in the text refer to?

- A Watson's childhood
- B Watson's family background
- C Watson's educational background
- D Watson's background in athletics

4. What did Watson's parents feel about his interest in wrestling?

- A They were afraid he would get hurt.
- B They insisted that he should have proper training at college.
- C They wanted him to give up wrestling.
- D They thought he would abandon the sport quite soon.

5. Watson seems to be in good condition now

- A although he has retired.
- B in spite of being a wrestler for so long.
- C because he stopped wrestling five years ago.
- D and he finds this fact amazing.

6. How does Watson regard the idea that wrestling is like acting?

- A He resents the suggestion.
- B He thinks wrestlers aren't good actors.
- C He has come to accept it.
- D He doesn't think wrestling can compare to acting.

7. Watson's present life is not so different from his past profession because

- A his work is still connected with characters.
- B he is writing about wrestling, his previous profession.
- C his family are still more important than anything else.
- D his fans still follow his career with interest.

