

QI HEALS

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QI FOR PETS (II)

A skilled but eccentric gentleman with whom I studied qi in Japan claimed to practice on his fish. He had a small pond with koi (carp) in his garden. He would place his hand under water and send qi throughout the pond, giving each fish a pretty good dose. He maintained that the qi tranquilized them, and that they would swim in slow ecstasy. I never witnessed this and only put it forward for future experimentation. My own experience with fish was quite the opposite.

It happened when our son was in pre-school. We went to his school carnival, and I lost sight of him in the crush for about a minute. During which time, he succeeded in achieving the unthinkable: he won a living prize at a rather difficult pitch-and-toss event.

This prize was a tiny goldfish in a small plastic bag with about enough water in it to wiggle its wee tail. This prize package had been standing in 106° sunlight most of the day, and the fish looked poached. Seeing the shock and sadness in my eyes, the prize giver sought to console me.

“Don’t worry,” said the fish lady, “these fish are guaranteed to die within three days.”

Our son named the fish Goofy, declared he loved it more than anything in the world, and brought it into the house to live with him forever.

We got Goofy a little fishbowl and a lot of fresh water. On the third morning of Goofy’s arrival, our son woke us up to say that Goofy had stopped swimming, and was sleeping on his side at the bottom of the fishbowl. Sure enough, Goofy was looking like a flounder that had just suffered a coronary. I prodded him, he seemed dead, and I went to get the net to scoop him out and inter his remains in the toilet.

“Oh, do something, Mama, do something,” our son implored my wife.

Rising to the drama of the moment, she stuck her finger in the fishbowl, aimed at the lifeless Goofy, and began sending qi for all she was worth. I cupped the bowl with both hands, and felt her qi swirling in the water. Now comes the amazing part.

Goofy remained inert for at least a minute. My wife and I were giving up hope when all of a sudden, *he swam straight up to the top of the tank and leapt out of the water like a rocket!*

That fish leapt and dove and swam in circles like a hooked marlin. There was nothing tranquil or mellow about his reaction. He swam to the side of the fishbowl and stared at my wife as if memorizing every line on her face.

Goofy returned from the (near?) dead by means of qi, I am sure of it. He returned (or turned out to be) a female, and so our son, being a Francophile, renamed her Gaufée.

Gaufée grew to be about seven inches long with a beautiful gossamer tail and fins. She lived for six years following her “coronary”. Therese had only to enter the room for Gaufée to swim to the side of the bowl and stare out at her. She then leapt out of the

water, my wife shot her a little qi, and she was happy in her tank the rest of the day, a very animated fish.

In short, your pets being living creatures, they possess the same features of qi as yourself. You should feel no hesitation to use your qi for the on-going health of your pets, or to get them over an illness, or help them to heal after an accident or surgical procedure. And remember: the more you love your pet, the more likely and able you are to help them when they need you. Your qi will be so well-intentioned and focused that your treatment, however clumsy, will be effective.

UNCLE ARNIE (V)

The most novel of my mother's ideas for Uncle Arnie's entertainment was to have him see professional wrestling. She assumed, quite rightly, that he would be an ardent fan of the sport; frequently televised, easily understood, the distinction between good and bad, winner and loser clear-cut; the perfect vehicle for transporting Uncle Arnie to a Nirvana of excitement. She planned the experience as a surprise.

The fourth morning of his stay, Uncle Arnie put on his Hawaiian shirt, patted the starfish on his breast pocket, felt something inside, and pulled out two tickets. He was plainly intrigued.

"Wadda dey say?" he asked me.

"They're tickets to see a wrestling bout tonight," I told him.

"Wrasslin'?! We gonna see wrasslin?! I love wrasslin! What time's it start?"

"Seven thirty."

"What time's it now?"

"Nine."

"It's a long time off," he sighed.

Not long enough, I thought.

In the three days we had spent together, I had grown immune to Uncle Arnie's physical repulsiveness, and had come to like him after a fashion. I found his interests and chatter juvenile and sometimes irritating, but he could sit quietly by himself for hours, keeping amused riffling through comic books or basking in the sun. I was touched by his sensuous joy in the ocean. He could not swim, and panicked if a wave crept over his knees; but standing ankle deep in

water with me or my mother holding his hand tightly, he was a picture of perfect bliss. He would sit erect at the water's edge like an antique Eastern potentate, digging into the wet sand and tossing clods out to sea. Though dark and hairy, his skin was very fair, and my mother and I had to be constantly rubbing him with suntan oil. He sweated so profusely that the oil was quickly washed away.

Taking him to the Parrot Jungle had been easy. The strange trees, looming, spreading, flowering and fruiting captivated him. He goggled at the vivid colors of the parrots, macaws, and flamingos, asking over and over if they were real. My mother bought him some birdseed to attract a large macaw to fly over and perch on his shoulder. When it did he was terrified, and shrieked to be saved from the ravenous bird who shrieked to be saved from the wild man.

The comedy of the moment was not lost on Uncle Arnie. The macaw rocketed back to its perch, and Uncle Arnie burst into stupendous laughter which ended in a coughing fit that left him winded. The rest of the day was anticlimactic for him: parrots on parrot-sized bicycles failed to seize his imagination; talking birds left him cold; even the spectacular Parade of Flamingos could not get

that one macaw out of his head. He went back again and again to watch it sit on its perch, now unruffled and insouciant. Again and again he squinted at his shoulder as if to confirm a bird had perched on it. He could talk about nothing else but that bird for hours, and arriving back at the house, asked to borrow my set of water-colors to capture his amazement for all time. Fortunately, my mother had taken photos for Uncle Arnie to show Arthur Pillars, who would otherwise have been baffled trying to discern the bird in Uncle Arnie's abstract interpretation. At his request we returned to the Parrot Jungle twice more during his visit, and though he lost his fear of the birds and could approach them without flinching, he was not inclined to let one alight on him. He flailed his arms as if driving off mosquitoes.

I enjoyed these outings with, as I said, certain reservations. My mother had been in charge, Uncle Arnie had been docile for the most part, and the beach and the Parrot Jungle were places he could be kept under tight rein. I was not in the least embarrassed to be seen with Uncle Arnie. He did cut a clownish figure, but there were many clownish figures in Miami.

The fact that my mother was an adult made her benign but attentive governance of Uncle Arnie seem appropriate to his age; an adult giving advice and orders to an adult. My only responsibility was to watch and report during my mother's brief absences to the toilet, ticket window or vending machine. It was she who wiped him when his eye ran, who dressed and undressed him at the beach, who decided what time we would depart and return, and then saw to it that Uncle Arnie adhered to her schedule.

My mother's plan to have Uncle Arnie and me see professional wrestling on our own made me very uneasy. Albeit his mental maturity was inferior to mine, he was still an adult, my father's age. He was also much heavier and stronger than I was. I did not fancy the public spectacle of trying to control a middle-aged man in a frenzied sports arena. It was a job for my father, but Mort would have no part of it. Listening to the reasons behind his vehement refusal to take Uncle Arnie to the bout, one might have wondered why he would send his only child to an event from which a sensible adult would shrink. It struck me at the time as a clear case of child

abuse. My mother did not agree. It was just a matter of sitting with him, she said, and seeing that he got home safely.

"I'll drive you there and give you cab fare home. All you have to do is sit with him and keep him well-supplied with hamburgers and soft drinks. Who knows, you may become a fan yourself."

My mother had not stinted when she bought the tickets. They were the best seats in the house, right at ringside. Between our seats and the ring, a table had been set up with half a dozen men sitting on folding chairs in front of microphones. Pushing through the crowd to get to our seats, Uncle Arnie introduced himself and then me to the men, adding that this was the greatest day of his life, and I was the best nephew a man could have. The men grunted. He introduced us to our ringside neighbors, an assortment of thugs whose acquaintance I would rather not have made. Nor were they impressed by the significance of this day in Uncle Arnie's life. A couple of men nodded mechanically and said, "That's swell", but no one sought to prolong the conversation.

Uncle Arnie fell into his seat and bounced around in it as if being dribbled by an unseen hand. "Read me the program," he said breathlessly.

"The first bout is a tag team between midgets," I read. I hadn't the faintest idea what that meant. It sounded cruel, as if the physically deformed were being goaded into combat by whips and prongs. Uncle Arnie merely snorted.

"That ain't no good. Them midgets is stupid."

"Next is a best two out of three falls bout between Nature Boy Kelly and the Chattanooga Bomber."

Uncle Arnie mulled that one over. "That'll be good," he declared.

"The main event is a tag team bout between the Lambert Brothers and the Terrible Zoltans. One pin, unlimited time."

Uncle Arnie grabbed hold of the armrests and stopped bouncing. "Boy oh boy oh boy," he whispered, slapping his palms together. "The Terrible Zoltans, huh?" He seemed awed.

"Do you know them?"

"No, but their name's real scary." Uncle Arnie was gleeful. "Well, we got time till they come on. Midgets!" he snorted. "Them midgets is stupid. I dunno why they even have 'em."

I guess they gotta work like everyone else," I said sympathetically.

"Why do I gotta pay money to see midgets work?" Uncle Arnie retorted. "Ain't no midgets payin' to see me work."

Uncle Arnie seemed about to expound on the subject when he was diverted by activity within the crowd. The majority of the spectators shared Uncle Arnie's opinion of midget wrestlers, and made their feelings known as the little men entered the arena. Less than half the seats were filled for this first bout, and those spectators who, like my uncle and myself, had come on time expecting to witness a clash of titans, greeted the midgets with jeers and hoots of derision, no one louder than Uncle Arnie.

"Go home, ya stupids, go home!" Uncle Arnie brayed from the first row. Uncle Arnie's insults were the mildest of the entire audience. Many in the crowd seemed familiar with the wrestling midgets, and their jibes became personal. References to family

members and their inclinations and anatomies were loud and rang with authority. Before the bout even began, the taunts had become so malicious that I half expected the midgets to pull out machine guns and annihilate us all.

The midgets welcomed the insults and even invited them, clowning and prancing in ways calculated to provoke vilification. They had oversized heads and undersized bodies with sturdy bowlegs and chubby little arms. They were nightmarishly grotesque when they came to grips with each other. Clumsy, unbalanced, weak, they shook their fists and shouted puny threats at each other in squeaky voices like mutated descendants of a race decimated by nuclear war. They were mindlessly continuing that war with the primitive weapons left them after Armageddon.

"They ain't hurtin' each other," Uncle Arnie complained.

"Wrasslers is supposed to hurt each other."

The midgets' grimaces and groans were not at all convincing. They grappled half-heartedly, and answered the now-frenzied catcalls with strange, twisted smiles.

"Go home, go home," Uncle Arnie screamed, drooling angrily.

The midgets suddenly ceased throwing each other around the ring. The four of them conferred with their eyes as if launching a conspiracy, and then leapt on the referee, a full-sized man, and began pummeling him. I took interest for the first time, reading into their concerted action an outburst of revenge against all normal-sized people who had treated them cruelly. Uncle Arnie and the rest of the audience had a different reading: the midgets had lost all sense of propriety and were acting above their station.

"They can't do that!" Uncle Arnie was aghast. He seemed to be all for the immediate implementation and enforcement of a midgets' code of honor. Other spectators were advocating rough justice for the midgets.

This latter advice was apparently taken when two men from the audience --undoubtedly part of the troupe-- left their seats, entered the ring and threw the midgets out. The midgets rubbed their battered heads and hips disconsolately, and left the hall muttering among themselves as the audience broke into rapturous applause. I was surprised that the audience let them go so easily. I imagined that at least one person would be so carried away that he would

attack the midgets in unscripted, unrehearsed fury; but no one risked being ejected over a midget. The referee was carried from the ring on a stretcher to even greater applause, and the two men who had precipitously ended the bout evaporated into the hubbub.

Uncle Arnie sat back in his seat, panting. I wiped his cheek and his mouth for him. "I told you them midgets was stupid," he wheezed.

"It was pretty exciting to me," I fibbed enthusiastically.

He looked at me as if I were one of the midgets. "Them midgets is stupid!" He practically shouted the words.

"Anyway, Uncle Arnie, they're just the warm-up act. They're sent out to work the crowd."

"Why do I gotta pay to watch a midget work?" he said again. He had a good line there and he knew it.

"Do you want a hamburger?"

"I don't need no hamburger now. The real wrasslers is comin' out."

Nature Boy Kelly was a blond in a red bathing suit, and the Chattanooga Bomber was a brunette in a black bathing suit. The

different colors were all that distinguished them. Both were tall and muscular with thickening waists indicating escalating years and declining enthusiasm for their profession. Both were competent wrestlers with not much to choose between them in terms of wrestling and acting technique.

Uncle Arnie sat watching them wordlessly from the edge of his seat. He was very interested, but not excited. The bout seemed to have been contrived as a sober lesson in professional wrestling; the stable beam balancing the scale of the impotent, ludicrous clowning of the warm-up act against the scale of the *gotterdammerung* of the main event. The bout was a nice psychological calculation: having been raised to the pitch of blood lust by the first event, the audience would feel an eagerness tinged with frustration to get on to the third event after being forced to sit on their hands, as it were, for the forty minutes it took to complete the second event. The wrestlers were so evenly matched, and the bout was so bland that, without anyone to cheer or boo, Uncle Arnie and I lapsed into conversation (about midgets) and never learned which wrestler won the bout.

That second bout had a calming effect on Uncle Arnie. When the referee declared the winner, Uncle Arnie asked for the first of what I hoped would be a succession of tranquilizing hamburgers. He insisted on going with me to the concession stand, but was frightened by the milling crowd, and had to be led back to his seat by the hand.

The main event was a study in contrasts. The Lambert Brothers, Mike and Tony, were from Columbus, Ohio, and looked like the kind of nice kids who would stop on a motorway to help repair your car. Their bodies were massive, hairless and well-oiled, defining their powerful musculature which really did not need extra definition. The Lambert Brothers leapt adroitly, youthfully into the ring, and stopping for a moment in the center, assumed what I took to be an attitude of prayer, as if thanking God for letting them wrestle that evening before a full house at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

Their opponents, the Terrible Zoltans, hailed from a vicious sounding village in Hungary. They spoke in guttural voices to each other in what passed for Hungarian. The only English they possessed between them was "Oh yeah?!". They wore long black tights and

tank tops over their hairy, barrel-like bodies. They leapt into the ring trailing black capes lined in scarlet. They both wore masks which hid all their features save their small black eyes and devilish goatees. They exuded malevolence like dungeon stench. The crowd hated them on sight. Uncle Arnie felt like killing them with his bare hands.

"They're bad, very very bad," he said, and shivered.

"Why do you say that, Uncle Arnie?" I teased.

"There ain't nothing nice about 'em. I bet they cheat."

Uncle Arnie could not have been more correct. They rabbit-punched the Lambert Brothers when they should have been shaking hands like gentlemen. The Lambert Brothers bore the treachery with stoic sportsmanship, and the tone of the bout was set.

"Go home, ya stupids, go home!" Uncle Arnie bawled, settling comfortably into his seat for the greatest entertainment of his life. His face was a canvas on which were painted changing aspects of pure pleasure. I wished I had a camera to record the pleasure for my mother; there was so little else that was rewarding to her about Uncle Arnie's stay.

Uncle Arnie's sentiments did not go unnoticed. One of the Zoltans turned from the ring, hung over the ropes and bared his teeth at Uncle Arnie. "Grrrrr," he said.

Uncle Arnie quivered, and spittle welled up on his lips. I thought the Terrible Zoltan had reduced him to jelly with a word, but he played the man and shouted back, "Go home, ya stupids, go home!"

Uncle Arnie was not the only one telling the Zoltans where to go. After a quick confabulation in their corner, they both hung over the ropes, bared their teeth, and shouted at the audience in the language of Franz Lizst and Zsa Zsa Gabor. The audience stamped and whistled, hooted and hollered, trying to drown out the incomprehensible ravings of the hateful duo. The masked foreigners seemed stymied by the ingenious defiance of the American audience, and turned their attention to the middle of the ring where Tony Lambert stood waiting, smiling patiently.

The Terrible Zoltans removed their capes with flair, and did a few deep knee bends. The audience urged them to stop fooling around and go out and fight, but the sight of Tony Lambert prowling the ring in a menacing crouch dampened the Zoltans' fighting ardor. They

stood in conference in their corner, pointing at Tony as if making petty criticisms of his style. It was obvious that neither had the guts to take him on man to man. Tony finally became bored, and made the near-fatal mistake of turning his back to the Zoltans in order to have a word with Mike who was signing ringside autographs. One of the Zoltans burst from his corner like a bear shot from a cannon, and crashed into Tony's broad back. The battle was joined.

The Zoltans were ferocious, the Lamberts tenacious, Uncle Arnie ecstatic. He exulted when the Lamberts retrieved an apparently irretrievable situation, and groaned when victory was stolen from them by their opponents, invariably employing an illegal move. Some of the Zoltan's moves struck me as not merely illegal, but also unethical.

The crowd was not so much behind the Lamberts as against the Zoltans. The latter had an uncanny magnetism for drawing rancor and hatred, not in outbursts, but in a steady, powerful flow. My ears sang with the noise. Uncle Arnie was drooling so uncontrollably that I had given up wiping his mouth. I simply laid my handkerchief on his lap to catch what spittle landed on it. He bounced out of his seat

and raged, he bounced back into his seat and lamented; he was growing hoarse and felt mortified at losing his only weapon against the Zoltans. From time to time one of them would hang over the ropes and bare his teeth in Uncle Arnie's direction.

"I shouldn'ta ate my hamburger. I coulda threw it at him," Uncle Arnie said dejectedly. It galled him and the rest of the audience that the Zoltans could flagrantly rend with impunity everything decent in American wrestling. The crowd called upon the Lamberts to rend, rip, tear, gouge, bash, punch, kick, and kill. None of which they would do; the Lamberts were decent Americans who played by the rules, even if it killed them. The next time a Zoltan came to our side of the ring, Uncle Arnie seized my shoulder.

"Tell 'em they're big jerks and stupid, too," he ordered me.

"You're big jerks," I said in a voice that did not even dent the wall of noise.

"Yell, g'wan, yell!" Uncle Arnie demanded.

"I can't, I'm too embarrassed." I was a child who thought the world was biding its time, just waiting for me to make a social gaffe or *faux pas* that would haunt me forever.

"Ya little sissy! Ya want them guys to win?"

Uncle Arnie was right, it was no time for niceties. The Terrible Zoltans did look on the verge of winning. They had managed to secrete a ballpeen hammer and screwdriver into the ring, and were about to perform a rough and ready lobotomy on Mike Lambert. Tony paced his corner outside the ropes, waiting for the tag that could never come. Mike was unconscious. One Zoltan was sitting on his chest, the other was calibrating his skull to find the exact spot to make the incision. The referee, suddenly distracted by the commotion of the audience, saw nothing of the Zoltans' lawless behavior. He scrutinized everything visible but the center of the ring. He was more a stuffed wrestling exhibit than a flesh and blood referee.

Would Tony Lambert obey the rules of wrestling at the expense of his brother's life?

Uncle Arnie would not. Hoarse pleading contorted his face. "Don't wait for the tag! Don't wait for the tag!" His teeth were clenched and his knuckles were white.

Tony took Uncle Arnie's advice, and bounded into the ring. At which, the referee suddenly returned to life, and attempted to eject Tony from the ring while reading him a stern lecture on wrestling etiquette. But Tony would not be stayed. He thrust the referee aside and rushed towards the Zoltans. The chest-sitting Zoltan bolted to his feet and held Tony at bay, trying to give his partner time to crack the skull. But Tony was possessed by demonic energy and slowly drove the defender back. One more effort and he would push the Zoltan away, and retrieve his brother.

The Zoltan with the surgical inclination would not yield his patient without a struggle. Unable to perform his first major operation with the necessary concentration and precision inside the ring, he threw Mike Lambert over the ropes and out of the ring. Mike's lifeless body crashed onto the announcers' table in front of me and Uncle Arnie. The microphones skittered over the smooth table surface and slid along the floor. The earsplitting hissing of electric snakes was now added to the din. The announcers fled before the ball peen hammer wielding Zoltan like the Philistines before Samson and his jawbone.

"Boy oh boy oh boy," said Uncle Arnie. He was on his feet at ringside, inspecting Mike Lambert. He touched Mike, poked Mike, even prodded Mike ever so slightly. Mike groaned and tried to rise.

"C'mon!" Uncle Arnie encouraged Mike, mouth to ear, "Get up and kill 'im!" Mike could not raise himself. His arms gave out; he collapsed and lay inert on the table.

The Terrible Zoltan was coming, stalking the aisle like a troll on the lookout for dinner. Should anyone doubt his object in leaving the ring, the hammer and screwdriver he carried made that object clear.

I grabbed Uncle Arnie from behind by his belt and tried to pull him back to the seat, but he was heavy, and the Terrible Zoltan had reached him before I had moved him an inch.

Uncle Arnie blubbered. The Terrible Zoltan uttered a fearsome Hungarian oath, and shoved Uncle Arnie back, knocking him into someone's lap. That person gave a no less fearsome American oath, and shoved him back at Zoltan. I grabbed Uncle Arnie around the waist in order to force him back to his seat, but he had too much waist for my childish arms and, before I could hook my fingers under his belt, he twisted and shoved me down to the floor. He was crying

in terrified bewilderment and could hardly see. He was trying to flee, but the crowd was dense, and I was underfoot.

The Terrible Zoltan hovered, a hulking thundercloud, over his prostrate opponent, and raised the ball peen hammer above his head. Uncle Arnie was instantly calmed by the sight. He blinked, and wiped his eyes with his shoulders. A man was about to be killed, a good man at that. The Terrible Zoltan gave a booming laugh of pure evil and raised the hammer a notch higher. The audience was shouting as one man. Would no one save Mike Lambert?

While all of this had been proceeding outside the ring, Tony Lambert, while fighting off the feeble clutches of the referee, had been pulling the other Terrible Zoltan apart inside the ring. Having disposed of those enemies of decency, he had now climbed to the top of the ropes in the neutral corner and was poised to strike like an avenging thunderbolt at the remaining foe. Uncle Arnie never saw him. What little he could see through the teary film of his good eye was all Terrible Zoltan, and he hated what he saw.

At the precise moment that the Terrible Zoltan began his downswing and Tony Lambert began his leap, Uncle Arnie, with

astonishing speed and dexterity, grabbed a metal folding chair from the floor and brought it down with full force on the Terrible Zoltan's head. The Terrible Zoltan gave a wounded shout, staggered, and fell, leaving a clear field for the leaping Lambert, who sailed headfirst into the front row seats and injured himself.

The crowd roared. Uncle Arnie was in a delirium of delight. He shook with triumphant, wheezy laughter. "Haw haw haw haw," he bellowed, sounding like a pipe organ falling down a flight of stairs.

"Who hit me? Who's the sonuvabitch who hit me?" the Terrible Zoltan demanded to know. It did not really matter who had hit him; it was purely coincidental that the man who had struck the blow was the man who was at his side guffawing. Uncle Arnie's idiot laughter provoked him more than the blow.

Nor was Tony Lambert in a good mood. "What the fuck happened?" he said, dazedly.

His brother Mike, showing surprising spryness for having been recently comatose, helped him to his feet. He, too, was unclear as to the sequence of events, but he was evidently annoyed that someone

had caused a deviation from the script. It was equally evident that Uncle Arnie's hilarity had gotten on his nerves, too.

"Hey, fatso, what gives?" this nice looking youth said to Uncle Arnie.

"I'm gonna murder this little fat shit here," the Terrible Zoltan said without any theatricality, and drew back his fist to punch my uncle into oblivion. Uncle Arnie stopped laughing, and looked at the Terrible Zoltan with disgust.

"You ain't no Hungarian," he said, "you're a big, stupid jerk."

I pushed my way through the cluster of people surrounding the three wrestlers and Uncle Arnie.

"Don't hit him," I shouted, "he's retarded. Please don't hit him. He doesn't know what he's doing. He doesn't understand things."

"...a big stupid jerk," Uncle Arnie continued. It was his final word on the subject.

The Terrible Zoltan thought about this for a second. "Yeah, well, you ain't no retard," he said, and punched me in the mouth. If Uncle Arnie thought an injured Zoltan was funny, he thought a bleeding

nephew was hilarious. Weak with laughter, he leaned against Tony Lambert for support, and drooled on his bathing suit.

"Jesus, this guy's disgusting," the usually mild-mannered Tony exclaimed, and pushed Uncle Arnie away.

"Ya shouldn'ta hit the kid," Mike said, shaking his head.

"Oh yeah?!" Zoltan exclaimed, and made as if to belt me again.

"Hey, leave them two alone," a nearby spectator shouted.

"Wanna make something of it?" the Terrible Zoltan shouted back.

That was the wrong thing to say. A dozen Terrible Zoltan haters rushed him and pulled him to the ground. His brother Zoltan jumped from the ring into the fray and tried to drag them off, but another dozen rushed upon him like a human wave. Some Lambert Brothers' fans wanted to hold a Zoltan, while others wanted to punch a Zoltan. When it became evident that not everyone could have his own way with a Zoltan, a fresh altercation broke out among the crowd and quickly turned into a full-scale brawl.

Mike and Tony Lambert had preferred discretion to valor, and were standing in the center of the ring --an underpopulated isle of calm-- talking philosophically with their erstwhile enemy, the referee.

Their expressions and gestures showed that they had no hope of fulfilling their planned one-week stint at the Convention Hall unless a pair of opponents could be had at a moment's notice. The Zoltans would not be appearing in the ring for weeks, maybe months.

Uncle Arnie seated himself out of harm's way on the edge of the ring, surveying with delight the pandemonium of his creation.

"Lookit, lookit! Haw haw haw," he brayed.

"Stop at once, stop at once. The police have been called," the public address system boomed over the din.

My mouth had stopped bleeding, and felt swollen to the size and shape of a boxing glove. My legs were wobbly from the blow, but I knew where my duty lay, and managed to lurch as far as Uncle Arnie.

"C'mon, Uncle Arnie, let's get out of here before the cops come," I begged, tugging at his trouser leg, but he refused to budge.

"C'mon, Uncle Arnie, we gotta get the hell out of here," I yelled, "my father will have a fit if we get caught by the cops."

I grabbed his ankles and yanked. He wrapped his arms around the ropes and held on for dear life.

"I ain't goin'. I'm havin' too much fun," he said, and began to cry. I let go of his legs, reached up and tickled his thick waist. He squirmed, but would not release his hold on the ropes. "Help," he cried, "somebody help me!"

"Well, well, what have we here?" Tony Lambert addressed this question to his brother and to Uncle Arnie simultaneously.

"This is the fat shit that started it all," Mike said, and smiled in a way eerily reminiscent of a Zoltan smile.

"He wants help, so let's help him," Tony said, and working quickly and expertly with his brother, had Uncle Arnie pried off the ropes and hanging over his shoulder in no time.

Mike climbed down from the ring, and held me by my collar. He looked from Uncle Arnie to me with loathing, as if trying to decide whether we were worth killing.

"You guys are real pains in the ass, y'know that?" he said.

"My uncle's retarded. He doesn't know the difference between real and fake. He didn't mean to do anything wrong, he just wanted to save your life," I explained through a constricted throat. "He

thought Zoltan was really going to kill you," I added, in case he had missed the point.

"Let's get 'em out of here," Mike called up to Tony. His brother, despite the weight of Uncle Arnie over his shoulder, leapt lightly down to the floor. The Balsoms were carried ignominiously out of the Convention Hall by the Lamberts. Tony led the way. He shoved through the crowd like an icebreaker through the Arctic Ocean, with Mike carrying me behind like a towed dinghy. Tony reached the back exit and kicked it open. Darkness rushed into the hall. Tony strode into the empty parking lot that seemed eerie in the thin, moist lamplight. He paused, planted his right foot on the asphalt, steadied himself with a deep breath, and then heaved Uncle Arnie ten feet.

"I ever see you again, I break your fat neck, y'unnerstand?" he spat.

"Yes, sir, I understand," I answered through thick lips on behalf of my uncle. Mike put me down and released his grip. "I promise you will never see me or my uncle again."

"Go to hell," Tony said, and stalked back into the tumult of the arena.

"Ya better put some ice on that lip, kid," Mike said, with sudden, unexpected kindness. He followed his brother, though at a slower pace.

Uncle Arnie lay curled up on the asphalt shaking with laughter. He had lost the best part of his voice, his lungs seemed to have deflated, and his jaws ached. He just lay shaking like something freshly squeezed from a tube. Tony's using him as a shot-put was more thrilling than any amusement park ride he had ever had.

"Time to go home, Uncle Arnie." I helped him to his feet.

"Yeah, too bad. That was great." His enthusiasm was undiminished.

We walked toward Lincoln Road on the lookout for cabs. The night was dark and damp with air that clung to you as if loathe to let you pass. A sea breeze rustled coconut fronds; their swishing sounded cool and refreshing, but the sensation of the breeze was unpleasantly enervating. I trudged with short, sweaty steps as if dragging a coffin tied to my waist. My head throbbed, my jaw ached, my ears rang, my gums stung. It might have been worse, I

reflected. I might be in police custody as well. The reflection did nothing to enliven me or put a spring in my step.

Uncle Arnie, on the other hand, maintained a lively clip, replaying the events of the evening to himself, and providing me with a running commentary on them.

"Them midgets was stupid, wasn't they? Didn't I tell ya? The Zoltans were scary. I done real good, huh?"

I felt that if I had to walk one more step in the saturated night air listening to Uncle Arnie's moronic babble about an evening that had left me with a lopsided face, I would turn on him and garrote him with his own belt.

A bus on our route home stopped not twenty feet from us. It looked comfortable and cheery. It was air-conditioned, and I was sure that the air on board was crisp and dry. I hooked my arm through Uncle Arnie's and, yelling to the driver to wait, tried to drag him to the open, waiting bus doors.

"I don't wanna, I don't wanna," he bellowed furiously.

"Whaddya mean, you don't wanna?" I bellowed back, let loose his arm, and tried to hook my arm around his neck.

"You two gettin' on or ain't ya?" the driver joined in.

"We're getting on," I said, with equal parts conviction and hope.

The attempted headlock having failed, I lowered my right shoulder and shoved Uncle Arnie up to, and then up the steps of the bus. He tried to stop himself by thrusting his arms out sideways, but I slapped them down and kept pushing him from the rear.

"Help me," I called to the driver. "Pull him in by his belt."

"Why should I? I don't care if he rides or don't."

Another shove and Uncle Arnie had reached the top step. There was room for me to climb on. The driver closed the door, and began to drive. With the first movement of the bus, Uncle Arnie began to whimper. His active resistance died with the closing of the bus doors, and he quivered as if on the verge of an anxiety attack. I sat by a window and pulled him down next to me, rubbing his shaking shoulders and cooing to him in a soothing bid to comfort him. I had not known about his fear of buses.

I felt I should apologize, or at least explain why I had been so eager to catch the bus, but he did not seem in a receptive mood.

"You okay?" I asked him.

He nodded, and said, "I don't like buses. Why we took a bus when we got money for a taxi?"

I didn't answer, but continued to stroke his shoulders.

"The midgets were really stupid, weren't they, Uncle Arnie?"

He didn't answer, but I could feel some tension leave his shoulders. His breathing had become more regular. He turned his head to look round the bus. His good eye was wide, but not panicky. A man was sitting alone in the last row of the bus. Uncle Arnie stared at him for a moment and relaxed a bit more. He turned to look at the man every few seconds, and finally twisted his entire body round to stare in comfort. He was intrigued.

The man had a strange, slightly demented expression, not unlike Uncle Arnie's when he was perplexed. I assumed that Uncle Arnie felt a bond with that expression. I did not care for the man's look, but if it kept Uncle Arnie from wreaking havoc on the bus, it was worth more than the Gioconda's smile.

Uncle Arnie's curiosity about the man could not be satisfied from where he sat. He stood up, and with slow, deliberate movement, edged his way down the aisle to within three feet of the man's seat,

from which vantage point he could observe the man without physical discomfort. The bus lurched and lunged, almost spilling Uncle Arnie into the man's lap, but Uncle Arnie took hold of the overhead rail and steadied himself.

I could no longer pretend I had not noticed my uncle's behavior; I was debating on a course of action. It occurred to me there was still plenty of time for us to be arrested, and I repented my impulsive haste in running for the doubtful environment of a bus rather than waiting for the absolute safety of a cab. I turned round in my seat for a clear view of Uncle Arnie and his prey.

The man was unaware of Uncle Arnie. At least he paid no attention to Uncle Arnie's intrusive fascination for him. I was deeply embarrassed by Uncle Arnie's ingenuous breach of bus etiquette, and walked down the aisle, intending to lead him back to our seat. When I reached him, Uncle Arnie pointed and said, "Lookit!" The man had his trousers open and was masturbating in an oblivion of pleasure.

"Let's get back to our seats," I stage-whispered.

"I don't wanna," he protested.

In Uncle Arnie's mesmerized good eye I had a nerve-wracking glimpse into a crystal ball. It showed me the man ejaculating on the back of the seat before him, coming out of his trance to find Uncle Arnie gawking at him, and becoming enraged enough to kill him. I saw myself trying to explain the ameliorating fact of my uncle's brain damage to an irate public masturbator, and wondered how many beatings I could sustain on my uncle's behalf in one evening.

"Uncle Arnie," I hissed, "this man is crazy. We have to get away from him. Let's get off the bus and take a cab the rest of the way home. Let's stop at a Burger King in a taxi cab on the way home. Please, Uncle Arnie, let's get off the bus. There's no burgers on the bus route."

Neither bribes, reasoned discourse, nor physical intimidation could induce Uncle Arnie to tear himself away. The look on his face was so intense that one would have thought it was he who was masturbating. There was nothing I could do but resume my seat and pray that we reached our destination before the man reached climax. The bus was making good speed along the shortest route to our

goal; the man was pleasurably dawdling en route to his, so I had hope.

We went before he came. It was no easy job getting Uncle Arnie off the bus. I had to shove him in the same manner I had successfully employed to get him on. The clotted night air was sticky and annoying, but it was the air of safety, and I enjoyed deep lungfuls as we walked the short distance home.

Uncle Arnie was not one to dwell on misfortunes. Though disappointed at having to miss the finale, he pronounced himself satisfied with what he had seen of the man's performance. Uncle Arnie had passed a full, rich evening in my company, and he walked into the house eager to tell his brother and sister-in-law of the wonders he had seen.

My mother was already asleep. Mort was sitting in his easy chair swaying slightly; his headphone-girt head was thrown back carelessly, his eyes were lightly closed. At a distance, he looked not unlike the man on the bus. Uncle Arnie hurried over to him, hoping to catch him masturbating. His clumping startled Mort from his reverie, and my father glared at Uncle Arnie with the ire of a witch

doctor interrupted midway through an impressive incantation. Uncle Arnie sat down on the edge of Mort's chair and fixed him with a glittering eye, the Ancient Mariner much the worse for wear about to launch into a sea story.

Mort sat up straight and removed his headphones with frigid menace. Mozart's noble music sounded flat and puny heard at a distance through headphones, like a donkey's bray filtered through cotton wool. Uncle Arnie shook his head in wonder that Mort could endure such toneless mush.

"We was at wrasslin'," he said.

My father's voice was tight. "Arnie, why don't you go to bed and tell me about it in the morning?"

My father left for work early on Saturday mornings, which meant that Uncle Arnie could not regale him until Saturday evening, a passage of time that insured almost total loss of memory. Uncle Arnie wanted to talk while he was still in full possession of the facts.

"Mort, the wrasslin' wasn't like what you'd expect."

"I don't know what to expect from wrestling, and I don't care. Arnie, can't you see I'm relaxing right now and don't want to be

disturbed?" He carried on in this vein, relentlessly insistent that his brother leave him in peace. One might have received the impression that Uncle Arnie had been boring Mort with stories for the past several years.

"Well," Arnie said good-naturedly, "don't come asking us tomorrow to tell you about wrasslin', cause we won't, will we?" He smiled at me with conspiratorial warmth and affection. I felt a deep ache in my chest, the desperate wish that Mort would give ten minutes to Uncle Arnie's tale. Unable to transmit the wish other than by words that might embarrass Uncle Arnie, I kept my ache to myself, and led Uncle Arnie off to the bedroom.

After undressing himself with his customary fastidiousness, Uncle Arnie rinsed his socks, brushed his teeth, put his clothes neatly away and got into bed. He lay on his back with his eyes closed. His face was childishly radiant, illumined by fresh memories of high adventure.

As I turned out the light, I asked him what he was thinking about.

"That guy on the bus had a really big dick," Uncle Arnie replied, and shook with suppressed laughter.

USEFUL HEALTH HINT

When exposed to something traumatic, be it visual or audible (a saddening sight or receiving saddening news), it is human nature to inhale swiftly and deeply and then hold the breath. This gives the trauma a home within you. Always receive a traumatic moment on an exhalation. This keeps the trauma from embedding itself in you, and makes sure you can continue to breathe normally.

SIKE HEALTH

QI ENERGY WORKSHOP

MAY 29, 2010

Therese & Mallory Fromm will be giving a beginner/intermediate workshop in the SIKE Technique at our home on Saturday, May 29, from 10:00-4:30. The cost is \$125, and includes: learning to access and transmit your qi, fundamentals of healing and health maintenance, an individual treatment, a great lunch, and conversation with interesting people. Detailed information about the takeaway skills taught at the workshop can be found at www.sikehealth.com. Click on Workshops.

We cannot over-emphasize the benefits of taking

a workshop. The knowledge and skills learned at a workshop enable the individual to understand his/her own diagnosis and treatment; how to maintain health and accelerate the healing process at home; how to treat others for aches, pains, and minor ailments. **We plan to emphasize techniques for health maintenance at home, with particular attention to kiryu as a simple, elegant, and effective means of wellness and mental clarity.** And finally, each participant also receives a treatment, which is included in the cost of the workshop.

With summer approaching, this will be the last workshop for at least two months. We urge you to get your body blended with the summer months before they are upon you.

For reservations and information, phone 818-992-0713 or email info@sikehealth.com.