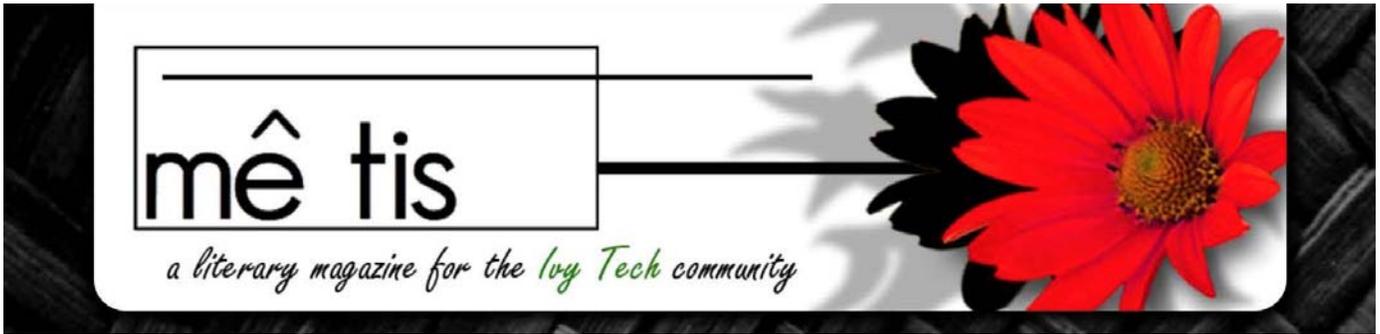


## **Heroes and Hair**

**By Jason Hillenburg**

When I was twelve years old, my heroes were larger than life. I was a child during the 1980's, and action heroes, science fiction characters, and professional football players loomed over my consciousness. Professional wrestling fired my imagination even more. Not the type of wrestling characterized by inflated and buffoonish superheroes with impossible ethics or their mammoth and monstrous foes, rather wrestling presented in a more credible manner with an emphasis on physical action over visual appeal. I knew that wrestling was athletic theater about good versus evil, but it deepened my blossoming fever for drama.

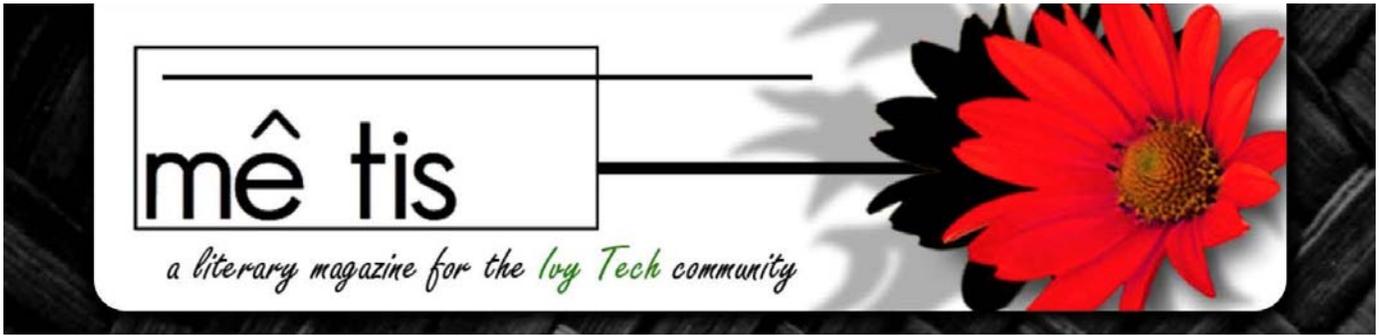
I wanted to be like my heroes. I wanted to be as strong as they were and have all the girls. I wanted to have the money they had so I could buy anything I wanted. I had my cousin paint my face like a tag team called The Road Warriors. I read articles in wrestling magazines about a former heavyweight champion, Bob Backlund, who was a legitimate former NCAA amateur wrestler from Minnesota. He was smaller than the typical professional wrestler of his era but was a virtual human tank of muscle and sinew. In one magazine, I saw a picture of Backlund hoisting a Japanese wrestler high into the air. His strength was astonishing. He defeated much larger foes and, despite his size, stood as tall as any giant in my eyes. His head sported a severe crew cut, and I wanted the same. If I had a crew cut like his, it would help me defeat any foe. If I had a



crew cut like his, it would help me stand as tall as any giant. I would be a champion wrestler and grapple with anything that came my way. A crew cut would make me as strong as my heroes.

When I was sixteen years old, I had different heroes and wanted a different haircut. Instead of the military severity of a professional wrestler's crew cut, I trimmed, sculpted, and treated my hair so that it bloomed into a lustrous blonde mane extending far past my waist. I would learn to play rock guitar and augmented my bluesy, slashing chords with wide swings of my hair. The distance I felt between myself and women would disappear in a potent, crimson brew of adolescent sex and power chords.

I am thirty-five years old. My hairline is deep into an inexorable march towards the top of my head. Combing my hair is a dodge, each slow swipe designed to conceal a forehead higher with every passing year. The two basic styles left for obscuring my age are parting to the left side or straight down all around my head. Male vanity is an ugly thing. I equate the movement of my hairline with clouds of electricity evacuating en masse from a life that once crackled with fury. When I am twelve years old, my heroes are larger than life. When I am thirty-five, my heroes are that twelve and sixteen-year-old boy who reigned over a reparatory of memory.



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Jason is 35 years old, a lifelong Bloomington resident, and he recently became a father for the first time. He is majoring in Paralegal Studies and plans to attend Indiana University to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree. He has been writing since his pre-teen years and fiction is his passion, though he writes in and enjoys many genres. He is a voracious reader who has been known to drive thirty miles away for a single paperback. If asked, Jason advocates boxers over briefs.

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