

THE DAY THE LADY WRESTLERS HIT GLOVERSVILLE

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On a peaceful summer's day in the placid village of Gloversville, New York, all hell broke loose. Posters had been up for two weeks, announcing the arrival of a group of female wrestlers. The villagers had never even heard of lady wrestlers, so they were dubiously awaiting the Tigresses (as the wrestlers were called). It was like a circus sideshow to the townfolk. These women were going to be freaks, for how many *real* women in the year 1919 went travelling around the country? For two weeks the men in the town had been saying, "First they have lady wrestlers. The next thing you know, hell will freeze over!" But hell did not freeze over; it just broke loose.

Anyway, these ladies arrived in Gloversville on a hot summer's day. There were eighteen of them. They were robust and red and hard. They looked almost like men—especially since they weren't smiling.

The Tigresses rode into town in six automobiles. Their manager, a cigar-smoking roughneck named Mick Gannon, was driving the first car in the parade. As they drove down Main Street to the Gloversville Inn, the townfolk peered out of their windows, staring at them. One little boy ran out of his house, pointing and laughing at the big women. His mother promptly pulled him back into the house and slammed the door.

The ladies were undaunted by the cold and curious stares they were receiving. They were laughing and shoving each other and—oh, mercy! They were smoking cigars!

The good women of Gloversville swore that they would not allow their husbands and children to watch the lady wrestlers. Imagine—smoking cigars! And in *public*! The townswomen became more and more disgusted as they stared out their windows in fascination. Meanwhile, the men of Gloversville were gathered in the pool hall, for it was Saturday. Even they stopped playing in order to watch the procession of lady wrestlers. Amazingly enough, not one cat-call came from among the group of men. They were in awe of the wrestling women. (Indeed, some of them were downright afraid, although they never would have admitted it).

Mick Gannon and his Tigresses parked in front of the Gloversville

Inn. The lady wrestlers rolled out of their automobiles, throwing suitcases at one another and making rude remarks about each other's figures, pompadours, and hats. "Hey, Enid, your head looks like an ostrich with its head-stuck in the ground!" "Aw, Myrtle, you're one to talk, you with your bats-in-the-belfry pompadour!"

Mick Gannon climbed out of his automobile. "Awright, girls, we ain't got all day to sit around and rib each other. We got a show this afternoon."

"Aw, Mick, we wasn't pickin' on you, honey!"

"Yeah, Mick, what's your beef?"

"We was just havin' fun!"

Despite the roughhousing and kidding, Mick Gannon and the Tigresses were genuinely fond of each other. They travelled all over New York state together, eating in the same restaurants and staying in the same hotels. The Tigresses and Mick had grown up in the city of New York, a city where street fights and prostitution were prevalent. Mick had rescued these women from the world of red lights and gang fights; he had offered them a way out. He was a great organizer, Mick Gannon, and from these eighteen women he had formed a united group. The Tigresses were the only lady wrestlers in New York state, and they always packed the auditorium everywhere they went. The women couldn't understand why people would pay to watch women wrestle, but Mick Gannon understood. He knew that people were attracted to freaks. He would stand in the back of auditoriums all across the state, smoking his cigar, watching the audience clap and cheer as the Tigresses threw each other on the floor. He was no dummy, Mick Gannon. He had made a lot of money because he understood people. And he understood people because he watched them very carefully.

"Come on, girls. Jeez—I gotta herd you ladies like a bunch of cows!" Mick Gannon waved at the group of men who were gawking at the Tigresses. The men did not even notice him. They were too engrossed in watching the lady wrestlers.

By the time Mick had turned around, a scuffle had erupted. Two women were clawing and screaming at each other. Before Mick could stop them, two more women had taken sides and joined in the fight. Before he knew it, the Civil War was being recreated before his eyes. Feathers were flying everywhere; skirts were pulled up and high-topped shoes were kicking out beneath them. Shrill voices were screeching

curses and flinging insults. The ladies could be heard all over town. This was too much for the people of Gloversville. They rushed out of their houses down to the Inn—they just *had* to see what was going on! There had never been a big fight in Gloversville before—nothing more than little boys pulling little girls' pigtails and such. This was a full-scale riot to these peaceful people. (By the way, this date, June 22, 1919, is marked in Gloversville history as the date of the first riot in town).

Mick Gannon rushed to the midst of the fight, shaking the women as he passed them. "Hey, listen—we don't give previews to our shows!" he yelled. After much yelling and shaking, he finally got the wrestlers calmed down. "Now what's the problem with you girls?" he asked the two who had begun the whole business.

"Pauline said that I was fat!" a fat lady named Emma pouted.

"Listen, baby, that just means that there's more of you to love," Mick said soothingly. He always pacified the women in this manner.

Mick rolled his eyes, saying to the townfolk, "Jeez, the things a man has to do to keep a woman happy!" The people laughed a little nervously. They knew that any man who could tame these eighteen Tigresses was a pretty powerful person.

"All right, ladies, let's rest up for our show. Now get into a single line and go into the hotel—quiet now!" The Tigresses meekly picked up their bags and filed into the hotel.

The Gloversville Inn had fifteen rooms in it. (Gloversville was not considered one of New York's prime attractions). Mick Gannon and the Tigresses inhabited ten of those fifteen rooms. Needless to say, the Inn was very noisy that day.

The Tigress' show was at five o'clock that afternoon. Every woman in Gloversville forbade her husband and children to go to the show, secretly hoping that her husband would forbid her to forbid him to go, and what's more, he would drag her along with him. This is precisely what happened. And while the wives continued to argue at their husbands, they were inwardly glad that they were being forced to go and watch the lady wrestlers. As a result, the entire town turned out to see the Tigresses. Each husband and wife argued through the entire show, but nevertheless, everyone did turn out. Mick Gannon was well pleased.

The lady wrestlers were amazing. They could pick each other up over their heads, flip each other, and scream marvelous curses at each

other. The men and children of Gloversville were enthralled. The women of the town, while arguing at their husbands, watched the show out of the corners of their eyes. While they loudly mouthed their disgust, they were really fascinated by the Tigresses—and even a little jealous. Just think—if they were as strong as those lady wrestlers, their husbands would obey their every wish! Ah, life could be so serene . . .

As the pace of the wrestlers' movements became faster and faster, the noise level from the women of Gloversville grew louder and louder. Children started crying because their ears hurt from the noise. This only served to add to the confusion. When it seemed as if everyone's eardrums would burst, one woman, imitating the wrestlers, threw her husband onto the floor. Taking her cue, all of the wives began flipping their husbands and screaming the same insults at them that the lady wrestlers used on each other. The downtrodden men of Gloversville looked up at their wives, who were glowering triumphantly down on them. (This date is also recorded in Gloversville history as the date of the first women's liberation uprising).

The bewildered Tigresses stopped throwing each other and watched the audience. Mick Gannon, who was standing behind the townfolk, shouted, "Come on, girls!" The Tigresses ran to the Inn, grabbed their suitcases, jumped into their automobiles, and sped home to New York City.

The husbands and wives did not speak to each other for a week and a day after the Tigresses had left. The men would gather in the pool hall each evening, discussing the Tigresses and the manner in which the lady wrestlers had affected their wives. They were extremely confused men at first, but eventually reached the conclusion that the Gloversville women were merely trying to be like the city women. Perhaps the good wives of Gloversville believed that all city women acted like the Tigresses.

When the Gloversville Town Council met the next week, they passed a law stating that from this day forth, female wrestlers would be prohibited from appearing in the city. And if you go to Gloversville today, you will find that that same law is still on the record. If you ask around, some oldtimer might be able to tell you this story. But if you never make it to Gloversville (as many don't), you now know why lady wrestlers aren't allowed in the city. (This story is God's truth, too—it's recorded in the minutes of the Town Council meeting on June 31, 1919!).

