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*Dramatic Publishing*

**Stronger  
Than  
Strong!**

**Great American  
Tall Tale  
Heroines**

**Comedy by Brian Guehring**

# Stronger Than Strong!

## Great American Tall Tale Heroines

**Comedy. By Brian Guehring.** *Cast: 4 to 5m., 6 to 12w., 4 to 20+ either gender.* The play opens with a ballyhoo (actors running up and down the aisle to drum up excitement and anticipation for the upcoming medicine show). The famous Doctors Wellington have arrived in this small town at the turn of the last century to sell their amazing strength elixir to the population. The Doctors Wellington and their troupe of amazing actors first tell the audience how Dr. J.M. Wellington (in search of ingredients to make the strength elixir) meets a young Tennessee gal who became the rip-roarin', 'gater wrasslin' Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett. Dr. M.J. Wellington meets Annie Christmas, a young New Orleans girl who became a keelboating legend with the strength to beat up 1,000 men and to haul her keelboat down and up the Mississippi River. Dr. J.J. Wellington gets the final ingredient from the Wild West after meeting the catfish-riding, bronco-busting legendary cowgirl, Slue-Foot Sue. Using ingredients from each of these three heroines, the doctors create an elixir so you, too, can be as strong as these tall tale legends! *Flexible staging. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: S1W.*

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*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
ph: 800-448-7469

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# **Stronger Than Strong!** **Great American Tall Tale Heroines**

Comedy/Adventure by

**BRIAN GUEHRING**



**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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To Grandma Guehring  
My favorite exaggerating storyteller ever

*Stronger Than Strong! Great American Tall Tale Heroines* was first produced in July 2006 as a 75-minute play with music featuring the tall tales characters of Sally Fink, Annie Christmas and Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett with the Papillion La Vista Arts Network summer camp with a cast of 64 students in 1st through 8th grades.

Director ..... Brian Guehring  
Music Director ..... Jackie Fowler  
Choreographer.....Sue Booton  
Producer/Set Design..... Dr. Debbie Kippley

*Stronger Than Strong! Great American Tall Tale Heroines* was revised to replace the Sally Fink story with Slue-Foot Sue and produced in June 2012 as a 55-minute youth production with the Omaha Theater Company summer camp with a cast of 16 students in 3rd through 7th grades.

Directors.....Brian Guehring, Jennifer Ettinger,  
Dange Sanders, Megan Friend

# **Stronger Than Strong!**

## **Great American Tall Tale Heroines**

### **CHARACTERS**

#### **PRE-SHOW:**

DOCTORS WELLINGTON:

J.M.: analytical inventor of a strength elixir.

M.J.: persistent co-inventor of a strength elixir.

J.J.: outgoing co-inventor of a strength elixir.

MIKE and IKE FINK

BARKERS #1-4: barkers, salespeople and storytellers.

FULL COMPANY

#### **ACT I:**

SALLY ANN: a strong, brave heroine.

GRIZZLY BEARS #1-4: hungry, attacking carnivores.

ALLIGATORS (4): thieving rascals.

EAGLE (2): soon-to-be bald eagles.

DAVEY CROCKETT: her husband-to-be.

IKE FINK: a braggadocio wrestler.

TEXAS MAN and WOMAN: recipients of alligator boots.

NEW YORK WOMEN #1-2: recipients of alligator purses.

#### **ACT II:**

ANNIE CHRISTMAS: the strongest, toughest keelboater ever.

DOCKWORKERS: New Orleans longshoremen. At least 4.

MIKE FINK: a chauvinistic, territorial keelboater.

AUNTIE and MOTHER: two worried relatives.

BANDITS: river pirates. At least 4.

### **ACT III:**

SLUE-FOOT SUE: a strong, brave cowgirl.

PAPA DORFLINGER: her naive father.

MAMA DORFLINGER: her naive mother.

HOT-FOOT GRANNY: her energetic grandmother.

CATFISH: El Tigre Grande.

MIKE and IKE FINK: braggadocio swindlers.

OHIO WOMAN: a woman who likes tea.

CATTLE: steer who just want to eat grass.

### **POST-SHOW:**

SHILLS (plants in the audience to help sell the elixir):

OLD WOMAN

YOUNG GIRL

### **SETTINGS**

A traveling show touring America during the heyday of medicine shows in the 1880s:

Act 1: The Tennessee wilderness, 1800-1820

Act 2: Louisiana and the Mississippi River, 1820-1840

Act 3: The Wild West cattle lands of Texas, 1840-1860

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

My grandparents instilled a love of tall tales in me as a young boy. My grandfather liked to needle my Texas upbringing—and my love of bragging and storytelling—by calling me Pecos Dale (my middle name). I can still hear my grandmother's laughter when we read tall tales. My grandmother also loved to spin her own exaggerated, funny tales, so I blame my storytelling on her.

In my time as education director with the Omaha Theater Company, and in school residencies, I have led many classes using drama to bring tall tales to life. I was always amazed how characters that I grew up with, such as Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan and John Henry, were unknown to the current generation. I loved sharing these great stories, which are a great way to explore curriculum topics like American history, geography, literary devices, etc. The more I taught drama classes on tall tales, the more I appreciated how theatrical these stories can be.

In 2002, I adapted three tall tales into a script for our professional company. *Larger Than Life! Great American Tall Tale Heroes* featured the stories of John Henry, Sally Fink and Paul Bunyan. I chose the Sally Fink story (I love introducing new stories to our audience) and the John Henry story (an amazing classic). I was asked to include the Paul Bunyan tale for name recognition to finish up the collection. At the end of the production, I was unhappy with the script. I didn't feel that we solved the theatrical challenge of size in the Paul Bunyan story.

In 2006, I revisited the script for a summer youth production camp in Papillion, Neb. This camp had 64 students and lots of young female actresses. I did a lot more research on female tall tales, which are less well known and harder to find, and fell in love with Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett

and Annie Christmas. Ultimately, the Annie Christmas story was too similar to Sally Fink, and the seriousness of John Henry didn't match the energy of the other stories.

So in 2012, I revisited the script again with Slue-Foot Sue joining Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett and Annie Christmas. My cast of 16 upper-elementary students enjoyed the humor of the tales and the exaggerated style of acting. We also had fun exploring the turn-of-the-century medicine show and making the props ourselves. We even sold water bottles after the show as "strength elixir." I made some more cuts and tweaks to the script and characters based on that youth production.

I am very proud of the strong female roles in this production. The show has flexibility to be done with a cast size of 13 through 60. It is a nice production in which to get a lot of actors involved. The three different stories also make it easier to rehearse different groups at the same time. Also, with 11 strong leads, it allows the company to develop a strong ensemble, challenging many young actors without putting too much pressure on any one individual to carry the show. The medicine show framework also allows the theatre to be creative with the technical requirements. The show can be done with a small budget.

I hope you enjoy exploring these comical, exaggerated tall tale heroines as much as I enjoyed developing the play.

—Brian Guehring

# **Stronger Than Strong!**

## **Great American Tall Tale Heroines**

### **PRE-SHOW**

*(C are a couple of old-time posters with “Doctors Wellington’s Larger Than Life Great Heroines of Americana Show” written in old-style lettering. The play starts with some actors working the crowd down the aisle.)*

**BARKER #1.** Come one! Come all to the town square! The show is about to begin! Hurry! Hurry!

**BARKER #2.** Don’t miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

**BARKER #3.** Come see the revolutionary Doctors J.M. Wellington, M.J. Wellington and J.J. Wellington!

**BARKER #4.** And their troupe of amazing actors!

**BARKER #1.** Guaranteed to enthrall, entertain and wow every man, woman and child in the audience!

**BARKER #2.** One performance only!

**BARKER #3.** You don’t want to miss this!

**BARKER #4.** Not only will you be amazed with the show,

**BARKER #1.** You will also have the opportunity to buy their patented strength elixir.

**BARKER #2.** Guaranteed to cure all that ails you and make you 10 times stronger.

**BARKER #3.** Or your money back.

**BARKER #4.** And now! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls!

**BARKER#1.** Please welcome, all the way from Philly-delphia,

**BARKER #2.** The world-famous Doctors Wellington and their amazing troupe of actors!

*(The FULL COMPANY, including DOCTORS WELLINGTON [J.M., M.J. and J.J.], performs a rousing, ridiculously over-the-top, big, show-stopping spectacle complete with tap dancing, sparklers, juggling and even dancing bears.)*

ALL. God bless America!

J.M. Aren't these actors amazing?

ALL (*except DOCTORS*). Thank you, Doctor Wellington.

M.J. They certainly have a lot of energy.

BARKER #3. We owe it all to your strength and endurance elixir!

J.J. Stop it. You're embarrassing us. Let's give another hand to these incredible actors of ours!

*(M.J. and J.M. step forward as most of the COMPANY leaves to get ready for the first story.)*

BARKER #1. Doctors Wellington, you have to tell them how you discovered your strength elixir!

J.J. Well, let's first do our show. Then if these people want to buy my elixir after, then that's their choice.

BARKER #2. After you see how it works, you'll fight to buy these bottles.

*(COMPANY exits backstage to get ready for ACT I. A map of America in the 1880s is placed in front on an easel.)*

M.J. When we started our medical practice, most of our patients were tired, exhausted and sore.

J.J. We realized that if we could invent an elixir to give our patients strength, we would solve a lot of problems.

BARKER #1. But they didn't agree on the most important quality they were looking for.

J.M. Obviously, based on the previous research and our own observations, we need to increase the power of our patients' muscularity.

M.J. Endurance is the most important quality. The ability to keep up your strength for the duration of a long test.

J.J. Actually, our patients need to increase their courage and conviction to become stronger.

J.M. Well this will be an interesting research query.

M.J. So we began a search all over this great country of ours to search for amazingly strong people and see if we could find out what they ate or drank to become so strong. Our first inquiries weren't successful.

*(MIKE and IKE FINK enter.)*

J.J. Greetings, young men.

MIKE. Howdy!

J.M. Would you be willing to help us out? I am Doctor J.M. Wellington

J.J. I am Doctor J.J. Wellington.

M.J. And I am Doctor M.J. Wellington.

J.M. And we are developing a strength elixir that should make you 10 times stronger. Do you know of anyone who is strong?

MIKE. Strong? Ha! Do you know who we are? I'm Mike Fink!

IKE. I'm Ike Fink!

MIKE. We're muddy water bawlers!

IKE. Salt river caterwaulers!

MIKE. We're reg'lar hollerers from the ol' Mississipp'.

IKE. We're half wild panther, and half sneaky weasel, and the rest of us is snappin' turtle bite.

MIKE. We can outrun, out jump, out spit and out fight, rough 'n' tumble, no holds barred, any man from Boston to New Orleans an' back agin to San Francisco.

IKE. And we're the toughest, strongest, bravest and smartest men in America!

J.M. Delightful. We would like to interview you two, analyze your environment and examine your routine to find out what the root cause is behind your strength.

IKE. What?

J.J. We want to find out what makes you so strong.

MIKE. Nothin' made us strong.

IKE. We was born this great.

*(MIKE and IKE pose.)*

M.J. Possibly, but our hypothesis is you are intaking some food or liquid that has helped you gain strength.

J.J. When we are done, we will create a strength elixir that could make you even stronger.

MIKE. We don't need to be any stronger.

M.J. Taking part in this research would help so many others.

IKE. The Finks only help the Finks.

IKE & MIKE. Cock-a-doodle-doo!

BARKER #1. Luckily for all of us, the Doctors Wellington were not deterred by their initial failure.

BARKER #2. They decided to split up and travel the country to do their research.

BAKER #3. And they discovered some incredible people willing to help.

BARKER #4. Doctor J.M. Wellington wandered up to a small Tennessee home and met a young teen named Sally Ann Feeble.

BARKER #1. Who, of course, later became world famous.

BARKER #2. Known far and wide as Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett.

BARKER #3. So on with the show: Now presenting Act I:  
The Chronicles of Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind  
Crockett, the Tennessee Tornado!

## ACT I

*(A new sign comes on: “The Chronicles of Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett, the Tennessee Tornado.” J.J. and M.J. exit. J.M. approaches SALLY ANN, a tomboy, who is sitting in front of a cabin. Beside her is a stick with all of her possessions tied to the end. She is chewing some ginseng.)*

J.M. Greetings and salutations, young lady.

SALLY ANN. Howdy. Who are you?

J.M. Doctor J.M. Wellington.

SALLY ANN. Well my mama ain't home. Nor is my daddy.  
Nor are my 14 brothers. So you'll have to come back later.

J.M. Actually, I'd like to talk to you.

SALLY ANN. To me? Nobody wants to talk to me.

J.M. Well, I'm researching regional ingredients to incorporate in a patented strength elixir.

SALLY ANN. Yer what?

J.M. I'm inventing a potion that makes people stronger. Do you know anyone strong?

SALLY ANN. Naw, nobody I know.

J.M. What's your name?

SALLY ANN. Sally Ann. Sally Ann Feeble.

J.M. Feeble?

SALLY ANN. I'm thinkin' of changin' my name.

*(Suddenly, GRIZZLY BEARS come out of the woods and move closer to SALLY ANN.)*

J.M. Look out, Sally Ann.

SALLY ANN. Bears.

BEAR #1. Grizzly bears.

*(BEARS start circling her.)*

BEAR #2. We're done hibernatin'.

BEAR #3. We're hungry.

*(BEARS get up on their two hind legs. SALLY ANN smiles. The light flashes, and the BEARS are blinded.)*

J.M. What just happened?

SALLY ANN. I smiled.

J.M. You were surrounded by bears who wanted to kill you, and you smiled?

SALLY ANN. Excitement makes me happy.

J.M. Your smile is so bright, it blinded the bears.

*(J.M. takes down notes.)*

BEAR #1. Like lightnin'.

*(BEARS start moving toward her.)*

BEAR #2. Now we're MAD!

BEAR #3. AND HUNGRY!

SALLY ANN. Yer not eatin' me. *(Screams.)* NOOOOOOO!

*(BEARS all are scared out of their bear skins and run off nekkid. SALLY ANN laughs.)*

SALLY ANN *(cont'd)*. I just scared those bears right out of their skin.

J.M. Your voice is as loud as thunder.

SALLY ANN. Yeah, my mamma is always telling me that.

J.M. They should call you Sally Ann Thunder Ann.

SALLY ANN. I like that.

J.M. Looks like you have acquired some good bear skins to make some warm clothes.

SALLY ANN. I sure do.

J.M. May I be so bold as to inquire, what are you chewing?

SALLY ANN. Just some ginseng. I chew it all the time. My papa grows it.

J.M. Fascinating. Would it bother you if I stay in these mountains for a bit and take down notes about your adventures?

SALLY ANN. Suit yourself, Doc. But I doubt if anything interesting will happen.

*(SALLY ANN takes her bearskins and wanders off in one direction. J.M. addresses the audience.)*

J.M. I quickly discovered that Sally Ann Thunder Ann is an amazing young woman. She is so strong, she can climb up the side of the mountain quicker than a bobcat. She is so tough, she uses a hornet's nest for a bonnet. And she uses her thunder voice to scare any critter that got in her way. I wasn't the only one fascinated by this young Tennessee mountain gal.

*(DAVEY CROCKETT comes whistling in. J.M. is taking notes while observing SALLY ANN. SALLY ANN enters with a hornets nest bonnet and a bearskin coat.)*

DAVEY. Now who is that purty young lady?

J.M. Her name is Sally Ann Thunder Ann. She is incredible.

DAVEY. Really?

J.M. Yep, she's helping me create a strength elixir.

DAVEY. Interesting ...

*(DAVEY hides behind a tree and places his head in the V where two branches meet)*

SALLY ANN. Now I know: if you wrastle a skunk, then you gotta wash yer clothes.

*(SALLY ANN takes off her bearskin coat and washes it in the river. She puts it on a rock to dry. Then she washes her bearskin vest. Four ALLIGATORS start swimming up the river. The ALLIGATORS go up on shore to snatch her coat.)*

SALLY ANN *(cont'd)*. You're gonna wish you hadn't done that. That's my bear coat. From my first adventure!

*(DAVEY comes out of his hiding place.)*

J.M. The young man went out to save this young lady. But when Sally Ann Thunder Ann started knocking around those gators ...

*(SALLY ANN starts beating up the ALLIGATORS in a comically staged fight.)*

J.M *(cont'd)*. He quickly realized she could take care of herself. So he went back to his hiding place and watched the show.

*(DAVEY goes back to hide, placing his head in the V between two branches.)*

DAVEY. Look at her grabbing them gaters by their tails.

*(SALLY ANN grabs the ALLIGATORS' tails.)*

DAVEY *(cont'd)*. She's spinning them around and around so fast she's creating a tornado.

*(SALLY ANN spins them around, and they fly off.)*

J.M. And when she let go, those gators flew 'round and 'round, high into the air. And it rained pieces of gator for 4 days ... All the way up to New York.

*(NEW YORK WOMEN #1 and #2 enter as purses drop from the sky into their hands.)*

NEW YORK WOMAN #1. How about that? An alligator purse just fell from the sky!

NEW YORK WOMAN #2. Oh, darling. It's darling.

*(NEW YORK WOMEN #1 and #2 exit.)*

J.M. All the way down to Texas ...

*(TEXAS MAN and WOMAN enter as boots drop from the sky into their hands.)*

TEXAS WOMAN. Alligator boots just fell from the sky.

TEXAS MAN. Let's go two-steppin'.

*(TEXAS MAN and WOMAN two-step off the stage as SALLY ANN wipes off her hands and starts to exit.)*

DAVEY. Wait!

*(DAVEY tries to cross to SALLY ANN, but his head is stuck. He struggles but can't get it out.)*

DAVEY *(cont'd)*. Hey! Hey! My head is stuck between these branches.

SALLY ANN *(laughing)*. Now that's funny.

DAVEY. Now help me out of here!

*(Two EAGLES [possibly puppets] fly down.)*

SALLY ANN. You're not very strong, are ya?

DAVEY. I'm strong.

SALLY ANN. But, you just got out wrestled by a tree.

DAVEY. These branches are stuck.

*(EAGLES start picking at DAVEY's hair.)*

DAVEY *(cont'd)*. Hey! That hurts! Leave my hair alone.

SALLY ANN. Yer not very smart, neither ... are ya?

DAVEY. I'm smart.

SALLY ANN. Why did you rest your head under a pair of nesting eagles? That's the funniest thang I ever saw.

DAVEY. Please help me. I've endured more than a dead possum could stand already.

SALLY ANN. All right.

*(SALLY ANN yells so loud the EAGLES shed their head feathers.)*

J.M. Sally Ann Thunder Ann's yell scared the head feathers off those eagle birds. Which is why we have bald eagles today.

*(SALLY ANN then bends down the entire tree to free DAVEY.)*

DAVEY. You bent that entire tree in half.

SALLY ANN. It's not that big of a deal.

DAVEY. I'm Davey Crockett.

SALLY ANN. They call me Sally Ann Thunder Ann.

DAVEY. After you created that alligator whirlwind, they should call you Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind.

SALLY ANN. Maybe they should call me Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett.