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Boxing enthusiast Gary Traugh stung by Ali's Death

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By PAUL LaPANN (plapann@newsandsentinel.com) , Parkersburg News and Sentinel

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PARKERSBURG - Muhammad Ali's death hit Gary Traugh like a punch to the jaw.

It hurt.

Ali, first as Cassius Clay, was an inspiration to Traugh, a Parkersburg businessman and former amateur and professional boxer.

Article Photos



Gary Traugh holds a boxing trophy Cassius Clay won as...



Traugh said he met Ali twice - once at a Charleston fundraiser in the early 1980s and in May 2008 at Ali's home in Louisville, Ky., at a fundraiser for the Muhammad Ali Center in his hometown.

"He was my favorite boxer," Traugh said Monday. "He inspired me."

As a boy in Lubeck, Traugh said, he would watch Ali, boxing as Clay at the time, on television. Traugh said he would go back to his bedroom and "jump around" as Ali did in the boxing ring, snapping his head back and forth in a confident style.

"I learned to box emulating Cassius Clay. I would pretend I was Clay," Traugh said, demonstrating a defensive move of leaning back,

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away from punches, while waiting for an opportunity to strike with quick, powerful jabs.

Traugh, who owns a Laundromat on St. Marys Avenue, said he won most of his 30-34 amateur boxing matches in the 1970s and about 13 professional fights in the 1980s at 140 pounds as a welterweight.

As a gimmick when he turned pro as a boxer, Traugh, who owned the former Kompak stores, billed himself as "The Kompak Kid."

"I boxed because of Muhammad Ali," Traugh, 59, said.

Ali's death in Arizona on Friday at the age of 74 was a big loss, Traugh said. He felt it was a shame that generations of people didn't get to know Ali because Parkinson's disease had affected him for more than 25 years.

"He was above boxing, which was a job to him," Traugh said. "He was more than boxing. He opened people's eyes to human rights."

The Traugh family, including Gary's 3-year-old son Cyrus, attended a fundraising brunch on Kentucky Derby Day in May 2008 at the Ali home in Louisville, Ky.

Cyrus sat on Ali's lap and Ali hugged him, Gary said. Cyrus, now 11 years old, was the only child at the Ali fundraiser.

At the 2008 fundraiser, Ali could only speak in a whisper, Traugh said.

The Traugh home in Wood County is filled with Ali memorabilia.

Albums contain the following: photographs of Ali at various times in his life, a card with Ali's signature shortly after he changed his name in 1964, Ali credit cards and checks, letters in 1978 where Ali was seeking an automobile dealership but was turned down, a letter signed by Ali talking about the Joe Frazier fight in 1970, notes from an Ali speech, a carbon copy of the Clay and Sonny Liston fight contract in 1964, and much more.

One of Traugh's favorite collectibles is Clay's signature on a school assignment when he was about 12 years old.

Traugh has fight cards from when Clay, in his professional boxing debut on Oct. 29, 1960, fought Tunney Hunsaker, police chief of Fayetteville, W.Va., in Louisville.

Traugh has several boxing gloves signed by Ali (Clay). One is the glove Clay wore when he won the National Golden Gloves competition in 1959. He has boxing trunks signed by 17 Ali boxing opponents at the Boxing Hall of Fame.

Traugh has a boxing glove from 1960 that contains written information on five boxing titles Clay won as an amateur boxer along with Clay's signature. He has a glove signed "Cassius X."

He has jump ropes Ali used for training and a boxing hand wrap. Traugh has a poster heralding the 1966 fight between Ali and Brian London in London, England.

He has Ali's name on potato chips, roach traps, boxing cards, tea from Japan, mugs, sugar packets, cookies and spray deodorant. Traugh has plates with Ali's drawings on them and a landscape painting by Ali's father, Cassius M. Clay Sr.

Over the past 25 years, Traugh has purchased Ali items at auctions and from the Boxing Hall of Fame.

Traugh said he cried when Joe Frazier beat Ali in 1971, when Ali, in a surprise, lit the torch at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta despite suffering from Parkinson's disease, and in 2008 at Ali's home when the boxing legend was signing his name, in a "programmed" way.

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