

Ex-Yonkers boxing great Roger Donoghue is dead

Welterweight killed man in the ring, later taught Brando to box

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Roger Donoghue, the former boxer from Yonkers who killed a man in the ring in 1951 and taught Marlon Brando how to fight for the movie "On the Waterfront" died this week at the age of 75.

A well-known and liked raconteur, Donoghue and his wife, the painter Fay Mowery Moore, were regular fixtures at posh restaurants and saloons in Manhattan until he succumbed to Alzheimer's disease several years ago, said boxing author and friend Bert Randolph Sugar.

"The two of them were always in society, and they made a very interesting duo," said Sugar, who frequently dined with the couple along with his wife, Suzanne. "They lived in Gramercy Park and did very well by and for each other."

Sugar said Donoghue contributed to screen history through their mutual friend, the writer Budd Schulberg, who wrote the screenplay for the 1954 Elia Kazan film that helped launch the young

Brando's career.

When Donoghue knocked out George Flores in 1951 with a left hook in the eighth round of his first bout in Madison Square Garden, Flores slipped into a coma and died five days later. Both welterweights were 20 years old, and Donoghue donated the \$1,500 purse to Flores' widow and hung up his gloves shortly afterward.

He pursued a career in television and movies, and was hired by Schulberg during a phone call to Toots Shor's restaurant as a boxing coach for Brando. During a conversation with Donoghue, Schulberg asked him if he thought he could have become a champion had he remained in professional boxing, to which Donoghue replied, "I could have been a contender," a line that became immortalized by the movie.

Donoghue was born in Yonkers on Nov. 20, 1930, and grew up in an apartment at Ashburton Avenue and North Broadway. His father was a first-generation Irish immigrant who was a cabdriver and chauffeur known around Yonkers as "Denny," according to historian Tom Flynn.

As a boy Donoghue worked as a newspaper carrier for the Herald Statesman and later as a delivery boy and clerk for Fleck's Grocery on Locust Hill Avenue. He was in-

troduced to boxing at Bob Melnick's gym, in the back of a billiards parlor over Bickford's Restaurant in Getty Square.

Donoghue won 29 of 31 amateur bouts between his 16th and 18th birthdays. He fought his first professional fight in November 1948 and made his debut at the White Plains County Center in January 1950, battling Jimmy Demetrius in a slugfest that ended with a sixth-round knockout.

Two weeks before the fight that killed Flores, Donoghue had knocked him out during a bout in White Plains. When he learned he had to fight him again during his premiere appearance at the Garden, Donoghue reportedly said: "I deserve better. I don't want him back." After Flores suffered blood clotting to his brain and died, state officials imposed a rule prohibiting boxers from fighting for 30 days after a knockout.

"He was a very good club fighter, not a knockout puncher but a good, steady fighter who moved in hard and stayed till the job was done," said Gus Alfieri, a sports writer who first saw Donoghue fight at the Ridgewood Grove in Queens. "The fact that he killed Flores and got out of the game might have been the best thing to happen for him, because he did go on and do so many other interest-

ing things with his life."

After a brief stint in California, Donoghue returned to New York and worked as a sales manager for Rheingold Breweries.

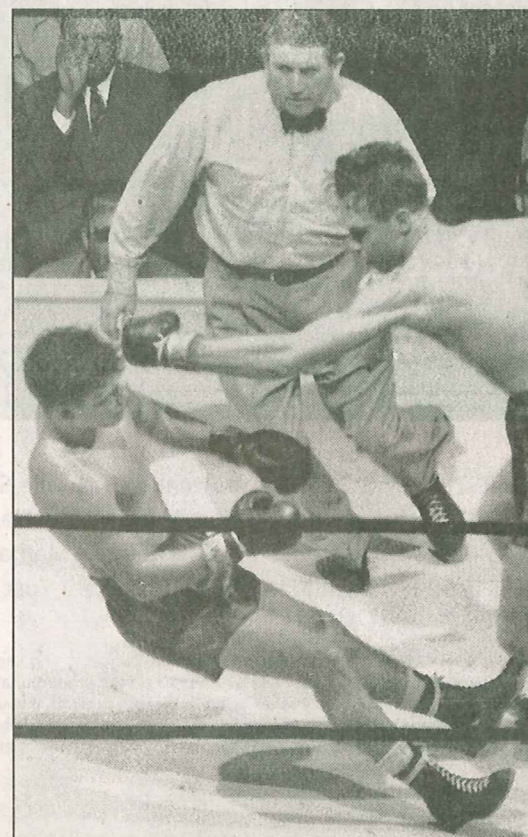
Donoghue was a close friend and drinking buddy of many celebrities, including Norman Mailer, who introduced him to the woman he married in 1963 and remained with until his death Sunday.

Mailer credits Donoghue in the introduction to his book, "Tough Guys Don't Dance," which published reports contend was the punchline of a joke about three prizefighters, a mobster and a moll in the Stork Club.

In 1989, Donoghue wrote a musical about another friend, band-leader Guy Lombardo, which was never produced. After he became stricken with Alzheimer's disease, Donoghue's wife moved him from their Manhattan apartment to a home they had in Greenport, on Long Island.

"Roger had a very cute way of greeting people. He'd tuck you under the chin very lightly and say, 'Hello champ,'" said Sugar. "He was a very pleasant, wonderful, affable person."

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File photo

Roger Donoghue lands what proved to be a fatal punch on George Flores in the eighth round of their welterweight bout in Madison Square Garden in this Aug. 29, 1951, photo. Flores died several days later without ever regaining