This is my remembrance of the day Rocky Marciano was killed in a plane crash. Monday September 1st 2003 would have been his 80th birthday.

It was Sunday Night August 31st, 1969 when he was called to his final resting place, on the eve of his 46th birthday September 1st. There was a terrible thunderstorm that night with a low ceiling. Rocky had talked the inexperienced pilot into making the flight against his better judgement. Typical Rocky bravado, oh it's only some rain, we'll be fine!

Rocky was anxious to get back to his Ft. Lauderdale home for the birthday party that was planned for him by his 16 year old daughter Mary Ann. It was a party he would never make. Rocky was going to make an appearance at ringside of a fighter in which a friend of his had an interest. He was flying from Chicago to Des Moines for his appearance. Tragically the plane crashed into an open field with a tree in it near a wooded creek. All three aboard the plane were killed instantly, the pilot, Rocky, and his friend. The National Transportation Security Board's report stated that "The pilot attempted operation exceeding his ability and level."

I remember it was Monday morning Labor day, and it was a beautiful sunny day. I was nine years old and boxing had been an obsession of mine for about four years. It was late summer 1969, and a lot was happening in the heavyweight division, and I couldn't get enough. In June of 1969 Joe Frazier had stopped Jerry Quarry in seven heated rounds. Jimmy Ellis, who held the WBA heavyweight title, tried to upstage Frazier while he was being interviewed by Howard Cosell after stopping Quarry. A few months later Ellis and Frazier signed to meet in February of 1970 for what was being billed as the undisputed heavyweight title.

During the summer of 1969 rumors were flying around that Ali and Frazier were going to fight in some obscure place so the government couldn't intervene. Some of the rumors had them fighting on a Jet plane flying at 30,000 feet, or on an Indian Reservation where the government supposedly had no jurisdiction. The best one was that Ali and Frazier were going to fight at Frazier's gym in north Philadelphia for free!

On that fateful Monday morning I rode my bike over to Radnor baseball field at the end of Radnor Avenue in Haddonfield N.J. where I grew up. As a kid I loved riding a bike and looked for any excuse to ride. I always would go over to Radnor field on weekend mornings to see who was out. We used to play football or shot baskets and just hang out. I was friendly with a guy named Bob Mitchell who lived at the end of Radnor Ave. He was older than me, maybe 15 or 16. He was a good basketball player and started on the high school basketball team. But, the main reason I used to look for him was because he was a big boxing fan.

Bob was also big Ali fan, and I was always pestering him to see if he thought Ali could beat Frazier if they ever fought. Since he was a fan of Ali, he always assured me that if they ever fought, Ali would win. That morning around 9:30, I remember going up the street and not seeing anyone. So I parked my Schwinn Apple Krate and sat on the bleachers hoping Bob would come

out and talk some boxing, he probably saw me and was waiting for me to leave. I used to hound him constantly about Ali and Frazier.

After a while I got back on my bike and started to leave. Just as I was passing his house he came running out with a newspaper in his hand. I turned around and rode up to him thinking he was going to show me and article on Ali or Frazier? When I approached him he held up the paper, it was the front page of The Philadelphia Inquirer. It had a picture of Rocky Marciano knocking out Archie Moore in what was his last fight 14 years ago. The headline read, "Former Champ Marciano dies in Plane Crash".

I couldn't believe it. I heard so much about Marciano from my grandfather who used to come over our house for dinner on Sunday's. My grandfather was one of those ol' school Italians, and as far as he was concerned, nobody coulda beat the Rock. I used to tease him saying, "granpop, Ali would've cut Marciano to ribbons". He would actually get mad at me for saying that, and he'd start yelling at my father for letting me talk that way. My father would have to warn me not to tease my grandfather about Ali being able to beat Marciano when he came over. Although I was petrified of my father, I'd still sneak it in and my grandfather would smack me on the back of my head as my father gave me the eye!

My grandfather was absolutely sure Marciano would've knocked Ali out. Remember, this is late summer of 1969 and some still had questions about Ali's heart and chin. At that time the Ali story was only about half complete. Ironically, Marciano and Ali had just completed filming the fight scenes for their computer fight in July. Unfortunately Marciano never lived to hear that the computer picked him as the winner.

On January 20th of 1970, Woroner Productions released the hypothetical computer fight between the only two undefeated heavyweight champions in history at the time. The computer picked Marciano as the winner, stopping Ali in the 13th round. Over the years my grandfather and I would argue over who would've won had Rocky and Ali crossed paths at their best. The one thing I never told him was that I wasn't as confident and certain as I had always projected to be. My grandfather never let me forget it until the day he died in 1997, that the computer picked Marciano to beat Ali. Rest assured, I did get my shots back at him! "I told him the guy who programmed the computer was a little fat Italian who hated Ali."

What I Respect About Rocky Marciano

What I respect about Rocky Marciano is that the title meant something to him. Being undefeated meant something to him. This is why he trained and prepared like no other fighter in history. Marciano knew he wasn't the most talented or gifted fighter. This is why he pushed and challenged his body. Rocky's mind set was, you may be able to beat me, but you can't beat my body!

I also like that he never sold out! He could've made a King's Fortune to come out of retirement to fight Patterson, Johansson, or Liston, but he didn't. He loved being perfect too much, and was smart enough to know that he could never summon the greatness back. There was no way he'd let Patterson, Johansson, or Liston have his name on their record, knowing that the name

was all that remained. Marciano was too selfish in a good way to let his name be on their record, like Louis' is on his, or Ali's is on Holmes, or Holmes' is on Tyson's. Being undefeated separated him from other former champions and he knew it. Marciano was shrewd and he knew that 49-0 (43) gave him certain bragging rights over all other heavyweight champs. It can argued forever and a day who could've or who would've beaten Marciano, but nobody ever did. A famous boxing trainer once said, you are what your record is.