I arrived at Joe Miceli's Long Island home shortly after rush hour. Our journey would take us into New York City and I didn't have the patience for traffic.

Neither did Miceli.

I thought I timed it well enough for us to miss the morning rush. As we approached the Long Island Expressway – the bane of local motorists – we see traffic at a standstill. Seated in my passenger seat is Miceli, the man who engaged in 110 bouts between 1948 and 1961. The man who fought 12 world champions. The man who fought six Hall-of-Famers. At 76 years old, he's as sharp and as spry as a man 20 years younger.

I was anticipating a leisurely drive into the Big Apple and some pleasant conversation about the sport of boxing. What I found was that Miceli, once a truck driver, has an amazing knowledge of the roads.

With the traffic jam glaring at us, Miceli instructs me, "get out of this lane and go straight." We head off on a detour and pick up the expressway several miles west. No traffic.

Along the way, Miceli provides a running commentary on the state of traffic, as well as the state of boxing. "In the '50s, there were so many great fighters. Then it got a little less in the '60s and a little less in the '70s. Who's around today? … Watch this guy, he's gonna cut you."

That's Miceli speak for another motorist intent on cutting me off.

I fiddle with the heat because Miceli appears cold. "No, I'm OK," he says. "I'm always cold. That's because I lost most of my blood in the ring."

While Miceli certainly endured his share of cuts, he drew more blood than he spilled.

The 12 world champions he faced are an impressive list: Ike Williams, Kid Gavilan, Joey Giardello, Johnny Saxton, Johnny Bratton, Gene Fullmer, Virgil Akins, Don Jordan, Wallace "Bud" Smith, Curtis Cokes, Luis Rodriguez and Ralph Dupas. He beat Williams 2-out-3, beat Saxton, Akins and Smith, drew with Giardello and lost a split decision to Gavilan.

"I hit Gavilan in the Adam's apple in the first round and he was really hurt, he was ready to quit, but I didn't know it," said Miceli. "He told me the next day at Stillman's. He said 'You had me in the first round.' I said, "Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhh."

There are times on the road that we both want to scream, "Aaaaahhhhhhh."

But Miceli remains cool and thanks the heavens for the HOV lane. By the way, he informs me early in the trip that it ends on the westbound side at Exit 33. When we arrive there, he's

correct.

It's now a straight shoot to Manhattan, no more detours. But the conversation takes a detour toward regret.

Miceli mentions the name Sonny Boy West, a tough and sturdy lightweight/welterweight from the Golden Age. Miceli decisioned West in Milwaukee in September of 1950. He described it as a one-sided affair. Several times throughout the fight Miceli asked the referee to intervene, to stop the beating. But West kept coming and the referee instructed Miceli, "They (fans) pay their money to see you fight."

So Miceli kept fighting, kept punching. West wins a few bouts after Miceli and then in December is knocked out by Percy Bassett at St. Nicholas Arena and never wakes up.

"I feel like I had something to do with that," says Miceli. "I still feel terrible about that. The beating I gave him."

After a few minutes, we arrive at a better place. No, not Manhattan. We're still on the LIE, but the conversation changes lanes to Stillman's Gym, one of Miceli's favorite places. The owner, Lou Stillman, who always carried a gun, charged spectators 50 cents to watch the stars train. He always made sure Miceli sparred in Ring 1. "Lou Stillman liked two people, me and Rocky Graziano. I don't know why."

A fighter from California, Charley Salas, came into the gym and his camp asked Miceli to work with him. They also asked Miceli to go easy on him. Joe's standard response was, "If he bombs me, I bomb him. If he kisses me, I kiss him."

The bell rings and Salas starts delivering the bombs. Miceli gathers himself and launches that famous, left hook-uppercut and knocks Salas cold. "They could have counted to 100."

A few months pass and, guess what, Miceli and Salas are matched at the Ridgewood Grove for a 10-rounder. Miceli barely trains, figuring, "if I knocked this guy out with headgear and big sparring gloves, I'll knock him out in a real fight."

The problem is that Salas runs for 10 rounds. "I thought I lost it, but they scored it a draw."

Of the all legends Miceli has faced, it is often the stories of the lesser known fighters that are the most amusing. The men that time has left by, who live only in the memories of a great fighter like Joe.

We arrive in Manhattan. The journey takes one hour, not bad for the volume of traffic. The interviews go well and by the afternoon we are making our way to the midtown tunnel. It's close to 4 p.m. and there is no escaping the crush of people leaving the city. We're caught in it. At the tunnel's entrance, Miceli grows disenchanted with other drivers who don't allow us access to the entrance lane.

“One and one. One and one,” said Miceli. “They don’t get it. It’s one … and then one.”

We finally exit the tunnel and Miceli informs me the rush hour traffic will begin to dissipate at exit 31. Amazingly, he’s correct. To pass the time, Miceli introduces me to “car poker.”

You play the four numbers on a New York license plate as your hand. It’s one dollar per car with “0” acting as the wild card. I win the first 2 cars – with hands of 4547 and 2234. Miceli wins the next three. We continue to play until the traffic gets too slow. No money changes hands. But he tells me the best hand he ever had was 5 nines. A truck drove by with 4 nines and a zero.

As we journey back to Long Island, the conversation meanders to 1949. That’s when Joe met Belting Willie Beltran in an eight-round main event at the Broadway Arena. His manager cautions Joe to “watch out for the guy’s right hand.” If Miceli wins this fight, it means a fight at Madison Square Garden. The Garden was perhaps the biggest carrot on the biggest stick during that time. Miceli needs no further motivation. He storms out of his corner and begins walloping Beltran.

Between rounds, Miceli is still breathing fire. “Watch out for the right,” says his manager.

The second round is more of the same, Miceli punishing Beltram. He can see his name on the Garden marquee. Then – BOOM – comes the right hand. Miceli goes down for the first time. He gets up, fights cautious. He drops Beltram for a nine count in Round 4. Beltram gets up – BOOM – another right. Two hours later, Joe Miceli is sitting in his dressing room talking to his manager.

“What happened?” he asks.

“A knockout,” said Bobby Nelson.

“Aawww. What round?”

“Fifth.”

Now Miceli begins to feel bad, coming to grips with a knockout loss. Nelson looks over. “Not you. You won by knockout.”

“I still don’t remember anything about those two rounds,” says Miceli, a huge smile on his face.

That may be so. But this is one ride I’ll never forget.