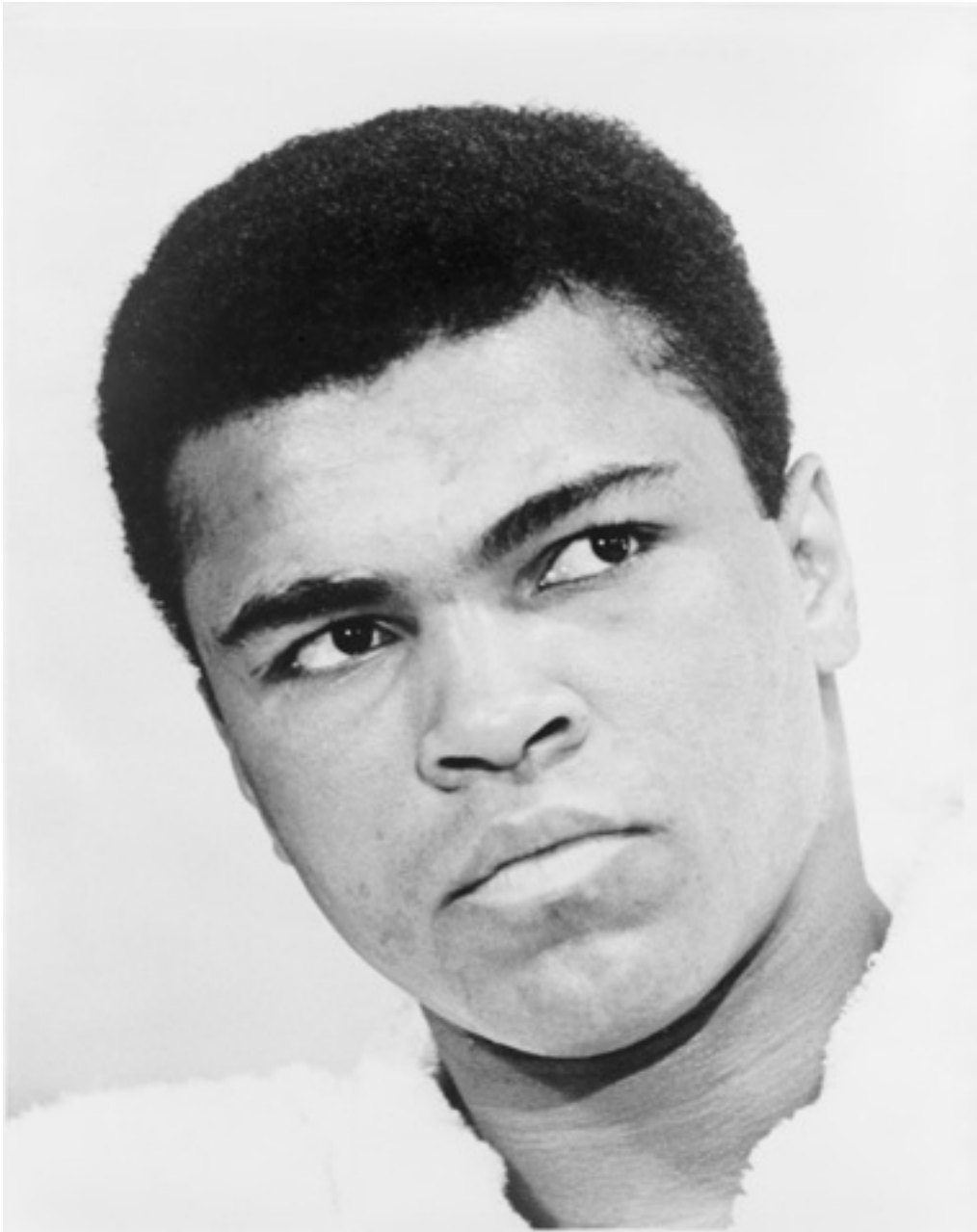


Wali Muhammad (1927-2012)...HAUSER

Written by Thomas Hauser

Tuesday, 17 January 2012 13:28



Today (January 17th) is Muhammad Ali's seventieth birthday and the world is paying tribute. But a poignant note accompanies the proceedings. Wali Muhammad died this morning at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx where he was in hospice care after a long battle with cancer.

Wali (formerly known as Walter Youngblood or "Blood") was one of the people who worked behind the scenes in Muhammad Ali's training camp. He was also in Ali's corner from the first Ali-Frazier fight on.

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I met Wali in 1989, when I was researching *Muhammad Ali: his Life and Times*. We became friendly and kept in touch from that point on. The article below was written two years ago after one of our lunches together.

Wali lived a good life. He made a lot of people happy and was very much loved.

* * *

Last Friday, Wali Muhammad was at Portobello's (an Italian restaurant in downtown Manhattan). He's 82 years old; still trim with a warm smile and sharp mind.

Wali was born in Louisiana. He has lived Harlem for most of his adult life. Sitting in Portobello's near a wall covered with photographs of fighters, he reflected on his journey thus far.

"My grandmother raised me," Wali recalled. "My mother had me at seventeen and then she was gone. When I was three, my grandmother started taking me to the fields. I'd sit on the sack and she dragged me along while she picked cotton. When I was five, I started picking cotton myself. At the end of each day, my grandmother would give me a nickel or a dime. I came north when I was fifteen. I boxed a bit. Then I got cut in a fight and the doctor said, if I fought again, it would endanger my eyesight. And I had a glass chin; that didn't help either. So I stopped boxing."

From 1948 through 1964, Wali was frequently in the employ of Sugar Ray Robinson, watching over his boxing equipment and serving as a personal aide. He was also an assistant minister to Malcolm X at the Nation of Islam mosque in Harlem. And he spent time at Sugar Ray's Café, which was a magnet for the entertainment elite.

"I met Dinah Washington [one of the most popular rhythm and blues singers of that era] at Sugar Ray's," Wali reminisced. "I got to know her quite well. Ella Fitzgerald [widely acknowledged as the greatest jazz vocalist of all time] was another friend. Ella was so sweet; a very nice woman. She gave me a pair of gold cufflinks with a small diamond in each one. I still have them. There were a lot of women. The way it was then; if you had one singer, the rest of them came after you so they could say, 'I had Dinah Washington's man.'"

“I think that, pound-for-pound, Ray Robinson was the best fighter ever.” Wali continued. “And I’d have to say that Joe Louis was the best heavyweight I ever saw. Ali was a creative fighter. But Joe Louis was a scientific fighter and he could turn that right hand over so fast on the inside. If Louis could have gotten Ali against the ropes, I think he would have knocked him out.”

“Joe Louis was a hero to me. It was sad when Joe got old as a fighter. It was sad when Robinson and Ali got old too, but that’s the way things are in boxing. That night against Rocky Marciano, when Joe got knocked through the ropes and Ray got up from his seat and was trying to comfort him; I was sitting right there with Ray.”

Wali paused for a moment before going on.

“There’s so much to look back on. When Joe was getting on in years, sometimes he’d come up to Ali’s training camp. I played golf with Joe Louis up there and beat him. I like to win, but just playing with Joe was special to me.”

Wali joined Ali as a security man and camp assistant in 1965, prior to Ali-Liston II. Over time, he became a fixture in Ali’s corner. In the past, he has spoken about those times.

On Ali-Norton I (when Norton broke Ali’s jaw): “During fights, Angelo would take the mouthpiece out, hand it to me, and I’d wash the mouthpiece. Against Norton, each round, I was taking out the mouthpiece and there was more and more blood on it. My bucket with the water and ice in it became red. In every other fight, between rounds, I’d take the mouthpiece out and put it in the bucket and there was just slobber on it. But here, after each round, I had to shake the mouthpiece to get all the blood out of it into the water.”

On Ali-Foreman in Zaire: “The plan was to dance for six or seven rounds, tire Foreman out, and when he got tired, move in on him. And instead, Ali was standing in one place, taking punches. A couple of times, I asked Angelo [Dundee], ‘What’s happening?’ Angelo said, ‘I don’t know.’ Then Foreman started slowing down.”

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On Ali-Frazier III in Manila: "After the fourteenth round, Ali came back to the corner and told us, 'Cut 'em off.' That's how tired he was. He wanted us to cut his gloves off. Angelo ignored him. He started wiping Ali's face, getting him ready for the fifteenth round. We sponged him down and I gave him a drink of sweetened water, honey and water, from a bottle I'd made up. I don't know if he'd have gone out for the last round or not. Ali's not a quitter; he'd never quit. But I'd never seen him exhausted like that before. Then Eddie Futch called the referee over."

"It's a wonderful feeling, being with a great man like Ali at important moments in his life. Zaire was the best. Ali against Larry Holmes was heartbreaking for me. Ali had fast hands, fast feet, and a fast mouth. That's gone now, but I have my memories."

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dino da vinci says:

Man led a more interesting life than most.

RIP, Mr. Muhammad.

Radam G says:

May Allah Grant him the highest level of Paradise. Holla!

damalbert says:

I remember the quite gentile giant the day he married my fathers sister (Delores Amalbert - Muhammad) I was 14 years old and could not let go of his hand. As known to his friends, Wali had a beautiful wake in New York City this Saturday. Thank you to all who came from and sent condolences from the Frazier and Ali families. My aunt and her Delores and their daughters Amienah and Daria felt love from all. Uncle Walter was sent from God to do his work in this world for the young and old alike. He will be missed.