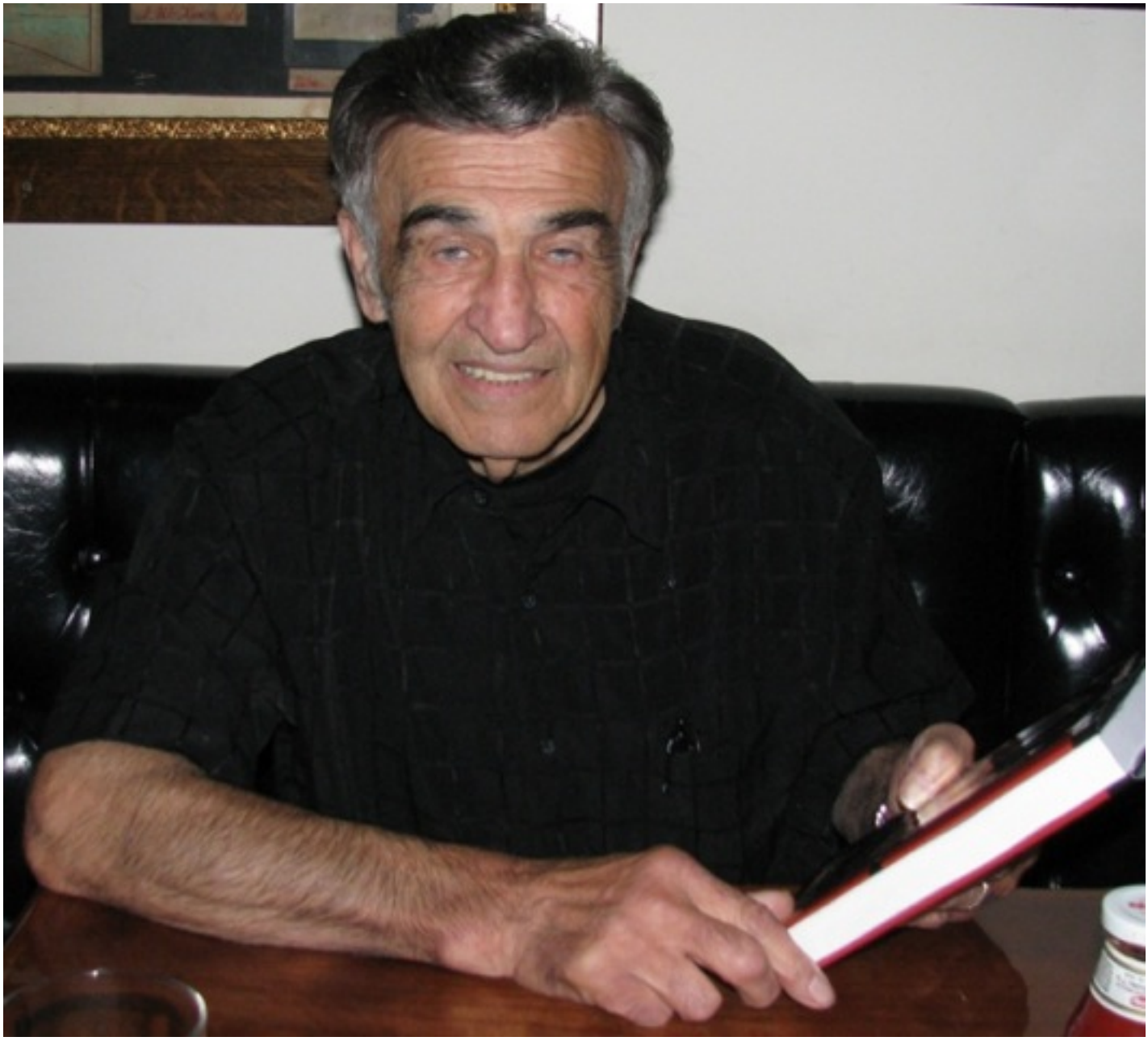

Certified good-guy Goody in 2008, at a book signing event for the late George Kimball's "Four Kings." Signing took place at McGreevy's Saloon in Boston, Sept. 28, 2008. (Photo courtesy of photog Dick Haley, of Haley Booksellers in Boston.)

The first thing he'd say when you walked into his gym was, "You still doing your roadwork?''

Goody Petronelli had the keen eye of a man who trained fighters for a living so he knew the answer whether you lied or told the truth but he always had the grace to nod in agreement

regardless of how you answered.

Rock hard and reed thin, Petronelli had the lithe body of a long distance runner, which he was almost to the end of his days. He made his name in boxing developing and training Marvin Hagler, the two of them and Petronelli's brother Pat forming what Hagler used to call The Triangle. They were three strong-willed men who stood up to forces in boxing that tried mightily for years to hold them back, refusing to turn on each other but rather growing closer as they slowly took control of the middleweight division.

The end is always hard on a man, as it was on Goody, who died Sunday at his home in Sagamore, MA. at the age of 88. He lost his beloved wife of 70 years, Marian, in October, a month after the passing of his brother Pat, after a long, hard battle with heart disease.

All his life Goody Petronelli was a boxing guy, a man who fought as both an amateur in the Navy and later as a professional until a broken hand derailed his career. He took a day job with his brother working as masons but even as their construction business flourished it wasn't their game. That was always boxing.

In 1969 they opened Petronelli's Gym in Brockton, where they'd grew up worshiping Rocky Marciano the way everyone did in a dying shoemakers' town. It was more a labor of love than labor and then one day a quiet kid who'd just moved to Brockton from Newark because his mother wanted to get him away from the race riots that were destroying that city walked in and sat in the corner.

He didn't say a word so Goody asked if he'd like to learn to box. The kid already had some idea what that meant but he said yes and thus was formed The Triangle, an alliance of three men who couldn't have been more different that would help make Hagler the greatest middleweight of his era and arguably one of the two or three best of all-time.

For years they struggled to get a break, fighting in high school gymnasiums and hotel ballrooms. Hagler's problem, Goody used to lament, was that he was black, left-handed and good. His blessing was that he had talent and the Petronelli's in his corner, Pat doing most of the talking and deal making and Goody the hard labor of training Hagler into a champion.

They traveled the world together, each guy carrying his own bag all the way to the top. There was no entourage with Hagler because who ever heard of a 40-legged triangle?

They made millions together and Hagler kept most of his end, enough to leave boxing behind after two blind judges stole his title and gave it to Sugar Ray Leonard. He went off to Italy and never returned to boxing but Goody stayed behind and never left the game.

He went on to train Steve Collins, teaching him the fundamentals of a trade he would later master after returning to fight in Europe without the men who built him. He trained Hagler's half-brother, Robbie Sims, all the way to a title shot and some good wins, including a memorable one over a faded Roberto Duran in 1986.

He was in Kevin McBride's corner the night The Clones Colossus retired Mike Tyson in 2005, stopping him in the sixth round simply by refusing to give in to him. That night was more about what Tyson no longer was than what McBride might be but Petronelli believed he had someone on his hands who could make some noise in the heavyweight division.

His uncanny professional eye probably knew better but a trainer believes in his fighters with his heart, not his head, and no one believed more fervently in the men who stood half-naked in his corner than Goody Petronelli did.

About a year ago, the Petronelli Gym closed down in Brockton, a victim of a battle over rent. Goody packed his equipment bag for the last time and left, never turning his back on boxing but tiring of it all to be sure. Life got harder after that, his wife gone, his brother gone, his gym gone, yet he remained in his heart what he'd always been.

Goody Petronelli was a boxing guy. He made money in the sport because a kid from Newark walked through the door one day but that wasn't really why he did it. He was as focused on the skinny kid from Southie or the one over there in the corner skipping rope who spoke little English. He loved talent but he loved grit just as much, knowing they don't always come in the same package. Most of all he loved the life.

He loved to sit in the gym before the fighters arrived or after they'd all gone and the place was eerily quiet, no bells ringing or bags being hit or ropes skipping rhythmically off the floor. He loved to sit there then and wait because, as he said so many times, "You never know who might walk through the door.''

One day it was Marvin Hagler but most of the time it was just a kid who needed a boost, a boy and in later years girls who would find some self-esteem in boxing but not a career. Goody Petronelli trained them all the same and he loved them all the same.

He's gone now and that makes the boxing world a slightly darker place this morning but in all likelihood he's turning to St. Peter about now with a skeptical eye and asking, "You still doing your roadwork?''

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Nice grand piece of copy about a grand giant of a trainer and man.

I'll see ya at da crossroad, GP! Enjoy your GRAND Mansion behind those Pearly Gates of God Eternal Kingdom. Much LUV! Holla!