

My 85-Year-Old Mother Meets Don Elbaum...HAUSER

Written by Thomas Hauser
Thursday, 14 July 2011 16:13



For the writer's mother, meeting King, and Elbaum, was infinitely more interesting than hearing about friends' manicures. (Hogan)

Four years ago, I brought my mother to a press conference and introduced her to Don King. Several days later, "My 81-Year-Old Mother Meets Don King" was posted on the Internet.

Thus, a tradition was born. Once a year, I bring my mother to Portobello's (at 83 Murray Street in Manhattan), where Anthony Catanzaro hosts a pizza party for my mother and assorted boxing dignitaries.

Last year, the guest list included Paulie Malignaggi. Later, in an article I wrote about the gathering, I quoted my mother as saying, "Paulie is adorable; a little cocky, but as cute as can be."

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The next time I saw Paulie, he told me, "Tell your mother I think she's cute but a little cocky."

This year, the tradition continued on July 11th with Don Elbaum as the primary celebrity guest. Readers with a good memory might recall that Elbaum was to have been a guest last year but stood my mother up.

"Is this like a blind date?" he asked when I called to re-extend the invitation.

"Don, I love my mother. I'd never do anything like that to her."

"So explain to me again what this lunch is about?"

"My mother likes meeting boxing people. She started with Muhammad Ali. Then she met Don King. Now it's you, and we're planning a special honor for you."

"What's the honor?"

"The honor is, if you stand my mother up again, I'll send Paulie over to beat the crap out of you."

"That doesn't scare me. Paulie can't punch."

"I'll give him a gun."

"I'll be there, I promise."

The guest list included Elbaum, David Berlin ("I owe him a lunch," Don explained); Frank Macchiarola (who oversees the Arthur Curry Scholarship Program at St. Francis College in Brooklyn); Steve Albert, Seth Abraham, and Lou DiBella.

As homework, my mother read "Bordello Boxing" (an article detailing Elbaum's efforts to promote a fight card at a Nevada brothel called Sherry's Ranch). (Article can be found here: <http://www.secondsout.com/columns/thomas-hauser/bordello-boxing1>)

When my mother and I arrived at Portobello's, Seth Abraham was already there. As is his custom, he was wearing a boutonniere on his jacket lapel.

"I was fifteen years old when I went to college," Seth explained to my mother. "Most of the girls were two years older than I was and I couldn't get dates. I confessed my frustrations to a fraternity brother named Paul Hill; and Paul told me that another part of my problem was that I was a slob. He took me to a clothing store and helped me pick out some nice shirts and a few pairs of slacks. Eventually, I started getting dates and I've paid attention to my appearance ever since."

Steve Albert was the next to arrive. "I wouldn't pass up this opportunity," he proclaimed.

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“To meet my mother?”

“No. Free pizza.”

Then, to the accompaniment of trumpets with seraphim flying through the air (I’m making that part up), Don Elbaum entered and handed my mother a blue gift bag.

“I have a lot of respect for mothers,” Don told her. “The way I was brought up, you open doors for women and treat them right. Even if the woman I’m with is a hooker, I’ll open the door for her.”

Over the next half hour, Frank Macchiarola, David Berlin, and Lou DiBella rounded out the group. In keeping with the spirit of the day, Lou brought his mother.

For the record, Anna DiBella is an elegant woman with three published volumes of poetry to her credit.

Anthony Catanzaro is fond of saying, “I’m just a guy who makes pizza.” He’s a lot more than that. But what pizza ! ! !

As lunch progressed, Seth told old war stories about Don King and Mike Tyson. My mother is fascinated by both of them. “I know that Don King has done bad things,” she said. “But I liked him when I met him. I can’t explain why.”

“When Don is being nice,” Elbaum offered, “he’s absolutely incredible. You have to love him. The problems come when he’s being Don.”

As for Tyson, Steve Albert was behind the microphone when Iron Mike bit off part of Evander Holyfield’s ear.

“That must have been exciting,” my mother said.

“Actually, it was disgusting,” Steve recalled.

Lou DiBella spent most of the time talking on his cell phone and eating pizza off his mother’s plate. Anna DiBella offered the information that Lou could speak in full sentences when he was eleven-and-a-half months old.

“And I dropped my first F-bomb when I was two,” Lou added.

Later in the conversation, Lou told my mother, “Everyone in boxing who has a heart has a love-hate relationship with the business. I love what I do and I hate what I do. There’s more evil in boxing than in any other sport. If you stay in the business long enough, you get f----d as many times as a porn star.”

“Lou is passionate and there’s a human quality about him,” my mother told me afterward.

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Elbaum is co-promoting a July 30th fight card at John F. Kennedy High School in Paterson, New Jersey. "I've got three guys from Peru fighting that night," he advised my mother. "You can't believe how good these guys are. Jonathan Maicello has the appeal of a rock star and his record is 15-and-0. He's the next Manny Pacquiao. Juan Zegarra is undefeated. And Carlos Zambrano is 13-and-0, but I've got an even better story for you about Zambrano. His wife's mother is fifty-seven years old. She has twenty-four children and all of them are girls. What are the odds of something like that?"

"Does this women really have twenty-four children who are all girls?" my mother asked me later.

"I doubt it. But with Don, anything is possible."

"You ought to come as my guest to see the fights," Elbaum offered. "These three guys will make Peru the boxing capital of the world."

"It's not for me," my mother answered, declining the invitation. "I don't understand, and never will, why all of you love this sport so much."

"I saw Willie Pep fight when I was young," Don explained. "It was like a beautiful ballet. I was totally mesmerized by the way he moved and slipped punches. Since then, all I've wanted out of life is to be in boxing. There have been good times and bad times, but I've loved every minute of it."

Later, while I was talking with Steve Albert I heard bits and pieces of further conversation between my mother and Elbaum. Don was speaking with great animation: "You can't believe how educated some of the women at Sherry's Ranch are . . . The people that run the place fly helicopters back and forth from Los Angeles . . ."

"It was a lot more interesting than talking with my friends about their manicures," my mother told me afterward.

Being a gentleman, Don drove my mother home when lunch was over. During the ride, he reminisced about meeting Frank Sinatra ("I forget the year, but it was before he died") and the time in 1979 when he was staying in the Mayflower Hotel on Central Park West in Manhattan. Two cops appeared at his door, investigating the theft of a horse.

"I've done some things in my life that might not have been one-hundred-percent kosher," Elbaum told the cops. "But I swear to you, I never stole a horse."

By the way, the gift that Don gave my mother was a magic ball called "rattleshake." If she wants to make a wish, she shakes it and it sounds like a baby's rattle. On the outside, it says, "You thrill me."

And a final thought . . .

"Your mother is fantastic, a real doll," Don said when he called to thank me that night. "And tell

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Lou that I liked his mother too.”

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thausen@rcn.com. His next book (Winks and Daggers: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing) will be published by the University of Arkansas Press in August.

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Radam G says:

Nice a\$\$ copy -- another master wuz gettin' on his sweet scribble weaving. Ya da MAN! Holla!