One of the joys in covering a big fight is that I never know what “extras” fight night will bring. On October 18, 2008, I was in the press room at Boardwark Hall in Atlantic City readying for Kelly Pavlik vs. Bernard Hopkins when Joe Frazier came in.

There was a time when Frazier regarded me as an adversary. I was Muhammad Ali’s biographer and thus “Ali’s man.” But in recent years, Joe and I have developed a friendship of our own.

Joe and I sat at a table in the press room and talked for an hour. “How the heavyweights got the way they are now, I couldn’t tell you,” he lamented. “But it’s sad. There’s one world. How can there be four heavyweight champions of the world? When I fought, people wouldn’t put up with two heavyweight champions. There was me and Jimmy Ellis; so we fought and there was one. Then Ali came back and we fought and there was one. Boxing is the best sport in the world and they messed it up.”

Joe talked fondly of George Foreman. “Big George beat up on me two times,” he said. “Someday, I’m gonna walk over to him, kiss him on the cheek, slip to the side, and hit him with the hook . . . Not really,” he added. “George is a good man. He came from a place that’s just as hard as the place I came from. And he could fight.”

Then Joe uttered a thought that isn’t often heard from him. “Muhammad could fight too.”

I thought back to Hugh McIlvanney’s words: "Mentioning nobility in connection with boxing is chancy, but exposure to men like Joe Frazier encourages such boldness."

Now Joe was rooted in the past. “That night at Madison Square Garden,” he reminisced. “Fifteenth round when I put Ali down. A fight like that. I stood where no one else ever stood.”

The conversation sequed to Joe’s childhood. “I grew up fast,” he recalled. “I became a man early, so there wasn’t much time for games. But I played a little baseball around the time I was twelve, thirteen years old. My position was catcher. I was always afraid the ball would tip off the bat, come up fast, and hit me in the face. I liked the hitting part of the game more.”

And we talked about the music we’d listened to when we were young. Elvis Presley, Little Richard, the Motown revolution.

“Don’t forget Fats Domino,” Joe offered. And he began to sing.

“I found my thrill . . . on Blueberry Hill . . .”

I joined in.

“On Blueberry Hill . . . when I found you . . .”

Neither of us knew all the words. But we muddled through the wind in the willow, love's sweet melody, and all of those vows we made that were never to be.

In everyone's life, there are moments that have no meaning to the world at large but are special to the person who experienced them. I'll always smile when I think back on sitting with Joe Frazier and singing *Blueberry Hill.*

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