

# More madcap memories of Tony Galento

It is quite understandable that no one really knows the reason why the street adjacent to the Orange train station was so named. There are few people in your locality who remember one of the most colorful characters who resided in Orange. The entire neighborhood has changed dramatically since the 1940s and early 1950s. But after reading your item about Tony, the thought arose that you would not mind at all if you were brought up to date about some of the background of the neighborhood as it existed during the era.

• When I was a teenager and attending Orange High School in the early 1950s, five of us tried to pin Tony to the mat at the YMCA on Main Street, where it stood at the time, next to the Pix Theater. Tony would work out at the YMCA, as we did at the time. Well, the entire five of us could never pin him to the mat! We stood on his shoulders; we stood on his outstretched arms; we even laid down across his chest. We may have weighed 500 pounds collectively, but we never pinned him to that mat. Tony was as strong as an ox.

Back around 1951, Tony wrestled a bear on the stage at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel School one night. He did it for a fundraiser for the school. The place was packed solid that night. Father Andrew, the pastor of the church, announced on the pulpit the following Sunday that the church took in \$3,000 from that one night. Tony then put on a boxing match another night also as

## Point Of View

By Vito Coscia

a church fundraiser. He fought five amateur boxers, all at once, in the ring that was set up on the stage. Tony knocked all of them out!

• Tony also had a rematch with Joe Louis up in Pompton Plains, where the training camp was located. It was around 1949. Tony knocked out Joe up there, but it was never publicized in any newspaper. Tony and Frank Sinatra got Joe a job in Las Vegas as a doorman so he could pay off his outstanding taxes with the IRS. I believe that Frank Sinatra also paid off some of Joe's debts so he could survive in the twilight of his years.

Tony's sparring partner for years was an African-American boxer named Willis. Tony kept him on retainer years after their sparring had become only verbal.

• Tony did have a bar-and-grill on South Day Street. The area now is nothing more than a parking lot, but back then its storefront was all black tile. The place was called "The Diamond Mirror." My buddy Paulie and I would go in, sit at the bar, and drink Tony's Rheingold beer on draft. We would also get a sandwich or a hamburger there as well. The place was usually packed with Tony's old buddies, who

included my uncle Joe.

Uncle Joe was called "Joe Montana" back then. We all had nicknames so nobody ever knew our legal identities. Some of the bunch that sat at the bar next to Paulie and me were "Half a Hat," "50 Cents," "Shift Gear," and "Half a Face." Now all of these characters are deceased. But back during these days you not only had a good time with these guys, you could spend all night in Tony's bar for about \$2.

• Tony married into the Grasso family. His brother-in-law was Paulie Grasso. He was a contract house painter. He was also quite a character. Whenever Paulie Grasso painted the interior of any apartment or house, he would always paint some type of mural on a wall, and it would be included in the price for free.

• Next to "The Diamond Mirror" was Adolf Stanzielle's bar and restaurant. That joint was also packed to the hilt almost every night of the week with the same type of characters that frequented Tony's place. Sandina Stanzielle, Adolf's mother, made me and Paulie many pizza pies whenever we showed up after a night on a drinking binge. We were young at the time, and as teenagers, we drank almost all of the junk the distilleries made. We even drank that "white lightning" down in the southland when we went on our excursions.

• One day, on the corner of South Essex Avenue and Lackawanna Plaza, Tony had a near-col-

lision with his auto. There was a Mobil station there at the time and I was getting gas in it when this occurred. Tony was not the best driver in the world, so as he was making his left turn to get to South Day Street, he almost ran into a car going north on South Essex Avenue. The other driver challenged Tony and asked him to get out of his car. Tony obliged the other man who wanted to punch Tony in the mouth. Tony told him to take his best shot.

After the man punched Tony squarely on his jaw, Tony sat on the pavement of the street and began to laugh loudly and heartily. The man got so scared he jumped into his car and sped away as Tony yelled for him to come back.

There are many stories about Tony like this. Crime in Orange at the time was almost nonexistent. We all lived together in harmony. Main Street would be lit up on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights from High Street all the way down to Park Street. It was a very thriving shopping center then.

Please don't feel offended with this information. The thrust of this note is to merely bring you some additional tidbits about Tony and the Orange of the good old days.

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**Vito Coscia, a former Orange resident, now resides in San Francisco. This was a letter written to the Rev. Darrell Berger of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Essex County in response to his March 31 column.**