

# BEYOND

Good and Evil

*A Life in Boxing*

GLYN RHODES MBE

WITH MARK TURLEY



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# 1

A LOT of boxing people have messy childhoods. You know the story, right? The kid from the wrong side of the tracks, saved from the streets by the gym. Boxing as an escape route, channelling inner rage, fighting the demons.

I don't think I'm one of those. Not really. I do sometimes wonder what made me a fighter but have not come up with a solid answer. I often feel like I just fell into it.

I never knew my dad. Perhaps we can pin it on that?

My mum, Wendy, was just 18 when I was born in 1959, and I was brought up in her parents' house in the Attercliffe area of north-east Sheffield. Later on, we moved to Firth Park, also in the north of the city. I was aware from a young age that I did not have two normal parents like other kids. But my grandparents more than made up for that.

Joe, my grandad, was a typical man of his generation. No nonsense, no sentiment, always working, always fixing things in the house. On one occasion, when I was still in nappies, all his

tools were laid on the floor, and I picked up a big clawhammer, raised it and tried to swing it, as I had seen him do. The thing was so heavy it took both my hands to lift it, and once I got it up at arms' length, it could only do one thing – come back down – which it did, on top of my head.

So, I was about two years old when I both dealt and suffered my first knockout. Glyn Rhodes done in by Glyn Rhodes. Perhaps that was a sign of the future.

Like most Sheffield men in the 60s, Grandad worked in the steel industry. To me, with his big, muscular arms and Brylcreemed hair, he was a hero. He had fought in World War Two, and actually took part in the D-Day landings in Normandy. Like most ex-soldiers, he had boxed a bit too, but Grandad was a reserved man and didn't speak much about his experiences.

My grandmother, Annie, was more talkative and provided a soothing, dependable presence. That was important, because when I was at primary school, my mother met and started dating a new man called Freddie. Of course, this was perfectly normal. After all, she was still a young woman with her whole life ahead of her, but I struggled with the change and gave everyone a hard time. I guess it was tough for me to accept that after all those years I was now expected to share her.

I started playing up, probably just a vain attempt to regain Mum's attention, to make her all mine again. I became moody and stropky.

One summer evening during that difficult time, I was messing around on the road with some other kids when a grown man, who obviously I had annoyed somehow, pushed me off my bike. He gave me a little slap, and I ran off crying, back to the house. My gran asked me what was wrong.

‘Some–fella–slapped–me,’ I said, through staccato sobs.

Immediately, she woke Grandad, who had fallen asleep in his chair after work, as was his habit. I was still crying.

‘Stop blubbin’ and talk to me!’ he said, grabbing me by the shoulders.

I explained.

‘Right,’ he said, rising from his chair, heading for the door. ‘We’ll sort that out then.’

Gran grabbed me by the arm and dragged me out after him. As we followed him out on to the road, Grandad rolled up his sleeves.

The man and my bike were both still in the street as Grandad strode out in the early evening light. It was like a dream. He calmly walked up to the guy, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, said something I couldn’t hear, then cracked him on the chin with a right hook.

The guy went down hard, like a puppet whose strings had been cut. Grandad turned to me, with a curious light in his eyes. ‘Get your bike, Glyn,’ he said. ‘It’s nearly bedtime.’

‘Yes, Grandad.’

Everything seemed different right then. The street shone. Grandad was suddenly about ten feet tall. The only time I had seen anything like that was in movies.

That punch stayed with me for ages. I must have relived it a thousand times. It was such a simple action, yet had such huge effects, on the man who had thrown it as much as the man who received it. God, how I loved my grandfather. I thought he was Superman.

Not long after that, I was in bed one night and heard shouting downstairs. The voices were instantly familiar. Mum and Grandad were arguing.

I crept down and it was clear what was going on. Mum had announced she was marrying Freddie by then and had come to say that she was taking me away, to live with her and her new husband. I watched and listened through the crack of the living room door.

‘He’s my son and he’s coming with me!’ Mum shouted.

‘He’s going nowhere,’ Grandad yelled back. ‘This is his home, and this is where he’s staying!’

The row continued back and forth, and I found myself looking from one to the other wildly, like a spectator at a tennis match. It was such a mad situation. After a while, I felt I had to say something.

‘I’m not going anywhere!’ I screamed, stepping into the room.



At that very moment, I think I saw my mum's heart breaking. She gave me such a terrible look. All the energy drained out of her and within five minutes she gave up and left, crying as she went. Mum and Grandad didn't speak for a long time after that, and I was left to live with what I had done.

I continued living with my grandparents, but something changed inside me. The trouble in the family had an effect, although I never admitted it. It made me colder and meaner.

I would only see Mum at the weekends, before she would leave me, to go back to her husband, which was so upsetting. To begin with, I cried every time, until I got hardened to that, too. I felt she had chosen him over me. Really, I was the one who chose, but kids don't think like that.

It was all such a mess, and I was still just a young boy, but ours was not a family that kissed and cuddled. I think what I needed was for someone to put their arms around me and tell me everything would be okay.

But no one did.