

A close-up portrait of Maurice Hope, a Black man with a short beard and mustache, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing red boxing gloves and is shirtless. The background is plain white.

LAND OF HOPE & GLORY

The Windrush Kid
Who Conquered
the World

MAURICE HOPE

with
Ron Shillingford



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Chapter 1

Olympic horror

WE HEARD the gunshots coming from the next building as scary TV images flashed worldwide. The shots, sirens and twinkling lights woke us up. In fact, I thought it was a dream. An animated Billy Knight was saying that something terrible had happened right beside us. All kind of things flashed through my mind. That's the time when you're really talking to God. You never know when your back is against the wall.

My mind was whirring: *Too close for comfort. What's happened there? It could be us next. God why did you bring me here? Please look after us. I've got my family. Is this my destiny?*

Although the TV commentary was in German, it was clear what was unfolding. Innocent athletes and coaches were being massacred by terrorists at the Munich Olympics. It was 5 September 1972, a date I'll never forget. Nor will many. Especially the Jewish community.

We couldn't go back to sleep again. Our families were phoning in but couldn't get through hotel reception. Their switchboard was in meltdown. Obviously, there were no mobiles back then so all

the dorm phones were going wild. The panic going on downstairs in reception was audible throughout the building. Chilling. An experience I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

Nobody had to tell me to stay in my room, I was going nowhere, hoping those four walls would be enough protection. We had to stay away from windows, of course.

It had all started so well a month earlier. We'd got close to the coaches, David James and Kevin Hickey, as we'd been in training camp at Crystal Palace and got to know them well before leaving for Munich. We were looking forward to the Games. The vibe was one big, happy family.

The opening ceremony was joyous; people in costume entertaining everybody. National flags proudly paraded around the stadium, athletes of all shapes and sizes in sharp uniforms or national costumes creating a sense of carnival. It helped take your mind off competition and relax for a little while. My boxing mates included Billy Knight (middleweight), Alan Minter (light-middle), Graham Moughton (light-welter) and Billy Taylor (feather). Although Kirkland Laing had beaten the great Vernon Sollas to win the ABA featherweight title that year, for whatever reason Taylor was picked.

The Olympic Village was impressive. Pristine accommodation. Newly installed bunk beds. Typical German efficiency. I shared with team captain Moughton. Excellent food. Open buffet with dishes from all over, including Caribbean. With so many different nations, a wide variety was needed. It was delicious but worked against some athletes, especially boxers making weight. The

chicken curry was nicest. And the rice! I'm a rice man. Everyone joked that my name's really Morerice.

It was so tempting that sometimes we'd eat a bit more than we should. We'd have to get up earlier than normal and go in the basement boiler room to sweat the excess off. I only had to do it before one fight but the greedy ones did it every time they fought, skipping and shadow-boxing in loads of layers.

Attending those Games was my ultimate dream but, in those tense minutes that spilled into hours, it became a living nightmare. All nine Great Britain boxers and two coaches holed up in our dorms watching the horror unfold; the terrible massacre by Palestinian militant group Black September who broke into the Olympic Village and took hostage Israeli athletes. Global TV watched in shock. We feared repercussions from more assassins. Sadly, it ended that night with 12 victims murdered and five terrorists killed.

By the next day, our terrified loved ones were finally able to phone, glad to hear our voices, knowing we were alright. We reassured them everything was okay. Of course, they wanted us to come home immediately. They weren't worried about medals or anything, just wanted us home. Alive. My family, especially my mum, Sarah, pleaded: 'Forget about everything Maurice, just please come home.'

Mum was the joy of the family. She kept everybody together, man. She hated me boxing and this was another reason to stop. When I was fighting she'd cover her eyes and ask: 'What's happening? Is he winning?' So funny. She would sit and watch the

fight at home but when I started having a hard time she couldn't bear to look. If she could have done she would have gone under the table as well.

Mum only came to a couple of fights. She was very superstitious too. Hated green. Being religious, she reckoned green is a forsaken colour. Unfortunately, Repton Boxing Club's colours? Yes, green. I enjoyed going out and knocking them out in my green kit hoping to change her mind. Dad, Norris, used to box too. That was surprising as he was such a quiet man. So I definitely had it in my genes.

When Mum shouted for Dad we'd both answer because our names sounded so similar. We were like George Foreman who called his five sons George and one of his daughters Georgetta. Foreman did far better financially after boxing with his grills and other projects. That's a great thing about being a retired athlete, when you finish, your life still goes on. His biopic *Big George Foreman* came out in 2023, decades after he'd retired and he's coining it again.

Retired athletes can get contracts to advertise and endorse things. Life is a lottery, we know that. You can lose your life in a car or plane crash. It's so random. I know the argument is that boxing is one man being allowed to damage another. But it's about skill. You need to learn how to slip the punches. That's what it's all about. The noble art. I've been involved in boxing for over 60 years. How time flies. When you look back on it you want to know where all the years have gone.

When I became successful, Dad had to fix himself up because he's so humble. When people knew he was my father they would

kiss him, hug and smother him and he couldn't cope. He had no choice but to come out of his shell. Considering his humility, it amazed me that as a young man he did a bit of boxing himself in Antigua. Their equipment was basic but they made the best of what they had.

When Dad came to my fights I'd spot him on TV after and he'd be rocking and fidgeting in his seat getting involved in the action, throwing imaginary punches. When you're watching you can't help but get involved, especially when it's your son. He's no longer with us but died a happy man. I was extremely proud of him, too.

My first bout in Munich was an easy, five-nil points win against Garry Davis of the Bahamas. Then I got a walkover against Alfonso Fernández of Spain before all the drama started.

There was a big memorial service at the Olympic stadium, which many athletes attended but I didn't want to go, partly fearful of another attack. I'm sure I wasn't the only one. Terrorists could have put on security uniforms and strapped themselves with bombs.

The authorities were considering cancelling the Games. We prayed for it to carry on. Fortunately, it did. They sorted it out for the remaining athletes but I was sad for those poor souls, who prepared so hard, came to Germany full of expectations and that was their fate. But such is life.

Obviously, the atmosphere in the village was more subdued after that, spirits never the same. I had my second bout a couple of

days after. It wasn't easy to get over those catastrophic events from that terrible day, but we we had to toughen ourselves up mentally to go on. Now we were all scared for our own safety. Being so close to the incident was disturbing. We saw the surviving Israeli athletes afterwards and, as you can imagine, they were all shaken up. Morale was poor, they needed a lot of uplifting. Our coaches were spooked too, doubling up as parents, advising us where to go and where not to go. They were experienced in life as well as boxing and knew how to get the best out of you. They were ex-boxers too but not successful ones.

It affected me mentally in the ring. That's the saddest Olympics ever, although the last one in Tokyo was blighted by the coronavirus.

Not surprisingly, I lost the bout, against János Kajdi of Hungary. Unanimous. Five-nil. I thought I deserved better but the judges didn't. He'd boxed at the previous two Olympics so had plenty of experience. In the final he lost to the Cuban Emilio Correa Vaillant. Anyway, I was rated fifth in the world after that. It was no disgrace whatsoever losing to such a great, experienced fighter. Plus, at 21, age was catching up on me. In those days, by the time a boxer passed 30 it was usually over, so I didn't have much time left. The only consolation from being eliminated was that I could go and watch other sports, despite the tight security. Athletics was one.

Three GB fighters got medals: Minter (bronze), George Turpin (bronze, bantam) and Ralph Evans (bronze, light-fly).

The closing ceremony wasn't as good as the opening, for obvious reasons. So much sadness. So many were openly crying,

it was like a gigantic wake. The massacre was the hardest memory for everybody. Those poor athletes left their families in high spirits, unaware they would never come back.

Nevertheless, the Olympics was one of my best experiences ever. To see nearly 200 nations together like that, blending so nicely, was wonderful. Although the swimmer Mark Spitz was the most famous athlete there for winning seven golds, the killings are what everybody remembers Munich for most.

One quirky thing I remember about those Games was the United States basketball team losing to the Soviet Union in the gold medal match. A bad-tempered game between two bitter rivals. The Soviet Union won 51-50 in a controversial end. The furious Americans voted unanimously to refuse the silver medals. They were so vexed that the captain, Kenny Davis, and another player, Tom Henderson, even have clauses in their wills that their children can't accept the medals either. Half a century later they are still vexed!

It was time to hang up my vest after a glorious amateur career punching for no pay. Time to reflect as well as look ahead. I was about 13 or 14 when Repton entered me in the schoolboy championships. If you won that, then you were somebody. You knew your talents and had an idea of how far you would get in the game. There was a fella from the Brooke House School in Clapton. They had a lot of talented boxers. I came up against one of them. In fact, he was the favourite to win the London championships. The first round was mine. Second round was closer, maybe even. Before the third, my corner told me what to do. Being southpaw

was tricky for orthodox opponents. I picked him apart, easy peasy. Unanimous. I felt there and then I could go all the way, maybe turn pro and be a champ.

Repton was a huge influence, not just the boxing bit. The first famous fighter I met there was none other than Joe Louis, the great heavyweight champ of the 30s and 40s. Repton has a proud reputation of getting legends to visit. Louis was old but was still working. I was about 11 at the time, didn't know who he was until years later, read about him and realised how great he had been. Nice guy, shook everybody's hand. I'm in a group picture. Annoying thing is I took my friend Damian. You can see Damian's face but not mine. Rocky Marciano, another heavyweight legend, visited Repton. Hollywood star Humphrey Bogart came, too. I didn't have a clue who he was then. Nor George Raft, another brilliant actor, best known for his gangster roles. A lot of other stars passed through. It was inspiring. Their visits made me realise early on how big boxing can make you outside the ring as well as inside. A lot of good things can happen to you that you don't even expect.

My schoolboy career flourished. Getting picked to represent Young England was a great honour. But there was another fella in contention, Dave Odwell. They didn't know who to send to Dublin. So we had a box-off at Repton. He was tall and skilful so I knew it was going to be hard. As he was much taller there was an inevitable clash of heads at the end of two rounds. He was cut above the eye. Thrilled to be going, my excitement soon evaporated in Dublin as they didn't like the English at all. I thought that,

being black, I'd get away with it but they were just as hostile to me. It was the first time I'd experienced hostility regardless of colour. The first time I'd heard anyone call me 'English' on the street in a hateful way. All the racist abuse like 'wog' and 'monkey' came out too but being English seemed to be as bad!

Although only about 15, I was strong and fit and could have sparked them but they were in a crowd. Cowards. They wouldn't do that on their own. It's better to be a live coward than a dead hero so I lived to tell the tale. At least I was smarter than them. That experience helped me become smart outside, as well as inside, the ring.

I boxed at Madison Square Garden once, the sport's most famous venue then. For England versus America, in 1971. Very enjoyable. Met a few stars there, too. We were introduced to an up-and-coming actor, really keen on the fight scene. Short and muscular with a big, pigeon chest and skinny legs. He congratulated us and sat at our table. He had a great interest in boxing. We took pics. It was as if he was researching for a role. It was none other than Sly Stallone. He wasn't Rocky yet. That came later. I'm surprised at how short he was considering the success of the *Rocky* films.

Winning the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) championship was always my dream. I won the London divisional championships a few times. York Hall, Bethnal Green got to be like my front room. Very comfortable there, one of my favourites. I never seemed to get past the London final though. Not because I wasn't good enough, just bad luck. 1972 was Olympic year,

which added an edge to winning it. Fit, strong and experienced, I was super-confident of beating Trevor Francis and going all the way. I won the first round comfortably but things went pear-shaped after.

We threw big shots at the same time, our hands collided and my shoulder freakishly popped out of its socket from the impact. When that shoulder went in the second round, it felt like the complete end. Indescribable pain. It felt like someone had just yanked my right arm out of its socket as it dangled to the side. Unable to lift my hand, the ref stopped it immediately. Apart from the pain, a huge wave of disappointment descended. I'd lost my chance to reach the pinnacle.

It's all over. Not just this fight, my whole career.

Another twist; in the dressing room, gutted, a glimmer of hope. A doctor with magic fingers and expert technique came in. He casually popped it back in place. Being young and fit helped. It was still painful as I left the Royal Albert Hall that cold March night, shoulder throbbing, arm in sling, popping painkillers. Many fighters have dislocated shoulders and never returned or are never the same again. But at least I was on the mend. Repton officials organised laser treatment, which helped immensely. The treatment helped it heal quickly. Shortly after, I started testing it. It felt okay.

No pain. No problems. Thank God. I can't believe it. Maybe my career's not all over after all.

In training, I felt normal again within a couple of months. Repton secretary Bill Cox had a word with the ABA about a box-off for the

Olympic place because Francis went on to win the championship. The suits liked my style and ability so they decided I should have a box-off in Earl's Court with Francis and Welshman Dave Davies, who he'd beaten in the ABA final. Francis was good. Fast. In and out. But he couldn't handle my southpaw style and extra experience. I beat him to the punch throughout and won unanimously. Davies was easier because he was a come-forward fighter, like Joe Frazier. As a counterpuncher it suited me nicely. He was strong but eating my jabs coming in.

Now the wait to see who got picked. From the reaction of the Repton guys I sensed I was going, but in the amateurs political decisions can easily go against you. Two weeks later, the confirmation came. Cox phoned then sent a letter. I'm sorry I didn't keep that letter, although it would be covered in mildew now. It was a proud moment indeed to be representing Britain and Antigua. That's the highest accolade an amateur can ask for. Our Olympic kits had to be picked up at Crystal Palace. The day all the other athletes gathered there was when it really sunk in that I was going to be an Olympian.

After the mixed emotions of Munich, it was time to turn pro.

Terry Lawless was the most respected manager in London at the time, so the choice was obvious. He had a good stable of fighters, the best being Ralph Charles, the Commonwealth welterweight (10st 7lb) champ. We trained above the Royal Oak pub in Canning Town. John H. Stracey was another top welter in the gym so, having grown into a light-middle (11st), I had

excellent sparring. It was a bit hard at first but showed me the road I was going to have to travel. Amateurs box three rounds of three minutes. Pros in those days started at six rounds up to 15 for championships. Training was much harder and intense. Amateurs is all speed. The slower pace of the pros suited me, I could take my time.

The choice of Lawless proved correct as, besides me, he went on to have world champions in Stracey, Jim Watt, Charlie Magri and developed the talents of future champs Lloyd Honeyghan and Frank Bruno. Terry guided me well in the pros and helped me reach the top. He instilled pride and made supporters and family proud.

Being famous had its perks. Like judging a Miss World contest in London. Joan Collins was another judge. She was very nice. Oliver 'The Stud' Tobias, her co-star, was one too.

Boxing has given me a lot of recognition. Invitations came for two big functions at No.10 Downing Street. They were totally out of the blue and I'll go into detail later.

I love Hackney. It was the first area I came to when arriving here and it'll always be my second home. When I won the world title, the mayor of Hackney, Sam Cohen, town hall workers and local dignitaries had a reception in my honour at Hackney Town Hall. Sam really got into it, enjoying Caribbean food for the first time and even dancing to reggae. He didn't have the right moves. He didn't care, he was so happy.

My brother Cranston, better known as Hopey, is not someone to argue with at the best of times. He took offence

to something a man said about my boxing ability. They started arguing. Next thing, Hokey slapped his face a couple of times. Surprised, hurt and embarrassed, the man turned beetroot red. End of argument.

About two weeks later, Hackney named a bike route the Maurice Hope Cycle Track. It runs from London Fields right up to Islington. What I'm very proud of is the day they called me for the naming ceremony. Mayor Sam provided about ten of us with bikes and we all rode the few miles there and back. That's another thing I like about boxing; if you're in the record books, your name lives on. You're immortalised in history.

Everywhere I went, Hackney treated me like a king. I was on cloud nine. Good job I was a sensible fella, otherwise it would have gone to my head. Living near Ridley Road Market, everyone would hail us. Walking down the street, everybody acknowledged me. I'd never felt that way before. Unfortunately, there was envy and jealousy. My car was scratched and some gave me a hard time. You could see on some people's faces that they weren't happy at all. What they said was opposite to the tone of their voices and body language. Boxing has taught me a lot about how to deal with people. They're only words; not as hard as the blows.

Being a famous black man doesn't always help. The notorious Metropolitan Police showed their nasty side one day, which led to all sorts of problems. Relations with black people may have improved now. But not much. I had an horrific experience with the Old Bill, which still troubles me today even though it happened decades ago.

I was head coach with the Antigua & Barbuda national boxing squad for a quarter of a century. Great experience. Got a chance to travel some more. For me, there's no better way of learning than travel to understand different races and cultures. We went to Jamaica, St Lucia, Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad and as far afield as Australia, Malaysia and America.

In Antigua there are a few talented boxers that could make pro careers if helped. Athletes and footballers, too. Please God, I continue to be successful so that I can help them. I'm still an adviser for Antigua and try to raise funds when possible. With a fresh talent, I try to help as much as I can by bringing them over to England to get the experience, then go back and show the others. They all want to come over now.

Alston Ryan, a lightweight I helped, competed at the Tokyo Olympics and represented Antigua many times in other tournaments, like the 2018 Pan-American Games, winning bronze. Lucky enough, Alston was born in Montserrat, which meant he could easily get a British passport. He then had to get an Antiguan passport to represent them!

He's been here for years with Repton. When he first joined, he soon tired and couldn't even hold his hands up. Repton have some really good boys and they don't mess around. After a while, he saw what it was all about and improved. Alston lived with me for three years, funded by the Antigua & Barbuda Amateur Boxing Federation. He's got a good job as a salesman in a clothes shop now. He's only lost a few fights and has won the Haringey Box Cup at Alexandra Palace.

My take on the fight game:

Boxing is an art

The study of a lifetime

In which you may exhaust yourself

But never your subject

It's a contest

It is a duel calling for fitness, skill and self-control

It is a test of temper

It is a trial of honour

It is a reveal of character

It offers you the role to be a man and act a gentleman

And to be a woman and act with honour

It's a vehicle to fortune and fame

So go to it all you boxers and don't worry about everything else

And champions, I'm sure you will be

Boxing today, plays a great part in changing a person's life altogether

It is educational, gives a chance to travel

And makes you a better all-round person

It was far harder to be a world champ back then. Today, they're fighting hard but it's not as competitive as before. In my day, the best fought the best, unlike now. I was in eight-round fights from the start, not the four- and six-rounders that novices have now. As a seasoned amateur I was thrown in at the deep end. Then it was ten-rounders, 12 and 15. But they've done the sensible thing now, dropping to 12 because after 12 the man has given his all. Anything after that, you're fighting on instinct. There are no ifs

and butts about it, you should be able to find a winner after 12. The game's changed a hell of a lot and the main thing is they've increased boxers' purses. It is so hard-earned.

People used to say: 'How much money you won?'

I'd say: 'Boxers don't win money. They *earn* it.' You're not gambling, although you're gambling with your health and life.

TV money has increased so much since my time. Every big fight seems to be pay-per-view. Some, like Canelo Alvarez, get tens of millions. And they're not doing 15-rounders either. My best TV earnings for one fight was less than five figures, not millions. More people are marketing the sport better than then. They have different ideas and social media plays a big part. It's always evolving. Fighters were worse off in the generation before me. The good thing in my day was that money was money. The spending power was much more. It feels like nothing now. Like Monopoly money.

In my mind, there's no disputing that boxing is the hardest sport out there. Rowing? When you're tired, you jump in the river and cool off. Rugby? I must admit that's the second most dangerous sport. Too many injuries. Although motorsport, skiing, American football and surfing are all very dangerous, they're not as painful as mine. That's the difference. Unless you fall over or have an accident, you're okay. Once you get in the ring, you know your head's going to hurt.

Like most people, definitely my favourite fighter of all time was Muhammad Ali. I had the pleasure of shaking his hand at the Albert Hall in 1979 when he boxed an exhibition. He actually

spoke to me, not the other way round, but I didn't like what he said. 'Hey man, you look like Joe Frazier.'

He playfully threw punches. I wasn't expecting that. Thought he would hug me up. Plus, I don't think Frazier would win any beauty contests either. Anyway, I shook his hand. After all, he was the all-time best.

Everyone knows Ali liked his women. My fiancée Patricia was with me. She sat at ringside. I was elsewhere. And the next thing I know he's sending one of his bodyguards to ask her to come to the dressing room to meet him. Although he was a heavyweight he'd be in trouble because I'd be throwing some punches, man. Anyway, Pat turned him down flat.

Ali's stance against racism and for the civil rights movement was admirable. They wanted to send him to Vietnam but he refused and sacrificed the best three years of his career over that. That's the same problem black people have here and all over the world; they try to punish you in a different way. Ali stood up for himself, didn't care what it cost him. 'I'm not going there to fight them,' he said. 'They haven't done me anything. They haven't even called me n****. You're all full of s****' He told them how it is really. He was out from age 25, but it just goes to show how great he was for doing what he did after, especially against Foreman. Done him.

Mike Tyson is another favourite. Never met him. Annoying thing is, I was living in Antigua for 25 years, came back to England and the year I came back here Tyson visited Antigua. Doesn't matter, there's still time.

Sugar Ray Leonard was a fantastic talent too. He had a detached retina, similar to my injury. In fact, when he came over to London he'd read about my injury and he linked up with me to discuss it. I felt really proud. He came to my house with his first wife, Juanita, and their son Ray Junior. Mum cooked. They loved her food, man. They sat with my family, had dinner and we discussed the injury. He had already retired and was thinking of making a comeback and wanted my opinion.

Leonard was so humble and down to earth, I couldn't believe it. In fact, I took him down the 'line', Sandringham Road, where the Caribbean community congregated for everything from our groceries, hair products and restaurants. He did everything I suggested.

'Let's go in there, champ. Come over here, champ.' We'd go in the barbers and different shops. Everyone was so excited. They still talk about it now. They couldn't believe what was happening before their very eyes.

Leonard did make a comeback, got the decision against Marvin Hagler and fought on for a few years before retiring permanently in 1991. The eye damage was done by Tommy Hearn with those long jabs, I reckon.

I don't watch as much boxing as before. There are some good fighters around my old weight, particularly Alvarez. Rate him. He's damaging them really bad, although he did lose at light-heavyweight. Canelo lives and fights like he's still a contender. Fame and money hasn't spoiled him. Plus, he always fights in front of his Mexican fans, which boosts him up. That's

another thing that gives him motivation; he'd die before he let them down.

Terence Crawford, the welterweight champ, is another great talent. Southpaw, stylish and fast. Of the heavies, I like Anthony Joshua for his skills and most of all I like the way he conducts himself. Speaks respectfully of others and keeps himself out of trouble. He's a proud black man too, talks about his African heritage. Although he was born in England, he knows his roots. I hope he is victorious if he fights Tyson Fury. Joshua's more talented than Deontay Wilder but the American's got that wicked right hand that can eliminate anything. He has so many rounds to do it in as well. Those boys need 12 rounds to beat him. He only needs 12 seconds. He's small-framed but powerful, plus he's unorthodox. Those punches come from anywhere. He's still hungry, which is why he fought Fury a third time. Wilder wasn't interested in step-aside money. He wanted retribution, even though he didn't get it.

One of the greatest talents was a fighter Terry Lawless needed my help to sign.

'Look Mo, I've known you for a long time. I've learnt how to deal with black people because of you, but I'm still not too familiar. I'm going to sign a black fighter and I'd like you to help me with him; Kirkland Laing, who lives in Nottingham. I want to bring him down to London but got nowhere for him to stay. Can you help me?'

I told him: 'Sure, he can stay with my family, we've got a couple of houses. I'll bring him home and we'll look after him.' Kirk arrived one afternoon with his suitcase at the Royal Oak looking

smart, hair trimmed. The first thing I noticed were his eyes. Those bulging, wild-looking eyeballs. That's what made him such a good boxer, he could see everything coming. Like a frog. Before the session was over we became friendly and I took him home to my parents. He gave my parents respect and settled in quickly.

Lloyd Honeyghan beating Donald Curry was a huge upset win. Not taking anything away from the 'Ragamuffin Man', but they'd never heard of him. Maybe Curry was weight-weakened but had he known Honeyghan would be so good he should have given up the title and moved up a division. Lloyd went out, showed no respect and beat him up. Good attitude. Honeyghan was so excited after that they had to throw him on the floor to celebrate.

Too many boxers seem to retire and go off the rails completely. Whether it's drink, drugs, women, gambling or bankruptcy or a combination. They make huge mistakes. It's partly because, when they retire and no longer have restrictions, they overdo it. Because they've stopped training and don't have to watch their weight anymore, the pounds pile on. Honeyghan is a prime example; ended up a squat heavyweight.

I think I'm very lucky in staying trim. Born thoroughbred, like Nijinsky and Red Rum. Like my dad and most of my family. Doesn't matter what we eat and drink, we stay the same size. I thank God all the time.

I pushed my body to an extent I would never have done ordinarily and that's one way of knowing your true self. I'm still reaping the benefits in my senior years. Some of my generation have sadly already passed away, like Laing, Minter, Frazier and

Ali. But the one I'm most upset about is Hagler. When he fought Minter in 1980, we spoke and he was very nice. I've been to former world champion conventions in America and Italy and met many great champions. We all have a mutual respect, which is what boxing is all about.

Boxing has evolved its appeal, which is great. Even the girls are boxing now, aren't they? To a high standard, too. Look at all the medals the Brits won at the Tokyo Olympics. And, of course, it keeps you fit as well. Look at me. I can still run for the bus without breathing heavy.

If I wasn't a boxer? I've always wanted to act. I hope my journey opens the door to acting roles. It's not too late. The only amateur dramatics I've ever done is with my family indoors. I've got the ratings from them and I'm good. Still pushing. Life is a dream.

Filming at Limehouse Boxing Academy a couple of years years ago, I did six high-knee jumps from a squat position, almost reaching the moon. When challenged to copy, all the teenagers did the jumps but not as high and without the squats to the floor. They copped out of that. Thank you boxing and thank you God for directing me through the sport I love. I've reached this milestone, three score and ten, still fit and with all my faculties. I'm not boasting. Just roasting.