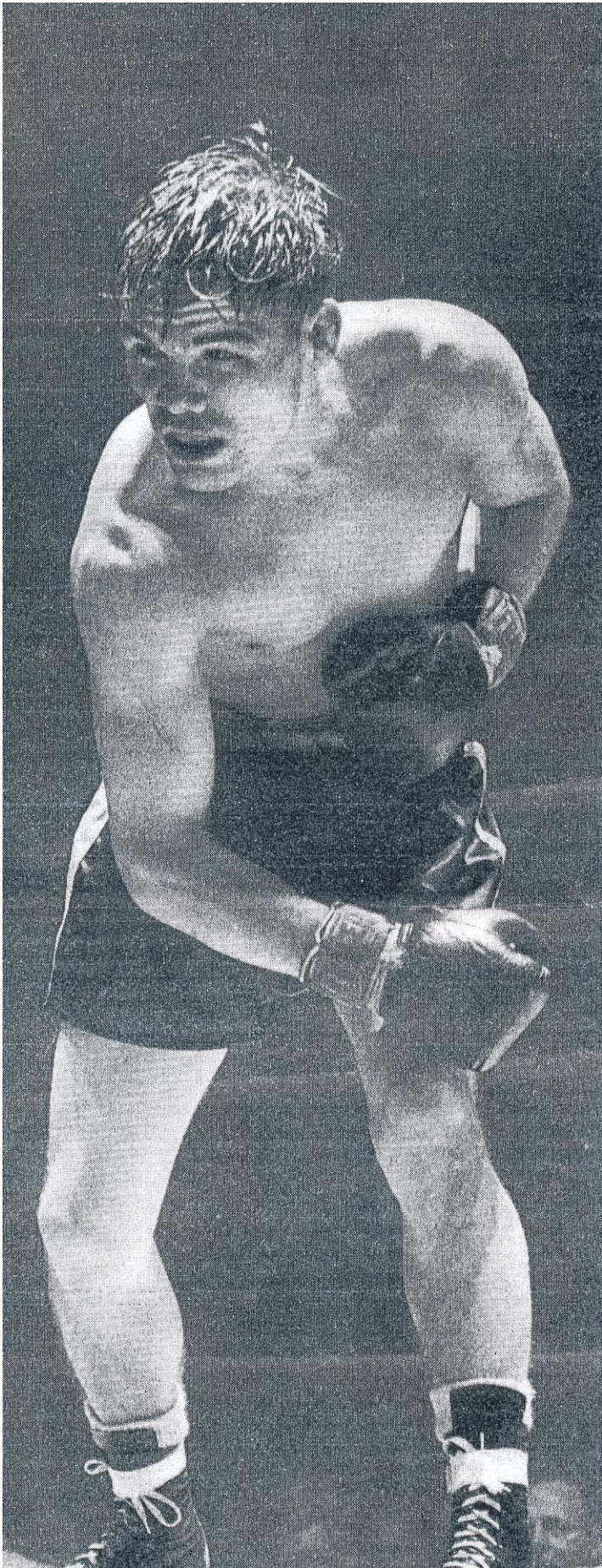


# STORY of a FIGHTER

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR LIFE  
BY LEONARD McCOMBE



Six weeks ago, on Jan. 14, a 22-year-old boxer named Vince Foster entered the ring in New York's Madison Square Garden for the biggest fight of his life. It was incredible that he should be there after such a brief professional career—30 months. His manager said, "He doesn't have enough brains for a headache," but he could hit like Goliath of Gath.

In the opposite corner sat a work-horse fighter named "Tough Tony" Pellone. Pellone was no champion; but he was regarded in New York as a sort of gatekeeper. Anyone who could lick him might be expected soon to have a crack at the welterweight (147 pounds) championship now held by "Sugar Ray" Robinson.

The odds against young Foster were 12 to 5. People who knew the boxing racket felt that he had no business fighting Pellone so soon, that he needed another year or two of having his brains jarred in the tank towns. But by the end of the seventh round they had changed their minds. Foster pounded Pellone senseless. When he came to all Pellone could manage to say was, "I never been hit so hard."

Foster's victory made a great impression. The New York *Sun* headline said, "FOSTER NOT UNLIKE DEMPSEY." The *World-Telegram* called him "The best-looking young fighter in years." Fame arrived overnight, and soon follow-up stories gave the fame an intriguing touch. Said the *World-Telegram*: "'IT'S THE WORK OF THE LORD,' SAYS FOSTER AFTER CHILLING PELLONE." Sports-page readers discovered that Foster had once been a very bad boy but had been saved by religion and was now almost an evangelist. He gave Bibles to his opponents and often said with obvious sincerity, "If it's the Lord's will, I'll be champion."

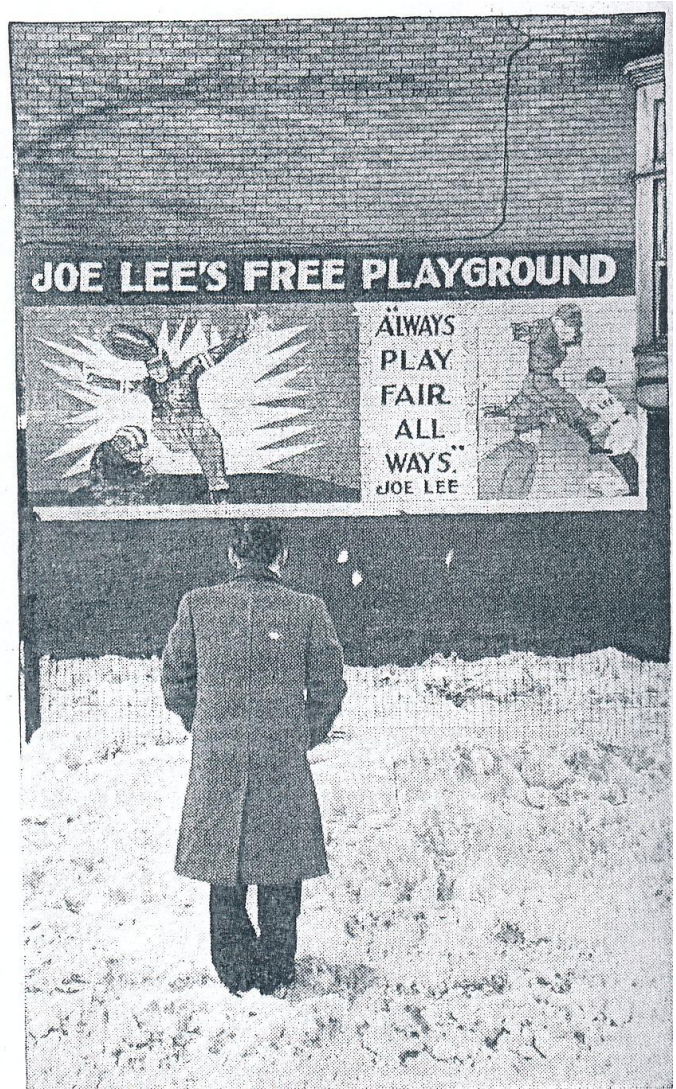


## **HE GOES BACK HOME TO RULO**

Vince Foster was brought up in a two-room tar-paper-covered shack sunk in the reeds beside the Missouri River on the outskirts of the town of Rulo, Neb. He was one of 10 children. His mother was a full-blooded Iowa Indian, his father an itinerate laborer.



**BOYHOOD MEMENTOS**, mostly cheap pictures of girls ("To Vince with love . . ."), were found by Foster as he poked through an old trunk in the shack.



**JOE LEE'S PLAYGROUND** took Foster off street and put him in ring. Lee, now dead, was an Omaha real-estate man who took interest in Vince, became first manager and his guardian.

**HYMN-SINGING** crinkles Foster's face in a smile of well-being as he rolls out a chorus of *The Old Rugged Cross* while his wife plays the piano and her grandmother, Mrs. J. A. Johnson, looks on admiringly.

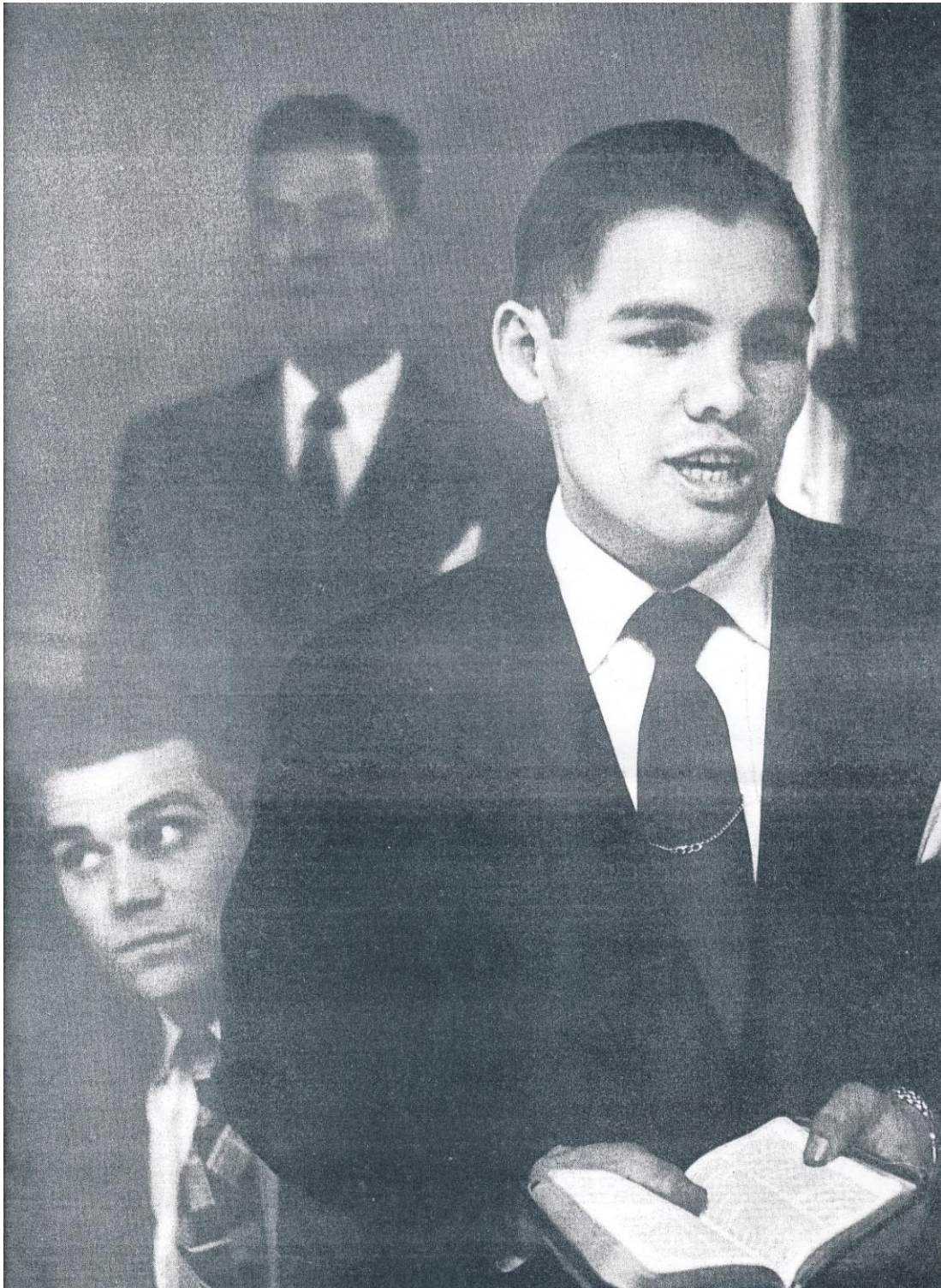


**INDIAN RELATIVES,** Mr. and Mrs. Walter Hamilton of Omaha, wear their tribal regalia to celebrate Vince's return to the old home town. He calls them uncle and aunt although they are really his cousins.





PAYING A DEBT, Foster drops by an Omaha bar to pick up a \$10 bad check he wrote when he was the local tough. Said Foster, " I bought everybody drinks .... tried to be a big shot."



**AT A METHODIST MEN'S CLUB** in Omaha, Foster reads bible to members on the day of his triumphant return from New York. When he finished reading he made a brief speech in which he said, "If I become a great boxer, I will be able to talk to a lot of people, and they will listen to me when I give them the truth."



**GOLDEN GLOVES AMATEURS** gawk as Hero Foster buckles on his watch after watching weighing-in.



**DEFEATED BOXER** Phil Burton grins as he gets an inscribed Bible from Foster following their battle.

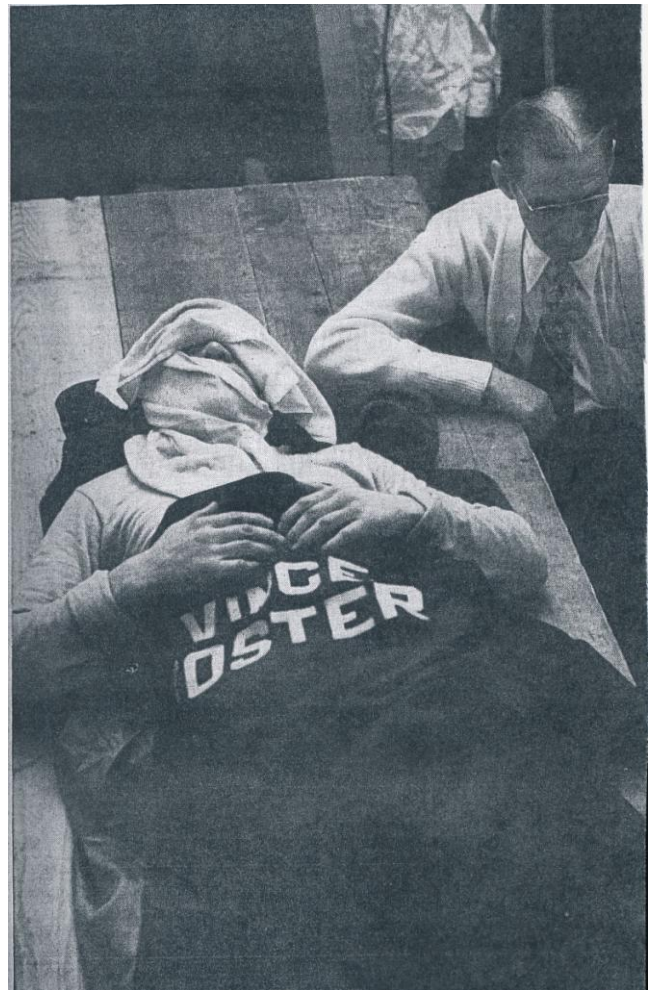
## HE FINDS RELIGION . . .

Foster found his religion in a strange and blasphemous way. He was riding a Chicago streetcar with Jack Hurley, who had lately become his manager. As they passed the Moody Memorial Church, the hard-bitten Hurley said, "That would make a great fight arena. It seats 4,000." Foster said, "Why don't somebody get it?" Hurley explained why and forgot about it. He had plenty to worry about. He had not managed a good fighter since Billy ("The Fargo Express") Petrolle retired in 1934, and he had his hands full keeping Foster sober between bouts.

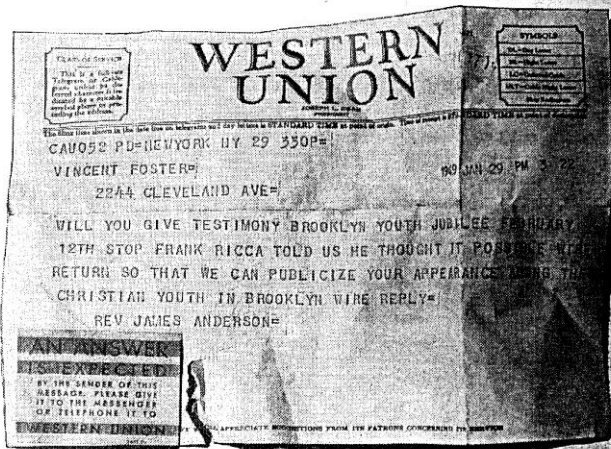
On Sunday, Aug. 22, 1948, in the middle of the evening, Foster wandered alone into the Moody Memorial to check on its seating capacity. As he stood near the door he heard someone preaching. The words sank into his soul. "When I came out," he said, "I was saved."

Overnight Foster changed. He gave up drinking. He frowned on swearing. He began to carry a small zippered Bible. He became a crusader. He spoke to religious groups and tried hard to convert his friends. Foster's wife returned happily to him, and even the ulcerous Hurley said, "He was such a little louse. Now it's a pleasure to be around him."

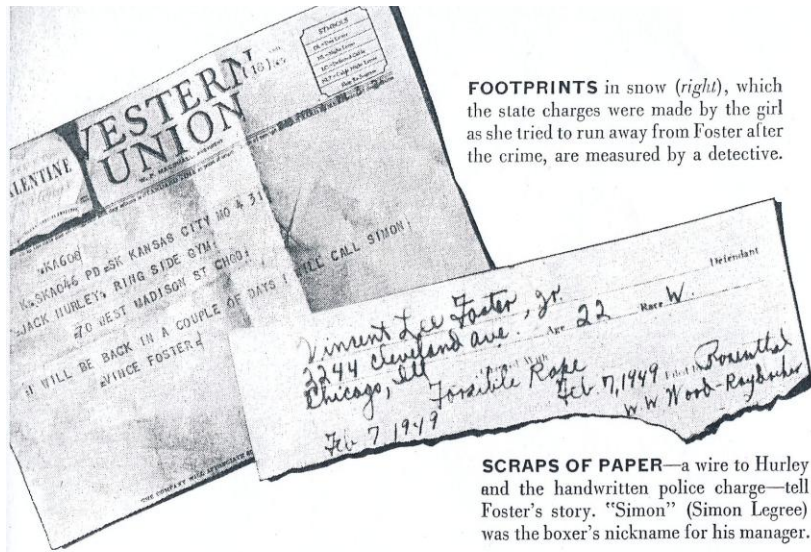
When word of Foster's great change got around, sportswriters and fans snickered. But those who took the trouble to ask him about his religion became convinced beyond all possible doubt that he was sincere. In the reeking gymnasiums where he sparred, watchers learned to hold their tongues when he opened his Bible and read his favorite psalm: "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight."



**AFTER THE FIGHT** Foster lies smothered in robe and towels on the rubbing slab while manager Jack Hurley commences to worry about the next bout.



**INVITATION TO TESTIFY** about his sudden conversion to religion was given Foster in Omaha just before he stepped into the ring.



**FOOTPRINTS** in snow (right), which the state charges were made by the girl as she tried to run away from Foster after the crime, are measured by a detective.



**SCRAPS OF PAPER**—a wire to Hurley and the handwritten police charge—tell Foster's story. "Simon" (Simon Legree) was the boxer's nickname for his manager.

## ... BUT HE BECOMES A BACKSLIDER

Vince Foster's tragedy overtook him at dawn on Feb. 7. Two weeks before, Manager Hurley had signed a contract for another Madison Square Garden bout, scheduled for Feb. 18. Under its terms Foster was to fight a welterweight named Charley Fusari and, win or lose, Foster was to receive 30% of a gate that seemed certain to reach \$100,000.

But on Feb. 6, when he should have been in Chicago training for the fight, Foster was missing. Hurley, trusting him, had allowed him to remain in Nebraska for a day or two to relax after the Omaha fight of Jan. 31 (p. 87). Foster had broken his word. Instead of returning on time he had sent a cryptic telegram (upper left) and disappeared. For three days Hurley paced his office alone, gulping milk to ease his burning stomach. Then he found out what was wrong. Foster had gone on a binge with a girl from Kansas City. On Feb. 7, near St. Joseph, Mo., he had been ar-

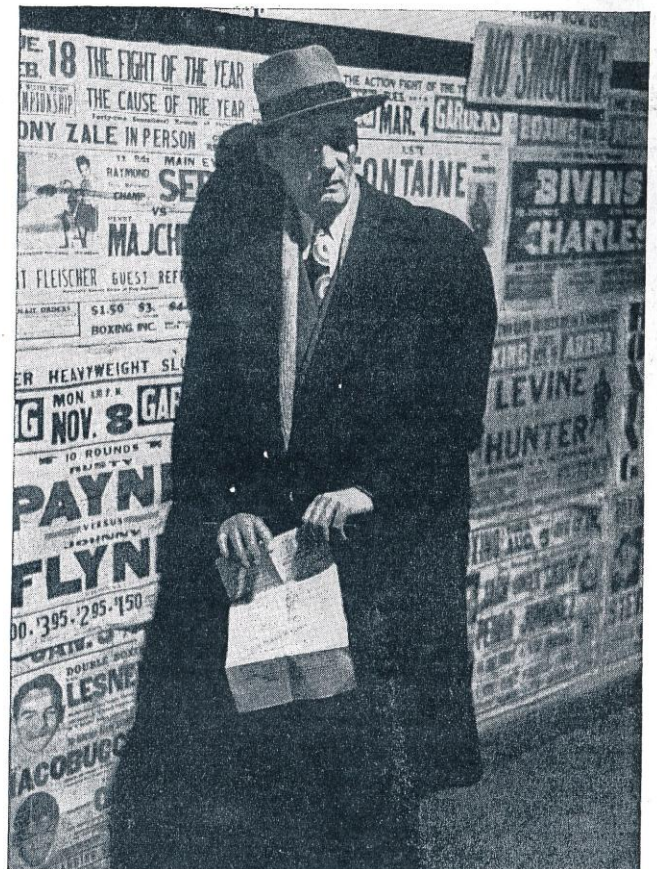
rested. The charge, which he denied, was forcible rape. Hurley winced and said, "A leopard don't change its spots." He canceled the Garden fight, on which he had pinned all his hopes, and took a lonely walk.

"One shocking blow has changed the entire complexion of Vince Foster's future," cried the Omaha *World-Herald*. Everywhere sportswriters pondered the incident, deplored it, drew morals from it, speculated on whether the charge was true or partially trumped-up. To them it seemed likely that a settlement would be made that would allow Foster to escape a prison sentence. But his career was checked; in a business that has only a few productive years, he would lose time that could not be made up.

As his court hearing (Feb. 23) drew near, Foster returned to Chicago to face Hurley. He was contrite. He went back to the Moody Memorial to pray. "The Lord did this," Foster said, "to put me in my place."



**THE GIRL**, nervously twisting a handkerchief in her hands behind her, tells her story before a wire recorder to St. Joseph's prosecuting attorney, O. R. Newcomer.



**THE MANAGER**, worn out and bitter after hearing the news, leans on the wall outside his office. He holds a fight contract which might have been worth \$30,000. 28



**IN MOODY MEMORIAL CHURCH** young Chicago divinity students pray for Foster, who wandered in last summer during an evening service and remained to be converted. None of them believes he is guilty of the charge brought against him, and most cling to the conviction that Foster will somehow redeem himself.

*Courtesy of J.J. Johnston*

# Vince Foster, Boxer, Killed in Auto Crash

## Girl Also Is Victim as Car Smashes Into Truck in Minnesota

Vince Foster, 22, Omaha welterweight boxer, who skyrocketed to fistic fame in his first main event in Madison Square Garden, died Monday of injuries suffered in a truck-car crash near Pipestone, Minn.

Foster, who turned into a "problem child" for his manager, Jack Hurley, when he was on the way to becoming a top attraction in the ring, was driving the car that crashed into a truck.

The Bible-reading slugger, who carried a knockout punch in either hand, had not had a fight since he suffered a first-round knockout by Charley Fusari, May 13, in New York.

### Three Others Hurt

A passenger in the car was killed. She was Ruth Newcome of Helena, Mont. Three other passengers were injured, two seriously. Foster's wife was not with him.

On July 9 Foster stopped in Omaha and said he intended to resume his fistic career after a short rest. When Foster knocked out Tony Pellone in the seventh round in January, fight experts predicted he would earn a quarter of a million dollars in three or four years.

The accident occurred at 1:50 a. m.

Pipestone County Sheriff Herman Heesch said Foster's car rammed into the rear end of a truck-trailer driven by William Smith, 26, of Pipestone.

### Didn't See Truck

Witnesses said Foster's car was traveling at an excessive rate of



Vince Foster . . . traveling at excessive rate of speed.

speed, and that Foster apparently did not see the big truck until he was almost upon it.

"He didn't hit his brakes until he was within 10 feet of the truck," the sheriff said. "There wasn't a tire mark on the pavement."

Foster suffered internal injuries and brain injuries, as did Miss Newcome.

Seriously injured were Walter Jones, 23, and Kenneth Allen, both of Flandreau, S. D. Mrs. Allen suffered bruises.

### Near 23d Birthday

Foster would have celebrated his twenty-third birthday next month.

Sheriff Heesch said the party was headed for Sioux Falls, S. D., after attending a dance at Hatfield, Minn., which is close to the South Dakota-Minnesota line.

There was no evidence of excessive drinking, the Sheriff said.

Foster had been in Pipestone about a week, the Sheriff said. Two sisters and a brother attend the Pipestone Indian School.

Foster had taken them to Omaha six weeks ago, and returned them here.

They are Berdina, 13, Verna, 8, and Norwood, 11. The Fosters are part Potawatomi Indian.

# Jack Hurley Tabs Vince as Unlucky

## Pilot Claims Foster Had Punch, Color of Great Champ

Chicago, Ill. (INS)—Fight Manager Jack Hurley blew a mouthful of cigar smoke ceilingward, leaned back and said sadly: "Vince Foster had the punch, the youth and the color to become one of boxing's great champions."

Mr. Hurley said of the fighting preacher:

"But he was just unlucky. One of those unlucky star guys."

The well-known Midwestern fight manager and promoter had just been advised that his sensational welterweight title hope had been killed in an automobile accident in Pipestone, Minn.

"Nothing ever turned out right for the kid. That accident must have happened when he was coming back from taking his two little sisters and brother to the Indian school at Pipestone.

### 'Best Since Petrolle'

"Vince had taken them to his home in Rulo, Neb., for a vacation and then was taking them back to school. Even his good deeds turned out bad," he asserted.

Despite the headaches the unpredictable youth caused Mr. Hurley, he likes to recall the thrill of seeing two-fisted Foster in action.

"He was my best since Billy Petrolle—The Fargo Express," he admitted.

Mr. Hurley, who always referred to Foster affectionally as "My Bum," recalled how he had spotted the blazing-eyed youth fighting in Omaha clubs. Hurley said:

"I knew he had the sock. All he needed was some polishing. He had the courage and love for the game, although he was confused sometime by his religious beliefs.

### Due in Chicago Wednesday

"Some people thought he was a crackpot when he'd quit boxing intermittently to go on preaching tours. But he meant every word of it, although he got into his share of scrapes."

"But Vince was only 22—and we'd finally got straightened away.

"He was due here Wednesday to start training for what we had planned would be a march to the title. Foster was in demand everywhere—and I'm sorry he didn't get to fight Charles Fusari again. "That one bothered him, because he said he never was hurt enough to stop the fight. That one-round knockout preyed on his mind, and he would have been a bad man in that ring in a return bout," Mr. Hurley declared.