

TSS WHERE ARE THEY NOW? "Caveman" Lee

By Shawn Murphy

William "Caveman" Lee, a knockout artist who gained a middleweight title shot against Marvin Hagler, fought out of the legendary Kronk boxing gym in Detroit. Although a talented fighter in the ring, it was life outside of the ring that dampened that talent, and unfortunately is what many people remember him for. Drugs led to armed robberies which led to three different terms in prison. In the ring Lee beat such notables as Marcos Geraldo and John LoCicero. In his biggest fight, Lee was TKO'd in one round by Hagler, and he went on hiatus for four years after the loss. Lee retired after a 1988 loss to Yawe Davis with a final record of 23-4. Lee says today he is married, working, and happy and most of all, sober.



SM: Caveman how are you today?

WL: I'm doing good Shawn. Been working hard.

SM: Where did you grow up and how did you start in boxing?

WL: I grew up in Philadelphia in a middle class area I guess. I was indoctrinated into boxing by my father. I would never have been a fighter if not for my father. That was my father's dream.

SM: How many amateur fights did you have?

WL: Oh, about twenty-eight, lost three of them.

SM: When did you start training at Kronk?

WL: In 1977. I fought at the Olympia Stadium here in Detroit. I was sparring with Tommy and those guys. Emanuel Steward liked the way I boxed and he brought me here to prepare Tommy for a couple of fights. In 1979 my career was a little depressing. I watched a lot of other guys pass me up and my father was holding me back as well. I turned pro in 1976 and by 1979 I was like 6-1. I had trusted my father with my career and I wasn't making any money.

SM: Why do you think he was holding you back?

WL: I don't really know, he took that to his grave. One thing that he did do was put a lot of difficult fighters in there with me to spar. I learned a lot from those guys.

SM: Who were some of the big names you hung out with at Kronk?

WL: Tommy, Ron Johnson, Duane Thomas, Hilmer Kenty, Jimmy Paul. We had some good times.

SM: So turning pro how far did you think you could go?

WL: I knew I could have been a champ, I was that good.

SM: Your drug use has been pretty well documented. When did you start using drugs?

WL: Really I guess it started when I was like fourteen. My brother started running away from home and

I started running with him. We got turned on to marijuana, started drinking and running the streets of Philadelphia.

SM: Tell me about some of your fights. How about Frank "The Animal" Fletcher?

WL: I trained way too hard for that fight and when we fought my timing was off and everything else. I know I could have beaten him but I over trained.

SM: Marcos Geraldo?

WL: He had just fought Hagler and he took Sugar Ray Leonard ten rounds too. Bill Miller got me ready for that fight. I lost to Fletcher and I needed a real comeback. Fletcher was real mad that I jumped over him. When I fought Geraldo I was in top shape. You saw the champ in me that fight.

SM: Toughest opponent? LoCicero maybe?

WL: Yes, because I didn't train right for the fight and I suffered for it. I was supposed to fight him a month prior but the fight got delayed and I stopped training right. I took him lightly and he surprised me.

SM: The Hagler fight you took on a couple weeks notice?

WL: Yes, a couple weeks. Mickey Goodwin hurt his hand and I knew I was next in line. I was in good shape physically but mentally no. I had just fought LoCicero and was still recovering from that.

SM: What was your plan for Hagler?

WL: My plan was to see if he could take what I could give him. I was going to take him out. He allowed me just one mistake and that was that I hesitated.

SM: After that first knockdown were you hurt bad?

WL: Would you believe me that I didn't see that fight until about a year or two ago? I just didn't want to watch it. I always thought I was just staggered and I don't even remember hitting the ground. That was the first time I had ever been KO'd like that.

SM: What did you make for that fight if I may ask?

WL: I cleared about \$60,000.

SM: Tell me about the failed drug test after the fight.

WL: I really did dry up for that fight. A guy that was working for one of the big promoters offered to urinate for me because I just didn't feel like doing it after what had just happened. I thought he was a friend. He urinated for me and it came back dirty. I didn't know the true consequences of it. I wouldn't have been dirty. Before fights I put all that stuff aside.

SM: What years were you in prison?

WL: 1984-86, 1991-93 and 1994-2006. The cocaine got hold of me and I should have known better. I started experimenting with it and it just didn't stop. Thank God I'm still here talking to you.

SM: After three prison stints what's different this time?

WL: By God's grace, hands were laid on me and God broke me of that habit. I've been free ever since. When I eventually got busted down in Atlanta the last time, I just wanted to get it started and get it over

with.

SM: Are you involved in boxing in anyway now?

WL: I open the Kronk gym up sometimes. I help Emanuel Steward with the fighters. Domonique Dolton is going to be the next welterweight champ. I'm helping out with training him.

SM: How do fighters compare today to your era?

WL: You know my first training was against a WWII veteran, Skinny Davidson. He was a champion during the 1920's. I trained with a lot of old school boxers. Now all these guys are gone. They had a ton of wisdom and know how back then. Hopefully I can pass that on. A lot of trainers now are more of opportunists. They just don't have the knowledge. Just because a guy has boxed doesn't mean he can be a good teacher. Some out there are good but it's just not the same.

SM: What about employment, what are you doing now?

WL: I worked for Parts Galore and got laid off from there. I work now for a small construction firm.

SM: You mentioned earlier that your father pushed you into boxing. Did you learn to love boxing at all?

WL: I learned to love the people in boxing. I might have loved it more if my father wasn't so forceful about it. I think my father was related to Idi Amin (laughing). If we didn't do what he said, he'd do us. My father used to help train Michael Spinks. He always told me that's how I should be. I always told him that I just wasn't going to be Michael. I really never would have chose boxing. I would have chose basketball, baseball or football. Boxing was never on my agenda.

SM: Caveman any final words or what do you want people to know about you?

WL: That I fell into the deepest darkness that anyone can fall into.

SM: Caveman thanks and the best of luck to you.

WL: Thanks Shawn.

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