

Malcolm Joel "Flash" Gordon
1947- 2015:
A Portrait of the Artist

Well, of course, he was mad – most artists are. He was also an unrepentant non conformist. An enigma, a paradox and a contradiction of terms.

A satirist, caricaturist, a Herald, a guru, a pamphleteer, a gonzo journalist, a finder of facts, defender of truths, a hater of lies, a chronicler of fact and an inventor of fictions.

A gadfly, a muckraker. A Quixote without his Rocinante, a Diogenes without his lamp, an Odysseus sans Calypso searching for truth and fulfillment in the abyss of the boxing business.

He compiled his boxing records with the mathematical precision of a Ramanujan. He maintained his integrity with the zeal of a Thomas Moore though his punctuation, syntax and spelling were something out of Finnegans Wake.

He was an anti-grammarian of the first order.

Morphologically, he resembled a long haired, diminutive (5' 2") version of Woody Allen – neuroses and all.

Philosophically speaking he was Count Kropotkin in keds.

The unhippest of hippies he didn't smoke, drink or take drugs. His only admitted foray into the sexual revolution was assignation with a prostitute that resulted in his asking for a refund. After that, he kept his own company.

He cared nothing for fame or fortune, money or prestige. He was the ultimate idealist turned bitterest cynic.

All his life he danced to his own music – then died in the deafening silence of self imposed loneliness.

Malcolm Joel Gordon – better known as "Flash" to his fans, admirers and detractors – was born to a Jewish family in the Bronx, New York in 1947.

He graduated from the New York City High School of Art and Design and, after a family dispute and being rejected by the armed forces on, "psychological grounds" - he moved into a one room apartment in Sunnyside, Queens – a personal hermitage that he would inhabit for the next 50 years till his death in 2015.

He chose Sunnyside to be nearest his two great passions: railroads and boxing. The former occupied a main rail yard north of his home. The latter, a boxing club Sunnyside Gardens – to the south.

At the train yards he would sketch - in the most meticulous detail – trains and engines, signals and switches, trellises and water towers with the intricate precision of a master draftsman. Only one thing was missing: living things.

Nary a bird nor a cat, a dog nor an insect – much less a fellow human being- appeared in his eerily, desolate landscapes. It was a portent of a self imposed life of desolation and loneliness that was to consume him.

At the boxing arena an alter ego emerged. Here he could be sociable, funny and gregarious.

He compiled records of the boxers and kept notes on their managers and trainers. And he ran into his alter ego – Johnny Bosdal (AKA: ' Bos').

A more incongruous pairing would have been hard to imagine.

Flash played George to Bosdal's Lenny – had Lenny been an idiot savant. A 6' 3" blond haired Brooklyn born son of Norwegian and Welsh immigrants Bosdal looked like something that should be holding a spear in the Ring Cycle.

As much as an ascetic as was Flash so was Bos his polar opposite. A hedonist of Falstaffian dimensions there wasn't a vice that Bosdal didn't fall heir to or engage in. Never the less this disparate pair for a partnership of sorts that resulted in the formation of the Charlie Green fan club (Members: Two) – and the launching of Tonight's Boxing Program.

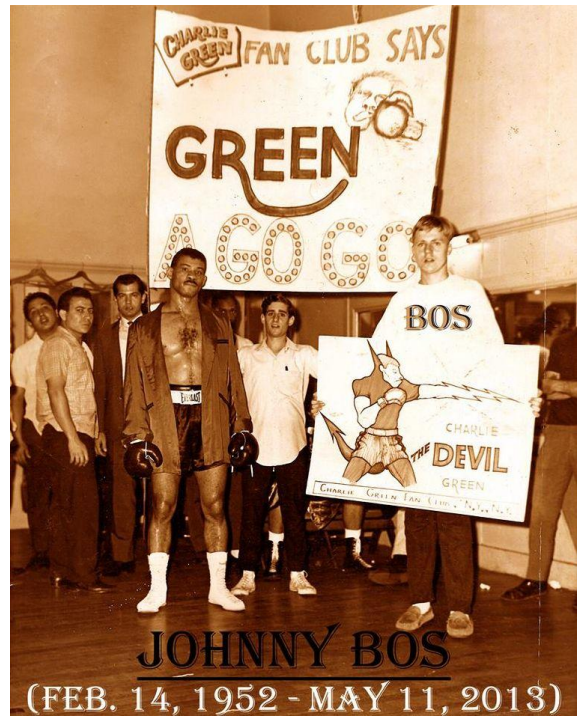
RISE....

Flash purchased a used offset machine with the funds left over from his Bar Mitzvah and began cranking the most rudimentary of rudimentary publications.

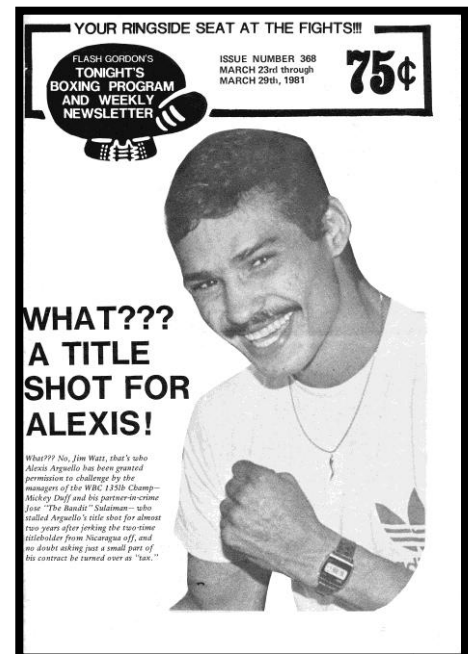
They sold the program outside of the recently opened Madison Square Garden and at small clubs in Northern New Jersey and Manhattan.

Originally it was a valentine card to the fight game. Praises and plaudits bestowed on every four round boxer, sparring partner, cornerman and roustabout. A thesaurus of superlatives was needed to keep up the flow of benedictions delivered by Flash and – now "Bos" upon every and any member of the boxing community – no matter how obscure or non descript.

Of course they developed a following among who had never seen their names in print - as well as every



Charlie Green, Flash Gordon and Johnny Bos



manager whom, for a mere request – could see their boxer listed as the second coming of Joe Louis or the most recent embodiment of Sugar Ray Robinson. Every promotion was fabulous, every manager fantastic, every fighter the greatest of his time.

Contributors, also, started pouring in. Everyone, it seemed, desired to be an unpaid contributor to Tonight's Boxing Program. Bruce Trampler, now Top Rank's Hall of Fame matchmaker, dispatched from his college dorm in Ohio and Jack Obermeyer sent his jottings over from Staten Island.

Anyone who had written an elementary school composition, high school essay, college term paper or filled out a postcard at any time in their lives began inundating Flash with columns, reports, editorials and results o all of which, were printed in their unfettered , unedited and unexpurgated copy.

Everyone in the business read it, talked about, contributed bits and pieces to it.

Gordon expanded his horizons to Philadelphia – where he published programs for then fledgling, promoter J. Russell Peltz. He printed a New York State Boxing Record Book and then an East Coast Record Book while launching a weekly boxing publication. All the while maintaining his honesty, integrity and, irrepressible idealism. But boxing being boxing things began to change.

As he researched and compiled fighter's records for his publications he invariably compared them to those of the Ring Record Book. The Ring was the, self proclaimed, "Bible of Boxing" and what it – or any of its publications - printed was gospel. Or not.

Flash began uncovering error upon error upon error. He presented his corrections to The Ring staff – and was ignored. He resubmitted his findings – and was dismissed. He printed his record book and The Ring editors threatened to sue. He offered them his records for free. No dice. All boxing records were theirs – now and forever, in perpetuity. Flash demurred. He would print and sell his record books and write an introduction proclaiming his accurate statistics and declaiming those of the Ring's, its venerated editor's – Nat "Fossil"- and its contributors.

The once long haired – if not, fair haired – novitiate was no longer a member of the faithful but a heretic and his East Coast Record book his Ninety-Five Theses.

On other fronts, boxing managers, promoters, matchmaker and agents – as is their wont – were exploiting young Mr. Gordon's naivete as they readily supplied his publication with items about their rivals and used the newsletter as an outlet for their personal vendettas.

Unlike the scrupulousness that he applied to his record compilations the policy of the weekly publication and program was to let run every and any item you were given verbatim. Believing the piety of the source to be unvarnished in its truth.



As more and more denizens of the fistic community used the pages of Flash's publications to air their grievances and carry out their personal vendettas Mr. Gordon's eyes began opening.

More and more sarcasm filled his columns. More cartoons – caricaturing the faults and foibles of boxing's denizens began filling the pages. Satire was replacing sentimentality as the rule of the day.

Yet still he maintained his independence and integrity. He could not be bought or sold. He turned down offers from Stanley Weston and Lew Eskin – (of which, on his recommendation I became the beneficiary) to join their publications.

He turned down investors who offered to have his newsletter professionally printed and edited.

He would not do publicity for managers, promoters or boxers. He refused free meals and offers to put a telephone in his home or tickets to Garden events – preferring to listen games of his beloved Rangers on radio in his one room apartment while dining on Campbell's condensed soup.

He was content with being a cult figure in the little world of professional boxing – even as he grew more skeptical of that world that he inhabited.

Then his world changed.

FALL...

In 1976 his old nemeses – the editors of The Ring magazine – decided to go big time and launch a tournament in conjunction with the promoter Don King and ABC television. King would be the promoter, ABC would serve as broadcaster and the Ring would supply the ratings from which the names of the boxer's who were participating were to be drawn. The Ring's sacrosanct reputation and impeccable accuracy of their boxing records would anoint the competition. All was right with the world – until it wasn't.

Upon the revelation of the participants Flash immediately began exposing the lack of credentials of most of them, the fraudulent ring records supplied for them and the exclusive cartel of managers benefiting from the inclusion of inferior boxers at the expense of superior ones.

Gordon's zeal became an obsession as nearly every article damned and condemned the corruption of the tournament. He wrote letters to ABC executives, the Attorney General of New York, the Governor of New York. National publications - not to mention – television networks – picked up the story. A scandal ensued. ABC cancelled the tournament. Malcolm Gordon was a hero. The Upton Sinclair or Carl Schurz of 'fistiana'.

He continued to work on his magnum opus – a North American boxing record book. Precise and accurate records compiled in a pre computer age. He was fanatical in his pursuit – monies notwithstanding.

Meanwhile his, always delicate, psyche was undergoing a metamorphosis that would, ultimately, transform him from eccentric neurotic to isolated psychotic.

His new found celebrity did not manifest itself into a burst of ego-maniacal self aggrandization but, rather, transformed him into a crusader battling all the, perceived villains and villainous of the boxing world. He had become his own super hero. In, effect, he had become the real Flash Gordon: the "Defender of the (Boxing) Earth" - and he saw a Ming the Merciless behind every corner and under every bed.

He was in his personal Skorpil War - a self appointed crusader battling the forces of evil for the good of mankind. The only difference being that, instead of battling the likes of Azura the Witch Queen, Bruka and the Giants of Frigia he was attacking Bob Arum, Don King, Top Rank, the WBC, the WBA, ABC, CBS as well as anyone and everyone in his path. In actuality he was battling his own demons.

Meanwhile, he magnum opus moved forward. He would print, layout and bind his book by himself. The massive undertaking grew from 200 to 300 to 500 pages with the cost growing exponentially.

He took orders for the book at \$30 per copy. Money came in - but never enough to cover the cost.

His obsession consumed him. He took the book to a professional printer. There was always more work , more statistics, more photographs - more bills. Hundreds of dollars came in - thousands of dollars went out.

All the while his bread and butter - the weekly publication- suffered He had transformed his publication from a combination of Punch and Boxing News into Lucifer the Light Bearer - a vehicle for his own self proclaimed revolution.

The cartoons grew more aggressive, the prose more scatological, the editorial policy more and more virulent. The paranoia exploded - and, sometimes, with good reason.

He was beaten up and assaulted by a boxing manager who had been involved in the corrupt tournament. Another one attacked him after being constantly lampooned.

The satirical cartoons and bon mots which had endeared publication were abandoned for frontal attacks and assaults on the ever growing enemies he perceived all around him - while the obsession - The Magnum Opus- drowned him in debt and robbed him of time.

To read through the arc of his publication's existence is to follow a descent into madness as if viewing the canvases of Van Gogh through his decline and fall.

Initially they were infused with idealism and good humored lampooning. Then sardonic criticism and an influx of cynicism. Finally page after page of profanity laced rambling rants. He had gone from the innocence of the Crouching Boy with Sickle to the menacing Wheatfield with Crows - and the crows consumed him.

By now, subscribers to his , near defunct , publication were asking for their money back - as were those who had sent him thirty dollars for the 'Magnum Opus' There was to be no

Magnum Opus – the man who had maintained his integrity while eschewing worldly goods - had run out of mind and money.

He had learned that the "Build it and they will come" - or "Print it and they will buy" philosophy did not apply.

His publication ceased at the expense of his book. Would be customers reported him to the postal authorities and asked him to be charged with mail fraud – if their precious fifty or sixty dollars was not returned to them.

His now, legion of enemies, rejoiced, "The incorruptible is corrupt" they declared. "He is just as much a crook as the rest of us." The man in the glass house was caught red handed with a fist full of stones.

His money gone, his reputation sullied, his integrity challenged and his, once abiding, idealism shattered forever, he did what any self respecting flower child of the sixties would be expected to do he: turned out, tuned out and, ultimately, dropped out.

He became an urban legend. Like Elvis and Judge Crater. Sightings would be reported of him at the main branch of the New York public library , Times Square or his, once beloved Sunnyside rail yards where he would sketch his desolate landscapes of inorganic matter devoid of humanity.

Some would write him letters - which, of course, were never returned. Others would venture to his Sunnyside cloister and ring a bell that was never answered or knock at a door that was never opened.– There were rumors that he had been confined to an asylum – no need He had created his own self imposed solitary confinement. Robinson Crusoe of Queens thank you! - and no Friday need apply ..

Ultimately, he had become the sole author of his exile and misanthropy and it got him. He led a Collyeresque existence and was found dead in his room on or about October 25, 2015. A neighbor had called the Health Department to report a "Strange odor" emitting from his apartment. It wasn't chicken soup.

There was nearly a ton of debris and detritus in the one room residence of 50 years. It took them a month to clear it out. Perhaps he was still editing the last pages of his great work - like Joe Gould and his Oral History of Our Time. The rubble of a lifetime may have collapsed upon him. We will never know.

In the ultimate irony this, most religious of atheists, was buried by the Jewish Burial Society, a group that inters the Jewish indigent.

He was laid to rest in an unmarked grave at Mount Richmond cemetery on Staten Island. He was his own Magnum Opus.

RIP

From Don Majeski