

You should've seen it then



GEORGE CANTOR

"You think the Atlantic Ocean looks good now? You should have seen it back in the '40s. That's when it was really an ocean."

Burt Lancaster in Atlantic City.

When Jack Sherman came home from Miami Beach two years ago, he told the cabbie at Metro Airport to take him to the

Royal Palm Hotel.

"You sure you want to go there, pal?" asked the driver. "That's a pretty rough neighborhood."

"That's all right," said Sherman. "I've

■ **Memories:** Boxer, city don't age gracefully, but images remain of the vibrant downtown Detroit had in the '40s.

lived in rough neighborhoods before."

He is 78 now. Parkinson's disease has slowed the quick boxer's stride, muted his voice to a raspy whisper.

But while others may walk along Detroit's Park Avenue and see only a city in its ruin, blank-eyed windows and blasted faces, Jack Sherman has come home. To the Detroit he remembers.

"My wife died two years ago and I had a lot of time on my hands so I thought it was time to come back. You should have seen this street in the '40s. This city," he says, looking from the window of the hotel coffee shop at the emptiness outside.

"Oh, there was moneys here, lots of money. You just had to know how to get it.

"Right down there was the Paddock Bar. Jack Dempsey's manager owned it for a while. It was the big hangout for the sports crowd in the '40s. You'd go in there on a weekend night and everyone who was in town showed up. Jake LaMotta. K.O. Morgan. Guys you never heard of now but who were big shooters back then.

"LaMotta. I had an interest in one of his fights, out at the U of D Stadium. Fought a kid named Jimmy Edgar. Greatest fight I ev-

er saw. They called him The Bull, y'know. He just kept coming at you. Kept coming. LaMotta lost that fight, I thought, took a terrific beating, but they weren't going to give it to the kid on a decision. So he got the win."

Sherman fought as a welterweight back in the 1930s, following in the path of his older brother, Morrie, who was state champion in that weight. After that, he was involved in gambling, some legal and some not, here and in Las Vegas and in Newport, Ky. He even ran a tool and die shop for a while.

He takes out the old photographs.

"That's my brother. He fought the best, fought 'em all. I used to train with Barney Ross. You heard of him? Great champion out of Chicago. All the attributes and a gentleman, too. Anyhow, Morrie was never of that caliber but they set up a fight with Barney to give my brother a nice payday.

"The deal was that Morrie would go six and then go down. Instead, he went down in the second. 'Why'd you do that for?' I asked him. 'I knew what I was gonna get paid, so why take the punishment?' he said. Very practical guy, my brother.

"Here's me with my manager. Used to hang out in a bar next to the Roxy Theatre on Woodward. Sharp dresser. Look at him. Looks like George Raft in the old gangster movies. All the guys in the Purple Gang used to come into the place. I think my manager was part of that crowd, too. Years later, they found him and one of his

JACKIE SHERMAN

associates in a field near Pontiac, kind of clutching each other's hands when the bullets hit.

"He used to tell the tough guys 'Leave the kid alone,' meaning me. 'Leave the kid alone. He's a good kid.' So all those tough guys were always nice to me.

"Wish I had a picture of Joe Louis. Terrific guy. He always called me Jakie. I could never figure out why. To everyone else I was Jackie. But with Joe it was always Jakie. I was a pit boss at the Aladdin when he was working at Caesar's Palace and every time he'd see me he'd give me a hug and say: 'Those were great times, Jakie.' A lovely man.

"I had maybe 20 some fights and then I quit. I never had the taste for it that my brother had. I saw what happened to the guys who got hit too many times and I had other things I wanted to do with my brain. Funny thing, though. When I was out in California, because I used to box I got hired as an extra for one of those Joe Palooka movies. Made \$7.50 a day. That was my big movie career.

"I made a living at it. It wasn't hard to do that back here in the '30s. They paid \$50 a fight and later on, I got a cut of the gate. Of course, the mob was in everything back then. The fights, the nightclubs. But I remembered what my manager told me. I left them alone and they left me alone."

Lots of pictures. At ringside tables in the night spots. In a boxer's stance, with the Star of David on his trunks.

"I came back here after the war and you couldn't believe the money in this town," he says. "I opened a place on Linwood and Richton, the Linwood Veterans Club. The house game was stuss (a cross between draw poker and monte). A strong game for the house. We did very nicely there.

"Every Halloween we'd give a big party for the

neighborhood kids. The cops liked that and so they never gave us any problems. Besides, I knew the crowd. I didn't want anyone to get hurt there, lose more than he should. I had a policy that anyone could get 10 percent of what he lost there back. Used to be a barbershop right next door

... "Nate's," I said.

"Yeah, that's right," said Sherman. "Nate's."

"That's where I got my hair cut when I was a little kid," I said. "I must have been in your place because that's where we always went out begging on Halloween. You mean to tell me that the Linwood Veterans Club was a gambling hall?"

"What'd you think we did there," said Sherman. "Show war movies?"

Well, as a matter of fact, I guess I did.

The Royal Palm is now called the Park Avenue Hotel. All the other places along the street are either shuttered up or gone. The Paddock, which became Cliff Bell's. The Tuller. Even the Statler, where the elite hung out, looming like an enormous brick cadaver at the end of the street.

We close the picture album and shake hands.

"It's not really that bad down here," he says. "That advice still works for me. You leave them alone and they'll leave you alone. I'm just a downtown guy, anyhow.

"But this street. I remember once I owed Eddie Moss some money. I was working down in Newport and every other year some reformer would shut the town down for a month. So I'd come up here for a while. I wanted to pay Eddie what I owed him but I didn't know where to find him. So I just hung out on Park and, sure enough, I saw him the first night back in town.

"Everyone showed up here. That's what this street used to be like."

You get the idea it's the street he still sees.