

Death Row Interview

By Joe Cicchelli Jr.

Waynesburg, PA, November 2001

The picture that I had in mind as I drove the nine-hour journey to reach The State Correctional Institution at Greene Prison to visit former boxer Anthony "Two Guns" Fletcher on death row, didn't match the reality of the prison. As I got closer I had imagined I'd see a dark, tall, gloomy structure looming off in the distance. Instead the structure was so unassuming that I had to ask for directions even just minutes away from it. In fact, it is a fairly new prison (built only in 1993) that sits on a well-maintained and manicured tract of land. Inside as well, the prison seemed very orderly and quiet as I walked un-chaperoned through the long corridors- the only sound being when the doors opened automatically in front of me as I approached them. Definitely not what I expected. But I soon found out the sound of silence for these death row inmates is deafening.

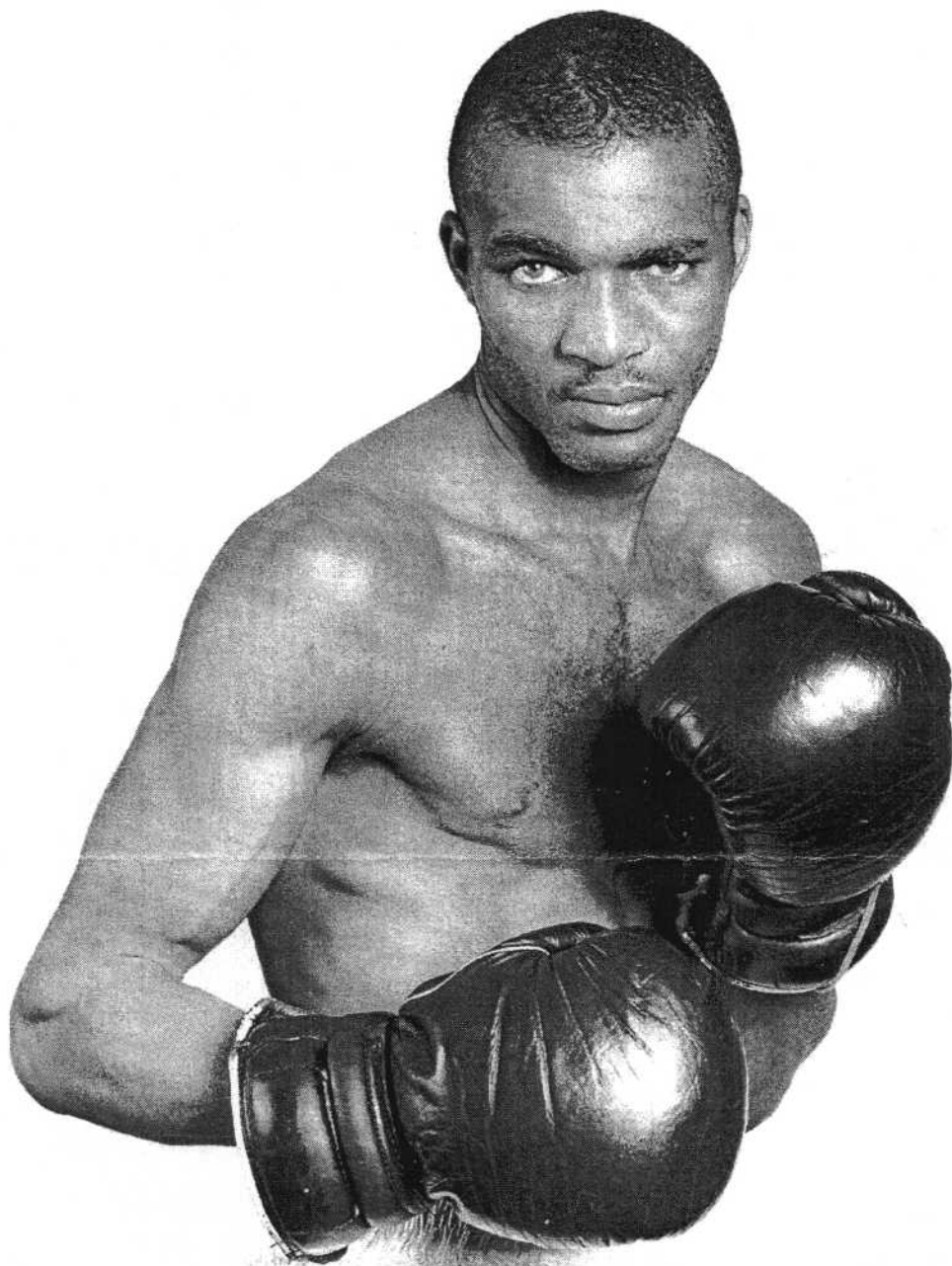
I entered the room where I was to interview Anthony Fletcher. Since he's on death row this was a non-contact visit so we had a glass partition between us. We have been in touch for some time by sending letters so I felt like I already knew him when I entered the room. I put my fist against the glass and he did the same on the other side. He was wearing a bright orange jumpsuit with his name printed on the front of it. "Two-Guns" appears to be in good physical shape- possibly even at his former fighting weight. But at age 45 and after many years spent in prison system you can see it has taken its toll on him.

Possibly because he has a lot to say concerning his case and few chances to communicate it to the outside world, he speaks very quickly, which doesn't make it any easier to record what he's saying when no recording devices (or cameras for that matter) are allowed inside. His excitement also shows when at times he stands up to demonstrate a combination and does a little shadow-boxing despite his handcuffs. Objectivity is a tough thing to achieve when you really want to believe someone as likable as "Two-Guns" (and I do want to believe his presence on death row is a mistake) but in all fairness I haven't thoroughly researched the details of the case so I can only hope that in the end justice is served.

Since our meeting Anthony has sent me a mountain of documents concerning his case and his appeal (meticulously pointing out the highlights of each important passage), and although I'm no legal expert, some of the points that he makes do raise some doubts in your mind...

JC: Please tell our readers about your amateur career.

AF: I started late in amateur boxing in 1975 at the age of 25 when I was discharged from the Army. I won the Regional, National and 6 out of 7 PA State Golden Gloves. But lost in the Nationals in Hawaii in 1977. I was also the



Anthony "Two Guns" Fletcher

Ohio Fair champion 4 years straight. I also beat Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini (2 times), Milton McCrory, Jimmy and Melvin Paul and Harry Arroyo in the amateurs. At one point Sugar Ray Leonard and his brother, Roger, worked my corner during an amateur fight. My first professional fight was on June 5th 1980- so that's when I turned pro.

JC: You handed future lightweight champion Livingstone Bramble his first loss as a pro. Please tell us about that fight.

AF: It was a hard fight and he hurt me three times during the fight but I never let him know I was hurt. I beat him inside at his own game rather than box him to death. The last two rounds I beat him like the third Ali - Frazier fight; he was just coming right into all my punches.

JC: What was your relationship with famed trainer/manager Manny Steward?

AF: Manny along with Milton McCrory and Tommy Hearn approached me about joining Kronk Gym and turning professional. But I wanted to try and win the Olympic gold medal. Plus I wanted to stay loyal to my trainer - which turned out to be a mistake because he sold me out to better himself. I see Manny's interviews on HBO and other places all the time and he speaks the truth. I'd like to ask Manny to give my best to the gang up there.

JC: You're brother, Frank "The Animal" Fletcher, was a regular on Saturday afternoon boxing during the 1980's. Tell us a little about his career and what's he up to these days.

AF: He's locked up in Whitedear, PA. In a

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federal jail named Allenwood. He got a 21 year sentence- he's done 8 years already. He was convicted of carrying a gun and then threatening a girl with that gun. Frank was fighting because he had the heart to fight and I think he started in jail somewhere, but when he came out he took it for good and no one could beat him because he believed in himself and had a big heart. When my brother was in shape he could beat anyone out there and it was my opinion that he was the only one out there who could match Marvin Hagler heart-to-heart and win because Frank did not back down. He had the fight signed with Hagler three months down the line but he took a fight (against Wilfred Scypion). I told him not to because I knew he would take Scypion lightly and might lose- as he did. Russell Peltz and Marty Feldman did well by my brother, they made him a household name, but he didn't know how to handle the greatness in his real life but he could handle anything in that ring.

JC: I could be wrong but was it your Mom who jumped in the ring after one of Frank's fights and attacked the other boxer? Please tell us about that.

AF: No, my mom didn't jump into the ring to attack no one. She was called into the ring to share the victory with Frank, but once the decision went the other way I think one of Frank's friends hit someone and things got thrown into the ring and hit Scypion's wife and they thought it was my family. But it was a fan of Frank's- my mom was getting out of the way and I was in the hallway at that time.

JC: Do you get to watch the fights from in here?

AF: Yeah, we get HBO and FOX Sports. But no PPV or Showtime.

JC: Do any boxers or boxing people come to visit you these days?

AF: None. Never!

JC: Are there any boxing facilities here?

AF: None. They don't even allow me to shadowbox when I'm in the yard. But at least I can get away with it in the cell.

JC: What size is your cell? How many hours are you in there a day?

AF: It's about 15 feet by 7 or 8 feet. I'm in the cell 23 hrs a day during weekdays and all day on the weekends.

JC: As you know James Scott was a light-heavyweight contender some years back who fought out of Rahway Prison and the bouts were even televised. Would you like to see that happen here?

AF: Well, statewide that was stopped. So you won't see that happening, especially with death row inmates, because they feel that they are too dangerous. It's like a fear factor with allowing death-row inmates to do something to stay in shape. These guards feel like that if the time comes to execute you they do not want us strong



Anthony, Fletcher, mom Lucille Fletcher and former 140 & 147 champ Meldrick Taylor

enough to overpower them when they come to take you away.

JC: If they did have it, would you like to take part in it?

AF: Oh, yeah. I would love to train youngsters to box and find a better way of life when they go home, something that would help keep them off the streets once they realize they have a good future in boxing. Cause once you have been locked up you have a lifetime attitude against the system and boxing is the only legal way to let it out- once you're in the ring.

JC: I'm going to throw out at you some names of boxers who have spent some time in prison both past and present- please tell me what you think of each of them:

JC: Tony Ayala?

AF: I knew him years ago; that's my man but he has problems with alcohol. It's a shame that they went through a lot to get him out and then (he commits another crime) and makes all his people look bad. Truly I'm on Tony's side because his dad- my man- has to feel bad himself because he allowed Tony to get that way. Because when Tony was on top he was allowed to do whatever and his dad knew about it but just looked the other way. That too would've been a great opponent for Hagler.

JC: Mike Tyson?

AF: Mike's my man too. He fought on two of my undercards in Atlantic City. Coming from the 'hood he never had anything and when we get that notoriety... And Mike's got a chip on his shoulder- if someone gets nasty with Mike he'll snap on them. Mike can't go to nightclubs because he's got a thing for the girls- kinda like my brother Frank. They cannot take "No" for an answer from a girl. But what people do not hear or know about Mike is that he is a wonderful guy and helps many people and gives to many charities and has camps for kids to go

to. But the papers always write bad about him and not the good that he does! He never forgets his friends.

JC: Ruben "Hurricane" Carter?

AF: I saw "The Hurricane" it's good but at times the case looked phony- some of the facts weren't right... Carter came here about a year ago to visit another inmate. (Sounding disappointed) He came to see me but only for a few seconds and I never got a reply from my letters to him. What more can I say? I feel that he stood me up.

JC: Fellow Philly boxer Bernard Hopkins?

AF: I'm trying to get in contact with him- he's my man! I won 10 envelopes by betting on him against Trinidad. We're friends. He was too strong for Tito... The terrorist attack that caused the postponement of the fight was a real tragedy. I think Bernard should go down as one of the all-time greats in his class and Big George (Foreman) should tell Bernard man-to-man that he is sorry for downing him all through the fight about his style of fighting. But George did try to clear it up at the end of the fight.

JC: As a former boxer do the inmates in here show you more respect that most?

AF: They do give me a lot of respect- but not because I was a boxer- I'm a nice guy so they give me respect for that. I have no problems with nobody in here. Once you land on death row you all become like a family fighting for the same cause (freedom) and not to hurt each other. We help one another to survive in these situations of no respect from the courts, and these guards who believe that their job is to treat us like shit.

JC: What boxers do you admire today?

AF: I like Hopkins, Mayweather, Spadaford, Vargas needs to stay more active. DeLaHoya is

a businessman- he's shot because he has no heart or drive left. But Sugar (Shane Mosley) is the man! I like Shane because Shane is willing to take chances in the ring. The best fight out there is Mosley and Vargas. Shane is in the driver's seat; it's up to Vernon (Forrest) to take the lesser payday to get the chance to prove himself.

JC: Which do you dislike, if any?

AF: Six Heads (Andrew Lewis). And (Angel) Manfredy, he's a shot fighter but he's a name fighter. He's got Sugar Ray Leonard behind him now. I thought Julio Diaz deserved the decision. I could come out right now and beat Manfredy; he's a phony always coming up with a different image. They say heavyweights can stay around longer in boxing (than lighter weight fighters) but I'll be the exception. I'll fight him right now with no tune-ups. I never abused my body. I guy like Angel could never beat me but I got to respect him because we are in the same business. So I would dislike him in the ring but outside he's a human being so I'd give him respect- that's how I feel about all boxers.

JC: Please tell us about the time you were shot.

AF: It was in 1989. I had the same car as someone who did a drive-by shooting days before. So it was in retaliation but for something I didn't do. I was in my car and this guy walked right up on me and started firing- I was hit 5 times. The only reason I survived was because I was in such great shape. But this is a time in my life that I try to forget.

JC: You're on death row for murder, please tell us how you wound up here.

AF: It's a long story, (And it is- Anthony has sent me many letters and piles of paperwork concerning all the intricacies of the case) but in a struggle over a gun I shot the man trying to kill me! They (the prosecution) never produced a gun and the autopsy report was false. I mean, I was home in bed 8 days later when they arrested me. Would a guilty man just stay at home- or would he be on the run? Two blocks right down the street from the scene???

AF: They offered me a lighter sentence if I was willing to testify against someone else (in an unrelated case) but I refused because I knew I was innocent.

JC: What is your execution date?

AF: My original date was a couple of months ago (May 3rd 2001) but it was put off because of the appeals.

JC: What is a day in the life of Anthony Fletcher like?

AF: I do dips, sit-ups and shadowbox in my cell. Also I'll put on layers of clothes and punch a homemade double-end bag. I put a basketball in a pair of pants and then tie each leg to a separate post. I have some access to the law library; I read legal documents concerning my case. I always spend time thinking about my (5) kids. Especially my

daughters- you know how fathers are with their daughters.

JC: How do the guards treat you?

AF: Certain ones are cool. Others slime me by taking away some of my privileges. You know or they can put the cuffs on too tight- this is a messed up place. Many guards are jealous of me because they can do nothing with their lives but be a guard. They don't like how guys treat me good and when we speak about boxing the guards don't like it.

JC: Do you believe that you will be cleared of these charges and not face the death penalty?

AF: Yes. I've got some dynamite evidence- witnesses were coerced to speak against me.

JC: You must worry that the conviction will stick and that the sentence will be carried out.

AF: No. I got faith- He came to me. I found God years ago, Jesus Christ. When I started putting my faith in God things started happening.

JC: What would you like to tell our readers about Anthony Fletcher and where he is today?

AF: I would never harm anyone, I'm not that type of guy- but I do believe in defending myself and my family.

JC: Who are the people on the outside who support you and help you to survive in here?

AF: Thankfully, there are many. Phillip and Rosemarie Triuigno ("Rosemarie has been like a second mother to me!") and their loving family. Then there's my mother Lucille who because of health reasons can't come up often. There's Stanley Wine, Nate Turner, Joe Waters, a special big sister Stephanie Alegria, Uwe Betken, Mr. Geoffrey Colegrove (school teacher), Oliver Dutschler, Magda Finnegan. Of course my son Anthony Jr. and his mother Diane Settles. Marty Feldman, who did everything a good father would do for me. Also Granluca "Sugar" Tesse, my stepson (and future boxer) Shane Kelly and Wendy have been great. All these people I just mentioned- their love keeps my heart beating.

*A legal defense fund has been set up to contribute- all donations can be sent to:

Dianne Settles
1313 S 49th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19143
Tel.: (215) 727-6779

**Or to write directly to Anthony Fletcher send letters to:

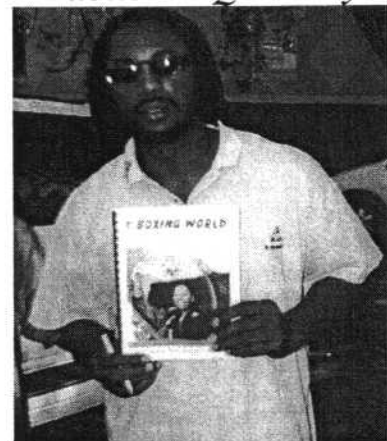
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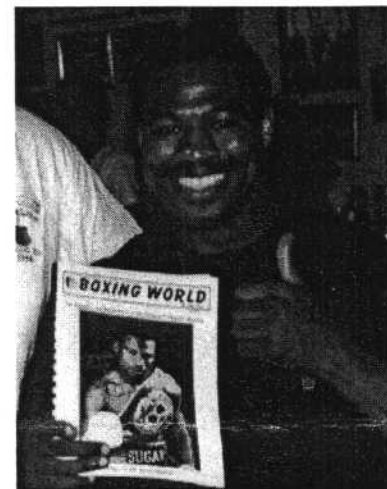
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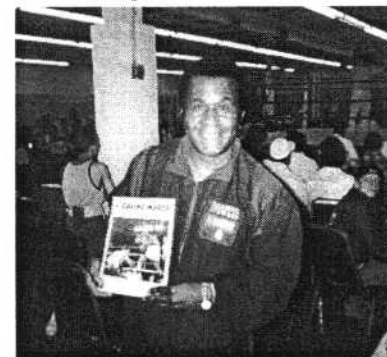
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