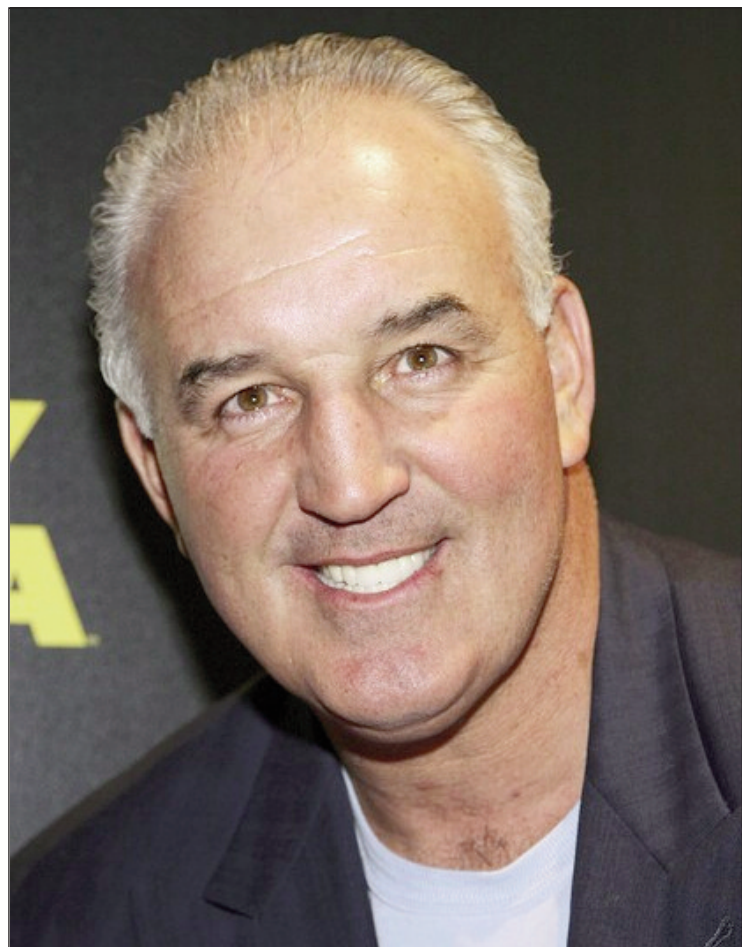




Foes once, friends now: Larry Holmes and Cooney.



Gerry Cooney in more recent times.

diction, he had his last drink on April 21, 1988, a date indelibly stamped in his brain.

The end of Cooney's storied career would come on January 15, 1990 at the Atlantic City Convention Center.

He was knocked out by George Foreman in the second round. Cooney once told a reporter this final fight helped him turn the page. "OK, I've had a great time. I got knocked down, I got up and dusted off my pants."

THE GOOD LIFE

Gerry Cooney has made his home in suburban Fanwood, New Jersey for nineteen years. He has a lovely wife and three children that he adores. The man who made his reputation as a professional athlete now proudly displays the names "family man" and "boxing legend" side-by-side on his resume.

"I love my family and have a great life," he says. "I look at it as a privilege to sign autographs and make people happy whenever I can. It's a nice feeling to be remembered."

But there is a more compelling side to this great athlete.

By his own words and deeds, the man, who will turn sixty this summer, is enjoying the most special time of his life. He is living a life of service, a believer in giving to those less fortunate through his involvement with many needy organizations, charities and orphanages since his retirement.

He founded "Fighters' Initiative for Support and Training," a non-profit organization which helps retired boxers transition from the ring to the real world by providing career assistance.

He became involved with "J.A.B.", the first union for boxers. He has supported the "Hands are Not for Hitting" program which tries to prevent domestic violence.

He makes weekly visits to Youth Consultation Service, a behavioral private health agency providing individu-

alized care for children and their families.

He has provided his support to Freedom House, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. Gerry is the boxing instructor at BrawlHouse. He co-hosts "Monday Night at the Fights" and "Friday Night at the Fights" on Sirius XM satellite radio.

"When I was a kid there were no answers," Cooney says.

"I had to bump along the road and find a way. I like to be available to help kids not do the next bad thing. I want them to walk the straight path. It's the same as I train fighters today. It's not about hitting the bags and skipping rope. It's about the whole life experience. You live your life like you're training. I try to promote that every day of my life."

And how does the transplanted New Yorker feel about living in New Jersey, where he is an approachable local celebrity to his Fanwood neighbors?

The man who regularly walks the streets of his adopted town sporting an Irish wool cap, waving to passers-by and signing autographs, has much to say on the subject.

"Listen, I'm a New Yorker, through and through. But I think New Jersey is great. I have been living here in Fanwood for about nineteen years. It's beautiful here. I have a wonderful family. New Jersey is a great place to live. I live thirty-five minutes from the city. I love it here in New Jersey."

Gerry is quick to show this writer around town and point out some favorite haunts ... Mara's Café & Bakery [250 South Avenue] where we enjoyed a great lunch.

"If you want the absolute best bagels, you've got to come to ... Fanwood Bagels & Deli [32 South Avenue] ... and a couple of doors right down here is the best pizza place in the world ... Nick's Pizza & Deli [42 South Martine Avenue]. My wife and I also like nearby towns

like Westfield ... there's Joe, the barber [Mr. J. Barber Shop, 607 S. Avenue W.], and we love Theresa's Restaurant [47 Elm Street]."

THE BEST IS YET TO BE

"I had a great experience from boxing. I did not get to where I could have been. But hopefully, through my journey, I will have talked to somebody who will get to that level in some area of their life, whether it's a mechanic, a doctor, a fighter, or a football player, that's the dream."

And Gerry Cooney has never forgotten the man who caused him so much pain and anger growing up in Huntington. He has made peace with himself as well as Tony Cooney.

"My father was sick," he says. "In order for me to live and enjoy my life I had to forgive him."

The man affectionately known by a generation of fans as Gentleman Gerry continues on his journey.

Through perseverance, self-searching, and solid family support, the Irishman with the devastating left hook has opened a new door to a happy and satisfying life, and is still punching after all these years.

John Esposito is a freelance journalist. His work has been published in The Star Ledger, The Bergen Record, and Morris County Daily Record [in New Jersey]; Greenwich Time, and Stamford Advocate [in Connecticut]; The Philadelphia Inquirer [in PA]; The Italian Tribune; and UNICO. He was a special correspondent for the online newspaper, NewJerseyNewsroom.com; and has written for numerous magazines. Mr. Esposito has interviewed such acclaimed writers as Pete Hamill, Mary Higgins Clark and John Updike. This Irish Echo article and the

complete Q. and A. interview with Gerry Cooney are also included on Mr. Esposito's website: www.PieceworkJournals.com along with his other publications. He maintains a Facebook page: "Piecework Journals by John Esposito" www.facebook.com/Piecework-Journals-by-John-Esposito-492572960923211/. Mr. Esposito lives in New Providence, NJ with his wife and two children.

