

down but
NEVER OUT

By Charles Redner

The true story of former boxing middleweight champion Joey Giardello, once baptized the “Bad Boy of Boxing,” and his wife Rosalie, who redirected their lives for the benefit of their son, Carman, born with Down syndrome.

introduction by Vince Papale





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Dedication

For Robert H. Adleman, author, *The Devil's Brigade* and eight other books. More than my first employer, he doubled as a mentor who opened my eyes to a world that I had not known existed before he revealed it. He paved the way for my career in advertising, broadcasting, publishing and writing where all things became possible. This book reflects it.

*“WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT WHAT IS ENGRAVED
IN STONE MONUMENTS,
BUT WHAT IS WOVEN INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS.”*

—PERICLES

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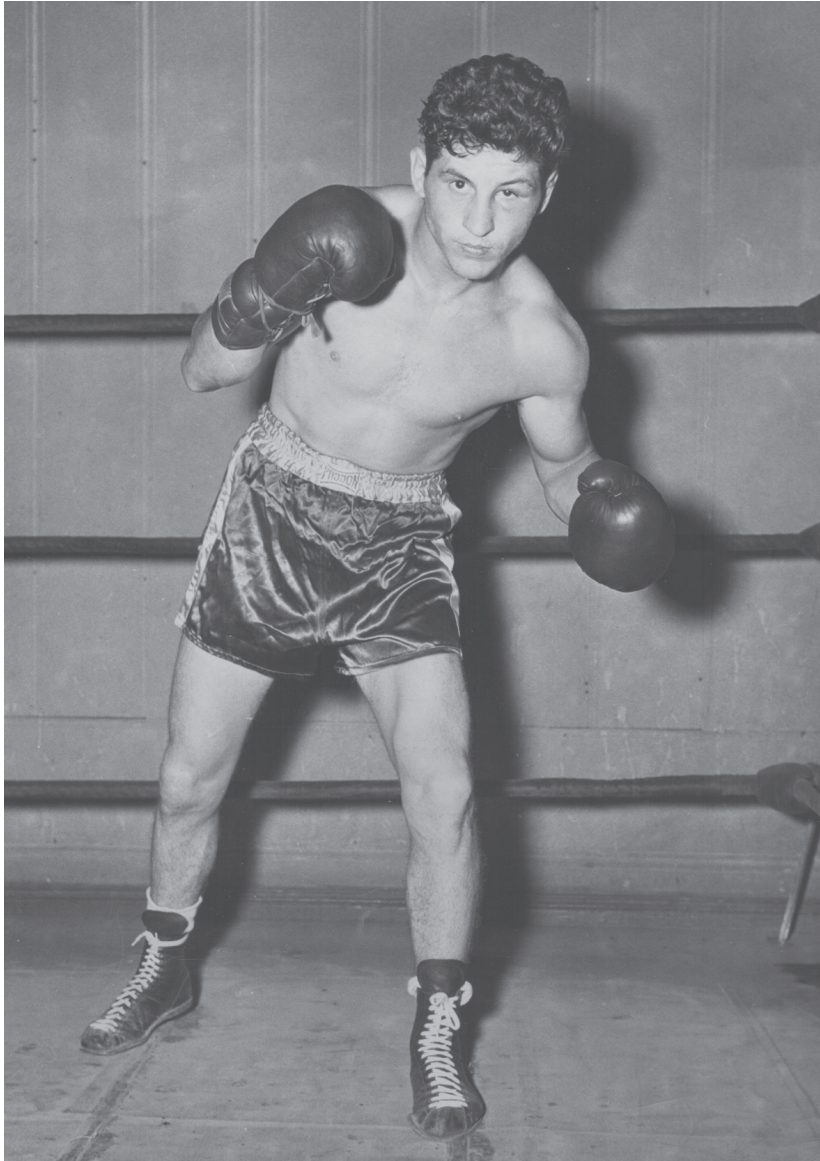
Major thanks to the many Down syndrome organizations, families and children, who welcomed me into their lives. To the planners and sponsors of the Los Angeles and Tucson Buddy Walks and the many families who freely shared their world, I salute you. To Tom Lempke and his son, Bryan, who told their Special Olympics stories, invited me into their home and allowed me to wear one of Bryan's gold medals, even if only for a few minutes. No greater thanks than to the Scholnick family, Jack and his wife Marie, their son, Mickey and daughter, Francine. If not for Jack's insistence, support and love, this project would never have made it beyond the talking stage.

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An 18-year-old Giardello poses for a publicity photo. After a few bouts, a quick-handed opponent never saw an opening like this again during a fight.

Introduction

Will the real Rocky, please stand up?

By Vince Papale

The once popular television game show, *To Tell the Truth*, always ended with the master of ceremonies asking one of three guests to rise when asked, “Will the real (fill-in the name), please stand up?” I was thinking, what if? What would have happened if Sylvester Stallone, Vince Papale and Joey Giardello were seated and the host queried, “Will the real Rocky please stand up?” Who would have stood? I imagined that all of us would have risen, but two would eventually have to sit down.

One of the two would have surprised the gathering.

Yes, Stallone wrote and starred in the 1976 blockbuster movie and its sequels, but his Rocky was a fictional character. He would sit down. Meanwhile, with my rise from the projects to a thirty-year-old professional football player with the Philadelphia Eagles, many would say that I could have qualified for the Rocky nickname. Jim Murray, the Eagles’ general manager at the time, proffered the idea of promoting me as a real-life Rocky immediately after the film’s release and phenomenal success. My agent even printed tee-shirts with a picture of me that were captioned: “Philly’s Own Rocky.”

As inspirational as my story might be, Rocky was, of course, a boxer. I was not. So I'd be next to sit.

That would leave only Joey Giardello standing. And rightly so! The former middleweight champion lived as close to the Rocky theme as anyone ever did before or after the film created the fictional legend.

The rise of Carmine Tilelli (who took the name Joey Giardello so he could join the paratroopers without parental approval) from a modest upbringing to a Boxing Hall of Fame middleweight champion classifies him, to me, as the best choice for a real-life Rocky. He knew and socialized with celebrities from the worlds of entertainment, politics, sports and business, including Vice President Richard Nixon, President John F. Kennedy, Senator Edward F. Kennedy, Frank Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio. Duke Snider, Pee-wee Reese, Carl Furillo and the rest of his beloved 1950s-era Brooklyn Dodgers were all friends. So was another Dodger with powerful Philly ties, former L.A. manager Tommy Lasorda. Giardello, of course, rooted for the Phillies when he moved to the City of Brotherly Love.

I first met Joey when he was a member of a football "chain gang" while I played for a World Football League team. I saw him on the sidelines and was in total awe, while in uniform, wanted to shake the hand of a legend. The rest of the story remains untold. I also attended the ceremony when Joey was inducted into the Philadelphia Chapter of the Italian American Sports Hall of Fame.

But there was far more to the man and his legacy than boxing and baseball. Joey was first and foremost a husband, and a father to four boys. His second son, Carman, born with Down syndrome, produced his own Rocky fairy tale. During and after his retirement from boxing, Joey raised thousands of dollars for his two favorite charities, St. John of God School for special needs children and the Special Olympics. He assisted Eunice Shriver when she launched the Special Olympics in 1968. Then in 1972, at the second games, Carman won gold. The image of the former world middleweight champion hugging his gold medal-winning champion son, a kid who really defied the odds,

is one of the many moments Charles Redner shares with all of us in *Down But Never Out*.

Joey died in September 2008, but his heritage will live on. Within the pages of *Down But Never Out*, the true spirit of the man is revealed for all to see. As the title suggests, Joey may have been down on occasion, but in the ring, he was never knocked out. The same applied in life. Now experience the dynamism and humanitarianism of Joey Giardello, champion boxer and champion father, and my choice for the “real” Philadelphia Rocky.

Vince Papale #83 Eagles, Cherry Hill, New Jersey,
October 2009

Author's note: The Vince Papale story, told in the book and movie, Invincible (2006), which starred Mark Wahlberg, provided an imposing platform for Vince to continue his inspirational journey. As a successful teacher, professional football player and a cancer survivor, Papale has experienced many of the highs and lows life can present but he always accents the positive. Now he actively encourages others to achieve their life's goals. With the publication of his next book, You can be Invincible in Tough Times, Papale plans to continue helping others across the country advance their own "Invincible" dreams.



Baby Carman (circa 1955—top) Dad (Joey Giardello) gives son, Carman, a boxing lesson in Cherry Hill home family room—mantle filled with the champ's trophies, above them world middleweight title belt.



Prologue

The Knockout Birth

February 5, 1954 • Philadelphia, PA

Rosalie Tilelli sat up straight, three pillows stuck between her back and the head of the hospital bed. She cradled her five-day-old son, Carman, in one arm. Her eyes locked onto a tiny black and white television set propped upon a food cart across the room, the portable set with its rabbit ears adjusted for the best possible reception. The grainy, flipping video made for difficult viewing, but Rosalie was delighted that the hospital staff had gone to the trouble for her. “Carman, you have to watch this fight with me. It’s your daddy’s first since you were born.” She gently shook her arm; two green eyes blinked open. The baby wrinkled his nose but didn’t cry.

The miniature figures on the screen were standing in the center of a boxing ring. The 10:00 p.m. telecast originated from New York City’s Madison Square Garden, the Mecca of boxing. One combatant, her husband, Joey Giardello, smiled cordially at his opponent. *Watch the low blows, no holding behind the head, in case of a knock down go to a neutral corner, break when I say so, let’s have a clean fight.*” Rosalie leaned forward to hear the TV commentary, the volume turned down to near in-audible in deference to the late hour.

Two chatting nurses walked into Rosalie's room together; one strode to the end of the bed, removed Rosalie's chart, made a note and placed it back on the hook. The second nurse handed Rosalie a warmed baby bottle and flopped down on the bed. "Is it time?" she asked, looking over at the television.

"The ref's giving instructions. It'll start in a minute," Rosalie replied.

The note-jotting nurse smiled at Rosalie and walked out the room. Rosalie placed the bottle in Carman's tiny mouth, her attention wholly focused on the television. Carman held the nipple in his mouth, lip not moving. Rosalie keyed on the boxing match. "This is Carman's first chance to see his father fight. I want to remember this moment," Rosalie said as she looked over at the nurse.



The referee nodded and the boxers hiked back to their corners. Joey hurried faster than usual. He lectured his trainer and cut man standing on the apron just outside the ropes, "Guys. I gotta get out of here. Rosey's still in the hospital with the newborn and I wanna see them tonight." He took a deep breath held it, puffing up his reddening cheeks. The crowd babble rose in anticipation of the bell.

"We know, Joey," said Joe Pollini, his trainer, "but watch this guy for a few rounds. He could be dangerous early."

"*Nessuna tale Fortuna*" (*No such luck*), responded Joey. Pollini jerked a towel off his fighter's neck as the bell rang.

Joey quickly turned, met his opponent in the center of the ring. Determined to end the fight quickly, he perused the attack.

Before the fight crowd had completely settled into their seats, Joey dropped Cartier on the canvas, not once but twice.

Some boxing writers would suggest that Joey Giardello didn't have a killer's instinct when he had an opponent in trouble, but that wasn't the case—at least on this night. Knowing the three-knockdown rule applied, Joey hastily threw punches from every angle, landing many. A looping right connected.

The retreating Cartier stumbled backwards. Gravity did the rest. The middleweight tumbled for the third knockdown, giving Giardello the win.

* * *

Rosalie watched the referee wave her husband away from the fallen Cartier and raise Joey's arm in victory. In less than three minutes of the first round Joey notched the win.

"Wow! That was fast! See, Carman? Daddy just won this fight for you," said Rosalie. Even she was surprised by how quickly it had ended.

"Here's Carman." She handed the newborn over to the nurse.

The nurse lifted the baby from Rosalie. Let's go; time for beddy-bye, Carman." She walked over to the television, turned it off, and marched out of the room with the baby.

Years after, Carman would joke that he remembered that fight.

* * *

Dawn approached as Joey pulled his car across the street from Methodist Hospital in south Philadelphia and parked. He shut off the engine and sat for a moment to revel in his thoughts. He let the radio play. Dean Martin's "That's Amore" blasted from car speakers. Joey loved Dean's music and this song was definitely one of his favorites. He sang along, "When you dance down the street with a cloud at your feet. You're in love." The recording ended, he turned the volume knob down until the radio clicked off. Joey *was* in love—in love with the whole world. Yes. Joey Giardello, he, *the numero uno* middleweight contender of the world floated high on life tonight. Already he was the proud father of a healthy boy at home and another born just five days ago. He was married to the cutest, sweetest girl in all of south Philly. *No sir. Heaven can't get any better than this.*

Joey stepped out of the car and walked toward the brightly lit front steps of the hospital, still humming "Amore" when he

pushed through the lobby door. He knew that it had to be beyond late for visiting, but he desperately wanted to see his wife and recently newborn son. He wanted to share his happiness with them. The Tilellis had decided that if it was a boy, they'd name the child after himself. Carmine, but spell it differently: Carman. Joey was flat-out determined to see his wife and new child.

"Visiting hours ended ages ago. Go home. Come back after ten," said the duty nurse. "No way you're coming in here now!" She stood up and puffed up her five-foot-two inch frame from behind the front desk. Joey stopped humming. He had to smirk in order to keep from laughing at the sight of this small, insignificant obstacle standing between him and his desire.

"No way yourself, I'm gonna see my boy and Rosalie." The boxer's raspy, bass voice blasted down the halls and reverberated back almost as loud. He pounded his massive fist on the counter, rattling the glass top.

Later Rosalie would confess that she'd heard him causing a fuss that night and quietly laughed at his antics.

Across the lobby, a supervisor heard the commotion and walked behind the counter to where the duty nurse steadfastly held her ground. The supervisor had recognized the famous boxer and whispered into the nurse's ear. The nurse nodded slightly, and then she lifted her chin. She glared back at Joey. "Okay. Okay ... IF ... *if* you quiet down. I'll take you to the nursery to see your son. But you can't disturb your wife—she needs her rest."

Joey nodded, accepting the deal. He followed her to the nursery. Soon he was looking through the glass at his son. He couldn't see much. A tiny pink bald head barely peeked out of a blue blanket tightly wrapped around the little body. Joey noticed that the neatly block-printed sign on the bassinet had the name "Tilelli" crossed out. Someone had grabbed a pen and scribbled "Giardello" under it.

Joey lowered his head and smiled contently. He felt a tug on his shirt from the impatient nurse. He looked down at her. He smiled again and meekly followed her to the front door. The roaring lion had been tamed, for the moment, by a docile, tiny

wisp of a human; his second son, Carman, whom the world awaited.



*Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, left, signs contract to fight Joey Giardello for the boxing middleweight crown in 1964 as unidentified executive looks on. Denzel Washington played Rubin "Hurricane" Carter in the 1999 movie, *The Hurricane*. The film wrongly depicts the final round of the fight in which Carter is shown beating a defenseless Giardello. After winning a defamation of character lawsuit, the film's director, Norm Jewison was required to state on the DVD that Giardello clearly won the fight.*

1

The Hollywood Hurricane

January 11, 2000 • Cherry Hill, NJ

The reporter drove down the street slowly, nearly stopping in front of each house as he checked the numbers on the curb. As the black sedan crept past, one neighbor peeked out from behind parted curtains of her two-story, colonial house beyond a perfectly trimmed lawn. Finding the address, the guest pulled into the driveway of Carmine Tilelli, who had renamed himself Joey Giardello many years before, and his wife, Rosalie. Mr. and Mrs. Tilelli had moved into the house in 1962.

Viewed from the front, the style and upkeep didn't distinguish the place from any other property in the suburban environs. The custom-built tri-level structure and an oversized backyard pool hinted that the owners may have been slightly more upscale than their neighbors during an earlier time. The home phone number had remained the same for nearly 40 years, and remained unconnected to voice mail or a fancy answering machine. It just rang if no one was home to pick up.

This family offered little clue as to their past public lineage. At this house, the Tilellis had raised four sturdy sons—Joseph, Carman, Paul, and Steve. The first two, Joseph and Carman, were

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born and reared for a short time in south Philadelphia before the family's migration to southern New Jersey.

As he stopped and pulled up the emergency brake, Bernard Fernandez paused and wondered if the adjacent neighbors, or those directly across the street, knew the history of this quiet Italian-American family. Did any of these residents have a clue that they were living next door or across the street from two distinguished champions?

Nearly 10:00 a.m. Fernandez mused that by this time tomorrow, the neighbors would know at least half of the story—the “Joey Giardello” portion. The account about the household's other celebrity, Carman, the Special Olympian, would surely soon be retold too.

* * *

In a semi-darkened Philadelphia movie house, Carmine Tilelli, who 35 years earlier had been known professionally as Joey Giardello, stared up at the huge wide-screen. He was dumbfounded, agitated. The proud sixty-nine year-old man couldn't believe what his eyes had just absorbed, what had assaulted his ears. He couldn't remain still any longer. He shattered the quiet of the attentive audience: “NOOOOOO!”

Rosalie grabbed her husband's shoulder. With a finger to her lips, she whispered, “Shhhhhh,” in an effort to calm him.

Movie viewers responded. “Be quiet!”

“Shut up!”

“Shhhhhh!”

“Yo, mouth!”

Joey had just watched the twenty-foot high image of actor, Ben Bray, portraying him as the world middleweight champion. There he was leaning defenseless against the ropes, being pummeled by Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, played by Denzel Washington, in the biggest fight scene of the acclaimed movie, *The Hurricane*.

Only it didn't happen that way. Not at all. The film's deviation from the truth caused Joey to vent, to disturb the peace.

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The scene allegedly depicted the 15th and final round of the 1964 title bout between Joey Giardello, the champion, and challenger Rubin “Hurricane” Carter. The film version fictitiously portrayed the last seconds of that round. In the scene, Denzel’s “Hurricane” delivered eleven unanswered blows. After a few pawing responses Ben Bray’s Joey tied-up his opponent. After the referee quickly separated their clutching arms, “Carter” landed twelve more unreciprocated punches to the head and body. The weary, bashed and bloodied “Joey,” took the punishment with hands down, defenseless. He somehow managed to stand upright until the bell ended the assault, the round, and the fight.

Film-goers then heard a ringside commentator announce above belligerent crowd rumblings: “It has taken thirty-five minutes for these judges to tell us what this hometown crowd already knows. Joey Giardello is about to lose the middleweight crown to Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter.”

A bell clanged four times and the ring announcer finally blared out the verdict:

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. IT’S A
UNANIMOUS DECISION
— THE WINNER AND STILL CHAMPION
— JOEY GIARDELLO. GIARDELLO!”

On screen, Joey’s hometown Philadelphia fight crowd boos heartily, and the camera pans to disgruntled faces of ringside fans, reporters, and Denzel Washington mimicking a dejected Rubin “Hurricane” Carter. A blow-by-blow television announcer looks directly into the camera. “All I can say is that these Philadelphia judges must have been watching a different fight—because ‘Hurricane’ Carter took the fight.”

During this sequence, Joey could barely keep his seat. He shook his head in disgust. “I don’t believe this. This is a joke. He never hit me that much in 15 rounds,” he quietly informed Rosalie.

Carmine and Rosalie were guests of the man who had pulled into their driveway hours earlier, *Philadelphia Daily News* sports

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reporter Bernard Fernandez. He had taken the “Giardellos” for a matinee screening of *The Hurricane*. Universal Studios promoted the film as “based on a true story,” the troubled life of Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, a top middleweight contender who, in 1966, two years after the fight depicted in the movie, was accused and convicted of a triple homicide in Paterson, New Jersey. Carter was vindicated and released after 19 years in prison when a federal judge overturned the convictions. The judge “found a pattern of prejudice and racism” during the trials. This became the principal theme of the movie—a compelling story to say the least—especially as Carter’s legal problems took place during the height of the Civil Rights movement, when equal rights and rioting dominated the evening news almost as much as the Vietnam War.

No matter how true the original story, Hollywood is well known for taking artistic liberties with particular scenes to create greater conflict, more trying situations, stronger motives and more lovable or more notorious characters. That’s why they preface biopics like *The Hurricane* with the non-retractable “based on a true story.” Studios do anything to create on-screen personae that can turn small films into successes, large-budget films into blockbusters. In *The Hurricane*, it was decided to spin the truth about the Giardello-Carter fight—suggesting that Giardello, who actually won a convincing, unanimous decision, was handed the fight—to play to the theme that drove the movie: eventual redemption from prejudice and racism. The Giardello-Carter fight scene provided additional evidence of racism for the plot in declaring Giardello the winner when the fight scene shows Carter beating Joey. What could be more racist than a black man being robbed of the decision and the championship title in the white man’s hometown, the huge Philly boxing scene where the white man got his start and built his fame?

Rubin Carter’s murder trials created a *cause célèbre*. Bob Dylan with Jacques Levy wrote the song, “Hurricane,” performed by Dylan in 1975 and featured throughout the movie:

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*Pistol shots ring out in the barroom night
Enter Patty Valentine from the upper hall.
She sees the bartender in a pool of blood,
Cries out, 'My God, they killed them all!'*

*Here comes the story of the Hurricane,
The man the authorities came to blame
For somethin' that he never done.
Put in a prison cell, but one time he could-a been
The champion of the world.*

In addition to Dylan, Muhammad Ali, Bill Bradley, Joni Mitchell, Ellen Burstyn, Stevie Wonder, Burt Reynolds and Johnny Cash lent their names and/or donated money to Carter's defense cause. The *cause célèbre* became worthy indeed, as Carter was exonerated for murders that he always claimed he did not commit.

However, he didn't beat Giardello to a pulp in their fight, either. In reality, it was quite the opposite. Which is why, some 35 years after last being in the spotlight as one of the toughest fighters on the planet, Joey Giardello was about to re-enter the public eye. And it wasn't for just another 15 minutes of fame, nor for the money. No, sir—it was required to set the record straight and to reclaim his rightful legacy.

Joey devoted his life to his stellar boxing career, his mentally challenged son and the rest of his family. He helped Eunice Shriver launch the Special Olympics and he raised thousands of dollars for St. John of God School for special needs children. Joey had a proud legacy, which he felt he earned. Not solely a legacy based on his Hall of Fame boxing career but outside the ring as well. His reputation had been tarnished by this movie. It had to be challenged and changed to reflect the truth. Joey was ready to do battle once again—this time against a powerful Hollywood studio.

* * *

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On the drive back to the Giardellos' Cherry Hill home, Joey lamented to Fernandez and Rosalie over the film's treatment of the actual fight of 35 years earlier. "Hon. I was never beaten like that movie showed, was I?" Joey asked Rosalie. He delivered the question more as a statement.

Rosalie, nearly as distraught as her husband, replied, "No. I couldn't believe what I saw. They made it seem like Carter beat the hell out of you. I was at the fight. It didn't happen that way."

"I don't want to, but I feel I have to ..." Joey's voice trailed a near whisper. "Sue somebody."

The next day's *Philadelphia Daily News* featured a full, tabloid-size, front-page photograph of Joey under the headline:

“THE REEL VICTIM GIARDELLO
INCENSED BY HOLLYWOOD’S PORTRAYAL
OF HURRICANE BOUT.”

In the article, Fernandez told how Joey reacted during the fight scene with Carter and he quoted what Joey said about suing someone. Upon reading it, several Philadelphia lawyers immediately queued up, each seeking to be the first to call Joey.

Before the lawyers could begin their bombardment, Fernandez phoned his friend, boxing-savvy attorney, George Bochetto, and asked him to call and consult with Joey. Thus, Bochetto earned the assignment to represent Giardello in a defamation of character civil action against Universal Studios and the film's worldwide distributors.



Private Giardello a "spit and polished" jump school graduate dresses in his class-A uniform for a 1947 photograph. In a full company photograph they spelled Joey's adopted name Giardell[i].