



Joe Frazier and Buck Dopp in July 2004.

The parallel parker

By **BUCK DOPP**

Something didn't feel right. Call it a sixth sense or a gut feeling, whatever you choose. I knew something was going down.

While sitting at a computer working on a budget in my south Philly office, my peripheral vision caught the glint of sunlight on a car window. I made a full 90-degree turn and looked out the window to the street in front of the building. A large white Cadillac was attempting to parallel park in a spot too small for the size of the car.

The boss's wife parked her beautiful golden Jaguar convertible directly in front of the doorway to the building and there were already cars in front and behind hers. There certainly wasn't enough space for this jackass and his oversized Caddie.

I remember thinking, who does this guy think he is anyway? Cadillac owners always drive like the laws don't apply to them. He's probably going to try the "bumper bump" technique of parallel parking—developed into an art form by New Yorkers. You drive backward until you hit the car behind you, then you go forward until you bump the car in front, straighten your wheel and back up six-inches. It's disgusting.

Don't even try it, pal. Not on my watch.

I stopped working on my budget spreadsheet and gave my full attention to the maniac trying to squeeze in front of the Jag. If that dude damaged that sweet machine in any way, there would be hell to pay.

After I resolved this incident, I would call my boss and tell him what I had done. He would appreciate that I was able to protect his wife's Jaguar and prepare my budget at the same time. It would show I could multi-task and it would build trust between us. You can never have too much trust with your boss, that's for sure.

The road hog rolled back and forth so slowly in trying to park, I felt I was watching a 15-year-old in a driver's training class. All of a sudden, it looked to me like the Jag rocked. He must have hit it! That's it. Let's roll, Buck. I sprang from my desk and darted through the lobby and out the front door.

Stopping a few feet from the door, I stood straight and tall and folded my arms like a principal monitoring recess. When the driver saw me, he put the car in park and just sat there. I figured he's trying to wait me out, thinking I'd go back in the office. This guy didn't know who he was dealing with, but he would soon find out.

I wondered who I was dealing with. The windows were tinted. Nevertheless, I could still see a man with a cowboy hat and a woman passenger. He could be a Don with the mob. There's a lot of waste management going on in the City of Brotherly Love. I figured I better watch my step. I could easily get whacked by some goombah for disrespecting him in front of his lady.

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PARALLEL PARKER

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I might need backup. Bruce, a sports producer, was probably at his cubicle. Bruce wasn't tall, but he looked kinda muscular and tough enough to make a wise guy think twice before taking me down. I hustled to the lobby and asked the receptionist to get Bruce to the lobby pronto with a camera. I would need documentation.

"What should I tell him?" she asked.

"Tell him to wait in the lobby. I'll come and get him when I need him."

"Whatever."

She shook her head and made the call. The receptionist didn't like being kept in the dark. I knew that. None of them do. I didn't really blame her, either, but I had no time to explain. Things were going down fast.

I resumed my ramrod-straight position, arms folded, with a stern don't-screw-with-me-buddy look. The driver's side door slowly began opening, and then it just stayed open, but the driver didn't come out right away. I wondered why. "Now what?" I wondered.

All of a sudden, this dude jumped out of the Cadillac like a jack-in-the-box. His frown and cold-eyed stare sent shivers down my spine. I was standing face-to-face with "Smokin' Joe" Frazier, former undisputed heavyweight champion of the world and gold medal winner in the 1964 Olympics.

In his 37-4-1 career, Smokin' Joe lost to only two fighters — twice to Muhammad Ali, and twice to George Foreman. His last fight with Ali is considered by many to be the greatest boxing match of all time. It was called the "Thrilla in Manilla," and it lived up to the hype. They bludgeoned each other for 14 rounds, and although

Frazier lost, Ali was beaten up so badly, his doctor Ferdie Pacheco advised him to quit boxing.

Ali later admitted, "It was like death. The closest thing to dyin' that I know of."

Frazier had come to our building to pay his cable TV bill. He was dressed in black from his cowboy hat to his boots with a thick gold chain and cross around his neck.

He stood a few feet away from me with his hands on his hips.

"Is there a problem?" he asked me.

"No problem, Champ. No problem at all," I said. "I was just wondering if I could get a picture with you."

"Sure."

"I'll be right back," I said.

I ran into the lobby and got Bruce.

"Hey, Bruce. Would you mind taking a picture of me with the champ?"

"Okay."

I stood next to the champ. He put his left arm around me. I thought of that famous left hook which had pounded 27 opponents senseless and then to the canvas.

Frazier put his scarred right hand on my chest. That same right hand that had pummeled Ali for 14 rounds in the "Thrilla in Manilla."

"What's this?" he said as he lowered the hand and patted my stomach.

I didn't answer. I just put my hand over his and smiled.

Bruce took the picture.

Buck Dopp is a Lake Havasu City resident.

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