

BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE & Daily Bulletin

'Tomato Can' Portrays Old-Time Coney Island

By Dr. Nikos Michalis Spanakos

When my identical twin brother Petros and I were having our monthly dinner at Long Island City's Waterfront Crabhouse Restaurant, we were introduced for the third or fourth time to Ron Ross, author of the soft-cover book, "The Tomato Can," published in 1993 by Oyster Bay Books.

"Tomato Can" is a funny, incisive novel about the fight scene in Brooklyn's Coney Island section with Tommy, the Dwarf, Big Nose Sallie, Fats, Foghorn and other Italian-American boxers during the days of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia.

What is a "Tomato Can" boxer? Tomato is somewhere between good and lousy. He goes in there, puts on a show and loses. Sometimes a good

tomato can lose beautifully.

Tommy, the protagonist, is depicted growing up as a Golden Gloves palooka in Coney Island, where he learns the facts of life: "not the birds an' the bees...but the villains an' the buzzards." Along the way, he becomes a "Tomato Can" among the Runyonesque characters and plots. Later, he fights as a professional in a major bout in the old Madison Square Garden.

I hope Ron Ross writes another book because the first gave such a good treatment to a sport I so revere. And I hope he continues sharing repasts with his fellow pug-nose and bent-ears prizefighters.

Dr. Nikos Spanakos, a retired educator who lives in Brooklyn Heights, was on the U.S. Boxing Team at the 1960 Olympics. He and his brother



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Petros were both Golden Gloves winners.