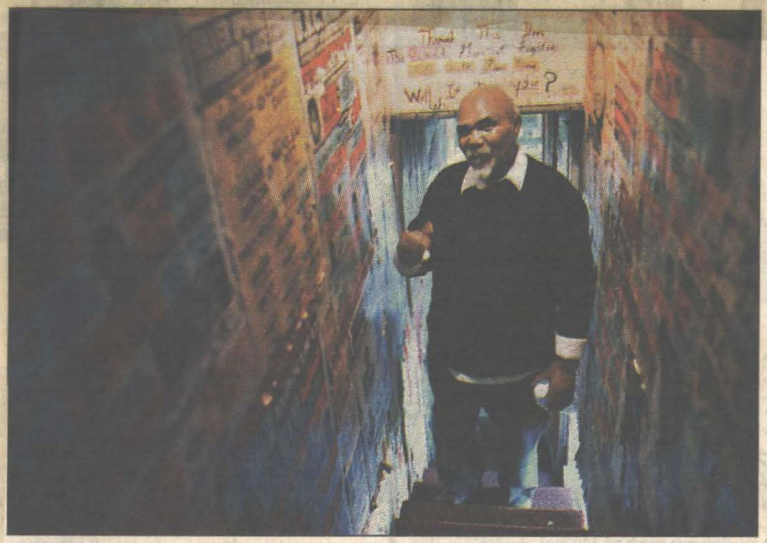
The Washington Post

THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2001 M1



BY JOEL RICHARDSON—THE WASHINGTON POST

Jim Finley, like 41 years' worth of fighters, takes the poster-lined stairway to Finley's gym, upstairs from Finley's Auto Service. At age 73, he has closed the gym.

Right Up His Alley

Finley's Gym Was a Site for Sore Eyes, Aching Arms and an Upbeat Owner

By WILLIAM GILDEA
Washington Post Staff Writer

The entrance to Finley's gym is down an alley behind Finley's Auto Service on 10th Street NE. Yesterday a sign on the window of the door announced: "Sorry! Closed! For Good! Thank you. Jim Finley." Upstairs on the second floor, the heavy bags and the light bags and the ring had all been taken away and the place was almost bare except for the fight posters. Finley's used to be the only place in town where you could get your oil changed while having your nose rearranged.

Forty-one years ago, Jim Finley opened his repair garage after determining in the Golden Gloves that the art of automotive maintenance suited him better than the Sweet Science. That didn't mean he didn't love boxing anymore. To the contrary, he simultaneously opened the gym above the bays so he and his friends could spar. Boxers soon found the place and came there, more often than not, gratis. Mike Tyson was the last famous fighter to train in the second-floor room, appropriate in that a strength of his is a knowledge of boxing history and in Finley's he had found Washington's mother house of fight gyms.

A part of Washington's history could be gleaned at Finley's. It's where Miles Davis used to work out when he was making music in the area, where a scene from a Burt Lancaster movie was filmed, where Mike Wallace did a "60 Minutes" interview with former heavyweight champion Riddick Bowe. A poster evoked a long-gone era: "Full Course Sitdown Dinner and live professional boxing." Other posters recalled more recent times, but those times also had van-

See FINLEY, *A16, Col. 4*

BZA
Case No. 16818
Exhibit No. 8

ZONING COMMISSION
D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16818
EXHIBIT NO.8

THE WASHINGTON POST



FILE PHOTO/BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST

Finley's gym, in Northeast, was a home to several boxing world champions and to hundreds of hopefuls.

After 41 Years, There Will Be No More Fighting in the Alley

FINLEY, *From A1*

ished, along with the fistic hopes of the combatants: "Boone Pultz vs. Kelvin Beatty," "Andrew Maynard vs. Lenzie Morgan." Fight posters covered most of the walls and the ceiling—many a fighter noticed the ceiling posters, not always clearly, while supine on the canvas.

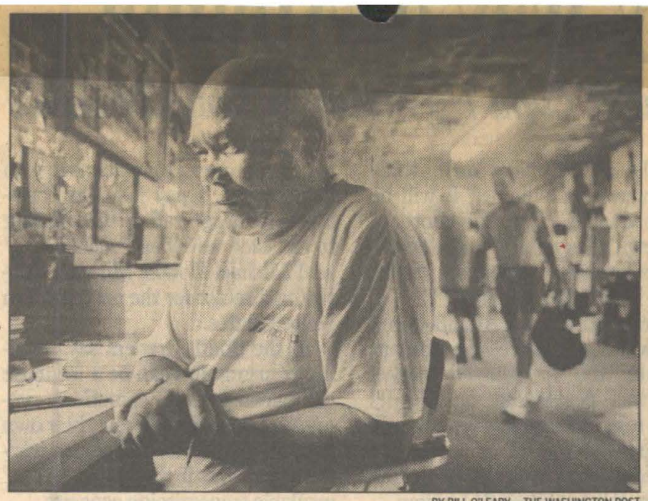
Holly Mims, the respected Washington middleweight, trained there; he almost beat Sugar Ray Robinson. Bob Foster trained there; he was one of the finest light-heavyweight champions. Sugar Ray Leonard sparred there before he opened his own place. Simon Brown and Mo Blocker went down the alley and up the staircase and climbed between the ropes and became champions. More recently, so did the bantamweight Mark (Too Sharp) Johnson. But it was the thousands of others—journeymen, the always-present hopefuls, neighborhood kids finding a haven from the streets—who gave Finley a sense that he had made a contribution to the community.

He'd been open to all comers, as long as they watched their language and kept their punches up.

"I can go so far as to use the word euphoric," he said, describing his feelings yesterday even as a worn sofa got the heave-ho into the alley. "This was never set up as a commercial venue, primarily because I didn't have to depend on it. I backed into this by setting up something for my friends and myself. It just gave me great pleasure to see the kids come in. Some didn't even know how to hold their hands. But in the next two or three weeks you'd see them shifting and dodging. They'd gotten it."

A hand-made sign suggested that hope was what had awaited at the top of the long, narrow steps: "Through This Door Someday Will Walk the World's Greatest Fighter. Will It Be You?"

What had been up there for certain, almost every day of the week, was a room full of working boxers—shadowboxing, sparring, jumping rope, many wanting to be champion, all hoping for something. Youths thought anything might be possible in boxing; older, wiser ones knew better, but some came in anyway because they contemplated comebacks. "In boxing," Finley said, "they all come back."



BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST

Gym owner Jim Finley, shown in 1997: "This was never set up as a commercial venue, primarily because I didn't have to depend on it."

Finley's was a comfortable place to dream, a kind of place with frayed edges once familiar in America but now disappearing from the landscape. In this instance, a man is closing his gym not because boxing is suffering through what the sport's onetime chronicler, A.J. Liebling, called a Dark Age, but simply because Mr. Finley, as he is known by most, has decided it's time for him to move on, to close the gym at age 73 to spend more time with his family, his books and his records,.

"I'd like to have a footprint of everybody who walked down the alley and up the steps," said one of the regulars, Ham Johnson, the father and trainer of Mark Johnson.

Having kept in shape in his own gym, Finley still looks as solid as the amateur middleweight he once was even though his goatee is gray. He's loved the place. He even slept there many nights, in a small room in back. He had a stove. He's known how to cook since growing up in a sharecropper's cabin in South Carolina. "I didn't have a good education. In fact, I had a sorry education," he said. "I worked in the fields. Work came first; it wasn't even debated as to whether or not you went to school. But I have loved to read and I have been able to gather knowledge by reading."

He came to the District in 1943. Monday nights were special for him because that was fight night at the old Turner's Arena at 14th and W streets NW. He listened to blow-by-blow on radio with Don Dunphy. On TV—black and white then—he watched the Friday night fights and the Wednesday night fights. He watched the fights from Madison Square Garden. He watched Robinson and Archie Moore. After either Sugar Ray or The Mongoose would fight, conversation in Finley's veered heavily toward one or the other for a week or two, when suddenly it would be time for them to fight again—none of this business of a year between fights. Finley's was about fighting and talk of fighting. Eleven years ago he sold the auto service and the building, but stayed on as the man upstairs who inspired, keeping his room full, by being upbeat. Time got away from him, it was so much fun.

Finley has 6 children, 12 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. Now he will have more time for them, and will have quiet time, too. "I have a thousand long-playing records"—they're stacked against a wall—"and some of those records, jazz and that sort of stuff, have not been out of the folders. I'm going to listen to records. I've got fight tapes to watch. I'm going to read."

He had put up a sign outside saying he was going fishing. In truth it might have said: "Gone reading."