

**Life Begins at Ten**

**by Bill Russo**

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The Cape Cod Canal Railroad Bridge.

Jumping off point from the island of Cape Cod to the State of Massachusetts.

The 130 foot high bridge was the largest vertical lift structure in the world when it was built in the 1930s and is still the second largest in the United States. The bridge is lowered to the level of the water, at the approach of the 'Cape Cod Flyer' – a speedy bullet train to Boston.

I chose this photo for the cover of this story, from an old postcard in my collection, because the bridge is a metaphor for new beginnings.

Some people come to the Cape over the bridge for a fresh start.

Some leave the Cape over the bridge for a fresh start on the mainland – perhaps in Boston or New York.

Others use the bridge as a jumping off point to leave the world, flying swiftly through the air until they plunge into, and are claimed by, the frigid and swift running, canal waters.

## Life Begins at Ten

“One!”

He does not see or hear anything. How could he? It's only one!

However, in that flitting, fleeting split-second between one and two, there is brightness; the sun?

Just above his head a dazzling illumination of some sort, flickers.

“Two!”

He’s fairly sure that he moved a finger, perhaps two or even three. It’s hard to tell because he still cannot actually see or feel anything.

“Three!”

His eyes are open and he might be able to see except for that blinding light shining in them.

His ears reach out and grab the sounds of... he's not sure what.

He thinks that perhaps it is the rumble of the breakers at Sea Street Beach in Dennis Port; bashing the rocks and surrendering their wildness while transforming into gentle foam that caresses the Cape Cod sand.

“Four!”

The beach! He’s sure now that he is at the beach; for a warm liquid is bathing his face. Able to prod his throbbing noggin a few degrees to the side he sees the whiteness of the sand.



“Five!”

Only it's not sand now. He's lying down on it and to his tender back it seems more like sandpaper than sand. His mis-shaped ears are reaching for a new sound. He hears someone shout, “Gaarrrrp, mon chp, garp gaaaarrp.”

He can't make out the words and his heavy lids crash down like rollup doors slamming over his blurry eyes.

“Six!”

He shakes his head back and forth as much as the pain will allow - as if doing so will somehow clear up the mystery of what happened to him and where he is. His attempt fails.

“Seven!”

His eyelids flutter and open slowly. The blazing white light comes into focus. The thudding of his heart in his head taps out a clear message of three letters: K O and D.

“Eight!”

Knocked out again! It's the seventh straight time he has fallen to progressively less skilled fighters. With just 5 victories in 20 fights he is no more than a stalking horse trotted out every three weeks to make some new pug look good.

But now? After being kayoed seven straight times they won't let him fight any more.

The Boxing commission will pull his license and promoters in all the 48 states plus Hawaii , Alaska, and Porto Rico will know it!

It's the damned computers. They keep track of everything; how many wins you have had; how many losses; how many knockouts; and how much of a show you put on for the crowd.

“Nine!”

Something is happening.

The blood on his face is being swept away by salty liquid coming from his eyes. Tears as strong as the breakers at Sea Street Beach are washing his face clean and making him strong.

The energy is rushing back into his battered body like a jet plane on takeoff. Seven straight knockouts be damned!

He could spring up from the canvas, beat the count, and finish the fight!

He could! He knows he could do it!

Ten! You're Out!

The referee counted out Juan Gilesteban Rivera Mendez for the seventh time in seven fights.

Sitting up, the young battler looked fresh and relaxed. He showered quickly, collected his loser purse of \$250.00 and walked to the Greyhound bus station in Hyannis.

Just 23 hours and 141 dollars later he was walking down the main street of a town near Agua Prieta, Mexico, heading for the office of Duro Boxing Promotions in the State of Sonora.

Inside, he spoke with a clerk and was directed to a seat in the chief promoter's office.

"From what my clerk tells me amigo, I can get you lots of good fights here in my territory. What was your record again?"

"I had seven straight knockouts in the 7,000 seat Cape Cod Coliseum. You could look it up," replied Juan Gilesteban Rivera Mendez, with a sly smile.

"Oh no amigo, I cannot do that. The fight game here is not computerized."

"Oh is that so? I did not realize this. Please get me some bouts," chuckled Juan on the first day of his second chance to be on the winning end of a one to ten count.

The End

Bill Russo, retired on Cape Cod, was educated in Boston at the Huntington School and at Graham College in Kenmore Square. He was editor of several newspapers in Massachusetts as well as a former disc jockey, news writer/presenter, and broadcaster for various outlets in New England.

His sighting of a swamp creature just before the turn of the century, led to appearances in the Bridgewater Triangle Documentary Film, America's Bermuda Triangle, and on Destination America's Monsters and Mysteries series.

In addition to his radio and newspaper work, he held management positions in logistics and warehousing as well as a stint as an ironworker and President of Boston Local 501 of the Shopmen's Ironworkers Union.

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