



2004
Pops Memorial
12"h, including base
Phil Nestel, New York, NY

This sculpture is based upon a really classic black & white photo from a March 14, 1980 Golden Gloves championship bout in Madison Square Garden. In the photo, "Pops" Nestel, the trainer, leans close to his fighter, Mike Trepani, whispering words of advice after the first round, as Mike stares at his opponent across the ring.

The sculpture was commissioned by Pops' son, Phil, who originally had asked if I could make a smaller sculpture to go with Pops' funerary urn. After some discussion, we agreed upon a free-standing sculpture of somewhat larger size (each figure, if standing upright, would be about 10" tall), on a polished stone base. Once that decision was made, and following the contract signing and initial payment, I constructed wire armatures, built up to proper proportions and dimensions with #2 Roma plastilene. In fact, I went through about six "drafts" of these figures, emailing pictures to Phil each time, and modifying or altering the figures based upon Phil's review of the pictures. With the intention of heightening the dramatic impact of the sculpture, and also following discussion, we employed some "poetic license" and departed from the photo by showing Pops in the act of gripping Mike's right arm with his own left hand, and demonstrating, with his other hand and arm, the kind of punch he wanted Mike to throw.



Fortunately for both of us, Phil's comments and suggestions were specific and reasonable, and we were able to work through numerous details entirely through use of email and digital images. Thus I was able to create figures and faces which were true-to-life and almost portrait quality, even with the small scale (each head is only about 1" high). Once Phil had given his final approval, I delivered the figures for casting to Carolina Bronze, returning to the foundry to personally go over the wax positives, and then to oversee patination. The final step, a ticklish business, was to peg and glue the figures to the polished stone base (thank you, Ralph!), which had been previously ordered through McCoy Memorials.



The finished sculpture, carefully installed in a custom-made, padded wooden box for protection, I personally delivered to Phil's house, north of New York City, on Tuesday, May 24, 2005. It was wonderful to meet the man who over the course of about ten months had proven to be such an exemplary "client" and now, indeed, had become a friend. How wonderful it was to sit with him in the back garden of [La Fortuna](#), just west of Central Park, on a warm, sunny day later that week, sipping a Latte and enjoying a slice of mocha chocolate cheesecake, compliments of the owner, Mike Trepani himself. Fit, trim, and with an intense, focused look, Mike said, snapping out his words, "I can't wait to see it [the sculpture]!" And the next morning, at Phil's house, he did, as shown in the accompanying picture.

