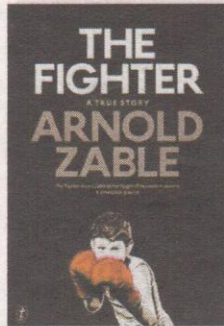


## books

A MELBOURNE LIFE IN  
SHORT, SHARP JABS

## THE FIGHTER: A TRUE STORY

ARNOLD ZABLE  
TEXT, RRP \$28

"Boxing is the art of the immediate, of shifting tempos and manic energies tempered by discipline and craft." Zable could be describing his own writing as well as the sport that took Henry Nissen (right) from working-class Carlton to flyweight champion boxer. Zable, a Melbourne storyteller, educator and human rights advocate, takes the art of the novel — the attention to tone,

rhythm, and perspective — and applies it to the true story of Nissen. Henry's identical twin, Leon, was also a boxer and the boys became household names, appearing on Seven's *TV Ringside* and Nine's *Golden Gloves*. Leon, who represented Australia at the 1970 Commonwealth Games, retired from amateur boxing, but Henry turned pro. When Zable describes Henry's first Empire Title bout, it's the written equivalent of those slow-motion scenes in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. I'm no boxing fan, but like that movie this book is about more: endeavour, belonging and redemption. It's the kind of story that made Bryce Courtenay's *The Power of One* a bestseller. In alternating chapters there are Henry and Leon as boys dealing with their mother's mental illness. Then there's Henry the heart-of-gold youth social worker (right) and wharfie. It's also about Melbourne, its light and shade, and the people who fall between the cracks and the ones who survive.

BC

Verdict: art and sweet science collide

Zable is a guest of the Melbourne Jewish Writers Festival, May 21-23. Program at [mjwf.com.au](http://mjwf.com.au)