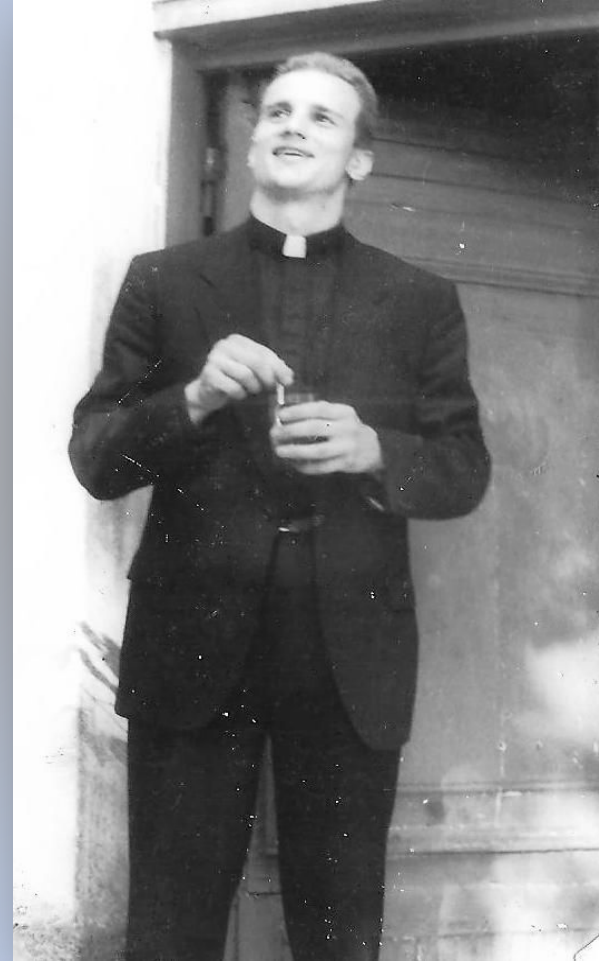


The Extraordinary Life of  
*Eriks Jekabsons*  
*“The Boxing Priest”*

Riga, Latvia, EU - Washington, DC, USA

July 2013

# “THE BOXING PRIEST”



**Eriks Jekabsons - Boxing Champion, Priest, Dissident, Interior Minister of Latvia, International Conflict Mediator - and Father Of Four Sons**

**Eriks Jekabsons was born in the beautiful country of Latvia. Throughout his life's many twists and turns, he has always treasured, loved, served and protected his birth nation.**



In the early 2000's, Eriks stunned his many friends by becoming something he vowed he never would be: a politician. He founded Latvia's First Party and was elected to a seat in Parliament. Later, he was named Deputy Speaker of Parliament (known as the Saeima) and then became Chairman of the Parliamentarian Committee to Investigate Government Corruption.

In a controversial move on the eve of the Latvian vote to join the European Union in 2003 that was later referred to as the "Midnight Massacre," Eriks held a television press conference to announce that Latvia was on the brink of becoming a dictatorship. Refusing to compromise his campaign promise to fight for a morally just and truly democratic government, Eriks ignored warnings from friends and foes alike and called for a formal investigation of the Prime Minister, which ultimately toppled the corrupt government. *The Economist* dubbed Eriks the "Latvian Arnold Schwarzenegger."



Later, through an ironic twist of fate, Eriks was named Minister of Interior and until November of 2005 directed his country's law enforcement and intelligence services, the Latvian successors to the reviled KGB. He took a hard line against Russia and President Vladimir Putin, the Russian Mob, oligarchs, money laundering and police corruption, defusing a major terrorist threat as well as defusing a potentially violent civil riot propagated by Russian-backed anarchists.

Russia publicly attacked Eriks for not extraditing Boris Berezovsky, former Godfather of the Kremlin and an oligarch-in-exile, when he arrived in Riga in 2005 to attend a meeting of a local chapter of the International Foundation for Civil Liberties.

Berezovsky (who recently died in what many believe was a fake, staged suicide) donated twenty-five million dollars to be used to chronicle Stalinist repression and support human rights. His open defiance enraged the Kremlin, which promptly threatened that "such an action will not be without consequences," and the Latvian government blacklisted Berezovsky from ever entering the country again.



In a bold and highly controversial move, Eriks resigned as Interior Minister in November 2005 over his government's failure to fund state security and unwillingness to stand tall against the Russians on the Berezovsky matter.

Eriks is considered a national hero by many Latvians while others have fallen prey to the paranoia of the past and speculate that he works for the Vatican, CIA or Russia's new secret police, the FSB. Still others fear that Eriks will someday expose them as traitors and informants who made Latvians suffer terribly during the Soviet Era or who unjustly reap rewards in Latvia from rampant, communist-style corruption.



Eriks has had the opportunity to meet many world leaders and government agency heads. When he left public office in Latvia, he continued his role as a mediator of world conflicts, and founded Cultural Bridges International (CBI), a non-profit corporation headquartered in Chicago of which he remains President.

The mission statement of CBI is “to become a global leader in bridging the gap caused by cultural differences through education and positive dialogue about universal, shared human values.” CBI champions enriched educational opportunities, conflict resolution intervention and training, humanitarian aid and infrastructure development by promoting cultural understanding and mutual respect throughout the world.



*Eriks Jekabsons and H. Steven Blum, Chief of the National Guard Bureau from April 11, 2003 until November 17, 2008*



*Eriks Jekabsons and Robert Mueller, Director of the FBI*



*Eriks Jekabsons in Italy*



*Eriks with Shaolin monks in their monastery*



*Eriks with late USA Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger*



*Eriks meets US ambassador Brian Carlson*



Eriks faced his first major life challenges during his service in the Soviet Army which ultimately made him a very strong man. While studying and training at the Riga Sports Academy, he was conscripted against his will into the Soviet military at age eighteen. Because of exceptional physical prowess and mental abilities, he was assigned to the Soviet Special Forces (Speznaz). He soon learned that his command in colonel had been in charge of the execution squad that in 1941 murdered his grandparents and countless other innocent Latvians.

Eriks left the Red Army in 1980 after a two-year mandatory stint and began a search to find deeper meaning in life. He rebuffed repeated attempts by the KGB to recruit him as an agent and instead joined the resistance movement. Later, he was arrested while trying to defect, found God as a Christian, became an ordained Lutheran minister, taught martial arts and led illegal underground religious classes.





Instead of destroying Eriks, the KGB's attempt to kill and discredit him only made him stronger and more dedicated to God and country. Nicknamed "The Boxing Priest," he became a modern day folk hero and confronted the Soviets on religious and human rights issues at every opportunity. Eventually, his dissident activities caught the attention of the American media, and *ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* broadcast an interview with Eriks in 1988 about the plight of Latvia, which resulted in the immediate expulsion of Eriks and his entire family. Thousands of Latvians cheered him at the Riga train station as he departed for the US.



The West embraced Eriks, and he was invited to speak at the first international conference of Three Flags for Freedom in support of independence for the Baltic States. Organized by the international Helsinki Organization for the Defense of Civil Rights, it gave Eriks the opportunity to address the Italian parliament at the Vatican on human rights issues and unveil persecutions of political dissidents and religious groups in the Soviet Union. Eriks and his family - now nearly penniless - eventually immigrated to California and later moved to Chicago. While serving as the pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in suburban Wood Dale, Illinois, Eriks continued to fight for human rights in Latvia by writing anti-Communist articles that were published and circulated in Europe. KGB harassment and intimidation never ceased even in the United States.

## The Boxing Priest



Eriks has appeared on *ABC Nightly News* with Peter Jennings and has addressed the *Italian Parliament* on human rights issues and the treatment of political dissidents and religious groups in the then Soviet Union (Rome 1988). Numerous articles have also been published about Eriks in both regional and local papers.

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KGB secret files on Erik Jakobson (8 pages)

Eriks with Margarita, the mother of three of his boys, who was twice Olympic Gold Medalist in Rowing. It was a truly amazing achievement for her: as a Latvian it was almost impossible to become a member of the Soviet Olympic team due to rigid discrimination and the Russians' disdain for and mistrust of Latvians.



**SMALL BUSINESS**

### Fitness center's owner completes arduous road

Eriks Jekabsons rolls his eyes and sigh when asked if it has been difficult for the one-time Latvian boxer who's now an American Lubbock minister to learn how to run a business.

"If I would have known what it would be like, I would think twice, probably," said Jekabsons.

It's as if the 40-year-old Addison resident wants it to be known that opening Eriks Boxing and Fitness in the Northgate Plaza at 1355 and North Avenue in Lombard has been the hardest thing he's done.

It's not even close.

Jekabsons has spent most of his life fighting not only for glory in the ring, but also for his freedom and soul outside of it.

In his native Latvia during the 1970s and early '80s, Jekabsons lived the privileged life of an elite Soviet athlete. "Advanced athletes like myself, we were practically professionals," he said.

If you lived in what President Reagan called "The Evil Empire," it was not a bad way to do it. Jekabsons admits life was tempered, though, by a dark cloud of dread.

He had never known a free Latvia, but Jekabsons harbored no love for the Soviet Union. He remembers starting at his own school in the snow after Russian children beat him up and called him a "Latvian fascist." His father would church his teeth and curse whenever Jekabsons asked about his grandparents, who died resisting Soviet rule. He blames Moscow's suspicions of the Baltic states for his failure to compete in the Olympics.

"We were potential defectors or spies," Jekabsons said. "That was the reason I never got the chance to become famous or to compete."

Jekabsons got in a compulsory two years as a soldier, serving as a sergeant instructor in the special forces, but his military service made him more of a resistor, especially after he learned his school had been designated for killing Latvian bandits.

When he returned to Latvia, he stumbled across the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and other western and eastern philosophers, and became a serious student of martial arts, which the Soviet Union had banned as a "bourgeois and anti-social sport."

Ultimately, Jekabsons and a friend tried to defect to Sweden, but were caught by the KGB 10 kilometers from Finland's border and jailed for three days.

During his detention, Jekabsons dreamed each night of a golden crane atop a tower lashed in sunshine. The vision ultimately led him to take up Christianity and study theology.

While preaching in Latvia, Jekabsons often clashed with the KGB. The government expelled him in 1989 and for the last 10 years, Jekabsons has been pastor of St. Peter's Latvian Lutheran Church in Wood Dale.

All along, he has offered private boxing and martial arts lessons. Two months ago, he opened his gym, which now has about 100 members studying boxing, kick boxing, martial arts and fitness. Fees range from \$10 to \$20 per month and include a weight room, punching bags and programs for everyone from young children to busy executives.

The gym focuses on sport and fitness, but Jekabsons tries to teach his lessons on morality and charity he has learned in his own "desert" gym gym.

Call 608/953-7144 for details.

**Caruthers & Culloton**  
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**Eriks Jekabsons, right, spent a lifetime fighting for his livelihood, freedom and soul. Now the Addison resident runs Eriks' Boxing and Fitness in Lombard.**  
Daily Herald Photo/Chris Hume





Eriks Jekabsons, now dividing his time between Latvia and the USA, believes that his life has been filled with the blessings of faith, freedom and the opportunity to shape his own - and his country's - destiny. Eriks hopes that by sharing his story, others will be inspired to speak out against oppression, corruption and moral and ethical decay - thereby preventing history from repeating itself.