

Crazy Sal Comes Home

What are you gonna do?

David Evanier

Sal Polisi, ex-wiseguy, budding screenwriter, came home for a visit to Ozone Park in Queens, New York, in December 2007. He'd been away twenty-five years. He is sixty-four now, a handsome, physically taut, dark man of quick movements with a light stubby beard. He has been part of my life since I met him in 1996. With his endlessly sunny disposition, he was a Huckleberry Finn of the Mafia. I met him in Hollywood, where so many ex-wiseguys seem to emerge as budding screenwriters, hopefully following in the footsteps of Henry Hill and *Goodfellas* after they get out of the federal witness protection program. (Sal talked with Hill on the phone in the early 1990s about becoming co-stars of a 900 phone line called Dial-A-Mobster. Sal has been trying to make it in Hollywood since then.)

I left Manhattan for Hollywood in 1992 when I received a fellowship from Stephen Spielberg's Chesterfield Film Company at Universal. I was working on a number of Mafia-related projects, including a screenplay about Jimmy Roselli, the singer and sweetheart of the Mafia. My book about Roselli, *Making the Wiseguys Weep: The Jimmy Roselli Story*, would be sold to Farrar, Straus in 1996 and optioned by John Travolta for Touchstone/Disney Pictures. That was when Carol Lees, my manager, phoned me and said that she had a new subject for me: an ex-wiseguy had moved into the house next door to her in Studio City with his young born-again wife and their two children. Carol knew my tastes. "You'll love him," she said. She was right. Carol set up a meeting. I met Sal later that week at his house, and, with his little boy on his lap, he exuberantly told me his life story and the great times he had had. Sal had begun writing his own screenplay about his life, but, frantically in search of publicity and recognition, saw me as a potential biographer and was happy to share his saga with me.

Once a trusted associate of John Gotti, the hijacker, bank robber, bookmaker, loan shark, extortioner, kidnapper, and narcotics dealer, Sal had served fifteen months of an eight-year term in Lewisburg in the kind of luxurious surroundings described in *Goodfellas*. Afterwards he moved his family to upstate New York to start a new life (he took \$600,000 in cash and a small fortune in stolen diamonds). Both of his sons became football stars.

Of the old days, Sal recalled to me, “We schemed and scammed and stole and sniffed and streaked and fucked and sucked.”

Sal told me he had delivered body parts in bags as a message to hoods in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island, Manhattan and Jersey. Dominic Cataldo, one of Sal’s bosses, worked for Carlo Gambino. Gambino had decreed that a hood named Rocky be chopped up for robbing other wise guys, which was against the rules. Cataldo told Sal and his pal Foxy: “You will act as my storks delivering a message to all the families throughout the five boroughs and New Jersey.” Cataldo turned to Rocky, who was taped down and badly beaten, and said, “You will pay for your stupidity with your life and bear the message to the world. Your right arm to Queens. Your left to Brooklyn. Your right leg to the Bronx and your left to Staten Island. Your head will go to Manhattan. The remainder goes to Jersey. You don’t have the heart of a New Yorker.”

Sal told me he had castrated a man whose name he never knew. He and his gangster partner Foxy virtually disemboweled a pimp in Harlem, taking him by surprise by playing out a theatrical game. They lured him with costumes and props. Sal robbed a bank under his apartment and escaped on his bicycle after getting the police to hunt him in the opposite direction in a Keystone Kops farce. What triggered his new life was finding true love with a hooker named Jane. Holding hands and his first kiss with her, he told me, were the most sensual experiences of his life. He burned down her brothel in a fit of jealousy. When he went away to prison, Jane disappeared, and he would spend years searching for her. “I would go to all the places she had hung out. All the nightclubs. The flower shops where

she would get flowers. The candy shop, or Zabar’s. She loved Zabar’s. How many times would I see someone with her look and hair style and walk up to her, look, and turn around, forget it.”

Then, soon after Jane’s disappearance, he started dealing drugs again, got caught, and became a government informer. Sal helped convict a corrupt judge and testified against Gotti. Sal and his family entered the federal witness protection program in 1985, but he couldn’t stand the isolation and being out of the spotlight, so he left it in 1989.

After that, Sal was on Larry King, Geraldo, and Connie Chung, in the pages of *Playboy* and *Vanity Fair*, and the subject of a 1989 book by Nick Taylor, *Sins of the Father*, that mainly focused on his relationship with his sons (which was why he wanted a more complete biography written by me). Later he became born again, remarried, and now has two young children. There is footage of Sal speaking and weeping at a church gathering about how he met a “good Christian lady” on a hill and how she helped him turn his life around and how he had become a good Christian. There is also footage, seedy and weird, of Sal walking on the beach in black, with a white collar and a huge cross hanging around his neck.

It was a traumatic time; after all, it was Gotti who affectionately christened him “Sal Ubatz,” Crazy Sal. Sal had first met Gotti in 1966, when Sal was twenty-one (“I was young, dumb, and full of cum”) and Gotti was twenty-six. “John would always tell me, ‘Ubatz, always use presence of mind,’ when I robbed.”

Sal said his film, *The Sinatra Club*, would be about “the night John Gotti became *John Gotti*. John didn’t know I had millions from drugs,” he recalled. “I did that stuff with the Colombo family, not with him. I would grab stacks of money out of my pockets and put it on the table like it was garbage. That bothered John. I’d say, ‘It’s fucking paper! All it is is paper! It’s crumbs. Who cares?’ John would look at me and say, ‘Look at this guy. Loose as a goose and jerky as a turkey.’ When we played, if I was sarcastic, John would peer up at me and, shaking a finger, say, ‘Don’t lose your nice ways.’

That was a warning. Gotti lost constantly and he lost hard. He would chew up the cards in his teeth and fling them across the table.” Gotti had confided in him about a deprived childhood. How he would put cardboard in his shoes to stuff up the holes. He told Sal of an empty Christmas when his father told the family, “Santa Claus is on the lam this year.”

But Sal’s childhood was far worse. He said he was beaten with belts by his father and chained to a pillar in the basement by his stepmother. Sal connected the years he spent in the Mafia to the fury and rage he felt from his parents’ abuse, and the years of liberation since his break to a gradual lifting of that rage. In his mind, the link to his recovery was his love for his sons.

Sal’s take on the Mafia remains a mixture of disapproval, ambivalence, and unquenchable nostalgia. “Oh, man, every day we would get up in the morning or in the afternoon and say, ‘What the fuck are we gonna do today? Who are we gonna rob in the afternoon and how much can we drink tonight? And how many broads are we gonna fuck tonight? How many blow jobs can I get and how many can you get? Who’s gonna get more? This is it!’ This is what we did. We just didn’t think it was going to end.”

I left Hollywood in 2002 to return to Manhattan. Sal kept in touch with me by phone. It was the year that John Gotti died in prison. Sal, with a touch of wistfulness, said, “In the end, don’t you think John’s life got shallow? What did he purvey? He was a purveyor of death. But oh how we laughed in the life. We laughed laughed laughed. I miss the laughing part of it. Everything was a joke. We’d say, ‘What does it all mean?’ A guy had a heart attack: what does it all mean? Hey that guy Joel got fifteen to life: what does it all mean? We’re all gonna die anyway. Everybody I saw around me was dying or going to jail.”

Sal kept trying to write his screenplay. For a while he collaborated with Mardik Martin, coscreenwriter of *Mean Streets*, but it

didn’t work out. We lost contact for several years, but in late 2007 he phoned me from L.A. and told me he had recently visited his old neighborhood in Ozone Park. He had gone there for two reasons. He was finally close to a deal for *The Sinatra Club*, which he had written with Gabe Bologna, actor and son of Joseph Bologna and Renée Taylor. Sal had worked with Gabe that summer on a film Bologna had directed, *Black Waters at Echo’s Pond*, and had gotten his first producer credit. He also wrote two scenes in the film. He wanted to show his old stomping grounds to Gabe and the film crew, and he also wanted to film his return to Ozone Park as a documentary aimed at HBO.

The Sinatra Club was a “social club” Sal set up in Ozone Park after he had been shot by a policeman in 1971 and couldn’t rob or hijack for a while because of his bad back. “I had just picked up a souped-up Corvette, brand-new engine in it, and I was testing it,” Sal told me. “My friends were standing outside the bar, Club Ninety Three. Took off, went for maybe three blocks, spun the car around. Came back. Parked the car. Went inside, had a drink. Twenty minutes later I come out and I take off again with the car, messin’ around. Maybe four hundred yards, spin the car around, stop in the middle of the street, pop the clutch, I do eighty or ninety. I look and in the middle of the street there’s this cop pointing his gun at me. I couldn’t believe it. All I’d done was a U-turn. He was motioning me to pull over.

“So what I do is I take the car and kind of aim it towards him. As I pass him, he shoots twice, catches me in the back. For no reason. So I got out and started running towards him. I was bleeding. He shouted, ‘Get on the ground, get on the ground. I’ll shoot you again.’ My friends came out of the club, two hitmen for the Colombo family. They started to choke the cop. Then they picked me up and rushed me to Jamaica Hospital. The bullet went in beneath the spine, so I was okay, but my arm was shortened. I was recovering from the bullet hole. Pete Hamill wrote about it in the *Post*.

“They charged me with second-degree assault on a police officer. In those days you weren’t supposed to shoot anybody unless he was in the act of a felony. I mean he said I aimed the car at him. Which I did, you know. I tried to scare him.

“So I couldn’t do any stealing for a while. I decided to open up a club to make some money. We found a building. I knew this burglar; I said we got to have some music. Go down there and burglarize that Polish bar. So he does and he brings back this jukebox. What’s in the jukebox? All these Bobby Vinton records. Get rid of this shit and go get Sinatra records.”

Social clubs of this kind, including Gotti’s Bergin Hunt and Fish Club (ten blocks away from the Sinatra Club, the Bergin didn’t have big poker games), were not much more appealing than storefront SRO’s on the old Bowery, grimly furnished by low-level wiseguys, many of them garbagemen, who would drop off tables and chairs they’d found on their rounds. The club was a windowless hole-in-the-wall in a one-story stucco building, a peephole in the metal door. But Sal had a different vision. He gave the club a nautical motif. “A South Pacific style,” he recalled. “Fishnets hanging from the ceiling with corks and dangling starfish in the strands. Earth colors. Bamboo to separate the rooms and all these Oriental lights. Posters from South Pacific. My favorite painting was on the wall: Salvador Dali’s *The Head of a Rose*, the body of a woman and the head of a rose. We played records like ‘Bali Hai’ from *South Pacific*, but mainly Sinatra. The bathrooms had black lights. In the rear there was an exit, in case the cops were coming through the front.”

By the beginning of 1971 mob crews from all over the city were coming to the Sinatra Club to gamble. Sal’s partners were Dominic Cataldo, Funzi Tarricone from the Genovese family, and Jackie Donnelly from the Colombos. Sal provided hookers who worked out of the nearby Surfside Three motel. He gave them business and they would kick back with sexual favors for him. Gene Gotti gambled there, and so did Willie Boy Johnson. John Gotti would come in and wait for someone to take his velvet-collared Chesterfield overcoat.

So in the winter of 2007 Sal had been back in Ozone Park with a crew filming his return to the old neighborhood: Gabe Bologna, actors Angelo Bonsignore and Mark Belasco, and a third actor we’ll call “John” because he still lives in a neighborhood of wiseguys. Sal mailed me a videotape of his homecoming, and I decided to get together with two cast members in a coffee shop in Chelsea to talk to them about what had occurred. I asked “John” if Sal, a known “rat,” wasn’t in danger showing his face in Ozone Park. “The way I look at things in this great country we live in, and the great life that we’re experiencing,” John replied, “today could be sunny and the birds are flying nice and they’re chirping, and everything is good, nobody’s bothering nobody, everybody’s copasetic. Tomorrow it snows or rains, people are running for cover, just like the birds. Birds can get hungry, birds want to impress one another, so you never know. I like to look at nature and food as comparisons.”

Angelo described how he got together with Sal. “About two years ago I got a phone call from some guy saying his name was Tony. How are you this and that. Says, ‘I’m from California. I wrote this great script. I’d like you to audition for it when the time is right.’ A few weeks later he calls me again. ‘Can you send me some of your work?’ I did. I didn’t hear anything for six months. Then he calls again. ‘What you been up to? Have faith in me.’ A year goes by. I get a call from Tony saying, ‘I’m in New York right now. Can you meet me at the Pierre Hotel?’ Before he hangs up he says, ‘By the way my real name is Sal Ubatz Polisi.’”

“While we were doing the shooting,” John said, “People always come and naturally gyrate toward the camera. So the people on that block, regular working-class people down in that Italian section of Queens, did that. These people, sometimes there’s opportunity and rules are breakin’. Fireworks season rolls around, someone might throw the garage up for fireworks and sell them, somebody might be involved in dismantlin’ automobiles. You know, so there’s always a little extra activity going on to keep the American blood warm. It seems that the people that lived on that block were on the same

genre. So they came over. You could see like one guy was one of the neighbors, he had his fun in life. Now he was on a methadone program of some sort. Usually when people use drugs they get involved in crime. You don't work nine to five and take drugs. You gotta steal. You don't have the patience and you don't want to pay. That's your middle name: 'Don't pay for nothin'.' So when we encountered some of these people, they were more than happy to see Sal."

In the footage of the documentary of his return that Sal mailed me, he was full of emotion, as always, looking around at where he came from. In some ways he was very proud of himself and was providing this information for future historians. "My first endeavor in this neighborhood was Sal's Pizza in 1965, my first bookmaking operation," he said to the camera. "Right here. And my first wife, before we got married, would walk from her mother's house around the corner to her grandmother across the street—that red house over there was her grandmother. And I would see her walk. She came over to Sal's for pizza, and we met and got married. And that was that. You see that barber shop over there? That was Al the Barber. He was the best, from Italy. He used German razors, sterling steel, he smoked a little cigar. So there's the park over there. This street was also significant. My son, who was eight years old, got hit by a car here. He was okay. Hit and run. Rushed him to the hospital. My pal Foxy would come here and he would make sure his car was always parked in a special spot where it wouldn't get dirty. Not on the avenue. In those days there was a train under here, and it would kick up a lot of dust. Foxy was particular, he didn't want his car getting dusty. I didn't give a shit. When my car got dusty I got rid of it and stole another one."

Sal walked down the street and stopped by a storefront, a balloon and party-favors store. "This yellow door: this was it. This was the Sinatra Club. There was a shoe repair next door. A step up and a little newspaper office, the *Long Island Press*.

"So this was it essentially. No basement. Very flat, small building, you go in the back, deep. In the inside it's nothing, just four

walls. There was no wall; there was cement. There was no ceiling; I had a fishnet hanging.

"A lot of times we would go through the night and take up all the parking spaces. One time we had a bad snowstorm and we were locked in there for days. It really started to stink after a while. Everybody's locked in there, gambling, smoking. Gamblers, they don't even want to leave the table. 'Faster, faster,' cried the losers. Four a.m. Because they wanted to get even. A lot of humor. We had great times. It was almost like when you look at the *Titanic* and they flash back. I can remember the Chinese food in the cartons. The sense of smell, the sense of sound.

"It's amazing, it's hard to believe the Sinatra Club is yellow and red with balloons. Although I look at that and I see dice. I see souvenirs, I think of all the chips and the cards. I see figurines. I see cards and cakes, party supplies; well, we all had a party, that's what I see."

Sal turned to the neighbors who were gathering around him. "Does Vito still live here?" They nodded yes. "Vito is still here?" Sal said. "You know what I would love to do? I would love to talk to Vito."

"Vito's brother Billy went out for a walk and he had a brain hemorrhage," a woman told Sal. A man beside her said, "Here comes Vito! Here comes the man!"

Sal exclaimed, "Oh my God. Look at this." An elderly stocky man, smiling, with a jaunty hat, red plaid shirt, and glasses, came toward Sal and they embraced.

"How you been?" Sal said, crying.

"Good. I seen you on Larry King years ago," Vito Camifamo said.

"What happened to Billy? What happened?"

"He walked out and he died."

"Unbelievable," Sal said. He called out to Gabe Bologna to join them. "Vito's the guy who used to see the crazies, my pals Foxy, Tommy"—characters in *The Sinatra Club*. "Tell Gabe about these guys."

"These guys ... lotta years!" Vito said, laughing. "Crazy. These guys."

"We used to play over here in the park," Sal said. "We played paddle ball. I was serious, right? Tell him." He called to Mark Belasco, the actor who was to play Sal's old pal Tommy in the film. "Remember Tommy? Foxy shot him in the head. You remember that. That was 1977. The same time that Elvis died. It was that summer."

"He shot all his teeth out," Vito said.

"Really?" Sal said, interested. "Foxy just walked away cold. Let me just tell you this. There was a woman, Dotty, in the bar, who worked for my mother-in-law, Filomena. She comes and tells me, 'Marrone, that fucking Jerry, he's abusive to Filomena.' So I said, 'When I see him, I'll talk to him.' So I catch up with the guy. I said, 'You abuse my mother-in-law? I will beat the shit out of you.' And I stole his wig! I stole his wig, Vito! I kept the wig. I was holding it hostage. I said, 'You dirty dog, you. You go in there and apologize to Filomena. You get up there and bark like a dog.' And he did.

"The parties! Vito, tell them about the seltzer fights. And the eggs. We used to go on the roof and throw eggs. We had fun here. A lotta fun. You look good, though, Vito. And the kids are all good? Joey? Christine? Oh my God, what happened to Billy. And Philip, how is he doing, Philip?"

"Customs broker," Vito said.

Sal appeared to hear only some of this. "Josie doing okay? We used to play over there day and night. Blackball, paddleball, oh, we played. My God, day and night.

"I got a wife who's just a little bit older than my oldest son," Sal told Vito. "Young wife, beautiful wife. I got a thirteen-year-old daughter, ten-year-old son. And my older boys, Tony is high corporate, and so is his wife. They got degrees. They're expecting their first baby. Joe is a computer project manager. He has two little boys." Sal paused, shaking his head. "Never again follow this," he reminded himself.

"You did good," Vito says. "On top of everything, you were talented."

"I come back here and I get tears, thinking of all that's past," Sal said. "But it's good."

"It came out good. You could've been dead. I know you went into the witness program. You went on television and you take off the glasses and showed everybody who you are."

"I didn't care," Sal replied. "I didn't want any more of that. You saw me on TV?"

Sal paused. "Remember the blackout? I remember this bar. I remember sitting there holding my baby, July 21, 1969, when we landed on the moon. I remember sitting right there with everybody. With Big Jaybo. We're landing on the moon!

"Any mob activity here any more? A time gone by, right?"

"I could never go with these guys," Vito said. "They said, 'Vito, come on, we got this set up, there's girls.' I said no. I might like it, I don't want to go."

"A hard-working guy," Sal said.

"I worked from 6:20 in the morning to 10:30 at night, six days a week," Vito said.

"Right here," Sal pointed. "The candy store. Vito remembers Foxy. Tommy, the crazy one, wanted to bother Foxy's sister, and that's why Foxy killed him. Foxy was built like a house. But you know ... things evolve. But I wasn't interested in killing. I wanna fight. You see me fight.

"I haven't seen you in forty-five years," Sal said to Vito. "I have thought so much about you."

"There were many stories about Sal," Vito said to Angelo. "They called him Crazy Sally Ubatz. You hear a story and you wouldn't think twice not believing it. Because it's Sal. He'd do that. 'Oh, Sal did that?' Yeah he'd do that. A hole in a jewelry store. Throwing a piece of steak with heroin in it to knock the dogs out when they eat it. So many things. And he was a good person. But he was crazy;

don't get on his wrong side."

A gap-toothed man asked Sal, "How does it feel to know you're going public?"

Sal didn't seem to recognize the danger of exposing himself in this neighborhood, where ratting out Gotti and other wise guys could be considered a high crime. He was awash in nostalgia. "Well, whatever," Sal replied. "I don't think about that. You know what I think about? All of this. All of the hoopla really doesn't add up to much. Because what really moves you is your emotions, man. A million miles of emotion. When you see somebody like Vito, you know? There's a guy who's all around this life, not even in it, but watched us. And we're talking thirty, forty years later, it really doesn't add up to a pile of beans, as Humphrey Bogart said. When in fact I don't care if I ran into Bill Gates; he couldn't mean anything to me. This guy means something to me. We were friends. We had family. He saw my kids grow up and I saw his kids grow up. And then I went off to start a new life. You shared a lot of deep moments with people, and then after all those years, you wondered what are they doing with their life? And you look at them and there's no words. It's good. Especially on the corner where you lived."

He was about to enter a bar, an old hangout, with Angelo and John. At this point the videotape I was watching went dark. The bar Sal had entered was full of elderly wise guys, and one of them had spotted Sal.

Weeks later, I asked Angelo and John to meet me in a coffee shop in Manhattan and tell me what had happened. "They were like retired wise guys in there," John said. "These guys never really retire; there's always action coming in from somewhere. So these guys got a strong interest in what they believe in. This is their life. That's it. Regardless of how many times you get arrested or how many times you get shot. As long as you're able to get up and move again, you're still gonna keep this dedicated business these people are in. Angelo wasn't aware of the atmosphere. So we walked into the bar. Angelo's

got the camera. I got the chargers. So these guys see all this equipment coming in. They got the taxicab hats, the nineteen-inch necks with the gold chains. They walk like stone. They think maybe it's surveillance. Sal recognized these people; they recognized him. I look at him, he looks at me, and we realize we're in fucking danger right now. Anything could happen. They could grab you in the fucking back room, they could drive up in a car and tie you up and put you in the car and there you go, you're done.

"So everybody gets jumpy. You see this guy jumps up, that guy jumps up. They're having a little meeting in the corner. I had said, 'Sal, where will I plug this in?' He ignored me. It was so quiet. Then he looks at me, turns his head sharply from side to side, no words. I seen that face. When I see there was no words, and that face, when somebody does something like that, the hand comes up, the head goes to the left, you're on your own, whatever's gonna happen. So Sal's making a bee-dive for the door now. He flew out. I never seen a guy move so fast. He made it to that door five times faster than anybody else I ever seen. He was gone. And I says, 'I'm gone too, I'm getting the fuck out of here.' I didn't even look for Angelo. Fuck this. Every man for himself. We just zipped. Sal went to the left, I went to the right. Forty-five minutes later one of the producers called us. Sal was in the basement of a house right near the store. So here we are in this fucking basement with this old lady I never met before, and she was real polite."

"The basement seemed like a place where you would chop up a body," Angelo observed to me. "Really dark. That dust smell, like grandma's place."

"Didn't Sal know he was going into a dangerous situation?" I said.

"I don't think the man really cared," John said. "I'll tell you the truth. I think that fucking guy is nuts. He really didn't care. Ubatz. Nobody gets that name for nothing. You gotta work for that name."

"Gotti gave him that name," I said.

"Well, there you go," John replied. "It came from the top. Of course Sal made his move when he hadda."

"He scattered like a cockroach," Angelo said.

"Everybody like vaporized," said John.

"But he survived all these years," I pointed out.

"Because," John explained, "it's like a drunk on the street. He can bang his head against the wall forty times, car crashes, falling off the second floor, backyard balconies—the man still survives. It's the same thing with him. Because God is with him. Because basically I think he's got a good heart in a lot of ways. I like a little excitement myself. Why not?"

"I think Sal didn't realize that anybody would still be around," Angelo said. "We went right into it like Times Square, into the middle of the action."

"What was your reaction to Sal from the beginning?" I asked Angelo.

"The old timers are still around," said Angelo. "It's a touchy topic. But I was thinking primarily that his story was something really powerful. This is like before John Gotti was John Gotti. This was the making. And we didn't have many stories like that. When Sal told me the story, I thought that I would want to do the same if I was him. I would want to go back. Imagine going back to a place that meant the world to you thirty, forty years later. To see everything change and try to describe how it was."

"It hurts, because the power's gone," John said. "At one time back in the seventies when Sal ruled, it was very powerful. The wise guys were just as powerful as the judges and the politicians. He was an independent operator. and he was protected by the five crime families. I'm just a paper reader, but from what I know, they did a lot of business hand in hand with each other. Business prevailed over a large, large scale. Like Meyer Lansky once said, 'We're bigger than U.S. Steel.'"

"The guy that spotted me in the bar hated me," Sal told me on the phone. "That guy would have loved to have a chance to whack

me. The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife. Well, the trip was supposed to be about getting footage to present to HBO for a documentary film. But what happened that day was sort of amazing. I never would have imagined that I would have been recognized by an old woman and her son, and then just the sight of my neighbor Vito, who had just lost his brother Billy a few weeks earlier. Vito was the very best friend you could have, like a father. I met him in 1965. I was twenty, Vito was thirty-six. Our friendship began on the handball court. For the next fifteen years both families became very close. Vito had six kids. He was 100 percent legit. He worked for the city all his life. When I went to the federal pen in 1974, Vito and his kids helped my first wife. After all these years, to just show up and see Vito. A thousand thoughts raced through my head while my heart ached for the agony that he was going through over Billy. I truly realize what kind of an amazing trek that I have covered.

"Many unexpected flashes of the past cropped up. I tracked down the man that owned the truck when I did a silver heist, which will be in the movie. Gabe and I actually had breakfast with him. I apologized to him and told him once we make the movie I will make sure I gave him back that money that was taken from him in 1972. That was a lot of money back then.

"Well, somebody once said you can never go home again. I think of all the pieces that fell right into place as I thought of the life that once was. Working on *The Sinatra Club* has opened doors that I thought I had no vision for."

Later, Sal wrote me from L.A.: "You know, the more I think about it, going back is being able to be man enough to admit that in my youth I was wild and crazy and now I don't mind offering an apology. I think as I get closer to the END (you do know we are in the THIRD ACT), I want to think I have a clean conscience.

"Later,
"Ubatz."

I didn't hear from Sal for a while. Then, on June 11, 2009, he surfaced on Page Six of the *New York Post*. *The Sinatra Club* was

becoming a reality. Filming was going on in L.A. Sal had brought Henry Hill to the set, the *Post* reported, but Hill was drunk and abusive and had to be escorted away.

The cast of the film had changed: Sal was being portrayed by Jason Gedrick and Danny Nucci was playing John Gotti.

Sal's dream seemed to be coming true.

Sal once said to me that in 1973 he took Sal Jr., who was six, and drove a van to Atlanta to spend a fresh new bunch of counterfeit twenty-dollar bills. Jane, the hooker, flew down to join him.

Sal took two rooms at the motel, one for himself and his son, and a connecting room for Jane.

Sal would keep going into his own room to look in on his son. Unknown to him, Jane quietly followed him. She watched the father and son together. Sal stroked the child's head, putting him to sleep, tucking him in. Sal Jr. could not fall asleep at night without cuddling up to his father and burying his face in his armpit.

"Later that night," Sal told me, "she said she had watched me with my boy. Kind of cuddling him, the way I do now with my young son Alex. I don't think she had ever seen that side of me.

"She said to me, 'You know, you don't belong in the life.'"