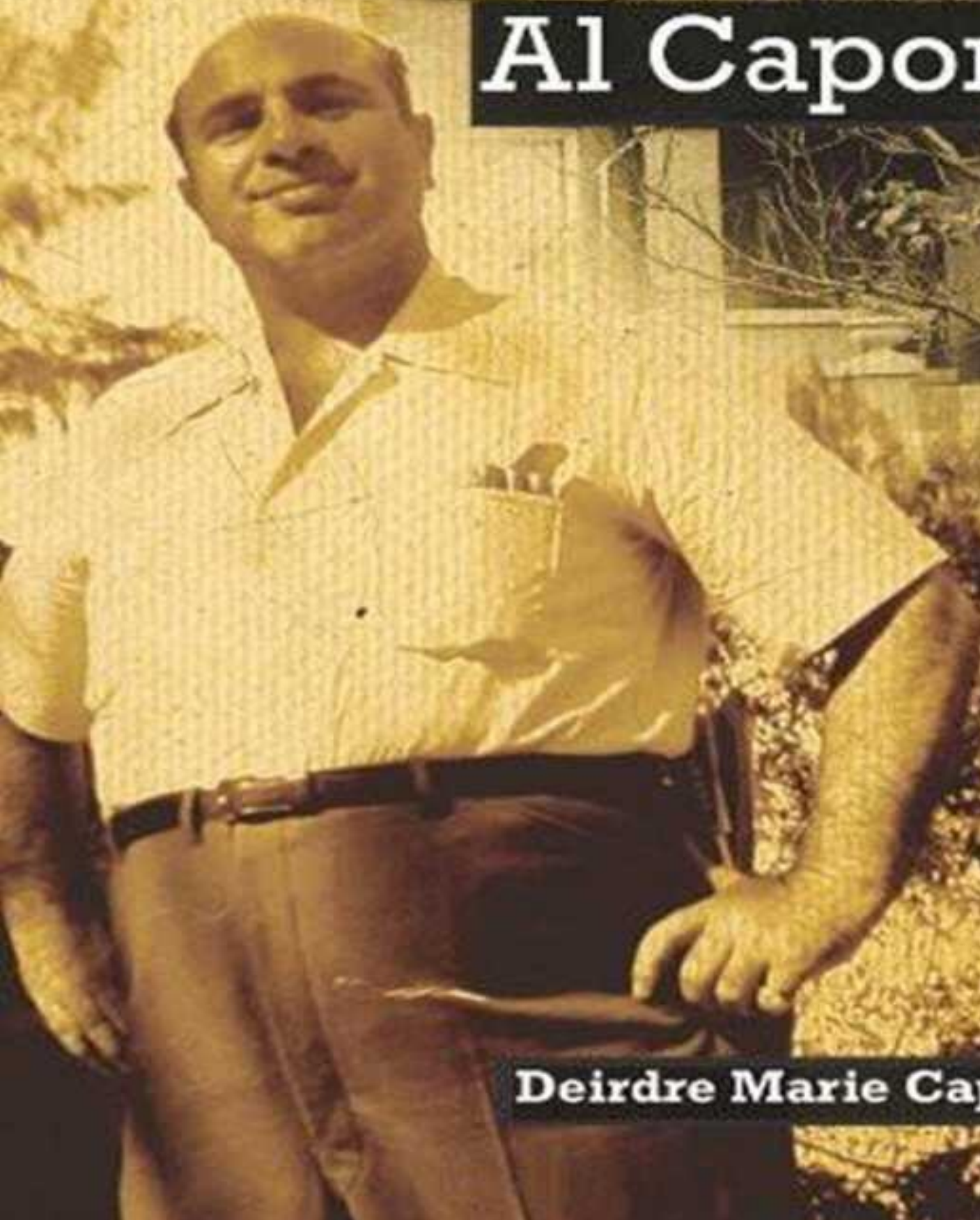


The Untold Story from Inside His Family

*Uncle*

**Al Capone**



**Deirdre Marie Capone**

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# UNCLE AL CAPONE

*The Untold Story From Inside His Family*

By

Deirdre Marie Capone

Recap Publishing Co.

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ISBN: 0982845103

ISBN-13: 9780982845103

LCCN: 2010911023

BNEPUB-J10-S301-G20



Al Capone & Deirdre Marie

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## Dedication

I dedicate this book to the family Capone that I knew and loved and who knew and loved me, most importantly my father Ralph Gabriel Capone. My hope is that my life and success will give his short life some real meaning.

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# Acknowledgments

Over the course of writing this book which began in the 1950s there have been many people who have listened, talked, and encouraged me to move forward sometimes through the tears I was shedding.

First I will start with my husband Bob. He was the first person in my life who did not judge me or criticize me because I was a Capone. I met him in 1957 working at the same insurance company who fired me because of my name. We lost each other for a couple of years but then found each other and picked up our romance where we left it. He is my best friend and partner. He helped me more than anyone, with this project. He put in many, many hours, helping me research the facts and proofreading. Thank you Honey!

Other people who deserve my thanks are Chuck Pipher my computer guru and friend and his wife Jackie for lending him to me for so many hours.

Beth Bruno who first was my editor then became my eyes and ears for all parts of this project.

My son Jeff for taking so much of his valuable time to read my chapters, look over contracts and make suggestions.

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# Forward

When word got out that I was writing this book I was bombarded with questions about it. One of the most frequent questions I encountered was “Is your book any different than the many other books written about Al Capone”?

The answer was always an emphatic “Yes”!

Granted, there have been many good books written about Uncle Al, but they all have one thing in common: none of the authors actually knew the man. They relied primarily on previous books, newspaper articles, and government records.

This is the only book written about Al by someone from inside his family, someone who as a little girl sat on his lap, hugged and kissed him, and traded “knock-knock” jokes with him.

Someone who helped him cook spaghetti, ate many meals with him and slept in his house.

Someone whom he taught to swim, ride a bicycle, and play the mandolin.

And probably most importantly, someone who as an adult had countless conversations with his older brother and business partner (my grandfather Ralph) as well as his other brothers and his only sister.

Someone whose father was raised by Al’s mother in Al’s house.

Someone whose father committed suicide due to the burden of the Capone name.

Someone who was scorned by classmates for many years, and was fired from jobs because she was related to Al Capone.

Only in this book will you find previously unpublished family photos and mouthwatering authentic Capone family recipes.

I promise you, Dear Reader, that after reading this book you will know things about Al Capone and his family that none of his biographers ever knew.

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## Chapter 1

# I Don't Like Mustard, and I Am Related To Al Capone

*I have always been opposed to violence, to shootings. I have fought, yes, but fought for peace. And I believe I can take credit for the peace that now exists in the racket game in Chicago. I believe that the people can thank me for the fact that gang killings here are probably a thing of the past.*

- Al Capone

I am a Capone. My grandfather was Ralph Capone, listed in 1930 as Public Enemy #3 by the Chicago Crime Commission. That makes me the grand niece of his partner and younger brother, Public Enemy #1: Al Capone.

For much of my life, this was not information that I readily volunteered. In fact, I made every effort to hide the fact that I was a Capone, a name that had brought endless heartache to so many members of my family. In 1972, when I was in my early thirties, I left Chicago and my family history far behind me, reinventing myself in Minnesota and making sure that no one in my life other than my husband Bob knew my ancestry. I succeeded—even with our four children.

But the truth about who I was hovered at the edges of the reality I had created, and I was terrified of it—terrified of revisiting the shy, wounded girl who grew up friendless, shunned by classmates; forbidden to play with a mobster's child; terrified of once again hearing those dreaded words, "You're fired," and seeing another employer's doors close to me because of my name; terrified of reawakening the grief of losing both my father and brother to suicide, collateral damage of the Capone legacy; and above all, terrified that if my children learned they had "gangster blood" running through their veins, they'd be exposed to the same pain I had experienced.

As if this weren't enough, my silence was also motivated by a little trick of fate truly stranger than fiction. My husband's uncle married the sister of one of the men killed in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. As you'll read later in this book, I have good reason to believe that Al Capone was not responsible for those cold-blooded murders as history has written, but all the same, how could I bring such a terrible complication into our family life? How could I know that my aunt by marriage wouldn't see her brother's murderers in my face? This concern was overshadowed because I was more afraid of my children finding out about their ancestry so I kept up the false front.

When my nine-year-old son Bobby came home from school one day in 1974 to announce that his class was learning about Al Capone, it knocked the wind out of me.

Ever since my children started school, I had developed the habit of asking, "What did you learn today?" when they came home. Of course, I always listened to their answers with great interest, but on that particular day, I felt like the whole world had just slid out of focus, leaving only Bobby and me. There he was, smiling and cheerful as always, telling me he was learning about my uncle in his fourth grade class.

My heart seized, but somehow, I managed to get out a half-casual, "What did you learn about Al Capone?" "We learned that he was a gangster," Bobby told me. He went on to tell me about Prohibition in the 1920s and 30s, Al's bootlegging operation, and how he had been such an experienced outlaw that when the police finally nabbed him, the only charge they could pin on him was tax evasion. I was so astonished that all I could do was nod along as he spoke.

Later that evening, when Bob and I were alone, I told him what Bobby had said. I felt like I had been holding my breath ever since Bobby so innocently chirped the name "Capone." Bob and I decided together that we couldn't keep the truth from our children any longer. We had no idea how they would react, but one thing was certain—we didn't want them to hear about it from someone else.



and now that our oldest kids were teenagers, they had started to ask about their grandparents. We couldn't keep this from them forever.

The next evening, as Bob and I gathered our kids in the kitchen, I was petrified. This was a moment I had created in my head time and again, since Bob and I decided to start a family. And each time I imagined it, it ended badly. I thought our kids would be furious with me for keeping the secret or for even being a Capone in the first place. Maybe they would be ashamed of me. Or worse yet—maybe they would be ashamed of themselves. Maybe hearing the truth about their family would send them into the same kind of downward spiral that had swallowed so much of my childhood.

When I was growing up, I was often mad at God for making me a Capone. I couldn't understand why other children weren't allowed to play with me, and my heart broke every time I heard someone murmur a slur or read the newspapers' awful accusations about the family I loved—and the family that loved me in return while everyone else shunned me. If these were my prevailing memories growing up as a Capone, I just couldn't imagine that things would be any different for my children. As I sat them down at the kitchen table and prepared to break the news, I felt like I was on the verge of crushing the happy life that Bob and I worked so hard to give to them.

I could tell they sensed my nervousness, and they sat unusually quiet as I told them I had something important to say. I squeezed Bob's hand tightly, and the words came slowly.

"There's something I want to tell you about my family," I began. "Al Capone was my uncle. My grandfather was his brother. I was born Deirdre Marie Capone."

For a split second, there was silence in the kitchen. I could feel my heart in my throat. Then, at the exact same instant, both of my teenagers exclaimed, "Cool!"

In retrospect, I suppose I should have anticipated the reaction, think about what any teenager might say upon hearing they are related to a legend. But to be honest, their excitement was the last thing in the world that I expected. I was so used to hiding and living in quiet shame that it just didn't cross my mind that my children might be more intrigued than upset.

But of course, it was a different time. I grew up with headlines about the menace of Al Capone. "Outfit" splashed across the front page. I grew up seeing my classmates' parents look at me and my family with constant suspicion and fear. I grew up well accustomed to men in dark suits guarding the Capone family home with machine guns. My children, on the other hand, grew up thinking of Al Capone as a celebrity, a folk hero more than a criminal.

As soon as that word, "Cool!" broke the tension in the room, the two younger kids chimed in. Bobby's eyes grew wide as saucers and, before I knew it, all four of them were peppering me with questions. "What was he like? Was he nice to you? Did he love you? Do you look like him? Do you have pictures?"

Relief washed over me. I had built this moment up in my mind for so many years, but here I was discovering that the very source of my shame was now the source of pride for my children. I tried to answer their questions as best I could. I pulled out my family photo albums and began to introduce my own children to the people who loved me most when I was their age.

First, there was Theresa Capone, the mother to Al and my grandfather. She was the rock of the Capones, the woman who held the family together as they emigrated from Italy to New York and then to Chicago. She had known poverty in Brooklyn and the realization of the "American Dream" as Al built his business in Chicago. She raised my father when his biological mother abandoned him, and she acted as a grandmother to me. Her house on Prairie Avenue became the warmest place in the world to me, even with heavy drapes drawn across the windows and armed men stationed at the doors.

Then there were her children. Mafalda—or, to me, Aunt Maffie—was the youngest and the only daughter. Only five years older than my dad, she was more of a sister to him than an aunt. To me, she was a hero and I was her spitting image. Everyone in the family called me "Little Mafalda."

The older children were six boys: Vincenzo, my grandfather Ralph and his younger brother Frank, Al, Mimi, Bites, and Matty. Frank, Ralph, and Al were all involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in earning the family's keep—which meant operating the Outfit, the organization that distributed liquor illegally during Prohibition. But to me, they were as far from “criminals” as anyone could get. They were loving, funny, larger-than-life men and fiercely proud of me. I could never reconcile the frightening images the newspapers painted of them with the warm-hearted people who teased and joked with me at Sunday dinners.

Finally, there was my dad, Ralph Gabriel Capone. In his short life, he had been the star and the hope of the family. He was keenly intelligent and determined to set out on a different path than his father and uncles. He wanted to make a name for himself with a legitimate business, but the Capone name dogged him and dashed his hopes. Ultimately, he took his own life when I was only ten years old.

Sitting at the table with my children and sharing these memories, some painful and some brimming with joy, was a defining moment for me. For many years, I had delved privately into my family's history, searching for the line between rumor and truth, and, very slowly, began shedding the thick blanket of shame that came with the Capone notoriety. But to offer this history to my children and to find that they were proud to call it their own was a new step for me. At the age of thirty-four with the help of my children, I finally accepted myself as Deirdre Marie Capone.

Not only were my children happy to learn of their family ties to Al Capone, they loved to tell people about them. And today, I have fourteen grandchildren who all think of their heritage as a badge of honor. When my granddaughter, Abby, was in the second grade, her teacher made a book for the class in which each student wrote two things about themselves, something true and something untrue so that the other children could guess which was which. Abby proudly wrote, “I don't like mustard” and “I am Al Capone's grand-grand-grand niece.”



Long before I told my children about my family—in fact, long before I even had children—began to research the Capone history. The research I did—sometimes by reading secondhand historical accounts, but more often by tapping the memories of the family members who lived the history personally—forms the basis of this book. It was my children’s acceptance that gave me the courage to go ahead with the writing, but this book has been in the making for many years. In a sense I have been writing this book all my life.

There was one episode in particular, when I was only seventeen, that set off my need to understand my family. In the fall of 1957, just after I graduated from high school, I got my first full-time job with an insurance company on LaSalle Street in Chicago. I was offered a full-ride scholarship to go to college, but my mother needed help supporting herself and my younger brother. The job was nothing glamorous; I earned \$200 a month as a secretary in the Boiler and Machinery Division. Each week, I turned my entire check over to my mother.

At first, the job was not what I envisioned for myself, but over time, I began to adapt. I was proud of myself; I was never late, and I worked hard. My boss even suggested I take on stenographic work for him in addition to my regular duties. And I made friends there—in fact, it was at that company where I met Bob, my future husband.

So, when my boss called me into his office slightly more than six months into my stint there, I had no reason to believe he would have anything negative to say. I assumed he wanted to test my dictation skills, as he had done once before, so I brought my stenographic tablet with me into the office. He gestured at the chair across from his desk and asked me to have a seat. I, still suspecting nothing, sat

down and got ready to take notes. But then he said something unexpected. “Deirdre, please tell me your name.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, I felt my face flush and my heart begin to pound. There is a trait that runs in the Capone family: intuition. My uncle Al survived countless attempts on his life because of it. In fact, he even had premonitions in dreams that saved his life. And in that moment sitting across from my boss, I sensed what was going to happen.

“Deirdre,” I answered. “My name is Deirdre Gabriel.”

For years, I had been going by Gabriel, my great-grandfather’s first name and my father’s middle name. My mother had even legally changed my brother’s name from Ralph Capone to Ralph Gabriel, but she said it wasn’t worth all the paperwork to change mine because I would get married someday and it would change then.

But my legal name did matter. I applied for the job as Deirdre Gabriel, and that’s how everyone I worked with knew me. But because it was a life insurance company, I was eligible after six months for a free policy, and I had to use my legal name on the paperwork. As soon as that paperwork crossed his desk, the life insurance agent called my boss with the news.

“Tell me your real name,” my boss said.

I swallowed. There was no sense trying to pretend. “Capone...Deirdre Marie Capone.”

“Are you any relation to Al Capone?” He asked.

“Yes,” I admitted, “he was my uncle.”

For a moment, the words hung in the air between us. Then my boss sighed and shook his head. “I’m sorry,” he said, “but we can’t have you working here. I’m going to have to let you go. You’re fired.”

I don’t know how I managed to get out of his office and into the ladies’ room without breaking down, but somehow I found myself there, sobbing uncontrollably. By that time, Al Capone had been dead for ten years, and the Outfit was now run by Tony Accardo. But it was still associated with my family. It was just at that time in the 1950s that they began laundering money by investing it in legitimate businesses like insurance companies and car dealerships, then sitting on their boards. I realize in retrospect that the executives of the company I worked for worried that, by employing me, they might give law enforcement the false impression that the Outfit’s money was behind the operations.

That was why they let me go. But at the time, even if I understood their logic, it wouldn’t have offered consolation. As I cried in the ladies’ room, I was overcome with shame. My being fired had nothing to do with my performance—I knew I had done a good job. And I saw this same situation destroy my father. He was enormously gifted, brimming with potential, but time and again, the Capone name had shut him out of opportunities. No matter what his merits, no matter how hard he worked, he couldn’t get a leg up, and ultimately, those continual disappointments killed him.

And I had to wonder if the same thing would happen to me. I felt like the door to my true identity had suddenly flung open for all the world to see. A sinking feeling in my heart told me that if I was Al Capone, I didn’t deserve a nice job. I came from a bad family, and I was a bad person by association. I didn’t deserve to sit across from an important man in a corner office with the sun shining through enormous windows. My real self finally caught up to me, and I understood that no matter what I did, I would always be doomed.

Somehow, I managed to regain my composure, clean out my desk, and leave the building. I got on the Illinois Central to go home, and the train’s rhythmic chugging sounded like, “You’re fired. You’re fired. You’re fired.” I was sure everyone else in the train car could hear the same words. I felt like they were staring at me, the poor unemployed girl, punished for the sins of her family. I don’t think the term “self-image” had been coined yet, but mine had taken a mighty blow.

The moment I got home, I knew exactly who to turn to. I called the woman who had always been my role model and confessor, my aunt, Maffie.

When I told her what happened, she answered without hesitating. “Come over and we’ll talk about it,” she said. “Uncle Johnny’s working, and I could use the company. I’ll fix us a good dinner of gravy and meatballs.”

Though Maffie was technically my great-aunt, that label didn’t hold much meaning in our family. The Capone generations were unusually blurred and interwoven. Because my father and Maffie were so close in age, they were much more like brother and sister than nephew and aunt. So, I considered Maffie my aunt and not my great-aunt.

This blurring of generations is partly why Maffie and I became so close. Add that to the fact that I was just like her, was the only Capone girl of my generation, and she treated me like someone special. Growing up, I spent a lot of time with her—often more than with my own mother. After my father died, she took me to my grandfather Ralph’s place and we spent the whole summer there together, healing and reconnecting to family. When I became a teenager, she took me shopping, fixed my hair, and, along with my grandmother Theresa, taught me to cook all the intoxicating, authentic Capone family recipes.

Whenever I felt blue or had a personal problem, I’d turn to Maffie. I knew she would take my side—the Capone side. In fact, after I left my first husband, an abusive man who threatened our infant daughter, Maffie asked me if I wanted to have him killed. I politely declined, but I’ve always believed she would have arranged it if I had just said the word.

And so, naturally, I went to her when I got fired. She had the grit to deal with any blow to the family honor. When she was born in Brooklyn in 1912, her parents Gabriel and Theresa Capone named her after the ten-year-old princess of Italy, the second child of King Emmanuel III. It was the right choice. As the only living girl of nine children, Aunt Maffie was the princess of the Capone family, and she had no trouble handling the role. Her brothers spoiled her, and she in turn developed a sense of entitlement and a ferocious tongue that she didn’t hesitate to use against anyone who crossed her or the people she loved. Everyone, myself included, was a little afraid of Maffie. She was the only member of the family I ever heard talk back to her mother, the matriarch Theresa.

Maffie was the female Al Capone. She had the dark, curly Capone hair that framed her wide-set eyes. But even with large hands, full eyebrows that almost met in the middle, and a habit of speaking through her teeth, there was something very feminine and attractive about her. She had both Al’s courage and his temper, along with the “Al Capone stare.” He was famous for it. All of a sudden, if he was threatened or in a tense situation, his face would just go stoic, and he would stare right through whatever hapless person crossed him. Aunt Maffie had the same focused, piercing stare.

She was fiercely proud of the Capone family name, and she was quick to defend her brother Al, even after he was sent to prison. Most of us, including Al’s own son, took on other identities to escape the burden of the family name. But not Maffie. I still remember visiting her in a nursing home shortly before she died. She leaned into me and whispered, “Tell them who we are. Tell them we’re Capone. They’ll treat me better.” She was one of the very few in our family who insisted that her real last name be marked on her headstone.

But Maffie’s grit didn’t only come from carrying Capone stock. It was also something she had to develop by necessity. She didn’t have an easy life, something I witnessed firsthand. She was barely eighteen years old when she married Johnny Maritote, a creepy, charmless man who could never hope to match her. It was an arranged marriage, designed by Al to secure relations between members of the Outfit. Johnny was the younger brother of Frank Maritote (alias Frank Diamond), a ruthless, out-of-control member of Al’s organization who was later killed by a shotgun blast.

Maffie told me that, as a little girl, she always dreamed of a big wedding but never had mar

suitors, much less proposals. As she put it, “Who would want to date Al Capone’s little sister? You’ve have to be crazy!” So, Johnny was Maffie’s only chance. But while the marriage was good for business, and gave the Outfit reason to hope Frank Diamond would be held in check, Uncle Al was never happy about it. He knew both Maritote brothers were thugs. And that was the real reason he didn’t attend Maffie’s wedding—not, as was reported, because he was afraid of being arrested or attacked at such a public event.

Al, however, did agree to pay for the wedding. How could he deny his baby sister the day of her dreams? He spent extravagantly, inviting four-thousand guests, including most of the Raiola family in Italy. Maffie loved to describe the occasion to me. In fact, in her house, she kept a photograph on the wall of the wedding cake. It was nine feet long and four feet high and baked in the shape of a ship—just like the cruise ship that Al would send them on for their honeymoon. The cost of the cake alone was \$2,100—in 1930 dollars! And the cake paled in comparison to the wedding gown. Maffie wore an ivory satin dress with a twenty-five-foot train. It took four women to hold the train up as she walked down the church aisle.

But, unfortunately for Maffie, the wedding was the best part of her marriage. After that gorgeous ceremony, her union with Johnny never brought her joy. I never heard them say a single affectionate word to each other. Johnny was a brooding man who gave me the creeps. Once when I was thirteen and stayed overnight at their house, I noticed him spying on me as I undressed. That same summer, at the Capone compound in Wisconsin, he offered to give me a driving lesson and insisted I sit on his lap. He began making inappropriate comments and movements. After that, I tried to stay as far away from him as possible.

In 1975, after I had been out of touch with all of the Capones for almost a decade, I called Aunt Maffie to say hello. Uncle Johnny answered the phone and gave me an enthusiastic, “Deirdre, where have you been? We’ve missed you!” I told him honestly that that was hard to believe—I didn’t think he loved me. His response was: “If I didn’t love you so much, I would have raped you when you were thirteen.” What kind of a man would say something like that? If I had had any doubts before, those words confirmed that my aunt Maffie had gotten a bad deal in that arranged marriage.

However, it was Johnny who finally drove home to me how much my aunt had cared about me. After she passed away in 1988, my husband Bob, our youngest son Jeff, and I all paid our respects to Johnny at his home in Michigan, where he and Maffie had moved to be closer to their daughter and granddaughter. He was happy to see us, and said over and over how much Aunt Maffie loved me and always called me “Little Mafalda.” He showed us a baby picture of me, which Maffie had displayed on her bedroom dresser for half a century. Seeing that photo sent a little wave of pain through me. Maffie’s later years coincided with the time when I needed to separate myself from being a Capone and I had fallen out of touch with her. But, still, nothing could diminish the tremendous role Maffie played in my life—and how, on that day in 1957 when I lost my job, she instilled in me a new sense of pride in our family.



When she opened the door to me that afternoon, the first thing she did was give me a fierce, tight hug of sympathy. Then, she unleashed a slew of choice words about my boss. But I was only seventeen and felt scared and sorry for myself. In my sorrow, I blurted, “Aunt Maffie, why did Uncle Al do so many bad things? Why was he such a terrible person?”

Aunt Maffie’s face crumpled. I could tell by the look in her eyes that I had broken her heart. She stared at me with a mixture of surprise and pain, as if my words were a dagger that I had shoved in her heart. Her face seemed to say, “I thought I would never hear those words come from your mouth.”

For a brief moment, tears actually sprang to her eyes. But then she rallied. Her teeth clenched together, and her fists clenched at her sides. This was the Maffie we were all in awe of—this was the Maffie who could pierce anyone with her eyes. She grabbed me by the arms and sat me on the sofa. Sitting down next to me, she said in a firm voice, through her teeth, “Look, if you want to be mad at someone, be mad at the idiot who fired you.”

Her eyes left mine briefly and she seemed to be searching her memory, trying to find the words to make me understand her fierce loyalty to the family. Then, that stare locked onto me once again.

“My big brother, Al, was the man who kept our family together when my father died,” she told me. “I was only eight years old. We had no means, and Al became the chief breadwinner. He moved th

whole family—including your dad, who was just a baby—from Brooklyn to Chicago. If it hadn't been for him, we would all have starved."

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Aunt Maffie went on to try to get me to understand what the culture had been like in the 20s and 30s, when Prohibition was an almost universally unpopular law. "Deirdre, it was a business," she said matter-of-factly. "The government was telling people they couldn't drink, but people wanted to drink. So, the businessmen who supplied alcohol were filling a need. The Kennedys did it. The Rockefellers did too. And Al and your grandfather...they were supplying high quality stuff; it wasn't rotgut. They were giving the people what they wanted, and the people loved them for it. Al's speakeasies were full of politicians, police officers, judges—I saw them there myself. They were his best customers, and half of them were on his payroll! He wasn't some ruthless person, committing crimes for sport. He was a businessman. And then, Prohibition was overturned, and the 'crimes' people wanted to hang him for became perfectly legal and honorable."

Maffie went on to tell me that she knew Al as well as anyone, and she would lay down her life for the fact that he never peddled drugs or intentionally harmed a single innocent person.

For a moment, I hesitated. "What about the people the Outfit killed?" I asked quietly.

Maffie nodded. "I knew you'd wonder about that," she said. "But you remember what we've always taught you. Family is everything. There were people out there who were trying to kill Al for their own gain—because he was the biggest competition there was. And they were willing to go so far as to threaten his family. When you were just a little girl, some of them were willing to threaten you. That's where Al drew the line. He didn't tolerate backstabbing, and he didn't tolerate people who wanted to hurt us."

She paused and held my gaze. I knew if there were ever a time to listen up, this was it. "No one in our family was ever involved in any cold-blooded killing," she said. "If somebody is trying to hurt you, aren't you permitted to protect yourself?"

Then she told me that she never knew a "gangster" who helped other people as much as Uncle Al. After the 1929 stock market crash, he set up soup kitchens all over Chicago and fed thousands of men, women, and children who otherwise would have starved. His speakeasies created jobs for people out of work and supported the careers of dozens of minority jazz musicians who perfected their craft performing for his customers.

"And my brother's word was his bond," Aunt Maffie finished. "Everyone knew that. He would have given his life to save your life or mine. So don't be so hard on him. He loved his family. He loved you. Don't you ever forget that, OK? Capish?"

That evening was a turning point in my life. Being a Capone had already influenced so much of who I was, but most of that influence centered on shame. Now, I wanted to understand my uncle Al and his partner, my grandfather Ralph, as human beings and not as "public enemies."

But much of their story took place before I was born. I was born in 1940, but Al and Ralph were at the height of their power during the 1920s. When I knew Al, he had already suffered through the seven-year imprisonment—most of it in Alcatraz—that changed him forever. And he died in 1946 when I was just a little girl.

So, to understand my family, I had to develop a strategy. From the day I was fired, I began to ask each member of my family—Aunt Maffie; my grandfather Ralph; Al's other brothers, Mimi, Bite, and Matty; Uncle Al's wife Mae, and their son Sonny—to tell me everything they would or could about Al and the family business. I wanted to know how things really were. What was the secret behind Al's business success? What was the true story of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre? What happened to Al in prison? And, of course, the question people have asked me all my life: Where did all the money go?

Some of my family members were more open than others, but all of them had stories to tell. And



all of them were concerned that I might be writing a book. They made me promise that if I wrote anything, it would not be published until long after they were dead and buried.

At the end of his life, my father was in the process of writing a book about the family, which I called *Sins of the Father*. Just before he was found dead, Hedda Hopper mentioned in her gossip column that he was working on a manuscript. So, there was a lot of speculation in the years after his death that perhaps it wasn't suicide. Perhaps he had been murdered—not by any member of our family, but by some other member of either the Outfit or politics who was worried about being implicated with the Capones. I will tell the full story of the questions surrounding my father's death later in this book.

People have often asked me, "Why has no other member of the family ever written a book? Why didn't Sonny ever write a book?" I think it's because of the mystery that my dad's aborted manuscript created. In this book, I will tell what actually happened at the St. Valentine's Day Massacre—and who I believe were the real perpetrators—as well as many other, as of yet untold, stories about the inner workings of Capone's Outfit. Revealing these secrets is no small matter when you're a member of a family that had such ruthless and unscrupulous enemies. Even if my father wasn't murdered while working on a book, the fact that everyone believed he might have been is telling.

But now those unscrupulous enemies are long dead. And so, too, are all the members of my family who can remember Al Capone personally. Uncle Mimi, the last of Al's siblings, died in 1984. Sonny, Al's only child and my godfather, died in 2004. As far as I can tell, I am the last member of my family to be born with the Capone name. So now, finally, it is time for the story from inside the family to come to light.

I will not pretend to be able to paint a rosy picture of my uncle Al. I cannot make him out to be a perfect man, or even a good man. But what I want people to know is that he was a complex man. He was human—and he had a heart. He was a son, a brother, a father, and an uncle. There were two Al Capones. There was the Al Capone that strutted, wore fancy suits and big hats, and loved the limelight. There was the leader of the Outfit, who sat straight in his chair, stiff and rigid. The man who often wore a smile on his face that could instantly turn into an intimidating glare when he felt challenged.

And then there was the Al I knew—the man who would get on the floor and play with me like a big teddy bear; the man who would put on an apron and make spaghetti sauce, roaring with laughter the whole while; The man who would sing operettas in Italian at the top of his lungs and taught me to play the mandolin. This was the private Al Capone that no one ever saw. And this is the Al Capone who does not appear in the dozens of books you'll find about him. Professional biographers can tell you about the legend, the businessman, and the leader—which they do by researching old newspapers and police blotters—but only a member of his family can tell you about the man within.

And that's what I will do. I'll start at the beginning—in Italy in the late nineteenth century, when Al's parents were starting a family and deciding to come to America. And I'll tell you the family history from before I was born, the stories of Al and Ralph's bootlegging operation, and Al's imprisonment. Then I'll move forward in Al's life to tell you about the uncle I knew personally for seven years. And finally, I'll tell you about the legacy that Al left behind, what happened to me and the rest of the family after his death, and how we lived with both his memory and his legend. It is my hope that you will come to know Al as something more than an icon of an era. It is my hope that you will get a sense of him as a man.

Perhaps my most important reason for writing this book, however, is that I hope it will give my father's short life some meaning. It will finish the project of telling the Capone story that he began many decades ago and was never able to complete. And it will, I hope, absolve him of the guilt he suffered from being the inheritor of the sins of his father. It will show that he came from a good family and produced a good family—mine.

If you read the biographies, you'll find no difference between the Capone boys and men like John Gotti. ~~But I know that there was a difference—and I will share it with you in this book. I am a patriot because of the Capones. My love of this country—and my eagerness to contribute back to it—was instilled in me by the Capones. And I learned from the Capones what it means to have a warm, generous heart.~~

Have you ever wondered how two people can carefully follow the directions for a recipe, using the exact same ingredients and measurements, and achieve entirely different results? What happened? How could it be? It's a mystery. But I propose to solve that mystery. The solution can be reduced to one word: Love.

When the Capones taught me to cook, they taught me that cooking is a labor of love. My grandmother Theresa used to say to me, with a little translation from Aunt Maffie, "When you cook for someone you must do it with love in your heart. That makes everything taste better." How we think influences the outcome of what we do. Cook with love in your heart, and those you cook for will love the results.

On the evening after I was fired, Aunt Maffie brought me into her kitchen and taught me her famous meatball recipe. First, we ground the different meats—beef, veal, and pork—kneading them together with breadcrumbs, pine nuts, and Italian parsley. After molding them into balls, we fried them in lard, and once they were brown on all sides, we baked them in the oven, giving us plenty of time to talk.

That night, I asked her the questions I had always been afraid to ask—about Uncle Al's business and about his relationship with my father, and about the things he did and did not do. That evening was the beginning of this book.

(I think putting this recipe here is appropriate but all the other family recipes will be in the back of the book along with more family pictures.)

## **Meat Balls ala Capone**

1 pound chuck ground once  
½ pound pork ground once  
½ pound veal ground once  
1 tsp salt  
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper  
½ loaf Italian bread  
small head Italian or regular parsley stems removed and blossoms chopped coarse  
6 cloves garlic chopped coarse  
2 eggs beaten  
small jar of pine nuts  
lard

Mix the 3 meats thoroughly in a large bowl.

Soak the bread in water and squeeze it until no water remains.

Flake the bread into small pieces and add to the meat.

Add remaining ingredients.

Mix and form meatballs.

Fry in lard until brown.

Set on baking sheet in a warm (300°) oven until ready to serve.

Don't let me in the kitchen because I will eat them as soon as they come out of the oven!

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## Chapter 2

# The Promised Land

From Italy to Brooklyn, 1865 – 1922  
*Don't call me an Italian. I am 100 percent American.*  
- Al Capone

On the southwestern coast of Italy, just above the toe of the boot, lies the province of Salerno in the Campania region. Salerno is a busy port region, and it was there that the Allies landed in 1943. If you visit today, you will still find much of the ruins and destruction left by World War II.

The little town of Angri, where the parents of Al Capone were born, is nestled in the heart of Salerno at the foot of the still-active volcano, Mount Vesuvius. Just to the west, tourists flock to the ruins of Pompeii, where thousands of people were petrified in twenty feet of lava and ash when Vesuvius famously erupted in 79 A.D.

Nearly two millennia later, the town of Angri, which has survived several eruptions itself, is much quieter than neighboring Pompeii. It boasts a few ruins and is not far from coastal resorts, but it is not a tourist destination. It is a place where Italians live quietly, and have for centuries. So it was when my great-grandfather Gabriele Capone was born there to Vincenzo Capone and Maria Calabrese in 1865. My great-grandmother Teresa Raiola was born in the same town five years later, to Raffaele Raiola and Cardino Alfani. The only records of their births are their baptisms—both were baptized at San Giovanni Batista Parish, Gabriele on December 12, 1865, and Teresa on December 27, 1870.

Teresa had three older sisters who were nuns and a brother who was a priest, and so, naturally, she went into a convent when she came of age. But she realized quickly that it wasn't the life for her, and the nuns released her before she took her vows. She married Gabriele on May 25, 1891. As most marriages were in late nineteenth century Italy, theirs was an arranged marriage. At twenty-five and twenty, they were both well over the average age to marry, and I imagine their parents were relieved.

Their first son, Vincenzo, was born in Angri on March 28, 1892. At that time, Italians followed strict patterns for naming their children. The firstborn son or daughter was named for the father's parents, while the second son or daughter was named for the mother's parents. If one of the children with an important name died, the next child born of the same sex would be given his or her name. Even to this day, many Italian families still adhere to this practice. There are exceptions to the rules—but they are rare in southern Italy.

So, Vincenzo, Al Capone's oldest brother, was named for his father's father. Shortly after he was born, Gabriele moved the family to Castelammare (now called Castelammare di Stabia), not far from Salerno on the Gulf of Naples. Gabriele had trained as a barber, and he set up a shop there. To supplement the family income, Teresa baked and sold bread and took up sewing. Their second son, Raffaele or Ralph, my grandfather, was born in Castelammare two years after Vincenzo. Gabriele and Teresa eventually had nine children, but Vincenzo and Ralph were the only ones born in Italy.

By the time Ralph was born, Gabriele and Teresa had realized that life in southern Italy held little promise for them. They did not belong to the group of racketeers called the Camorra, a sort of precursor to the mafia, nor were they part of the aristocracy or church. They had little hope of advancing their station in life. And so they decided, like so many other Italians of their generation, to gamble on the American Dream.

In 1895, Gabriele entered the United States alone by way of Canada and found a job and a

apartment in Brooklyn. Teresa followed shortly after with Vincenzo and Ralph in tow. They passed through Ellis Island, which automatically gave the three of them citizenship. Teresa was pregnant at the time with their third son, Salvatore or Frank, who was born in Brooklyn not long after she arrived there.

Because he had immigrated through Canada, Gabriele did not at first have citizenship papers. He took a government-run class in New York, and although he spoke no English, he passed, earning legal citizenship. My grandfather Ralph liked to tell me that his father was very proud of this accomplishment. Once he had settled the family and became a citizen, he also changed the spelling of his name to "Gabriel," and Teresa changed the spelling of hers to "Theresa." They started pronouncing their last name as "Cap-own" rather than "Cap-own-ee." They wanted to assimilate in every way they could.

Gabriel tried opening a grocery store in Brooklyn but met with little success. He soon fell back on the training of his youth and opened a barbershop. The family was beginning to see a glimmer of possibility in their new life. In 1899, four years after they arrived in the United States, Theresa gave birth to Alphonse, who would become the famous Al Capone. He was the first of the Capone children to be conceived and born in the U.S., and my great-grandparents saw all of their hopes and dreams of becoming an American family in him.

But the family soon hit difficult times. In 1900, Theresa experienced a brutally difficult pregnancy. At the turn of the twentieth century, 90 percent of doctors were without a college education. They attended so-called "medical schools" that were condemned by the government and the press as being sub-standard. Perhaps if she had better care, the baby would have survived, but as it was, she gave birth to a stillborn son in 1900. They named him Ermino. He was followed by a baby girl in 1901, which they named Ermina in keeping with the Italian naming pattern. Ermina's brief life came to an end from meningitis in 1902.

Theresa quickly found herself pregnant with their seventh child, a sixth son born in 1903 and named Ermino. He was followed in 1906 by Alberto, in 1908 by Amedeo, and, finally, in 1912 by Mafalda. By the time I knew them, all of my uncles used nicknames. Ermino was John or "Mimi," Alberto was Bert or "Bites," and Amedeo was "Matty." Al and Ralph also each had a "mob" nickname; Al was called "Snorkey" and Ralph was "Bottles." When my father was born, they even called him "Riskey."

When the Capones settled in Brooklyn at the turn of the twentieth century, Italians were the most recent ethnic group to start immigrating en masse, making them the lowest group on the totem pole. Last to be hired and the first to be fired, people called Italian immigrants "dagos," an ethnic slur that came loosely from the Spanish name "Diego" and was a blanket term for anyone with dark hair and skin.

Gabriel and Theresa were very poor. Few apartments in New York City had indoor plumbing, and theirs, by the Navy Yard, certainly did not. They had to go down a flight of stairs into a shed in the backyard to relieve themselves and carry water up in buckets to wash themselves, the dishes, and the clothes.

The three oldest boys, Vincenzo (Jim), Ralph, and Frank, shared the same bed in the parlor, and Al slept in the bedroom with his mother and father. During the winter, they heated the apartment with a coal-fired potbelly stove in the parlor and turned the oven on in the kitchen, leaving its door open for heat. But the price of coal was very high, so they could only resort to the stove and oven heating sparingly. My grandfather Ralph would tell me stories about waking up with his eyes glued shut from ice in his lashes on bitter cold mornings.

As a barber, Gabriel was making \$10 a week, considerably less than he was able to earn in Italy, and rent was as much as \$4 a month. The family eventually saved enough money to move to the

building on Park Avenue that also housed Gabriel's barbershop, and there, they were able to take in boarders for extra income. One of the boarders was also a barber, so he cut hair for Gabriel in lieu of paying rent, which brought in more customers and more money.

Ralph told me a story of how his parents took in a boarder who was a musician. Music fascinated Vincenzo, or Jim as he was called in America, and he asked the boarder to teach him to play his violin. Soon enough, he was much more interested in playing the violin than in going to school.

Gabriel was a stern man, and though he loved music, he ranked it second to schoolwork. He graduated from high school in Italy, a high level of education for a common person in Salerno in the nineteenth century. One of his hopes for the family was that his children would get an American education. So on the day Gabriel came home and found Jimmy playing the violin when he should have been at school, he flew into a rage. He broke the violin over his knee.

Unfortunately, Ralph and Frank never finished school; in fact, my grandfather Ralph dropped out after sixth grade. This was partly due to the fact that the family needed the extra income from his work and partly due to the fact that school was a rough place for Italian immigrants. My uncle's schoolteachers were mainly Irish, and they had no qualms about saying publicly that their "day students" were greasy, smelly, slow learners who were not motivated to improve. None of my relatives ever had the hope of getting far enough in school to become a doctor, lawyer, or businessman. That simply was not part of the equation. They expected to be forced into finding ways to survive as best they could.

Al, however, did earn a high school diploma. Contrary to what many biographers have written, Al Capone was a high school graduate. I have a photo of Al—the earliest photo of him that I am aware of—on the day he graduated from high school, and his father is sitting proudly beside him.

The family continued to struggle to make ends meet. As her boys got older, Theresa would send them into the street to sell the bread she baked. The Capone boys did what they had to do to eat. They would sneak behind vendors and steal fruit off their carts to sell along with the bread. They would occasionally steal things out of stores, sell them, and use the money to buy milk to bring home to Theresa. They were typical scrappy boys growing up on the streets of Brooklyn in the early 1900s.

Over time, their troublemaking evolved into gang activity. The gangs were partly a way to survive and make a little income, and partly a way to feel a part of something in a rough community. As was portrayed in the book and film *Gangs of New York*, the gangs my grandfather and uncles ran with in Brooklyn were vicious, and there were many fights. The one with the furthest-reaching consequences happened in 1908, when Jim was sixteen years old. He, Ralph, Frank, and Al all got into a big fight with some Irish boys, probably members of a rival gang. Jim pushed a boy through a glass window after he took a knife to Al's throat, then ran away scared.

When the three other boys got home and found Jim there, Al told him, "You killed that Irish kid." My uncle Jim was ashamed and afraid of what his mother and father would do. That very day, he ran away from home. The circus happened to be in New York at the time, and—just like the stuff of legend—he stole away with it.

It would be decades before the Capones ever saw or heard anything from him again. He traveled with the circus as an animal caretaker for several years, until he found a "Wild West Show" in the Midwest that seemed more interesting. He practiced his shooting skills endlessly, using milk cans and bottles as targets, until he was an expert enough marksman to become part of the show. Changing his name to Richard James Hart, after a silent movie star, he went by Jim and never revealed his Italian ancestry to anyone. As a matter of fact, most people thought he was an American Indian.

When World War I started, Jim joined the infantry, serving in France and rising to the rank of lieutenant. He even received a sharpshooter's medal from General John J. Pershing, commander of the

American Expeditionary Force.

After the war ended, Jim returned to the United States, settled in Homer, Nebraska, and married in 1920. And then, his life took a truly ironic turn. He became a Prohibition agent, using clever disguises and a knack for investigation to uncover illegal bootlegging operations. He led countless raids and was the subject of local headlines throughout Nebraska. Eventually, his successes earned him the nickname “Two-Gun” Hart.

In 1926, because of his accomplishments in stemming the tide of bootlegging in Nebraska, Jim was invited to become a special agent for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He moved to a Cheyenne Indian reservation in South Dakota, and there, during the summer of 1927, he served as the bodyguard for President Calvin Coolidge when he vacationed in the Black Hills. Just imagine—the president of the United States, protected by Al Capone’s oldest brother!

And through all those years, my family knew nothing of what had become of the beloved first son. I am sure, though, that Jim kept himself informed about his famous brothers. I can imagine him reading the headlines about his outlaw family, and there he was, a celebrated law enforcer.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, the newspapers caught wind of the “missing” Capone brother. My aunt Maffie told me that on several occasions, strange men would come forward posing as Vincenzo, but Theresa always rejected them. She and Vincenzo shared a secret that no one else—including the other siblings—knew, and she wouldn’t let anyone past the front door who couldn’t prove he knew the long-ago story.

Vincenzo was born a frail child, and when the family immigrated to Brooklyn, he became sickly. Disease was prevalent among Italian immigrants in New York City due to their crowded quarters and limited food, so Theresa worried about him. Every day, she would take him down to the stockyard and have him drink a pint of fresh cow’s blood, hoping it would strengthen him. She told him never to talk about this with anyone, not even his brothers, because they would think he was a vampire.

In 1945, Jim fell on hard times. He had no job or money, and finally, he called his mother in Chicago. Aunt Maffie, who was not even born yet when Vincent disappeared, answered the phone, and she told him to come by the house. I was there when Theresa opened the door. There was this man in his fifties, standing on the doorstep telling her in Italian that he was her long-lost son. But my grandmother didn’t recognize him—the image in her mind was of her sixteen-year-old boy. She spoke to him and said, “You are not my son.”

Theresa walked to the parlor and sat down. Jim bent down and whispered something in her ear—the secret of the cow’s blood. The moment she heard it, she passed out cold. He was her son. The revelation was just as much a surprise to Jim’s wife and children as well. They never knew he was Al Capone. All along, they had known him as Jim Hart.

[By the way, Jim found out upon his return that he, in fact, had not killed anyone. Al had only told him he killed that young man to scare him. Do you know what Jim did when he saw Al—the legendary Al Capone, feared through all of Chicago—after all those years? He punched him in the face.]

When Jim ran away from home in 1908, my grandfather Ralph was suddenly thrust into the role of eldest son. In a turn-of-the-century immigrant family, this meant that he assumed responsibility for helping his parents provide for his younger brothers and sister. He was only fourteen years old.

Ralph managed to find different odd jobs here and there. He worked as a telegram messenger, teller in a bank, and even at the Lifesaver Candy Company. Frank and Al, who were thirteen and nine when Jim disappeared, helped as much as they could by selling newspapers, but the real burden was Ralph’s. Many biographers have described Ralph as either being less intelligent than Al or less of a leader, but I know that was not true. He was the businessman behind the Capone success. Al was the flamboyant face of the Outfit, but Ralph made things run from behind the scenes. He kept the books

paid out salaries, and coordinated the liquor shipments. There was a reason the Chicago Crime Commission named Ralph Public Enemy #3 behind Al's #1. Without Ralph, Al could not operate, and they knew it.

But his leadership skills didn't only apply to his life in bootlegging. He developed them and exercised them when the Capone family was under duress in those early years in Brooklyn. He learned to take care of those he loved, and this was a trait that stayed with him for all of his life. At the end of his life, when he moved out of his lodge in Wisconsin, a cousin of mine helped him pack his things. My cousin told me, "Deirdre, I found all these little pieces of paper in his strong box." They were IOUs that people had given him, and he had never collected on. Some of them were years old. He would give this person \$25, that person \$500, and he didn't expect anything in return. He took care of his own.

In June 1914, as World War I erupted, my grandfather Ralph enlisted in the Navy and was sent to Paris Island. But it was quickly discovered that he had flat feet, and they sent him home. Flat feet run in the family—all the Capone men, including Al, had them. So, Ralph returned safely to Gabriel and Theresa. He would not be among the one hundred million Americans who died in that war.

Back in Brooklyn, he met a beautiful young Italian girl named Filomina (Florence) Muscatto in 1916. He was twenty-two, and she was only sixteen. They married, and in April 1917, their first and only child, a son, was born. That son was my father, Ralph Gabriel Capone. His arrival could not have brought more joy to my grandmother Theresa. He was the first in a new generation of Capones, and he was a boy. Women of that era saw promise in their boys—girls were expected to help with the chores.

A second boy was born in the Capone family a little more than a year later, December 4, 1918 but under less joyful circumstances. My uncle Al, then nineteen years old, was sowing his wild oats, and he got a local girl pregnant. By then, Al had already contracted syphilis, which the girl caught from him. Probably because of the disease, she had a very difficult pregnancy and died in childbirth. The boy she bore was himself weakened by the ravages of syphilis and suffered from health problems a good portion of his life.

When my grandmother Theresa found out that Al's relationship with the girl had produced a son, she insisted that he stay with their family. He was named Albert Francis Capone, or "Sonny." Theresa wanted him to have a mother, and even though the twentieth century was well under way, arranged marriages were still perfectly common. She found a devout Irish Catholic woman, Mary (Mae) Coughlin, in her parish who was twenty one years old, nearing spinsterhood in those days. Mae was sterile due to a birth defect, and so when my grandmother pleaded with her to marry Al and raise his son as her own, she agreed. She would be a devoted mother to Sonny and wife to Al for the rest of her life.

Without warning, life for the entire Capone family turned upside-down in 1920. My grandfather Gabriel died suddenly of a heart attack in November at the age of fifty-five. Without him, Theresa could not keep the barbershop open. The family's means of survival was lost forever.

Although both Al and Ralph already had families of their own, they were the only ones capable of supporting their widowed mother and helping her feed her five children still at home. They needed a way to earn money—lots of money.

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## Chapter 3

# The Making of a “King”

From Brooklyn to Chicago, 1920 – 1923

*I came to Chicago with forty dollars in my pocket... My son is now twelve. I am still married, and I love my wife dearly. We had to make a living. I was younger than I am now, and I thought I needed more. I didn't believe in prohibiting people from getting the things they wanted. I thought Prohibition was an unjust law, and I still do.*

- Al Capone

Long before his father Gabriel died, Al Capone started developing a skill that would eventually secure him not only a fortune, but a place in history. He was becoming street wise—and he was learning how to lead a gang. It started innocently enough and I'm sure that as a teenager, Al never thought that his running with rough kids on the streets of Brooklyn would pave the way for his life's work. But slowly, over time, crime defined more and more of his life.

The Capone family needed its young sons' contributions to survive. Working six days a week on hard labor, a young man could hope to make around \$900 a year in the early 1900s. But milk at the time was 33¢ a gallon. There were nine Capone mouths to feed. If the family drank only a gallon of milk a day—which is less than a glass for each person—fifteen percent of a paycheck could disappear just for milk. What about food, rent, clothing, coal, medicine...the endless list of expenses any family with young children incurs? Clearly, whatever menial labor the boys could secure wasn't enough.

Gang activity was one answer. By the time Gabriel died in 1920, Al had already been involved in crime, some petty and some not so petty, for years. It started when he was very young, simply stealing fruit and vegetables from street vendors' carts, and eventually he learned to loot trucks and warehouses. He was neither the first nor the last to resort to this solution—gangs have been in existence for as long as there have been inhabitants of this world. In fact, the word thug dates back to thirteenth century India and refers, loosely, to a member of a gang of criminals.

“We called him a ‘wharf rat,’” Ralph told me in one of our talks about his boyhood with Al. “And he gradually became a fast-thinking and hard-fighting young lad.” The first gang Al joined was a Brooklyn group called the James Street gang. But there were bigger fish to fry on the streets of New York City. In the early 1900s, an Italian immigrant and notorious criminal named Paolo Antonio Vaccarelli, a.k.a. Paul Kelly, formed the Italian Five Points gang. It was named for its home turf situated in the Five Points section of Lower Manhattan, which is also called the Bowery. The gang evolved to become one of the largest and most structured street gangs in American history.

After Paul Kelly, the second in command of the Five Pointers was Johnny “the Fox” Torrio. He instituted a practice of recruiting street hoodlums into a “farm team” of young boys called the Five Pointers Juniors. At the age of twelve, Al left the James Street gang and joined the Five Pointers Juniors, where he met three other boys who would grow up to become infamous figures in American crime history: Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Meyer Lansky, and Bugsy Siegel.

Torrio, who was eighteen years older than Al, watched his new recruit with a keen interest. He saw that Al was bright and had a knack for leadership, and he began to groom him for more responsibility. When Al was still a young teenager, Torrio was confident that he had learned the ropes well, and he allowed him to graduate from being a Five Pointer Junior to a true Five Pointer.

Torrio believed in putting business first, but many other members of the Five Pointers were too accustomed to a life of petty crime and making rash, hasty decisions. Eventually, he got fed up, and with his buddy Frankie Yale, he left the Five Pointers and set up a new base of operations at the Harvard Inn in Brooklyn. Al followed them—in fact, he got the famous scar that gave rise to the



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