

◀ epilogue ▶

“The real estater . . .” Those three little words had given me chills when I videotaped the big Irishman for the last time. The taping was a formality, an affirmation, analogous to putting a signature on the confession that already existed on audiotape. I did not anticipate that still more confession would spill out during the session. But then as the character Sarah said in *The Right to Remain Silent*, my novel based on interrogations I had conducted that solved major crimes: “[C]onfession is one of the necessities of life, like food and shelter. It helps eliminate psychological waste from the brain.”

When I tried to get more details about “the real estater” out of Sheeran he cut me off. No probing allowed. Sheeran’s caginess was due to his deeply held beliefs. He confessed in order to relieve his guilt and save his soul, but he never wanted anyone to call him a rat. Sheeran said the word “rat” with such contempt in the ordinary course of conversation that my partner, Bart Dalton, and I adapted it for use in our law practice.

While Sheeran hated rats and would not be one himself, he bore no malice toward John “The Redhead” Francis who, dying of cancer and not wanting to die in jail, implicated himself and Sheeran in the killing of Salvatore “Sally Bugs” Briguglio and Joseph “Crazy Joey” Gallo. Because Francis had already implicated himself, Sheeran would only confirm Francis’s involvement. But it would take a lot of skill and hard work to get Sheeran to implicate even a dead man in anything the man was not already at least suspected of doing. Sheeran often spoke of someone’s family, including his own daughters, needing his protection from bad publicity. Sheeran told me: “You got enough, Charles. . . . Be satisfied, Charles. . . . You got enough. Don’t be probing.”

The next day we prayed together, and then he stopped eating. A man who “painted houses” and determined the life expectancy of more than two dozen other men — not counting those he killed in combat — determined his own. And so the “real estater” would remain nothing more than an intriguing slip of the tongue.

Until one day in fall 2004, when I spoke by phone to retired New York City Police Department detective Joe Coffey, the man who solved the Son of Sam and Vatican Connection crimes, along with countless other high-profile cases, and who co-wrote *The Coffey Files*. A mutual friend, the mystery writer and retired NYPD detective Ed Dee, put us together. While knowledgeable about the mob, Coffey had never heard of John Francis. He said he would check him out with a mob confidant he still had in the former Bufalino family. I couldn't tell Coffey much about John Francis that wasn't already in *“I Heard You Paint Houses,”* so I sent him a copy.

I called Joe in February 2005. He hadn't read the book.

“But,” Joe said. “I did look into that real estate guy. Like you told me, he was very close to Russell Bufalino.”

“What real estate guy?”

“What's-his-name, the driver. He wasn't merely a driver. He was big in his own right. He had a commercial real estate license. He was independently wealthy from it. He was very close to Bufalino and to Sheeran. He might have driven for Bufalino, but he wasn't really a driver per se.”

“John Francis? The Redhead?”

“John Francis. That's it. Very big in real estate. Independently wealthy.”

Chills. The chills I got as a young prosecutor when the truth would lead to more truth, snowflake by snowflake until it became an avalanche.

In 1972, on orders from Bufalino, Francis drove when Sheeran killed Gallo. In 1978, again on orders from Bufalino, Francis fired, too, when Sheeran shot Briguglio. Does there exist any possibility that this member of that very tight trio of Bufalino, Sheeran, and Francis was left out of some role in the 1975 Hoffa hit? I suppose there's a possibility. But one thing we now do know is that John Francis was a “real estater,” and not a fly-by-nighter, but an independently wealthy commercial “real estater,” the kind of man who must have had connections far and wide.

After the first edition of *I Heard You Paint Houses* was published in 2004, a Detroit newspaper reporter tracked down the son of the owner of the house in which Sheeran shot Hoffa. The house had belonged to a now-deceased woman who bought it in 1925 and sold it in 1978, three years after Hoffa's disappearance. Her son told the reporter that his mother moved out several months prior to the murder and let a single man, whom neighbors described as "mysterious," rent a room in the house. Are there dots that connect "real estater" John Francis to an unsuspecting "real estater" in Michigan to that "mysterious" boarder?

It would be helpful to read the FBI file to see what, if anything, it says about John Francis's possible role in Hoffa's disappearance. In 2005 I filed a Freedom of Information Act request for the file on Francis and the others, including Sheeran, the Andretta brothers, Briguglio, and Chuckie O'Brien. If possible, I also wanted to corroborate Briguglio's role as a confidential FBI informant. But I anticipate as little success with my FOIA request as the Hoffa family and the Detroit newspapers had with theirs. While individual agents are top notch, as an institution the FBI sometimes behaves more like an armed public relations agency than a public service agency. The FBI would be too embarrassed to divulge that Briguglio was an informant and that they failed to protect him. As Kenneth Walton, who headed the Detroit FBI from 1985 to 1988 said about Hoffa, "I'm comfortable I know who did it, but it's never going to be prosecuted because . . . we would have to divulge informants, confidential sources."

If I do end up getting any of the file, which could take years, the censor's black ink will probably cover the FBI's failure to protect its informant, and the file will not be worth the cost.

However, if the FBI were to give relevant portions of its file to the Oakland County district attorney, David Gorcyca, there could be no black ink. He is the brother law enforcement officer to whom they turned over the Hoffa case on March 29, 2002, when they threw in the towel. It would be an insult if the FBI blackened his pages.

Unfortunately, despite at least three requests by Gorcyca beginning in June 2004 for relevant portions of the file that deal with Sheeran, Briguglio, and the Andretta brothers, none of the requested portions of the FBI's seventy-volume, sixteen-thousand-page file have been released to the DA. Gorcyca wrote me, "It is obvious on the local level

something is seriously up with their reluctance to cooperate.” He spoke of “old stereotypes about the FBI,” and said he was “incensed.” But all he can do is ask. Since Oakland County has no standing grand jury, Gorcyca also asked the feds to convene a grand jury to call as witnesses the last living participants identified by Sheeran: Tommy Andretta and Chuckie O’Brien. That request was denied.

Just before the first edition of *I Heard You Paint Houses*” came out, Fox News followed leads they read in an advance copy of the book. They got permission from the current owners of the house where Sheeran confessed he shot Hoffa to allow forensic lab specialists to spray Luminol, a chemical agent that detects evidence of blood, iron oxide, on the house’s floorboards. The boards tested positive, revealing eight tiny indications of blood in a trail that exactly matched Sheeran’s confession. The blood trailed from the vestibule down the hallway that leads to the kitchen.

Two shots to the back of the head produce relatively little blood. Even though I knew that the forensic lab Fox News hired felt there was an insufficient quantity of blood for DNA testing; that nearly twenty-nine years had elapsed and that a prominent forensic pathologist, Dr. Michael Baden, felt that the biological components of Hoffa’s blood needed for DNA testing would have degraded due to environmental factors; that there were “cleaners” to make sure no blood was left behind; that linoleum had been placed on the vestibule floor to catch any “paint” that did spatter; and that the body was carried out in a body bag, I got caught up in the hope and the hype. I wanted a DNA test to prove the blood was Hoffa’s. Maybe the linoleum dripped as the cleaners carried it out.

The Bloomfield Township Police Department read portions of *I Heard You Paint Houses*,” then ripped up sections of the floor and sent them to the FBI lab to see if the blood’s source could be positively identified. On February 15, 2005, Chief Jeffrey Werner announced that the FBI lab found human male blood on the flooring, but that the DNA in the blood did not match Hoffa’s. At the press conference Gorcyca made it clear that while this did not corroborate Sheeran’s confession, it did not refute it either.

Dr. Baden, former Chief Medical Examiner of New York City, commented, “Sheeran’s confession that he killed Hoffa in the manner

described in the book is supported by the forensic evidence, is entirely credible, and solves the Hoffa mystery. Nothing about this latest finding speaks against the confession and the overwhelming weight of the evidence.”

After nearly twenty-nine years, finding another’s blood could mean anything from a boy with a nosebleed to the house being used by the mob for other murders, as was the case with the Gambino family’s house of death described in Gene Mustain and Jerry Capeci’s fine book about that family, *Murder Machine*.

Eight months earlier, in mid-June 2004, I had received an unsolicited letter from Professor Arthur Sloane, author of *Hoffa*, a biography I’d relied on for information about Hoffa and the Teamsters. Although this 1991 work offers a different theory on the Hoffa disappearance, Sloane wrote after reading Sheeran’s confession: “I’m fully convinced — now — that Sheeran was in fact the man who did the deed. And I’m impressed too by the book’s readability and by its factual accuracy in all areas on which I am qualified to pass judgment.” When I called to thank him he said to me: “You have solved the Hoffa mystery.”

When Sheeran and I found the house in 2002, I did not bother to try to enter. As an experienced homicide investigator and prosecutor I never dreamed there would be forensic evidence nearly three decades after the murder. As a recognized expert in interrogation I was certain I had found the house — a house burned forever into Frank Sheeran’s memory — and I didn’t want anyone challenging the confession in this book on the grounds that we had seen the interior and had been influenced by it. Friends have said that I have an uncanny knack for interrogation, and I was willing to test that. Let the snowflakes fall where they may.

In a visit arranged by Fox News, I entered the house for the first time after “*I Heard You Paint Houses*” had shipped to the stores. The current homeowner, Ric Wilson, his wife, and one of their sons were present. (During our visit Wilson and his son recognized me as the man who was outside their house in 2002 taking the photo that appears in this book. For a view of the house’s interior see the Wilsons’ Web site, www.hoffas-true-last-stand.com.)

I opened the front door and entered a small vestibule. As soon as I entered I got those old chills I got as a homicide investigator when I viewed a scene, and it added to my understanding of the crime.

Sheeran described a “small” vestibule, and I wrote the word “small”; this vestibule was very small, indeed, and had a box canyon feel to it. It became instantly obvious that the only person who could have killed Jimmy Hoffa was the man who brought him in, and Hoffa would have entered this strange house only with his friend, the loyal “Hoffa man,” Frank Sheeran. There was no escape from this vestibule for Jimmy Hoffa.

Directly in front of the vestibule on the left I saw the staircase that leads to the second floor. The staircase was so close it gave the appearance of crowding the vestibule, and it blocked the view of the kitchen and most of the hallway. It hid the cleaners. It effectively cut off the back door as an escape option. With no time to think, the only way out was the way Jimmy Hoffa tried to get out, the way he’d come in.

To the right of the staircase was a long hallway leading to the kitchen. On the right side of the hallway were two rooms: the living room and then the dining room. At the end of the hallway there was that kitchen out of whose back door the body of Jimmy Hoffa was carried in a body bag to be placed in the trunk of a car and taken away to be cremated at what Sheeran called an “incinerary.”

The interior was now revealed to be precisely as Sheeran had described to me and as I had written. Except for one important detail. There was no back door out of that kitchen. My heart sank.

“Sheeran told me Hoffa’s body was carried out a back door,” I said to Fox News correspondent Eric Shawn.

“Look – there’s a side door on the left at the top of the stairs to the cellar,” he said. “And the last indication of blood stopped in the hall just before the stairs down to the cellar. He must have meant this door.”

“No. He said a back door. At the end of the hallway and through the kitchen leading to the backyard. A back door. This door goes to the driveway alongside the house. It’s a side door.”

I went to the living room and asked Ric Wilson if there had ever been a back door to the backyard through the kitchen. He said, “I took that back door out in 1989 when I renovated the house. I got that back door still sitting in my garage.” Chills again; snowflake by snowflake.

In some jurisdictions a credible confession alone suffices to convict. In others there needs to be one added piece of corroborative fact. Here

we already had the fact that in 1999, Sheeran confessed to me that he lured Hoffa into the rear passenger seat of the maroon Mercury — even though Hoffa always insisted on the front “shotgun” seat. The driver of the car, Hoffa’s foster son, Chuckie O’Brien, denied Hoffa was in that car and passed a lie detector test.

On September 7, 2001, the FBI announced that a hair recovered from the headrest of the rear passenger’s-side seat and saved all these years recently had been DNA-tested and was indeed Hoffa’s hair. Sheeran’s confession and that piece of important forensic corroboration would have been more than enough to convict Sheeran. I put four men on death row with less evidence than I amassed against Sheeran out of his own mouth.

Interestingly, O’Brien’s alibi had already been shot full of holes by the FBI. To my eye, this also corroborated Sheeran’s confession. Sheeran told me that O’Brien was an innocent dupe and truly believed he was taking Hoffa to a mob meeting. And that is likely why O’Brien did not have a planned and well-thought-out alibi.

Sheeran’s lawyer, former Philadelphia district attorney F. Emmett Fitzpatrick, warned Sheeran in front of me that he would be indicted. They discussed how Sheeran’s health would likely delay the proceedings against him.

Among the kind letters I received after publication of the first edition of *I Heard You Paint Houses* was one from Stan Hunterton, a Las Vegas attorney. As a young assistant U.S. attorney in Detroit in 1975 he drafted the search warrant for the maroon Mercury and successfully argued against the mob lawyer’s motion to have the hair and anything else seized from the car returned to the car’s owner. (Nice work, Stan, in preserving that hair until DNA science could catch up with it.) In his letter Stan congratulated me on getting “the first confession concerning the assassination” of Jimmy Hoffa.

In February 2002, five months after the FBI announced finding Hoffa’s DNA in the strand of hair, Sheeran and I searched for and found the house of death. This find was additional corroboration of Sheeran’s confession. The house’s location and exterior features were just as Sheeran described.

And now with the book in stores, the home’s interior turned out to be just as Sheeran had described as well. Further, we now know that the homeowner at the time of the shooting was living elsewhere. A

lone boarder is much easier to plot and plan around than a family full of people coming and going. The snowflakes mounted.

More chills were in store, and they wouldn't all be mine. The avalanche was about to start.

Sheeran confessed that in 1972, on orders from Bufalino, he walked into Umberto's Clam House in New York's Little Italy alone, and with two guns shot the place up, killing "the fresh kid," Crazy Joey Gallo. I intensely interrogated Sheeran on this "matter." The prevailing story, derived from informant Joe Luparelli, was that three Italians associated with the Colombo crime family to which the rebellious Gallo crew belonged — Carmine "Sonny Pinto" DiBiase and two brothers known only as Cisco and Benny — were down the street at a Chinese restaurant. Luparelli saw Gallo arrive at Umberto's. Luparelli then walked to the Chinese restaurant and encountered the three Italian men. He told them that Gallo was in Umberto's. Sonny Pinto impulsively announced that he was going to kill Gallo, as there was an "open" contract out on Gallo. He told Benny and Cisco to get guns, and when they returned with the guns the three Italian men stormed into the Mulberry Street side door at Umberto's, guns blazing as if it were High Noon at the OK Corral. The three alleged Italian gangsters wounded Gallo's bodyguard, Pete Diapoulos, in the buttocks and killed Gallo as he fled.

After I exhausted all my cross-examination skills on Sheeran, I was satisfied that although Sheeran's confession went against all the books, a movie, and every reference on the Internet, he was telling me the truth about killing Crazy Joey, and like everything else he confessed to me it was going in the book. It seemed to me that Luparelli was providing disinformation to the FBI and to the public. Perhaps he had some personal motive or personal gain to sell this story to the authorities — maybe he owed a lot of money he couldn't pay and needed to get off the street. Likely on orders, Luparelli was shifting the blame away from the mob bosses who ordered and sanctioned the hit in case Gallo's crew was thinking about a vendetta against the Genovese family, too, rather than just against their own family, the Colombos, with whom the Gallo crew was already feuding.

Sheeran told me long ago that no mobster associated with one boss paints a house in another boss's territory without the express approval

of that other boss. For example, Hoffa could not have been killed in Detroit's territory without the approval of both the Detroit boss and the Chicago boss, as Chicago's territory overlapped Detroit's. Down south, Carlos Marcello ran such a tight territorial ship that he would not permit a mobster from another family to visit New Orleans without his express approval, much less allow him to paint a house there.

Umberto's Clam House was owned by a high-ranking Genovese family capo, Mattie "The Horse" Ianello, who was at the restaurant at the time of the shooting. Ianello had been a codefendant of Sheeran's on the list of top twenty-six mob figures in the civil RICO lawsuit brought by Rudy Giuliani a few years later. Clearly, the Genovese family, at least, if not Ianello personally, would have to have sanctioned the hit in Ianello's restaurant. Unless it were some crazy impulsive and unsanctioned act, the eyes of the Gallo crew, now led by his brother, Albert "Kid Blast" Gallo, would narrow on Ianello and the Genovese family. It was well-known that the Bufalino family did a lot of work with the Genovese family, a family that included Tony Pro. And so Luparelli told the authorities and wrote in a book that it was "a spur-of-the-moment-thing."

In any event, not one of the three Italians was arrested for Gallo's killing on Luparelli's information, because his statement was never corroborated in a single detail. In fact, "Benny" and "Cisco" were never identified further.

Following publication of *I Heard You Paint Houses*, the shooting of Crazy Joey Gallo by a lone gunman, and not by three gunmen, was corroborated in an article posted on www.ganglandnews.com by author Jerry Capeci, who checked the original news accounts of the Gallo hit. As a young reporter for the *New York Post*, Capeci said he "spent a few hours at Umberto's Clam House on Mulberry Street in lower Manhattan during the early morning hours of April 7, 1972." Capeci wrote that Al Seedman, legendary chief of detectives for the NYPD, had walked out of Umberto's and announced to the reporters that all the carnage was the work of a lone gunman.

Capeci wrote in his second edition of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Mafia*, published in 2005, "[I]f I were forced to make a choice [about who killed Gallo], I'd say Frank Sheeran did the work." As to Hoffa he wrote: "Sheeran's account has the ring of truth."

And then fortune brought me something special. Eric Shawn of Fox News called. Based on a tip from an old news hand at Fox he had learned about an eyewitness to the Gallo shooting. She was a respected journalist at the *New York Times* who wished to remain anonymous. He called her, and she admitted she had been there and witnessed the shooting. He said, "I understand three Italian types came in and started shooting." She said, "No, it was a lone gunman." He directed her attention to Capeci's Web site and to a postage-stamp-size photo of Sheeran taken in the early seventies, around the time of the Gallo hit, the same photo that appears in this book. She said, "Oh my God, I've seen this man before. I have to get this book." Shawn immediately walked from Fox News on Forty-seventh Street to the New York Times building on Forty-third and delivered a copy.

I told this story to Ted Feury, a friend of mine and retired CBS executive. Ted said, "I know her. She was the best grad student I ever had at Columbia. She's a terrific gal, very bright, a great journalist, and as honest as they come. I'll call her."

The three of us had dinner at Elaine's in New York. Although many people close to this eyewitness in her profession know of her involvement in "the matter," she told us that she still wanted anonymity. The eyewitness drew a diagram of the scene for us, including where her table was in relation to the Gallo party, and said, "There were a lot of shots that night, and I heard those shots for a long time afterward." She confirmed that it was, indeed, the work of a lone gunman, "and he wasn't Italian, that's for sure." She described him as an Irish-looking man fitting Frank Sheeran's general description and facial features, his distinctive height and build, and his approximate age at the time. She flipped through a collection of photos I had, including photos of other gangsters, and when she saw an enlarged version of the black-and-white photo of Sheeran taken around the time of the Gallo shooting, she said: "Like I told Eric Shawn on the phone, it's been a long time, but I know this much. I've seen that man before." In answer to my question she said, "No, not from a photo in the newspaper. I've seen him in the flesh before." I showed her black-and-white photos of a younger Sheeran, and she said, "No, too young." An older Sheeran, "No, too old." Then she looked again at the photo of Sheeran taken around the time of the Gallo hit, and she said with palpable fear, "This picture gives me chills."

The meeting at Elaine's was more social than business. Ted and the eyewitness were regulars.

Elaine Kaufman sat at our table and told us that Gallo used to frequent her restaurant with the actor Jerry Orbach, who played Gallo in the movie *The Gang Who Couldn't Shoot Straight*, and Orbach's wife at the time, Marta. Marta had contracted to write Gallo's biography. Elaine said that Gallo always gave her what she called "the eyelock." And she demonstrated it. She said he stared directly into her eyes whenever he talked to her about the travails of owning a restaurant, and it was hard to get away from him or his gaze.

Like all restaurants, the lighting at Elaine's is subdued. I wanted to formally interview the eyewitness alone and on tape, show her the still photos in better lighting and show her a video of Sheeran in color — "in the flesh." I wanted to run by her the things I'd read that conflicted with Sheeran's confession. Due to our mutually busy schedules nine months elapsed before I met with her at her New York-area home. I brought my photo collection and a video I'd made of Sheeran on September 13, 2000, when he was seventy-nine. Although he was twenty-seven years older than he'd been at Umberto's, it was in color and it was Sheeran "in the flesh."

"I was eighteen at the time," the eyewitness said, "a freshman in college in Chicago. It was probably spring break. I was with my best friend. We were visiting one of her brothers and his wife. They lived near Gracie Mansion. We'd gone to the theater. I think we saw *Equus*, and then we probably drove around and did some sightseeing. None of us were drinking. We were underage, and my friend's brother and his wife didn't drink when they were out with us. We ended up at Umberto's about twenty minutes before the shooting.

"No way were there only seven people there besides the Gallo party, if that's what some book says. It was pretty crowded for that time of night, with people at maybe four or five tables and a couple of people sitting at the bar. Maybe people left after we got there and before it happened, that I don't know. We came in the front door — the one on the corner of Hester and Mulberry. There were no tables to the left on the Hester Street side. They were all in front of you as you walked in — between the bar on the left and the Mulberry Street wall on the right. We were sitting toward the back. I was facing Hester Street. My best friend sat to my right. Her brother and his wife sat opposite us.

They faced the back wall and the side door off Mulberry. I remember the Gallo party to our left because of the little girl, and because I thought that the girl's mother was very pretty. Besides the little girl there were two or three women and two or three men. I don't remember seeing the faces of the men.

"Our seafood had just arrived when I noticed a tall man walk in through the Mulberry Street door. I could see the door easily. The door was just off my left shoulder. He walked on a diagonal to the bar, walking right in front of me — the whole way in my direct line of vision. As he walked past me I remember being struck by him. I remember thinking he was distinctive — quite tall and a handsome man. He stopped at the bar not far, at all, from our table. I was looking down at my plate of food when I heard the first shot. I looked up, and that same man was standing there facing the Gallo table with his back to the bar. I can't say I remember a gun in his hand, but he was definitely the one doing the shooting. There's no doubt about that. He was calmly standing there while everybody else was ducking."

The Gallo party didn't know what hit them.

"It was Sheeran. That man is the same man in this photo. Even the video looks more like the way he looked that night — even though he's much older in the video. Oh, it was him. I'm positive. In those news photos [circa 1980] you showed me he looks bloated and fat, but not in the video. In this photo he looks like a clown [a photo published in *Newsweek* in 1979.]"

I told her that Sheeran had done a lot of drinking and became bloated after he was forced to kill Hoffa in 1975, and she said, "That's the year I came to New York to go to grad school in journalism at Columbia."

She then went on with her account. "My friend's brother yelled for us to get down. Other people were screaming to get down, too. Besides the gunshots the thing I remember most when I was down on the tile floor was the crashing of glass. We stayed on the floor until the shooting stopped. When the shooting stopped my friend's brother yelled, 'Let's get out of here,' and we got up and ran out the Mulberry Street door. There were a lot of others shouting "Let's get out of here," too, and they ran away when we did.

"We ran up Mulberry. There was nobody on Mulberry firing at any getaway car, if that's what the bodyguard claimed. Our car was parked

near the police station. On the drive home we speculated about whether we had just been in a robbery or a mob hit. Nobody wanted to stereotype Little Italy, but we thought it was mob related. I don't remember if we heard it on news radio on the way home, but we saw it in the papers the next day. It was pretty horrible. I think if my girlfriend and I had been there alone we might have gone back the next day, but her brother and his wife were very protective and didn't want us involved in any way."

This Gallo witness with a journalist's memory and eye for detail told me that she had not read any of the stories that had cropped up over the years. She didn't like thinking about it or talking about it. She had never heard about the "three Italians" until Eric Shawn had mentioned them. She said, "That's ridiculous. There's no way three Italians burst through that side door on Mulberry Street and started shooting. I'd have seen them come in. If there were three men we'd have been too scared to get up and run away. If we did get up we wouldn't have run out that side door."

I closed the session by asking her again how sure she was that Sheeran was the man she had seen that night. She said, "I'm positive. He's definitely the man I saw that night."

This positive eyewitness identification sealed it; if I were the prosecutor in this case, I would have just heard the cell door slam. Although the identification was made many years after the fact, she was a budding journalist who had an opportunity to see the killer and to form a mental image of him before he became a threat with a gun in his hand. Eyewitnesses confronted with a gun often remember only the gun.

As a result of her identification, I decided to buy as many books as I could find on Gallo. It's been a while; many are used, out of print. Their versions of that night at Umberto's often border on the silly. However, a 1976 book written by Pete "The Greek" Diapoulos, Gallo's bodyguard, was more revealing.

In *The Sixth Family*, Diapoulos writes that Gallo's birthday celebration began that night at the Copacabana, the famous New York nightclub. Don Rickles was the entertainer that night, and he paid his respects to Gallo. At the Copa, Gallo had an encounter with "an old timer, Russ Bufalino, a regular greaseball." In Bufalino's lapel Gallo spotted an Italian-American Civil Rights League button. True to Bufalino's love of

jewelry, this button had a diamond in it. Joe Colombo, Bufalino's friend and fellow boss, the man Gallo ordered hit, had been in a coma for ten months. Gallo said to Bufalino, "Hey, what're you doing with that? You really believe in that bullshit league?"

Diapoulos wrote:

You saw how Bufalino's chin went, his back going very straight, turning away from us. Frank [Bufalino's companion] with a very worried look, took Joey by the arm. "Joey, that's nothing to talk about here. Let's just have a few drinks."

"Yeah, we'll have a few drinks."

"Joey, he's a boss."

"So he's a boss. So am I a boss. That make him any better than me? We're all equal. We're all supposed to be brothers."

"Brothers" came out like it was anything but.

"Joey," I said, "Let's go to the table. Let's not have a beef."

Diapoulos identified Bufalino's companion, the one "with a very worried look" who took Gallo by the arm, as a man named Frank. Diapoulos described how the "beef" got started: "Champagne was still being sent over. A wiseguy named Frank sent some. He was with an old-timer, Russ Bufalino, a regular greaseball, the boss of Erie, Pennsylvania."

And Frank Sheeran, Russell Bufalino's regular companion on their drives to New York, always described Gallo as "a fresh kid." Frank had reason to know. Because this incident at the Copa reflected on Bufalino, it was the kind of detail Sheeran would have omitted in his confession to me.

Joseph D. Pistone, the real-life Donnie Brasco, told me that when he was working undercover for the FBI he used to hang out at the Vesuvius. There he met Bufalino and Sheeran. They came in every Thursday night. The Vesuvius was a long walk or a short ride from the Copa. Gallo's birthday party at the Copa began at 11 P.M. on a Thursday night. By 5:20 on Friday morning Joey Gallo was dead.

Russell and Frank in New York City at the Copa the night Crazy Joey Gallo got "fresh" with the wrong people and had his house painted. Like Jimmy Hoffa's, and all the other houses Frank Sheeran confessed to painting, the Gallo mystery is solved.

EPILOGUE

307



One of Frank Sheeran's daughters, Dolores, told me after the release of *"I Heard You Paint Houses"*: "Jimmy Hoffa was one of only two people my father cared anything about. Russell Bufalino was the other one. Killing Jimmy Hoffa tortured my father the rest of his life. There was so much guilt and suffering my father lived with after the disappearance. He drank and drank. At times he couldn't walk. I was always afraid to face that he did it. He would never admit it until you came along. The FBI spent almost thirty years torturing my father and scrutinizing his every move in order to get him to confess.

"Having him for a father was a nightmare. We couldn't go to him with a problem because of our fear of the horrible things he would do to fix it for us. He thought he was protecting us with the way he handled things, but it was just the opposite. We didn't get protected by him because we were too afraid to go to him for protection. A neighborhood man exposed himself to me and I couldn't tell my father. My oldest sister never went with us when my father took us out, because she was afraid he wouldn't bring us back home. We hated the headlines growing up. All of us girls suffer from it to this day. My sisters and I begged him not to write this book, but in the end we gave in. At least I did. He needed to get it off his chest. We had enough headlines about murders and violence, but I told him to tell you the truth. If my father had not told the truth to you no one would ever have known the real story.

"I feel like we've lived under this black cloud forever. I want it to be over. My father is finally at peace now. I would like the same for Jimmy's family. My father killed his friend and regretted it till the day he died. In my heart I always had my suspicions and I did not want them confirmed. Now that I have been forced to acknowledge the life my father lived, I have had to come to terms with it and with all the conflicting emotions the truth has evoked."

And only the truth has made it into this book.

New York City
March 2005