

TO THE READER,

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines an accident as *an unforeseen and unplanned event or circumstance*. If you retrieved this book from the shelf and opened it to this page, the odds are it was not by accident. Even if you planned to do so after a moment's glance at the cover, it is not, by definition, an accident that you are reading these words.

It was most likely the title that caught your attention and prompted you to read beyond the cover. *The Good, the Bad, and the Forgiven*. Sounds like a title to a Western movie starring *the Good* guy, Clint Eastwood. Or perhaps it was the blurb on the back of the book about the "mob guy" that piqued your interest. Certainly, he must fall within the category of *the Bad* suggested by the title. Maybe it was neither or both of these that caused you to read further, or maybe the book fell off the shelf and hit you squarely on the head. Whatever the reason, I can almost assure you it is not by accident that you have this book in your hands at this moment.

Someone other than yours truly is trying to get your attention. I challenge you to read further. If you do, I just might make you an offer you cannot refuse.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Franzese". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Franzese

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INTRODUCTION

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

—Jeremiah 29:11

I AM THE SON of one of the most feared crime bosses ever to walk the mobbed-up streets of Brooklyn, an enforcer known to be so cold-blooded and deadly that he evoked as much fear among his minions as the devil did among his. I’ll never forget how Dad was once described in a 1965 news article entitled, “The Hood in Our Neighborhood”:

John (Sonny) Franzese, 45...tabbed as the fastest rising young executive in the Cosa Nostra empire of crime. His business: supervision of underworld rackets in parts of Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens and in almost all of Nassau and Suffolk counties. The tools of his trade: greed, fear and, when necessary, the gun.

—Long Island's *Newsday*, 1965

(Author's note: Unsubstantiated claims by law enforcement officials say that as many as thirty-five unfortunate mobsters were victims of the latter.)

La Cosa Nostra means “this thing of ours” in Italian. The LCN, as it is known by the FBI, can best be described as an organization comprised of different “families” whose members are linked by blood ties and who engage in various forms of organized criminal activities. It is more commonly known as the Mafia. Its “made” members refer to it simply as “the life.”

I chose to follow Dad's infamous footsteps into the life, and I would soon prove to be as lethal in the skyscrapers of the business world as my father had been on the streets of New York. My area of criminal expertise differed from that of my father's, but I was definitely a mobster, heavily entrenched in the business of organized crime.

Within a decade, Franzese had become... one of the biggest earners the mob had seen since Capone, and the youngest individual in Fortune magazine's survey of "The 50 Biggest Mafia Bosses."

—*Vanity Fair*, February 1991

The biggest problem we encountered was that... Michael had so much going on—car dealerships, bank loans, money laundering, unions, gas taxes, gas terminals, insurance fraud, counterfeit bonds, loan-sharking and gambling operations, construction businesses, movies, the Russians, you name it...

—Ray Jermyn, assistant U.S. district attorney

Those were my business activities during the almost twenty years I spent as a member of La Cosa Nostra. But that was then. I do not consider myself a mobster any longer. I defected from that life over a decade ago. The circumstances of my defection were difficult; the mob doesn't let one of its own just walk away. There is no retirement age. I did not sign a contract upon my induction. There is no out-clause, no "take this job and shove it" when a made man wants out. Much of what I know about the secret life remains locked inside my mind and my heart. The oath demands that once you're in, you are in for life. You either leave in a coffin, or you cooperate with the government and enter

the Witness Protection Program. Yet I have done neither.

There's an old saying that the only way to leave the Mafia is in a coffin. Members are pledged to a lifetime of secrecy, and to quit would be to arouse suspicion that you are cooperating with the police or federal agents. Such breaches of faith are punishable with death.

—*Life* magazine, December 1967

My defection from the life resulted in years of struggles for myself and my wife and children: a mob contract on my life, a period of total alienation from my father and most of my blood relatives, intense government pressure to become a cooperating witness. It was all part of the price I paid for my defection from the Colombo crime family. Experts on both sides of the law predicted I would end up dead, like all the others before me who had violated the secret code in one way or another.

I wouldn't want to be in Michael Franzese's shoes. I don't think his life expectancy is very substantial.

—Edward McDonald, former attorney-in-charge
Organized Crime/Strike Force
Eastern District of New York, 1991

He will get whacked!

—Bernie Welsh, former FBI agent, 1991

But I am very much alive today—at least I was at the time of this writing—and I believe I know why. Some people in government would have you believe that I bought off the soldiers who were given the contract to whack me. Others theorized I paid the family boss ten million dollars to spare my life. If the officials who arrived at those conclusions really understood the life, they would know those theories are preposterous. The mob would have taken my money all right, and then would have killed me anyway. They don't honor deals with defectors.

There are still others in law enforcement who believe I never really left the mob—that I am still somehow secretly involved in the life. With all the informants and high-tech surveillance equipment used to investigate the mob today, there are very few secrets remaining from law enforcement. For me to have somehow managed to remain in the life undetected for a number of years is, quite simply, absurd.

I'm alive today because I serve a different boss—a boss whose plan for my life did not call for my execution at the hands of a Mafia assassin. And when *this* boss has a plan,

no one and nothing will stand in the way of his plan being fulfilled—not even a vengeful mobster packing a pistol and a pair of cement shoes.

As a sworn member of La Cosa Nostra through a multitude of arrests, indictments and years in prison, I experienced first-hand the proverbial *long arm of the law*. As a believer in Jesus Christ, I am blessed to have experienced the even *longer arm of the Lord*. A loving God reached into the depths of the underworld to rescue a Mafia soldier. His arms extended unscathed through the razor-wired fences and cold steel doors of a prison cell to give me comfort and peace at a most dire time in my life. He will reach into the devil's own worldly cauldrons to rescue even the most hard-core sinner and the most long-lost soul. No one is beyond His mighty reach.

I have been given a new purpose in life: *to share what God has done for me* with all of you who feel you are too bad a person, too unworthy of God's saving grace or in far too hopeless a situation to ever fulfill His purpose in your own life. If God will save a notorious Mafia caporegime (captain) with blood-stained hands and have a plan and purpose for his life, then **NO ONE** is so bad

that they are beyond the reach of God's infinite love and mercy.

"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

—Isaiah 1:18

NO ONE is left out of the plan that God has for all of our lives.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

—Jeremiah 29:11

NO ONE is beneath or beyond fulfilling God's purpose in their life.

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord...who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace...

—2 Timothy 1:8, 9

My life is a mob story, but it's also a love story. It tells of a young boy's love for his father—a love that bound him by blood to the underworld of the Mafia, until an innocent young woman walked into his life. Her exotic beauty captivated him. Her faith in God saved him. His love of God protected him.

In the pages that follow, I invite you to come along with me as I tell you how God took me through a life-long process of revealing His plan for my life and preparing me to fulfill that purpose.