

EPILOGUE

The year he got out of Creedmoor for the last time in 1967, I happened to be driving down in Hell's Kitchen. There was a crowd on the corner, and something just made me pull over to check it out. I, of course, knew that the Old Boy (the name we all came to calling him) always came back to that spot, and my curiosity got the best of me. Sure enough there he was, strumming away and singing his heart out...the old fedora sitting on the ground collecting dimes, nickels, quarters, and more than a few paper bills. When he finished and the applause had died away, I went over to pick up the hat and it startled him.

"It's me Grandpa...Ronnie."

I could tell he was embarrassed trying to tie up the jangled pieces of memory floating around in his head.

"Oh," he said, "I thought you was Sonny."

I chuckled. He always got me confused...all the many times I had been up to visit and bring him his Luckys...he still confused me with Pop.

I gathered up the bills and coins from his fedora, organized it, and put it in his hands. I brushed off the old fedora and set it respectfully on his head.

"I gotta run," I said, "but if you're through for the day, let me give you a ride home."

He replied, "Oh that'd be great. You sure you don't mind?"

"Never Grandpa."

It wasn't a long drive back to Astoria and his tiny one room rental. Pop and I had made the trip many times before, but this was the first time that it was just him and me. And while he often got 'Ronnie' and 'Sonny' mixed up, he seemed pretty lucid. He started telling me about how good the crowds had been lately, and how he and the old fedora were getting a workout; and about the songs he'd been playing lately; and that he had been looking for a book he had written back at the hospital but couldn't find at the flop house as he called it, and thought he might have left it there. He asked if I got the chance, would I go over and get it for him. I said I would, but honestly, I thought he was lost in his head back to someplace I knew very little

about. But he was insistent and said that I should ask some doctor named Angsfeld or Angstrond. As always, I took it with a grain of salt, let him ramble and forgot about it.

When we got to the apartment, I walked ahead and opened the door for him. He gave me a funny look and said, "You're missing something."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." I responded.

Then the slightest of smiles crossed his thin pallid looking lips. He took the hat from his head and smacked it down smartly on mine, and said, "You can't be a man without a fine fedora!"

"But Grandpa! Where are you going to...?"

I never got to finish the question. With a wave of his hand, he turned and said, "I love you, Sonny!"

Nana passed away in 1969 from natural causes. In 1973, I was in the Army National Guard and working with a band, recording cover songs for K-tel records, when I was told that the Old Boy was admitted to Creedmoor one last time, where he died. He had lasted longer than any of us, including himself I'm sure, would ever have imagined. I'll be damned that while going through his things, Pop came across this book. I feel guilty now that I didn't believe him. And wouldn't you know that in one of his shoes, we came across the letter that I have since placed in the book where he had intended. We never told him about Nana's passing - we couldn't stand the thought of breaking his heart or denying him his only reason for living. He asked all the time about her - though he never got to see her again. After much gnashing of teeth among his daughters, he was at long last laid to rest in the same grave as his beloved Jenny. They're together now - finally - God rest them both.

- Ronnie Tourso