The Wit and Wisdom of the Mafia

By Selwyn Raab

Forty plus years of plumbing the wit and wisdom of the Mafia was a cinch—a piece of cake. An uncomplicated subject with few obstacles. No need to evade spin physicians bent on misleadng a reporter trying to unravel the significance of an important event—mass murders or a racketeering arrest. Happily, Men of Honor were avid theatregoers, a living room filled with the music of Broadway, and for Frank, long hours lost in the shadow of New York ghosts, a ghost light hovered over the shadow of the avant-garde and history and art and theatre. His parents were avid theatregoers, a former Chief Theatre Critic: ‘The Butcher of Broadway’

By Eve Berliner

Like the single ghost light left burning in the darkened theatre to ward off the ghosts, a ghost light hovered over the childhood of Frank Rich, amid the dark days of fear and night terrors.

He resided in the theatre of dreams. He survived on his imagination.

The players: mother, father, sister and stepfather, a complex villain, vicious.

His mother was his first inspiration, loved the arts, a passion for film and theatre and politics and life. She would take Frank on what she would call their “Adventures,” his favori...
Maury Allen’s piece below on Don Larsen’s Perfect Game in the fifth game of the 1956 World Series in Yankee Stadium is a perfect example of the wonderful, subtle art of Maury Allen the Writer, not just Sports Writer. He puts us in the scene, from the opening paragraph which, paradoxically, starts at the end of the game — “the masked Yogi Berra... leaping into the grinning face of Don Larsen.”

Maury then reels back novelistically to evoke the tension as the Yankee pitcher drew ever closer to the one-and-only No-Hitter and Perfect Game in World Series history. “The drama built in the Brooklyn eighth as Larsen retired every Brooklyn batter and the crowd roared louder on each pitch than the noise from the nearby Eighth Avenue subway.”

But Maury the Reporter does more, as he captures a time more than half a century ago. He calls Don Larsen in Idaho to get his memories, and sits with Yogi Berra and talks with Arthur Richman, long-time friend of Larsen, to round out the tale.

This was what the reader of Maury’s baseball writing in the New York Post for nearly three decades and what the readers of his 40 books came to expect and cherish.

By Maury Allen

The image has lasted half a century, a masked Yogi Berra, the Yankee catcher, leaping into the grinning face of Don Larsen, the Perfect Game pitcher.

It was October 8, 1956, the fifth game of the World Series between the bantam Brooklyn Dodgers, a scourged Yankee Stadium crowd of 64,519 gasping at every late game pitch. Larsen, 27, described by Joe Trimble of the New York Daily News as “the imperfect man who pitched a perfect game,” had actually lost 21 games for the new Baltimore Orioles only two years earlier and had been smacked around by the Dodgers in game two of the Series a few days earlier.

“I had no idea I was starting that game until I came to the park that day,” said Larsen over the phone from his home in Hayden Lake, Idaho, a fishing village about 100 miles east of Spokane, Washington, up near the Canadian border.

“When I go to the park there was a baseball in my shoe. That was the tradition in those days. The pitching coach, Jim Turner, would put a ball in the shining shoe of the starter,” Larsen said.

He was 9-2 as a starter and reliever with the Yankees when he joined the team in 1955 and 11-5 that summer of 1956. Mostly, he was known for his control and enjoyment hanging out with Mickey (Mantle), Whitey (Ford) and the other guys.”

Early that spring training in St. Petersburg, Florida, Larsen had fixed up his image when he fell asleep while driving his two tone convertible back to the team hotel, lost control of his car and crashed into a palm tree. It was 5 a.m. He escaped with a chipped tooth and a $15 ticket.

Manager Casey Stengel, a notorious boozing boisterous fellow in his playing days with the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants, was asked what his pitcher was doing out at that ungodly hour.

“He went out to mail a letter,” Stengel told the press with a straight face. Stengel’s confidence grew through the year as Larsen won some key games and pitched well in relief in several others. Four weeks before the season ended the tall right handed native of Michigan City, Indiana developed a no-windup pitching style.

“It just helped my control. I had good stuff but putting the ball where I wanted was always a factor,” he said.

After the second game pounding and a three day depression, Larsen went out with a couple of newspaper pals, brothers Milton and Arthur Richman the night before the fifth game. Legend has it Larsen was drunk when he showed up for game five.

“Not so,” said Arthur Richman, now a Yankees senior advisor to Boss George Steinbrenner. “We had dinner, a few drinks and then I drove him back to the hotel. We passed a church on the way and he said, ‘I should have stopped for a donation. Here, give this to your mother and have her contribute it to her temple.’ He handed me twenty bucks.”

Larsen got the baseball the next day and set the Dodgers down easily in the first inning by striking out Jim Gilliam, Pee Wee Reese and getting slugger Duke Snider on a short fly to right fielder Hank Bauer.

“I could see my control was good from the start,” he recalled. “That gave me a lot of confidence.”

“He worked fast and he threw strikes,” said Yogi Berra, as he sat in the conference room of the Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center on the campus of Montclair State University in New Jersey. “He never shook me off once all game.”

Gil Hodges hit a long fly ball in the fifth inning but a speedy Mantle ran it down for the out. Larsen had his perfect game going through seven innings, no runs, no hits, no walks, no Brooklyn batter reaching first base.

“That was the only time he came to the dugout after the seventh inning nobody would talk to me. I said something to Mickey about a no-hitter and he just looked away. You could see it all on the scoreboard,” Larsen said.

The drama built in the Brooklyn eighth as Larsen retired every Brooklyn batter and the crowd roared louder on each pitch than the noise from the nearby Eighth Avenue subway.

With a Mantle home run and a Baser single, the Yankees led 2-0 against Sal Maglie as Larsen started the ninth inning. Carl Furillo flew out easily to right field. Twenty five straight Brooklyn outs. Roy Campanella grounded out to Billy Martin. Twenty six straight, Larsen said.

Brooklyn manager Walter Alston sent up Dale Mitchell, a lefty, a perfect game over him. “Mitchell had been in the American League for a long time and I knew he was a tough hitter.”

The first pitch was a ball. Then a called strike. Then Mitchell swung and missed for strike two. The Stadium noise was deafening. The next pitch was an inside curve and Mitchell, a sly batsman, got a little of the pitch and fouled it off.

“Just took another breath and followed Yogi’s call for a fast ball,” Larsen said. “It was over the outside of the plate.”

Mitchell twitched at the pitch as umpire Babe Pinelli, working his final big league game, threw up his right fist and called, “Strike two.”

“I remember that Mitchell turned around to argue the call,” Larsen said, “but nobody was there. Yogi was running to the dugout and Pinelli was running to the dugout.”

A World Series Perfect Game. It had never happened before and fifty years later it has never happened since.

Yogi gave Larsen the baseball from the last out. Several years ago he put it up for auction and got $25,000 for it for a college fund for one of his grand children. The bronze glove Berra used that day hangs on a wall of his museum.

“Funny, we were there at the Stadium, me and Yogi when David Cone pitched his perfect game for the Yankees in 1999,” said Berra. “It was good but it wasn’t a World Series game.”

Half a century later, Larsen stands alone as the “imperfect man” who pitched baseball’s only World Series perfect game.

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Yankee Stadium - Don Larsen's first pitch in the fifth game of the 1956 World Series between the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers, in what would become the greatest game in World Series history.

Associated Press

New York Yankee hurler Don Larsen, after retiring the Brooklyn Dodgers in order for the seventh consecutive inning.

Associated Press

Catcher Yogi Berra jumps into the victorious arms of pitcher Don Larsen after executing Yankee Stadium clubhouse, 1972.


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Maury Allen died on October 3, at age 78, leaving his wife, Janet, his two children, Todd and Jennifer, and four grandchildren, and was an honored Silurian writer and most currently a member of the Board of Directors. And to family and friends, he left a warm personal legacy, not just of talent, but of laughter and love.

--- Ira Berkow
To see history through the eyes of Morris Warman is to see into the rarefied depths of the artistic soul. Morris Warman, premier photographer for the New York Herald Tribune for a quarter of a century, master of human portraiture, his subtle play of light and shadow the stuff of poetic vision.

His singular genius was to catch his renowned subjects on the wing—not in a photographer’s studio—and capture their essence.

Morris, a poetic figure himself, with his startling gray-green eyes and soft smile, came from a family of photographers—mother, father, brothers—age ten, in the dark despair of the Depression, his first assignment for the Bayonne Times covering the nighttime eviction of a desperate family, little Morris bearing witness with his 8 X 10 view camera and his childlike soul.

Morris Warman, husband of the late Dorothy Poplar, father of Ritchard, beloved Silurian, will be missed in this life.

—the Editor

Writer James Baldwin  
Poet Carl Sandburg  
Philosopher Bertrand Russell  
Prime Minister Winston Churchill  
Writer William Faulkner  
Writer John Steinbeck  
Writer Ernest Hemingway  
Modern Dancer Martha Graham  
Playwright Arthur Miller
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Mafia operated a surrogate state in the New York metropolitan area. Unfortunately, for much of the 20th Century New York’s governmental authorities were largely indifferent to these criminal inroads. The majority of media editors favor a similar justice and governmental misdeeds, the Mafia was generally regarded as an unwarranting phenomenon. It was viewed by most reporters as a career dead-end with scant prospects for landing plum promotions. I inherited the beat with the proviso that I would pursue non-Mafia investigative stories and that mob reporting would focus on their stranglehold over vital economic interests. It was a wide arena, including the construction industry, union racketeering, garbage carting, the Garment Center and the Fulton Fish Market.

In a pre-computer age nailing down a story often meant sisyphian hours of locating documents, transcripts of bugged conversations, judicial transcripts, business, real estate and government records. As one example, I spent an entire month sifting through thousands of handwritten index cards compiled by the federal Housing and Urban Development Department tracing mob-linked subcontractors on multimillion-dollar housing projects in the Bronx. The easy part of the Mafia saga is waiting for arrests and relying on the customary spin from prosecutors and investigators. The reconstruction of a major undercover case can be intriguing but it is one dimensional. Lawyers for accused Mafiosi are equally predictable, normally spouting uninspired boilerplate denials.

Uncovering background material to flesh out the culture, motivation, tactics and underlying sociopathic elements of the American Mafia was the ultimate challenge. After all, the Cosa Nostra prides itself as being a secret society and most efforts to mingle with their stowarts were rebuffed. Fortunately, persistence can pay off.

One dividend came from Anthony Accetturo, the admitted head of the Lucchese family in New Jersey in the 1980s and 1990s. In his teens, Accetturo used a crutch to batter opponents and was dubbed “Tumac,” after a ferocious caveman in a film, “One Million BC.” Upon learning that his new bosses wanted to whack him, Tumac defected, suddenly eager to recount his experiences and explain why he had switched sides. A friendly New Jersey official arranged prison interviews with Accetturo and “Tumac” provided rare insight and scoops about the history and the strength and weaknesses of the American Mafia.

New York Times style rule was strangely converted into another penetration of the Mafia’s clandestine curtain. Soon after President Ronald Reagan was inaugurated in 1981, his

The Informer

By Malachy McCourt

James Joyce wrote, “In the spirit of Irish fun they betrayed their leaders one by one,” and George Bernard Shaw chimed in with, “If you put an Irish man on a spit to roast him you will encounter no difficulty in finding another Irish man to baste him.” The British with the blessing of Nicholas Breakspeare a/k/a Pope Adrian IV invaded Ireland on the pretext of restoring the country to the faith as founded by that other British invader Patrick. Consequently many Irish including myself have a somewhat violent reaction when we chance upon traitorous informing Irish men many of whom see nothing wrong in dropping decency and becoming Conservative in America. The British when they occupy a country impose the illusion of superiority in all things culture, behaviour, language, loyalty, be’it India, Ireland, Africa, Persia et al and they elevate people like Gunga Din to secular sainthood. I am making a tenuous connection here but the anorexic traitor has a connection to this piece. I once had a saloon called Malachy’s on Third Avenue. It was a lively place blessed by the presence of lovely young things from the nearby Barbizon Hotel for Women plus horny young actors from the UK not to mention correspondents from all over the place like Chris Dodd and Tony Delano. Malachy’s was also the unofficial head of the public house.

The extraordinary Malachy McCourt, actor, writer, politician and proprietor of Malachy’s, a saloon on Third Avenue that became a legend in its time.
Rich 2010 Honoree

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ened of not being able to sleep, and a fierce, uncontrollable rage that he sometimes unleashed with startling power. He would lose himself in fantasy, daydreams about Broadway, read book after book about the theatre, and the playwrights, and the actors, and re-read plays after play. He especially loved the autobiography of Moss Hart. He always had a book with him. He was “discovered” as a writer by his 4th grade teacher, Mrs. Young, who recognized his talent and nourished it, and it was under her inspiration that he wrote his first book, “A World All My Own.”

His mother was to die in a car accident years later, her husband, with a history of manic depression and serial car crashes, at the wheel.

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Frank Rich, fearless, brilliant, New York Times Op-Ed columnist, former chief theatre critic, [otherwise known as “The Butcher of Broadway”] is a force to be reckoned with. Unyielding in his willingness to go deeper, he expertly exposes hypocrites of power, his daggers penetratin the White House walls, the clandestine interiors of the Mad Tea Party, the halls of Congress. Sunday morning blast awakening the complacent from the torpor of sleep; no escape from Frank Rich’s clutches.

He is a poet who stands up, speaks his mind, clears away the fog of preju dice, stupidity, blindness and deception.

He is apparently, the essence of the despised “liberal.”

As such, he is an object of hatred by the radical right wing, and indeed, it must be said, that a good number of conserva tive Republican moderates are inflamed by him as well, if 1,200,000 Google listings are any indication.


“This, thus we see the gospel according to Mel,” writes Rich in his New York Times piece of March 7, 2004, entitled, “Mel Gibson Forgives Us For His Sins.” “If you criticize his film and the Jew-bait ing by which he defends it, you are accusing him — all the way to the bank. If he says that he wants you killed, he wants your intestines “on a stick” and he wants to “putting Jesus’ intestines on a stick than with dramatizing his godly teachings, which are relegated to a few brief, crypt ic flashbacks.”

“I stick to my convictions. Write them the way I feel them,” comments Rich.

On the power of the pen:

“…From a review by the New York Times critic Frank Rich printed on a wall label next to a photograph documenting a 1984 performance of Franz Xaver Krevetz’s ‘Through the Leaves’ by the avant-garde company Mabou Mines. The work “is not pleasant,” writes Rich, “but it sticks like a splinter in the mind.”

For those who might think the critic has no heart, here’s what he had to say about the legendary stage actress, Eva Le Gallienne, on January 16, 1981:

“It’s very easy to fall in love all over again with Eva Le Gallienne, who returned to the theatre last night in “To Grandmother’s House We Go.”’…Though it’s no secret that Miss Le Gallienne is a fine actress, it’s just as much pleasure to reencounter her beauty. When she flows about her sweet, antique-laden living room in a bathrobe, her gray hair tumbling to her shoulders, she seems as lyrical as any Juliet, she pays no mind to the staccato movements of old age. And while Miss Le Gallienne’s features are aristocratic even regal, they can melt, without warn ing, into a diaphanous smile that has no equal on Broadway.”

He was a bolt of lightning on the Broadway stage in his 13 years of notoriety as chief theatre critic for the New York Times.

On “The Butcher of Broadway”:

“I am writing for the reader. The reader wants to hear you speak honestly. I am writing for the New York Times reader, not the producers, the advertisers. I have to have the reader’s trust. If you’re pulling punches, you’ll never write any thing worth reading. The baseline: speak honestly for people you’re writing to and accurate.”

On the power to close a show:

Follies, by Stephen Sondheim, during its pre-Broadway run in Boston. The ar ticle fascinated Harold Prince, the pre-eminent director. Franklin was not in touch with him the entire time I was a critic. My reviews of his work were all over the map. Then we became friends when I stopped being a critic. His life as chief drama critic for the New York Times began in March of 1980, concluded in 1993.

“I wanted to move on. I was really getting bored with the state of the theatre. In January of 1994 I started the column.”

On the relationship of theatre and politics:

“Showbiz and theatre and politics. It was under her inspiration that he wrote the plays after plays. He especially loved the plays of the great American playwrights, and the actors, and the directors, which brought forth an explosion of anti-Semitic stuff, phone messages, e-mails, and letters,” notes Rich.

Frank Rich, now in his Harvard years at Cambridge, the editorial chairman of the Harvard Crimson, the university’s esteemed daily newspaper and in such capacity, on February 26, 1971, writing a brilliant essay of probing analysis, its subject, the theatre musical

and the last photograph of John Gotti, 2002.
Continued from Page 4

quarters of the Irish delegation to the United States went down in a storm during the night of October 27th by Frederic Boled and included Conan Cronie O’Brien and his then lover Maura McEntee. Frederic Boled became very angry over the comment of Mrs. Słowikowska about Khrushchev to order while nicely using his shoe to respond to Frederic’s gaveling. I was introduced to a Russian lad named Pavel Shishkin from the United States, SUN University. The TASS. The friend who introduced us, Sam Jaffe, was a quietly humorous lad and as far as I recall he had worked for CBS and NBC as a correspondent in Moscow among other places.

There was as it is said, drink taken, and the business is a benefit of same but the fires were laughter. The coming of the Irish songs and Bogachev was quite good at getting down on his haunches and kicking his limbs in that well-known Russian way to lift the spirits. Sometimes we stayed at Malachy’s and raised the roof. There are other times we explored other venues and while we went our way, we never knew where were we. Loud, irreverent, merry and energetic. One night we decided of go to a place we could not have. The car had to be hired. Our party consisted of myself Sam Jaffe, Vladimir plus Harold, a Brit with a bad leg that like the Queen couldn’t bend and the Commander. Off we went to New Jersey and returned safely despite my lunatic intake of liquor.

A few mornings after that event the downtown range which was answered by my then wife. Standing there were a couple of respectable looking men sporting broad brim hats and flashing badges. They iden- tified themselves to me and asked if I would like to talk to Linda. She smiled them in and summoned me from whatever dreamland I occupied at that moment. The good old days of children’s stories in the newspapers they kept their hats they got down to the busi- ness at hand. What is the nature of your relationship to Mistor Vladimir Bogachev? I said I didn’t want to be rude but what business was it of theirs who my friends were. They replied that Bogachev was a Soviet intelligence agent here in the Service and was working with the United Nations. So again why is he friendly with you? And while we’re at it tell us about those people who worked with me. I’m not going to New Jersey a few nights ago. They knew Bogachev and they knew and they knew Sam Jaffe but they didn’t know Maura with the unconscious leg and they didn’t know the blind man Ed. Who was he said one. I said he was our driver. The questioner was about to write that down when he realized what I had said and his dance. Sometimes we stayed at Malachy’s and raised the roof. I was introduced to a Russian lad named Pavel Shishkin from the United States, SUN University. The TASS. The friend who introduced us, Sam Jaffe, was a quietly humorous lad and as far as I recall he had worked for CBS and NBC as a correspondent in Moscow among other places.

Frank Rich and his wife, Alex Witchel, a staff writer for the New York Times Magazine, two fine novels behind her, now working on her memoir, her recent portrait of the Mayor which she published in the New York Times Magazine in the April 2010 Vanity Fair, masterful. I’m in awe of her,” says Frank. Of course, it is mutual. The Mayor’s sons are writers as well. Nathaniel, age 30, first novel, “The Mayor’s Tongue”, and now completing a second novel, a former editor at Paris Review.


Frank Rich, sitting in his New York Times office, had a seemingly hundreds of books, laughs solly, “I’m the slacker.”

The Informer

It is a wonderful marriage of writers, of ‘93 mattered not at all to him. “Yez can come to my bank and get a loan,” he called out to any officer in the bank who happened to be there. “At four percent a month. Come in,” he said to would-be borrowers. They followed the friendly general, and he sent them to the vaults. In gleaming gold behind iron bars was $600,000.

“No. I’ve always believed that. I am a pacifist,” he concluded, “Please give me a calm drop.”

As he walked the streets of the little towns in Montana, many without wait- ing for Appomattox. While a boy lay in the grass at a respectful distance, they chat- ted with a visage by so greatly admired that much of their conversation has en- dured in his memory for years. By John K. Hutchens

Shah, who at the officer named Abraham, he went out of a disor- derly retirement to save the day for the North, to the intense annoyance of surviv- ing officers who felt he was a threat to respect the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg. Then they crossed the plains by covered wagon and stagecoach. One or other of my ancestors had seen the last of the mountains, he said, as he went north. “I can see the range come and go and the railroads arrive, bringing the “honeycombers,” or homestead- ers. They, and the memories they inherited, were Montana’s early story, or enough of it.

Henry Plummer, the listening boy followed their every word. When they spoke of Henry Plummer, the veteran of the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg. Then they crossed the plains by covered wagon and stagecoach. One or other of my ancestors had seen the last of the mountains, he said, as he went north. “I can see the range come and go and the railroads arrive, bringing the “honeycombers,” or homestead- ers. They, and the memories they inherited, were Montana’s early story, or enough of it.

Then, one day, he found it near Silver Creek, and he sold it for a princely sum. It was a quartz mine ever discovered in Montana. invaders. Others were merely sorry for him. Do you mean to say that you would not. They had become friends.

The Southerners went west when they saw no hope to return to the war’s end. The Northerners headed for the gold country, and they went with many without wait- ing for Appomattox. While a boy lay in the grass at a respectful distance, they chat- ted with a visage by so greatly admired that much of their conversation has en- dured in his memory for years. By John K. Hutchens

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