

**BOOK PROPOSAL
SYNOPSIS
INTRODUCTION OF SCREENPLAY
REVIEWS AND BLURBS**

Bad News on the Doorstep

...inspired by a true story
copyright 2004 Joseph Rocco Cervasio

SCREENPLAY ADAPTATION BY
Joseph Rocco Cervasio & Ralph Greco
August 27, 2014
WGA REG: 1587286

INTRODUCTION:

BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP is an adapted screenplay based on the novel of the same name by Joseph Rocco Cervasio. The screenplay is a collaboration between Mr. Cervasio and Mr. Ralph Greco.

Here are some thoughts relative to the novel, published in 2004:

Bad News on the Doorstep

by

Joseph Rocco Cervasio

An American Epic

“Bad news on the doorstep . . .,” a throwaway line from a long-ago song—Don McLean’s rock ‘n’ roll anthem, “American Pie.” The book is about the desolation of seeing something innocent die, and then reaching down for a deeper lesson and carrying on. Indeed, McLean sang about the day the music died. Perhaps in 1959 . . . more died than just the music. But as many have come to know, for a rebirth to occur, there must first be a death.

This is an encyclopedic novel of an Italian-American neighborhood in New Jersey in the 1950s. In its pages you will learn everything about everyone who lived there, until you know them all as friends and family members. At the end of the book, you will not want to say goodbye to any of them.

You can watch “The Godfather” or “Goodfellas” for the gangster cartoons of immigrant life. But if you want to touch the Italian-American heart and witness its sweetest passing moment, you must begin here, at the doorstep.

BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP is inspired by a true story and focuses on three events affecting the residents of Belleville, New Jersey at the end of the Fifties:

1. An unforgettable high school football game, now referred to as the “Mud Bowl”, that really took place, during which an extraordinary gesture made by one of the players changed the lives of everyone watching, and even those hearing of it many years thereafter.
2. Alleged criminal activity in the area—counterfeit money circulating that has the potential to trip up some of the story’s main characters.
3. A national news event—the shocking deaths in an airplane crash in faraway Iowa of three famous rockers of the 50s: Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper; a tragedy that still haunts many Baby Boomers to this day.

There is no going back on any of these events. That’s the bad news that overtakes the Bonaducci family and propels the young members into a world of worry and responsibility. Yes, many and much are . . . “killed softly”, but a new day dawns.

This is a story of the times—of Dion and the Belmonts, Connie Francis, Frank Sinatra, and so many others. It’s a story about food, faith, music, school, sports, lust, envy, jealousy, hopes, dreams, death, and life. It’s about family and youth culture, and the growing tension between them. Most of all, it’s about the triumph of character in the face of despair.

What makes the book different?

We’ve been ushered into a new era in publishing, whether we like it or not. This post-9/11 era has an appetite for conservative themes and wholesome treatments—less sex, fewer killings, and more wholesome values.

BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP meets this emerging market head-on. It’s a book about values that acknowledges the pressures that can pull families apart. It is a kind of *Peyton Place* in reverse: the story of a place and time in which character and courage triumph over sleaze and tawdriness.

This novel, like many of the great “middlebrow” works of American literature—*Gone With the Wind*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Our Town*—creates an entire community of characters with vivid personalities Cervasio remembers from his youth.

Belleville, NJ is a moral universe unto itself, full of worries and aspirations, temptations and dreams. And this story is a rich and positive antidote to all the lurid and crime-filled tales of Italian Americans from this era. What stands out is how lovingly the characters are delineated, and with such spiritual energy.

We believe ***BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP*** is more than just a novel. It’s a framework for an extended television drama vehicle, like “The Sopranos,” “Boardwalk Empire,” “True Detective,” or “Mad Men.” It has that kind of feel and depth to it.

But, perhaps the ground it cultivates has even been seeded by such film masterpieces as “American Graffiti,” “Stand by Me,” “October Sky,” “Remember the Titans,” and “Friday Night Lights.” And, thus, ...

THE SCREENPLAY

by

Joseph Rocco Cervasio & Ralph Greco

BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP, the screenplay, like the novel, is a tapestry of life in the late Fifties. More than that, however, it becomes a metaphor for the vanishing of a decade that sees innocence replaced with awareness, maturity, rebellion, and the pain of harsh realities. Ah, but for the price of change.

Not unlike the film “Seabiscuit,” the movie’s Director and his creative team will weave an epic mix of history and music that will be unforgettable. From Dion and the Belmont’s “I Wonder Why” in the first act, to Don McLane’s haunting “American Pie” in the final scene, viewers’ minds will be tattooed forever with the impressions of ***BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP***.

A football game, the temptations of easy money, and a national loss of legendary rock ‘n’ rollers meld together a dramatic family epic that will teach lessons for a lifetime.

About Joe Cervasio

BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP is the barely disguised story of events from Joe Cervasio's own youth. Joe grew up in Belleville, New Jersey. For 25 years his dad Rocky helped mix Jergens Lotions for the hands of housewives everywhere. Joe attended the very school that competed in the infamous Mud Bowl of 1957. He knew the goodfellas and what they were up to, first hand. But he was drawn to a different vision, which is what his book is about—the possibilities of grace in everyday life, allowing for resultant success, peace, and prosperity.

“I wrote this book to introduce my heroes to others—that Greatest Generation that poured more into my life than I did into theirs. This is my love letter to them, since so many went home to their eternal reward without knowing how powerfully they had impacted my life and those of many others. It was a time period that can teach us lessons today, bringing wisdom, a smile, or a tear.”

Joe enjoyed a successful career in resort real estate sales and marketing, a highlight being his role as President of Bluegreen Institute, an internal learning organization within a mid-cap public company. While speaking and leading around the country, he never left his beloved New Jersey where his wife Maria and he raised two beautiful and successful daughters. Tina is a five-time Emmy-winning sports journalist/broadcaster, and Corrine is a leading sales professional in health care information technology.

Today Joe writes and gives motivational talks about life, sports, and the beauty of the Italian-American experience. (As mentioned above, the screenplay adaptation {with partner Ralph Greco} of ***Bad News on the Doorstep*** is presently being marketed; his second book, *Now or Never: The 11 Secrets of Arimathea*, keeps him busy on the speaking circuit.) In 2013 his essay, *A Symbol of Hope*, was named a winner in the Essex County (NJ) “Legacies Writing Contest”. In 2014 Joe earned honorable mention in the same contest for his “Forty-Four DeCamp Bus to New York City.” In the following year, Mr. Cervasio was given “Special Recognition” for “A Quarter to Five.” It should be noted that all three essays were based upon the lives of several characters that were fictionalized in the novel and the screenplay.

Joe knows his way around the media, and is not shy about speaking up on his own behalf, having already been interviewed for ***Bad News on the Doorstep*** by dozens of papers and broadcast programs. Mr. Cervasio is a graduate of Cornell University, has his MBA from the Stern School of Business at New York University, and is a member of the Belleville (NJ) High School Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2012 he was named the Grand Marshal of the largest Columbus Day Parade in New Jersey.

Author's statement

“My book and our screenplay try to pinpoint the moment when things began to change, when the Greatest Generation began to let go, and my generation began to come into its own. I've traced it to that one morning when the *Newark Star-*

Ledger hit the front porch, and the Baby Boomers, who had been so fortunate, realized that they, too, were on the line for something.

“Don McLean’s lyrics in the song ‘American Pie’ sum it up best:

*Bad news on the doorstep,
I couldn’t take one more step.
I can’t remember if I cried
when I heard about his widowed bride.
Something touched me deep inside,
the day the music died.*

“And as the country changed, the featured family continued to fight the battle to stay on the straight and narrow middle road, avoiding the temptations of organized crime and the hollow dreams of the entertainment business. While their actions are relevant, it is the deepest caverns of their hearts that are explored.

“Perhaps, however, it was the strange events in this unforgettable high school football game which represented the birth pangs for change locally and throughout the country months later. Indeed, the many ways people reacted to this game contain clues for their entire future.”

ABOUT RALPH GRECO, SCREENPLAY CO-WRITER

Ralph Greco is a writer-director-producer with nearly twenty years of experience in film and television. More importantly to his partner on the screenplay, Ralph is the oldest child of Ralph Greco, Sr., a dear friend of Joe’s from back in the day. So, according to Cervasio, “... young Ralph has heard the stories that have inspired *Bad News on the Doorstep* from back as long as he can remember.”

Ralph began his career working on big-budget studio films including “Strange Days” (directed by Kathryn Bigelow and produced by James Cameron) “Jurassic Park III,” and “The Scorpion King.”

He spent four years working with David E. Kelley Productions on the Emmy Award-winning series, “The Practice & Ally Mc Beal.” He then went on to produce multiple series for CBS, ABC, FOX, MTV, Cartoon Network, and The Discovery Channel.

He was also a producer on IFC’s acclaimed docu-series “Film School” where he collaborated with Nanette Burstein, the Oscar-nominated director of “The Kid Stays in the Picture,” “American Teen,” and “Going The Distance.” Ralph was also the Director, Writer, Producer of the acclaimed “Killer Kids,” the dramatic documentation of this most disturbing subject.

Ralph recently moved to Montclair, New Jersey, after many years residing in Los Angeles. He is a graduate of Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY.

Here are some reviews of the novel:

Ed Marinaro, (All American football player and Emmy Award-winning cast member of “Hills Street Blues” and “Sisters”): “ *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley* meet *The Sopranos* in Joe Cervasio’s entertaining read.”

★★★★★ **Outstanding Read**, April 23, 2005

Reviewer: **Shirley P Johnson "(Published Author)"** (USA) - [See all my reviews](#)
TOP 1000 REVIEWER REAL NAME™

There are times when a book has a certain impact upon a reviewer; it strikes a cord, brings a smile, a memory renewed that had been deeply buried; this is what Mr. Cervasio's outstanding work has done for me. Growing up in New Jersey, born to an Italian American father, this book was almost like going home. The story takes place in the 1950's in the town of Belleville, where we are introduced to the Bonaducci family: the father, Rocky; mother, Marietta; and their three children, Frank, Jo-Jo and Donna.

In this wonderful novel, we share the journey of this family's life, the challenges of the times they live in, their commitment to each other and the extended family that all Italians have, and the battle to keep the world from crashing in on their sanctity, yet allowing for the independence that each member needs. I smiled at the wonderful stories of their family gatherings, the abundance of food, the talking, eating and body motion that was done all at the same time; it is indeed a wonder to behold. We travel along as the family matures, life complicates living, and the Bonaduccis grow together to meet the challenges. Never a dull moment, as is the case in most Italian households; and this is certainly true in the Bonaduccis as well.

In this read, we have a dash of some mob temptations, a historical football game where a difficult decision was made, and even a splash of the world of entertainment, all touching this family and helping to sculpture their lives in the decisions they make and their relationships one to another.

The author does a wonderful job in bringing each character alive, allowing you to feel as if you have always known them. You begin to care what happens to the family, their struggles become your struggles, their hurts, your hurts, their victories, your victories, their family, your family. Well done!

The descriptions of the different locals that you travel to are vivid and add much to the story, and Mr. Cervasio does an excellent job in portraying the mindset of the time; and the happenings of the era.

If you want a truthful, heartwarming look inside the life of an Italian American family in the 1950's; a glimpse of their traditions, a taste of their strength and unity as a family, or just a read that delivers to you a wonderful story, this book is for you. Thank you, Mr.

Cervasio, for an enjoyable read.

Recommended.

Shirley Johnson/Senior Reviewer
MidWest Book Review

★★★★★ **A whole universe in a single book**, February 2, 2005

Reviewer: [M. C. Finley "Big Canary"](#) (Saint Paul, MN USA) - [See all my reviews](#)
REAL NAME™

Don't look the wrong way at this book just because it's a publish-on-demand project. What it is is quite remarkable: an epic description of what life was like, growing up Italian-American in northern New Jersey in the 1950s. I was horn-swoggled by the depth and accuracy of the people depicted in this book, and the grand adventure that sweeps an entire community along.

If you liked *American Graffiti* for its to-the-bone recalling of youth culture from that period, you will like Cervasio's story.

Likewise, if you dig *The Sopranos* for its cool look at contemporary Italian-American culture. Or (and this gets a little more ambitious), if you think *The Brothers Karamazov* did an OK job of looking at the universe through the eyes of a single small village, then this is like that. And that, well, ... it ain't bad.

But it's even better than them, because this book has a heart that doesn't quit. You don't have to be Italian to fall in love with these people, or to identify with their struggles and joys. You do have to be human.

Joe Cervasio has created a universe of remarkable characters. It seems to me, here is a framework for a very large drama. I am not saying an Aaron Sorkin-type would want to snap it up and develop it into an extended vehicle like *West Wing* or *Picket Fences* or *Northern Exposure*. But it has that kind of feel and depth to it.

This book is a blessing to everyone who picks it up. Let it be a blessing for you.

... and some comments about the screenplay:

Eric _____, screenplay writer:

“Just a quick note, I read the screenplay. It’s great. Really loved it. The dialog is superb. The story stuck with me for days afterwards. It also made me do what all good movies make me do, which is research more information on the subject matter. Read a lot about Dion and the Belmonts afterwards. I'm going to read it again before giving you more detailed notes. Very impressed. Great work.”

Andrew Davis, producer:

“I finished your screenplay today--congrats, it's really good! The ending almost had me tearing up, no joke.”

Fran Ganguzza, producer:

“I wanted to let you know I truly enjoyed reading your script, *Bad News on the Doorstep*. It was a heartwarming story which rings home for me. I felt a deep connection to many of the characters as if I have met them all before and was intrigued to find out more about each one of them.

“Being Italian American myself, I felt as if I was sitting at my dining room table talking with my relatives... Your dialogue was spot on...and very believable. So Kudos!

I loved the retrospective look at this simpler, yet enriching time, and you, indeed, captured a moment that I believe **WAS** the beginning of change for a generation.”

Steve Schirripa, actor (“The Sopranos”):

“I really like the story. With the right execution, this will be a great film.”

Frank Vincent, actor, musician (“Raging Bull,” “Goodfellas,” “Casino,” “The Sopranos,” etc.):

“You’ve got something here. The music will be important.”

Supporting Documents

Bad News on the Doorstep

By Tina Cervasio, *That's Life Magazine* staff writer, free-lance journalist, Emmy Award-winning sports broadcaster, and Director of Research for Mr. Cervasio

“Bad News is Good News”

Joe Cervasio has been known to his business colleagues as “Joe C.” for more than thirty years. On the other hand, Joseph Rocco Cervasio is the name he chooses to be identified with as the author of his first novel, *Bad News on the Doorstep*. There is no hesitation when asked why. “That’s my name, and it’s a tribute to my father, Rocco.” But it doesn’t take long after beginning your read of this family epic, spiritual journey, and coming of age book that you conclude that this fifty-six year old corporate executive bestows honor on more segments of “the greatest generation” than just his dad.

“When I was commuting seventy-seven miles each way to work back in the early nineties, the frustration was getting to me until my wife Maria suggested using the time in the car to write a book. With tape recorder in hand, I began the challenge, and just finished it nearly ten years later!”

Joe’s friend and New Milford, NJ native, Ed Marinaro, (All American fellow-Cornell footballer and Emmy Award-winning cast member of *Hills Street Blues* and *Sisters*) had this to say about the novel: “*Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley* meet *The Sopranos* in Joe Cervasio’s entertaining read.”

Joe is quick to point out the essence of his Jersey genre: “On those long drives I couldn’t get my mind off all the great people back in my roots who invested their lives in mine, or who were unknowingly my heroes. It had to be about them—the decisions and sacrifices they made and the alternatives they could have enjoyed. And, I could not forget the late fifties in Jersey, particularly 1959.”

Bad News on the Doorstep is published by AuthorHouse and may be ordered directly at 1-800-839-8640, 1-888-280-7715, or at www.authorhouse.com, or on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. It will soon be on booksellers’ shelves.

If you’re a Jersey person, wish you were one, or are just looking for that summer time read that you won’t put down, Cervasio’s 415-page tapestry of this time period and its colorful characters may just be it. A legendary football game between Belleville and Nutley High Schools in 1958 sets up a nostalgic look back at this decade when the middle class living of Cervasio’s featured family, the Bonaduccis, clashes with the temptations of mob affiliation and the allure of the entertainment industry. Meet Marietta, Rocky, and Frankie Bonaducci, as well as their family and friends---“Petee Five Corners”, Aunt Bella

Bruno, also known as “Bella LaStarr”; Gino “Sneaks” Babula; Tommy “Two Tones” Anthony; and many more saints and sinners.

“The book is written in memory of my mother, Marietta, my father, Rocky, and my first football hero, Frankie D’Angelo. Of course, it’s fiction, and I never met Frank, but characters evolve that certainly resemble them, or at least what I remember them to be.”

Football, the doo-wop music of the period, Italian-American living in the Newark area, Sinatra, Dion and the Belmonts, a counterfeit plot, mysterious deaths, the Buddy Holly crash, and spiritual references make Cervasio’s work an emotional journey through the year 1959. It is then sensitively capped with a leap to 1971, ending with a nostalgic look back from the present.

Cervasio has written throughout his career as a veteran of the resort development industry. A corporate executive, leadership development expert, strategic coach, entrepreneur, and demanded public speaker—his business plans, motivational talks, and training programs initially dominated. However, he then had a string of articles published in *The Crescent*, the newsletter of the Cornell Football Association. The response across the country was too much for him not to accelerate his writing projects.

Some of the other praise for *Bad News on the Doorstep* is note-worthy. Dr. Michael Kormanicki, a colleague of Joe’s from his days at Marriott Vacation Club International, readily saw the leadership principles that Cervasio represents in his professional work evolving as themes throughout *Bad News on the Doorstep*: “The characters, plot, dialogue, and emerging themes go well beyond Joe Cervasio’s seemingly nostalgic look back. In an era of self-absorption and hubris, he has given us a hero who values humility, compassion, courage, trust, and perseverance; it is a study of leadership and spiritual development at all levels, as well as a great read for the whole family.”

Joanne Cocchiola Oliver, Associate Counsel for the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority and Nutley, NJ Mayor, expressed her appreciation for how her neighborhood in Essex County was portrayed: “This is a heartwarming story about a legendary event. The characters and scenarios are so true to life that it allows the reader to live every moment. Reading the book has made me proud to be an Italian American, more proud to be a citizen of my hometown of Nutley, and most proud of my friend, Joe Cervasio.”

Cervasio is transparent about his crafting of the book. “The writing adventure was an emotional experience for me. While I had fun with my imagination, some foggy memories of growing up from Fifth Street and Bloomfield Avenue in Newark, to Belleville Stadium, and then to the Oval in Nutley paraded a kaleidoscope of characters before my mind’s eye that often brought a tear, and sometimes a chuckle.”

The title of the book comes from Don McLean’s legendary song, “American Pie”, and introduces another phenomenon of the work. “There’s no question about it,” says Cervasio. “The old *Newark Star Ledger* was our Bible for everyday living and our telescope around the world. It’s one of the lead characters in the book.”

Except for his years in college, Joe has never moved from New Jersey where he lives in Nutley with his wife Maria. After earning his degree in Organizational Behavior at the School of Industrial Relations at Cornell, he received his MBA from the New York University Stern School of Business. Today he commutes from Jersey regularly to his

offices in Boca Raton, Florida and Ridgedale, Missouri. “The time at airport gates and in hotel rooms enabled me to jump on the computer at all hours of the day and night.” As Vice President of Organizational Development for the Resort Division of the Bluegreen Corporation and Director of the Bluegreen Leadership Institute, Cervasio travels the country telling the tales that fashioned *Bad News on the Doorstep*. “My audiences know about the Sopranos and that I’m from Essex County. So, I give them a peek at the middle class lives of the rest of the population and identify the leadership and personal development lessons that can be learned from the less glamorous, but law-abiding. We have fun, makes some history in our business, and change a few people’s lives.”

The screenplay is in the works. “Yes, at 4 AM most mornings we visit that project!” Marinaro and Joe Pesci (through his cousin Joe Marra, a Belleville High classmate) have advised Cervasio he shouldn’t stop with the book. “Marra told me Pesci said ... it made him laugh.”

In the end, *Bad News on the Doorstep* is good news for the reader. Heroes roam the pages in every chapter, and lessons for life are always a by-product in Cervasio’s first novel. There will be other books. “I have to write about my business,” says Joe. “You think the characters in this book are interesting? But we’ll always return to Jersey. Where else? I haven’t left yet,” concludes Cervasio, ... a real Jersey guy, telling the “good news” of growing up in the Garden State.

Tina may be reached at tinacervasio@gmail.com or at 917-226-0740. The author can be contacted at joe274339@aol.com or at 973-725-8713 or 973-235-1415. Book signings and speaking engagements are being set now in New Jersey and Florida.

To: Brother Joe Cervasio

From: Michael Kormanicki, PhD, Instructional Systems Design, Florida State University

I trust this message finds you well and in good spirits in anticipation of tonight's literary review at your home. I tried mightily to find my way to your Nutley Studio for this evening but it was not in the cards. I've read the screen play twice, and then decided I had to go back and reread the entire book. I have pages of notes and observations, but in the interest of time, I have condensed my thoughts into the following paragraphs.

You and your collaborator, Ralph Greco, have done some prodigious work to condense 415 pages into this recent draft of your screen play. In conversations with my cousin Todd Komarnicki (different spelling; screenplay writer, producer, novelist), I know how challenging a task that is. Thus, knowing that staying true to the essence the story relies much more on great dialogue and less on exposition, I say. “Congratulations!”

When I first read *Bad News...* , I was struck by how easy it was for me to identify with the character. The themes were ones I had experienced firsthand--Family, Friendship, Faith, Fidelity. This is not surprising given the stories you had shared with me about your life growing up in North Jersey and the values we shared.

When you first started talking about trying to adapt the book for the celluloid medium, a few prototypes came to mind. Your character "Marietta" reminded me of one of the first great TV shows that aired back in the late '40's/early 50's: *I Remember Mama*. It was based on a Kathryn Forbes memoir titled *Mama's Bank Account*. It was adapted for a 1944 play and then written for a 1948 film--*I Remember Mama*. It told the ongoing story of a loving Norwegian family living in San Francisco in the 1910s through the eyes of the elder daughter, Kathryn Hansen (Rosemary Rice),

who was seen looking through the pages of the family album at the start of each episode with the opening narration:

This old album makes me remember so many things in the past—San Francisco and the house on Steiner Street where I was born. It brings back memories of my cousins, aunts, and uncles; all the boys and girls I grew up with. And I remember my family as we were then: my brother Nels, my little sister Dagmar, and of course, Papa. But most of all when I look back to those days so long ago, most of all, I remember ... Mama.

***Bad News on the Doorstep (the book)* has a lot of the same “ethnic novel” elements of *I Remember Mama*. If you were going to try and adapt it as a series, it almost has a “Soprano's Lite” feel to it (G/PG). (There's certainly a wealth of material in the 415 pages to create a great mini-series).**

A few weeks ago, after my first reading, I called and asked you “When you wrote the book, what audience did you have in mind?” I've thought a lot about that question as I reread the screenplay and then went back and read the book. It got me to focus on the core question that people always ask someone when they see a movie: “***What's it about?***”

Here's what I think: It's a “coming of age story”. The protagonist is Frank Bonaducci. His initiation into adulthood takes place without the usual Hollywood stereotypical sexual encounter or violent disruption or abuse. Frank's maturation happens through understanding the process of dropping of preconceptions (Gino's life), experiencing some disillusionment (Uncle Pete's alleged troubles with the law), and reading the “Bad News...” that abuses the false sense of security and invincibility (The Day the Music Died).

Who has purchased *Bad News on the Doorstep* ... the novel, and who will want to see the film.

- Italian Americans. The number of people in the United States with at least one Italian grandparent is estimated to be about 26 million.
- Denizens of Jersey, as well as others around the country curious about the common man on the perimeter of the *Jersey Boys* and *The Sopranos* stories.
- People willing to spend money to read a book or see a film in which goodness is a good thing, and evil is not depicted in the most attractive way possible.
- Baby Boomers all over America hoping for a clue about themselves. **(In August of 2014, Lisa Rose of *The StarLedger* reported that "...two of the world's largest 1950s conventions are held {in Wildwood, NJ} annually, ... drawing enthusiasts from around the globe... {in addition} People in Europe love the 1950s culture, and they're keeping it alive... The hit Broadway musical and movie "Jersey Boys" gave the Garden State oldies scene a boost. She quotes Terry Cook, a retired magazine editor, '... it was the good old days when kids ... had toy guns, not real guns. You don't see sixties, seventies, eighties reunions because those eras didn't have the innocent fun of the 1950's...'")**
- Members of the Greatest Generation, who appreciate a few words of tribute.
- Teachers and clergy who want a good book or movie to recommend that won't get them in trouble.

Complementary Titles

Novels exploring similar themes

- Fortunate Pilgrim* by Mario Puzo.
- The Godfather* by Mario Puzo.
- Lucia, Lucia* by Adrianna Trigiani.
- Honeymoon* by James Patterson.
- Standing in the Rainbow* by Fannie Flagg.
- Donnie Brasco* by Joe Pistone
- Wiseguys* by William Pillegi
- Bleachers* by John Grisham.
- The Painted House* by John Grisham.
- I Love You Like a Tomato* by Marie Giordano.
- American Pastoral* by Philip Roth.

- Snow in August* by Pete Hamill.
- The Rocket Boys* by Homer Hickman.
- The Body* by Stephen King.

How has Joe promoted his book, and with the help of Ralph, the screenplay?

Joe is a salesman, and not a shy guy. He knows how to sell stuff – by selling his own character and forthrightness. Ralph is a fully committed writer, director, and producer in LA.

Mr. Cervasio has been a guest lecturer at:

1. Cornell University
2. Harvard School of Business
3. Montclair State University
4. Seton Hall University
5. Manhattan College
6. Pennsylvania State University

In his professional life he has been a keynote speaker, moderator, and guest lecturer for such groups as:

- Marriott Vacation Club International
- American Resort Development Association
- Coast-to-Coast Resorts
- New Jersey Association of Directors of Athletics
- National Association of Newspaper Advertisers

In addition, Joe has spoken to countless local business, educational, and sports-related gatherings. He also gives entertaining presentations on topics such as “Situational Leadership” and “Best Sales Practices”. His most popular presentation title, “Just Who Do You Think You Are?” has been received with ovations, laughs, and even a few tears.

Joe has been interviewed many times already about *BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP*, and is looking forward to even more.

It should be noted that Joe’s older daughter, the Emmy Award-winning Tina Cervasio, has over 35,000 Twitter followers. Combined with her father’s and Mr. Greco’s contacts, financial support for the project should be readily available.

Testimonials/Endorsements

Joe and Ralph can deliver testimonials from a host of show business personalities, magazine editors, and scholars in the Italian American experience as well as those from faith-based organizations. In addition, they have both been encouraged by film, television, and publishing leaders who appreciate the lessons that can still be learned from the decade of the Fifties, and the people of faith who navigated the turbulent waters out of them.

Table of Contents and Summary of the book :

(Of course, the screenplay adaptation does not include all that is below, with name changes as well.)

Chapter I: May the Symphony Begin

Marietta Bonaducci enters her home at 7:15 am on the last day of 1958, as she completes her fifty-second straight week on the graveyard shift at the local factory. Today will be unlike any other that year as she and her family would prepare for the traditional New Years Eve feast at Grandpa Joe's. She discerns winds of change are blowing as she begins her day in prayer and as her family awakens upstairs. The playing of 45 records by second son Jo-Jo joins with the sounds of the kitchen as Marietta begins her cooking for the holiday. Rocky, the father, is already up, shuffling his body to the family bathroom. His heroics in the South Pacific during WW II make him a model of manhood for his family. Older son Frank can't sleep with Jo-Jo's favorite song blasting on the hi-fi. Seven-year old Donna calls out to play the song she is sure is named for her, Ritchie Valens' "Donna."

As the culture and characters are introduced, it becomes apparent that God, family, tradition, and callings are the themes of this typical, blue-collar, guilt-ridden Italian-American family. At the center of their thinking is a counterfeit ring rumored to be operating locally, Marietta's bountiful antipasto for Grandpa Joe's house that night, and the local "run" for Rocky and the boys, and a football game played three weeks ago at Belleville-Nutley High that everyone is still talking about. Because of what happened in that game, the tranquil fifties have already ended for the Bonaduccis. Something strange happened that night that changed everything.

Chapter II: Pregame with Uncle Pete

On the Saturday of that game we find Uncle Pete, Marietta's rotund, loving, and mischievous bachelor butcher brother banging at the backyard door, carrying the pre-game meal for Frank's ninth game of the season. Though it's only 7:30 am, his sister welcomes him, knowing how much Frank's high school football career has made "Petee 5 Corners" a popular guy on Bloomfield Avenue in Newark, where the local "connected guys" depend on Pete for his catering and occasional "family errands." With family dog Blackie, Pete's childhood friend Greenie Delaney, and the rest of the Bonaduccis, this morning becomes a punctuation mark to how critical Frank's performance later that day will be for obtaining a college scholarship, as well as another indication that frustrated middle-class living is about to collide with the temptations of local organized crime.

The *Newark Star Ledger* is retrieved at the frozen doorstep. As food, snowy weather, and football dominate the kitchen conversation, the local sportswriters accentuate the importance of this high school football rivalry. It will be the only game to be played that day, as Frank's teammate, Gino Babula, attempts to become Essex County's leading scorer. Frank has a plan that will cast both his and Gino's name into legendary bronze. On the other hand, it will be the deed that

ultimately allows those inevitable winds of change to sweep through people's lives.

Chapter III: **Vinnie's Victory Voyage**

With the breakfast over, Rocky drives Frankie to the locker room in his limping '49 Chevy. Exchanging final thoughts on the game, both men wish drier conditions were prevailing so Frank and his running mate Gino could put on a show against rival Nutley. However, a vicious snow and rain mix is creating horrific game conditions. Frank makes it to the locker room, as Rocky, the hardened ex-Marine, asks God for Frank to do something special that day. The prayer will be answered.

Bus driver Vinnie Giampietro, a crippled Korean War veteran, navigates the trip to Nutley. The importance of the game becomes evident, as does the reality that in some families in the Belleville-Nutley area, high school football is all they have to look forward to.

Chapter IV: **The Mud Bowl**

The pre-game pep talk by Belleville coach Ed Popalinsky bring the Bellboys to a feverish pitch, as we are introduced to Frank's teammates. An emotional entrance to the muddy bowl confirms bizarre field conditions, but the overflow crowd is in a state of pandemonium in anticipation of the clash.

From the first play it becomes apparent that all at the field and those watching by TV would experience a "Mud Bowl." Neither team could move the ball, with Belleville's attempt to get Gino Babula his historic touchdown being thwarted by mud-caked Nutley gridsters. At halftime the game was still scoreless.

Nutley decides to change its strategy to passing, while Belleville is still obsessed with Gino's quest. Frank has his own plans. On the first play of the second half Frank intercepts Nutley's trick pass and begins a sixty-yard legendary journey to immortality. Rather than scoring unimpeded, he turns around at the four-yard line, looking to lateral the ball to Gino. His secret strategy turns disastrous as he is tackled just short of the goal line. A sure score is prevented. No Babula touchdown follows after four attempts from in close, and Nutley goes on to win the game!

Only Uncle Pete, Greenie, and "connected" but kind Thomas "Two Tones" Anthony brave the mud to retrieve Frankie from the killing field of his attempted heroics. The boys had lost lots of money on the game, but their love and admiration for Pete's nephew was genuine. The rest of the family and the exhausted team await Frank at the Belleville bus. The taunting by the Nutley grammar school kids signaled that Frank's decision had become the stuff of embarrassing folklore.

Chapter V: **For Old Time Sake**

As Frank peers out the fogged window of the bus back to Belleville, he sees Uncle Pete on the outdoor phone. Gino's dad, Sneaks Babula, is on the other line at Rahway State Prison. He can't believe what Frank tried to do for his son. Pete

is shocked when the local Boiardo Family member commits \$10,000 to Frank's college education, partly for his gesture, and partly for what the deceased father of Marietta and Pete did for Sneaks when he arrived in Newark from Sicily during the Depression. A benevolent criminal from the mean streets of the old neighborhood of Newark had to show his appreciation. Pete was relieved for his worrisome sister. Her financial concerns about college for Frank were over.

Chapter VI: **Post-Game Plans**

After hearing the coach forgive Frank for his errant attempt to help Gino, Rocky drove his son back home where friends and family confirmed that confusion was brewing about what Frank had done. Marietta's homemade muffin pizza quenched everyone's appetites, as Maria, Frank's girlfriend, joined his closest buddies and Jo-Jo's as well. A full house of support existed as Eric "The Snatcher" Thatcher confirmed to his friend that he would become a local legend, but with its detractors. Marietta began to worry that a scholarship may have been sacrificed in the name of friendship. Perhaps counterfeit twenties would help? She had yet to hear of Sneaks Babula's scholarship fund for her son.

Maria convinces Frank that they must attend the traditional Victory Dance that night, in spite of his mixed emotions. All agree as Jo-Jo and his munchkin friends relish imminent puberty, but lament its seemingly endless wait. Rocky and Marietta take Donna to shop at the local blue-collar department store and to "treat" themselves to a cigarette and cup a coffee there. Jo-Jo is left alone to wonder about his big brother's decision.

Chapter VII: **Visitors at the Victory Dance**

With "The Snatcher" spinning Top Forty 45's and his own coveted reel-to-reel tapes, it is almost impossible to get the Belleville teens to dance or show any sign of retuning to normalcy because of their stunning defeat at Nutley. However, a drunken and drugged Paulie Puccini, who arrives with his juvenile delinquent friends to teach Frank a lesson, stuns all out of their funk. Gino Babula shows his father's savvy and physical force in quelling the errant classmate and former athlete-turned mob wannabe. With peace returned, not only does the Belleville crowd begin to dance, but also the Nutley team arrives uninvited, but peaceful to end the night on a positive note. They just wanted to dance, have fun with their cross-town rivals ... and meet Frank. The legend was fast growing.

That night Frank and Gino would find it hard to sleep. Both were thinking of their old friend Puccini who went bad after a tearing a knee during a freshman football game.

Chapter VIII: **Meet You at the Manger**

With only Marietta's vocal prayer jumpstarting Rocky's sorrowful Chevy, the Bonaducci family slips and slides to Grandpa Joe's on this snowy New Year's Eve of 1958. Here the festive assembly of family and friends join in to celebrate this Italian American culture with eating, drinking, smoking, and conversation. With sexy and glamorous Aunt Bella leading the front porch greetings of hugs and kisses, cousin Nick Durso waits in the vestibule for his classmate Frank to

make sure the night begins with youthful, yet cerebral sarcasm, wit, and commentary on the eclectic gathering.

Much to Marietta's disgust, Uncle Caesar Casciano begins an unwelcome dinner table discussion of Frank's controversial game decision, which cousin Nick deflects to his treatise on the propensity for struggling middle classers to be tempted into the alleged local counterfeit ring. Marietta breaks out in cold sweats thinking of her son's possible sacrifice of a much needed scholarship, then squirms when hearing of the fake twenties which she thinks may have touched her naïve but needy hands weeks before, when neighbor Rosa Gubitosi came by for coffee and canole. The only intermission in her motherly agony during the antipasto, pasta, and main course extravaganza is granted when cousin Carmine Bonaducci from Brooklyn calls for his annual holiday greeting to his Jersey cousins. Bella and Rocky field the telephone interruption only to hear Carmine "The Artist," supposedly a suave and articulate capo in the New York City Commission, is losing his infant commercial enterprise in Cuba that night, faster than thirty-five happy family members around the table can consume the antipasto soppressetta.

Due much to cousin Nick's conversational performance, Frank and Marietta gain a reprieve from sensitive table talk, as the family disperses to different parts of the house for additional smoking, drinking, eating, and song. Connie Ferro, Belleville's own national singing star, has a song for them, as Sinatra, Glen Miller, Johnny Ray, Lanza and Caruso light up the airwaves in this huge family home in East Orange on the western border of Newark.

When Frank escapes just before the midnight roar to find solace in Aunt Bella's bathroom upstairs, he collides on the stair landing with a collage of photos portraying his family's arduous trek to pride and achievement, all the way back to Grandpa Joe getting off the boat early that century. With Sinatra, Mamie and Ike, Congressman Rodino, Berle, and Durante all featured in this Bonaducci collage, Frank is reminded of what is important in life. But did he do the right thing at the Nutley game? He is looking forward to the New Year.

Chapter IX: **Broken Windows and Breaking News**

The daily *Newark Star Ledger* wastes no time in busting through the Bonaducci paneled front door, announcing changes in '59 were to come at break-neck speed. As four-eyed, but friendly paperboy Russell Giardella speeds off unaware of his bull's eye delivery, Jo-Jo tells all of Castro's control in Cuba. While Marietta's two college-bound sons discuss the headlines, Rocky smirks knowing that cousin Carmine just might have to get a legitimate job now.

The stage is set for the second half of this last holiday celebration, as Marietta prepares her fresh ham and lasagna for soon to be visiting Uncle Pete, stern and cold Grandma Frassa, and flirtatious Maid of Honor Dalla Della Pella. All three children and Rocky can't wait for the bowl games to begin on the family's temperamental TV.

After the meal, as the second half of the Rose Bowl is about to commence, unforgiving change arrives again on the doorstep. Dalla cites an unnaturally large lump on the right side of Jo-Jo's throat. All are alarmed, and eventually the flamboyant but practical Aunt Bella has to come onto the scene with her graveyard-shift drug store manager of a husband who thinks he's a doctor. With tumor or cyst confirmed by Uncle Emil Bruno, as he mixes a double of scotch with anisette, the Bonaducci family is well on its way to a new life, glancing back as the serene fifties quickly slip away. The only consolation is Uncle Pete's last minute revelation to Marietta of Sneak's scholarship fund for Frankie.

Chapter X.: **From Basketball to Backstage Johnnies**

With everyone anxious about the strange growth on Jo-Jo's neck, Frankie is back at basketball practice as the New Year settles in. The sore right ankle that kept him from being the premier running back on the football team isn't healing. Basketball Coach Hiram Wilhelm's sarcastic remark about Frank's attempted lateral to Gino strikes a cord in the usually serene student-athlete, and he suddenly decides to quit the team.

As he leaves Belleville High headed for a two-mile walk home, Frank gets a glimpse of an enigmatic classmate afflicted with cerebral palsy, Craig Francello. Being hoisted onto a New York City bound bus by a bevy of attractive coeds, the strange little guy is headed to a mysterious destination. Frank wonders what might await Craig everyday in the cavernous urban domain.

Frank labors through the snow and slush to meet Joe Pelli, the fast-talking would-be comedian who doubles as a barber and numbers runner for the boys on Bloomfield Avenue. With the wisdom of the ages spewing out of Joe's mouth, filtered by vintage Jerseyese, Frank discovers from Joe that he is still a hometown hero in spite of the decision at the Mud Bowl. Joe even promises for Frank to meet Dion and the Belmonts and other rock stars in the city with tickets he can provide.

Arriving home, Frankie learns from his mother that Uncle Emil was correct, and Jo-Jo is scheduled for neck surgery.

Chapter XI. **Aunt Bella to the Rescue.**

The day for Jo-Jo's operation arrives, and a sterile, musty Children's Hospital welcomes its newest patient. Marietta and Rocky are anxious, while their son is hopeful to get back to classes, basketball, and his girlfriend Rosemarie. Not sure how they will meet all the medical expenses, Marietta and Rocky are surprised by the arrival of Aunt Bella and her husband to assist in the admission process. Bella will guarantee the bill as she slips a twenty into the hand of the slow-moving volunteer checking them in.

All goes smoothly until Bella discovers that her nephew lacks a television in his room. She orders Emil to check with his shady patrons at his all-night drug store to locate one. In the late hours of the next morning, Thomas "Two Tones" Anthony escorts two strapping black teenagers into Jo-Jo's room.

Indeed, the new TV reveals that Bella's worldwide traveling and dancing have ushered her close to organized crime from Newark to Miami to Havana. Her host in Cuba always being her classy cousin Carmine, she could have married one of his lieutenants, Benny "Bad Boy" Badalamenti. Instead, in a naïve sort of way, she picked Emil, her family of nieces and nephews, and the Catholic War Veterans to be the center of her life. But brushing shoulders with the worlds of entertainment and organized crime is too tempting a compromise for the sassy older sister of Rocky. Plus, it got Jo-Jo the TV.

Chapter XII: **Belleville Cornfields.**

Jo-Jo's operation is successful, but the morning of his first day back to school proves memorable beyond its impact at 711 Belmont Avenue. The morning radio announces the tragic plane crash of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper in a cornfield in snow-swept Iowa. The Bonaducci home and millions across America are in shock.

Both Bonaducci boys dwell heavily upon the news. Lessons are learned that day at School Ten where Jo-Jo is a leading student. He captivates his teacher, Ellie Angus, with his mature take on the event. Later, during his bus ride home, Frank contemplates the loss of the rock and roll icons, envisioning Buddy and Dion (from the Belmonts) arguing over who should be on the fateful plane.

When Frank finally arrives home, he must make a phone call to Joe Pelli, the barber. It's time to become a "backstage Johnny" in New York City. Frank has important questions to ask Dion and the Belmonts.

Chapter XIII. **Road Trip ... Unauthorized.**

Jackie Carey is the hero-worshipping classmate of both Frank and his high-scoring teammate Gino. By March, with the college scholarship offers dwindling in light of poor classroom performance, Gino's getting frustrated and sees Jackie's vintage customized '49 Golden Mercury as his transportation to a surprised coaching staff on the campus of the University of Maryland. The backslapping Carey takes the bait and plays chauffeur to Sneak's son for this ill-fated recruiting trip, totally orchestrated by Sneak's Baltimore area "associates."

The weekend visit goes from bad to worse. Gino is silent for most of the ride, while Jackie's Jerseyese dominates. With a chilly welcome in College Park, only the warm beer and curious Southern coeds keep Jackie from jumping back into the Merc to head back north. Gino becomes sullen, realizing Maryland is no longer interested in his '58 heroics. Not forgetting the Kansas coaching staff's earlier curiosity about his potential, Gino decides he and his nervous driver should now head west! Jackie calls his Irish sister and Frankie for help, while his demanding passenger searches for pizza and beer along Route One. The bad news travels quickly back home in Jersey, as Sneaks and his crew get the update, and Frank surprisingly gets the approval from his parents to go on the rescue mission. Praying all the way down on his train ride, Frank doesn't realize that Tommy "Two Tones" Anthony and Benny "Bad Boy" Badalamenti are also heading south. Frankie and his own crew of invisible associates arrive first.

That night in the musty motel room in Maryland, Frankie tells Gino of his faith in a loving Higher Power, and Jackie and Two Tones get an earful as well. Only Bad Boy, the New York-based hood, sleeps through it, dreaming of counterfeiting rings in Newark, Belleville, and Nutley, and his ever-increasing immersion into Jersey "business." Not only is the trip to Kansas scuttled, but also by the end of the night, four lives have been changed forever.

Chapter XIV: **April Fool's Day.**

On April first of 1959 Frank and his friends learn where they're going to school next year. It's Cornell for Bonaducci, while Gino surprisingly accepts Maryland's suggestion to attend prep school in Virginia. Marietta and Rocky are proud and relieved, particularly that Frank had earned financial aid at the Ivy League institution. The Bonaducci matriarch temporarily lays aside her haunting concerns for finances, knowing not only that Cornell would be providing a job and money, but also that Sneak's "scholarship fund" was still available. Her joy is mitigated by her renewed hope that her closeness to the alleged local counterfeit ring will go unpunished by her Creator. It was a good day all around at 711 Belmont Avenue in Belleville.

With college decisions now behind him, Frank reminds Gino of Pelli's invitation to hang out with the rock and roll stars. The tickets are set-aside for Frank and his friends as they prepare for their trip to the Brooklyn Paramount.

Chapter XV: **Bellboys in Brooklyn**

The Belleville Bellboys heading to meet the stars in Brooklyn included Frank, Gino, Bobby Hardy, Eric Thatcher, and their driver Jackie Carey. The five seniors are eventually escorted to the backstage party by Joe Pelli's comedic sidekick, the suave Ralph Benedetto. A football nut who made lots of money on the exploits of Frank and Gino last fall, Ralph is the perfect host at the Paramount, as well as "Backstage Johnny" trainer. The boys are about to come face to face with the heart of rock and roll and the entertainment business in the smoke-filled back room wreaking with the smell of overcooked food, booze, and smoke.

The crowd of celebrants they meet looks more like a Bloomfield Avenue, Newark, NJ reunion, with some bigger surprises! The boys cannot fathom the reason cerebral palsy-stricken Craig Francello is there with Belleville High's sexiest coed, Julie Manzer, and her dad, a slimy Newark cop. And there's Two Tones hanging with Newark's best falsetto singing group, Lenny Latore and the Four Loves. Can that be "Bad Boy" as well? And supposedly, Belleville's own Queen of Rock and Roll, Connie Ferro will make a special appearance. Frank is wondering where Dion and the Belmonts are!

The Belmonts never show up, but Alan Freed, Frankie Lyman, and Jackie Wilson appear, and the night goes on to become a Jersey love fest as Connie and The Four Loves steal the show. The Bellboys are slightly impressed, but then alarmed when after her performance, Connie Ferro can't take her eyes off of naïve Frank. As her conversation with Frank seems to be getting amorous, Frank's friends

come to the rescue, only to learn their straight-laced football hero is telling the tempting recording star all about his girlfriend Maria!

Since Jackie Carey took full advantage of the free drinks, Frank drives the boys home as he and cerebral Eric review the eclectic evening and the lessons they've learned. With everyone else asleep in the Merc, Frank tells Eric what he would have asked Dion had the doo wop wonder appeared. It would have been about his absence on that ill-fated plane trip. Only Frank knew he could not separate Dion's decision to stay with the Belmonts from his own attempt to help Gino get his record-breaking touchdown. And both young men could not settle their opinions on how such a diverse Jersey group could have been playing "Backstage Johnnies" at the same time, in the same place!

Chapter 16: **Roll Call.**

Frank, along with the entire readership of the *Newark Star Ledger*, finds out why such a diverse cadre of Essex County characters was at the Brooklyn Paramount several days earlier. Many of them are indicted on federal counterfeit charges handed down by the county prosecutor!

When Rocky informs Marietta her neighbors Rose and Gary Gubitosi lead the list, she begins a smoking marathon, upset she might get dragged into it. But she's prayerfully grateful when the cops don't go after Pete. However, his two best friends, Greenie and Two Tones, get driven downtown, as do some big surprises: afflicted Craig Francello, humble bus driver Vinnie Giampietro, impeccable athletic director Hiram Wilhelm, Bad Boy, jailed Sneaks, and a bevy of others from Bloomfield Avenue.

With one of the Four Loves, Patsie Pratola, also escorted to Newark's Police Headquarters, lead singer Lenny Latore calls his favorite ex-Love to coax him back into a cappella. It's Rocky's newest brother-in-law, Jimmy Quinn. This is Rocky's sexy little sister Pinky's "Amedigan" (non-Italian, Irish) young husband. He's thrilled, but his suddenly conservative Natalie Wood look-alike wife puts her foot down. No national singing tour for her gas company worker!

Many lives changed in the neighborhood that day. Jimmy Quinn's was not one of them.

Chapter XVII: ... a Quarter to Five.

While springtime was springing in Jersey on May 15, Marietta and Pete were marveling over not being called into the counterfeit investigation, With Sneak's scholarship fund gaining interest in a Belleville bank, and Frank's ankle now well-healed, the Cornell-bound running back should have been upbeat and expectant. However, trading baseball for track for the first time in his young life and the periodic haunting of his failed Nutley game strategy have cast shadows over our hero.

Returning home after an abbreviated track practice on this Friday, Frank was surprised in his backyard by garage tenant and ex-fighter pilot Al Matte. One of the biggest surprises on the list of alleged counterfeiters, Al has been keeping his

motorcycle in the Bonaducci garage until that day. Marriage is now calling him, and he is taking the machine out for the last time. Surprised when the strapping Frank refuses to take the last ride with him, Al rides it off to the Shell station around the corner, owned by his best friend and outstanding citizen Henry Davidson, also an indictee. Frank's reason for saying no to the cycle ride: "I have to be home at a quarter to five for my Dad." This was one rule that could not be broken at the Bonaducci home.

Al and Henry are killed moments later on that last ride, one that Henry swore he would never take. Frank had been spared. An emotional night of mourning and celebration ensues with Marietta as the ultimate host, bypassing the graveyard shift for the only time that year. All family members are invited for pizza, Italian pastries, homemade wine, and Friday night fights. God had protected Frankie!

Rocky insists that Angelo and Sally Giardina, the parents of Frank's girlfriend Maria, attend. The head of the house wants his guests to hear the ultimate neighborhood ... quarter to five story. Angelo cooperates as he details how twins from up on Forest Street went off to World War II, only for one of them to be declared missing in action as the Allies chased the Germans to Berlin. The other brother somehow got to the battlefield, to finally find his twin ... with the whistle each would use back in the thirties and early forties to warn each other whether their dad would be home for ... a quarter to five! The two returned victorious from war, only because of the quarter to five rule in this Italian American neighborhood!

Tears and joy overflow as the smoke-laced room and pizza-filled crowd of friends and family erupt emotionally. Uncle Jimmy Quinn leads them all in the singing of "God Bless America." Later that night as everyone retires, Marietta wipes the tables clean with the soiled "moppeen" (overused dish rag), as she thanks God for his favor and for the family tradition that kept her son off the motorcycle. This was her last Friday night off in 1959.

Chapter XVIII: **And the Winner Is**

Graduation finally arrives for Frank and his friends. The big question among them all is who will get the biggest ovation when the diplomas are awarded. Everyone from Gino, to the class valedictorian, to sexy Julie Manzer is mentioned. With the counterfeit indictments still hanging over the town, it can't be the overachieving victim of cerebral palsy, Craig Francello, himself a part of the infamous group of accused. How wrong the teenagers turn out to be!

Struggling to make it to the podium, Craigie Boy hears a thunderous roar, and the crowd at Belleville Municipal Stadium erupts in a standing ovation. The cheers ring out from an appreciative community that truly respects the survival story of one of their own. Frank can't take his eyes off Craig, as Gino and other footballers help him off the stage. He has a hunch Francello's life is just beginning.

Chapter XIX: **One Summer Night**

Eric "The Snatcher" Hatcher produces his first "Sunday Sensational Sounds" for the summer of '59. From his back porch his reel-to-reel tapes will join with his

collection of 45's to treat the neighborhood youngsters and all those within hearing distance to the teenage sounds of the fifties. As hormones rage with soon-to-be high school girls strutting down the street, Gino and some of the other members of the football team join Frankie and his friends, as well as Jo-Jo and his munchkin buddies to continue this doo-wop ritual Eric had invented several summers before. As Antoinette Thatcher, Eric's drinking mother, looks over the diverse group of young people, her keen perception overcomes her alcohol-influenced psyche to discern changing winds blowing on these innocents.

Chapter XX: **Das Boot**

At the end of the emotional night of record-playing, Bobby Hardy, heading to Annapolis that week, suggests a final game of "Stalag 17" between the older boys and their younger siblings and friends. It turns out to be one memorable summer night as Jo-Jo's team hides in the Gubitosi's infamous garage with the oversized boat. The younger Bonaducci comes upon a neatly wrapped package of vintage twenties in the hull of the under-construction vessel. The counterfeit ring has made it into the hands of Jo-Jo.

Later that night lying in the tattered Bonaducci hammock in his backyard, Jo-Jo can't get his discovery out of his mind. The cash is in his pocket. Unknown to him, however, having heard of the escapades of his ex-girl friend with an older teen from Gino and his teammates, Jo-Jo has a close encounter of the sexual kind. This distracts him from his cache of cash. Surely on this summer night in June Jo-Jo's innocence is vanishing with the moon. With only his mother's lilacs capturing what was left of his innocent senses, it begins to rain. He can't remember it raining on a summer Sunday night before.

XXI: **Wildwood Days**

By mid-July Uncle Pete still has not been implicated in the counterfeit case, and Frank's free ride to Cornell was set. However, a possible double suicide in the neighborhood has everybody frightened and wondering. On the home front, Marietta must confirm with her family once again that only vacation day trips would be affordable. Not one of the kids has experienced an overnight stay yet. On the other hand, Frank's girlfriend and her family in Wildwood extend a weekend invitation to Frank and Jo-Jo, as well as a guest. Marietta and Rocky are off the hook with the kids!

Jo-Jo coaxes Frank into approving newspaper boy Russell Giardella as his traveling mate, and the two first-time travelers overnight are ready for the Wildwood Beach, as well as the hordes of Philly teenage girls. Lots of sun, food, and surprises are to be discovered when they arrived at Maggie Corino's house and motel apartments. Maria's warm and generous aunt turns out to be quite a mentor for Frank on that short stay at the Jersey Shore.

With Maggie's brewing gravy competing with the scents of grilling sausage and peppers from the boardwalk all weekend, Frank and she discuss the coincidence of Cousin Carmine "The Artist" Bonaducci opening up motels at the legendary Jersey seaside resort, as well as getting intimately involved in the music business

at the many nightspots on the beach. After Maria's surprise sighting of Aunt Bella, it is beginning to appear to Frank that another unexplainable convention of characters is about to occur.

Aunt Maggie Corino makes the weekend for all of her guests a memorable one. However, it will be Frank who learns the most practical business and personal lessons that the industrious and loving motel owner can share with her niece's handsome boyfriend. In the meantime, Jo-Jo and Russell will have the time of their lives in the Wildwood surf, staring at pretty *Bandstand* girls, being stuffed with Aunt Maggie's food all weekend, and even playing touch football with Frank and Maria's cousins on the beach. No one wants the weekend to end, but it is soon back to Essex County where more change is awaiting the Bonaducci family.

XXII: **Mama**

Aunt Bella has orchestrated an August seventy fifth birthday party for Grandpa Joe, and family and friends will come from all over. Not only are the Bonaducci cousins invited from Brooklyn, but old friends from the old Newark neighborhoods, and even some blacks from around the block in East Orange! The hot, humid day punctuates the passionate celebration by all, as traditional hot dogs fight for attention from the best sausage and pepper ever cooked on an American grill. The wine, beer, and soda flow, as does festive Italian blood as the girls of the family celebrate their heritage with their backyard dancing to a Louie Prima album.

But generous Cousin Carmine has a surprise for all when he introduces his special gift to his Uncle Joe: world famous local pop star, Connie Ferro! Arriving with her family and cousins from Belleville, the cute Italian-America chanteuse pleases all her fans with her chart-busting hits. However, the biggest surprise comes when she joins with Aunt Bella, the singing and dancing star known as "Bella LaStarr" to burlesque patrons before the war. To everyone's amazement, the two do a rendition of "Mama," the tearful Italian folk song that touches everyone. Marietta and Bella embrace emotionally afterwards, signaling their mutual frustration with having abandoned personal dreams for their families. Few take notice.

As the afternoon of traditional festivities progresses, Rocky and Carmine slip away to the front of the house to debate a subject always sensitive between the two cousins: Carmine's involvement with less than credible ways to make money and Rocky's self-righteous concerns for the Bonaducci name on both sides of the Hudson. Each learns a lesson from the other. Rocky will pursue his own dreams as well as raise his family, and Carmine will eventually go legitimate in all of his businesses.

Unknown to both Bonaducci men, Jo-Jo hears their entire conversation as he lies in the back seat of Carmine's new Cadillac.

Chapter XXIII: **Far Above...**

With the summer of '59 coming to an end, and the cloud of the counterfeit case still lingering, Frank arrives at Cornell for pre-season football practice. After a good start, classes and his dishwashing job have him looking back to more

familiar and family-filled days at 711 Belmont Avenue in Belleville. Homesickness has set in, but only alcoholic war veteran and fraternity cook Sy Berg can get Frank to admit it. Frank finds a special mentor in Sy Berg, and although the job does not last, a four-year relationship with a very wise Jew helps our naïve Jersey kid learn more out of class than in it.

Chapter XXIV: **Hey, Ma, Greenie's on the Phone**

October brings anxious anticipation for the December counterfeit court case. However, good news arrives from Frank that he's adjusting to college, and in fact scored his first college touchdown. Jo-Jo is excelling on the Belleville Freshman football team. On the whole, Marietta is feeling good about things. The graveyard shift is still putting food on the table.

Down on Bloomfield Avenue, Pete is upset that Greenie's doing extra favors for the Boiardo "family" at Port Newark, preventing Pete from seeing Jo-Jo play, let alone sponsor a steak and egg pre-game meal at 711 Belmont Avenue. On this hot and humid Indian Summer day, Barringer and South Side are clashing at City Stadium in the midst of tense racial feelings. When Greenie finally shows up to help Pete, a gang war erupts right in front of the butcher shop between the black South Side students and their white Italian-American and Irish Barringer fans. Only Two Tones crew can stop the melee, but it takes Crazy Louie Montana's gunshot into the air to break up the crowd!

In the midst of the fight, Pete suffers a fatal heart attack.

Marietta has lost her beloved Pete, and so many mourn his sudden passing. Sneaks Babula gets a pass from Rahway State Prison to pay his respects and confirms with Marietta about the "scholarship fund." But he insists the source was pony money Pete had saved for Frankie.

Marietta and her mother feud over Pete's short and frustrating life, until Rocky takes his wife to Pastor Tony Votolo's Full Gospel Church. The old neighborhood wise guy who found religion in Missouri convinces Marietta her grief will only be lessened when she forgives her mother for her cold and impassionate raising of her two children. Miraculously it works, and Rocky is touched. However, he knows the next Christmas will be different. With Pete gone, the kids won't have as many gifts around the table.

Chapter XXV: **Buona Natale**

It's right before Christmas, and the counterfeit case is in full bloom. With conservative Judge Leroy Liloia on the bench, there doesn't seem to be much hope for the menagerie of fake money indictees. On the other hand, Prosecutor Giantempo has picked a weak team, purposely keeping off powerful district attorney Bobby Zarcone, a political rival. Sneaks feels so confident he can get the alleged printers off, he defends himself!

A circus ensues after ethnic slurs begin to dominate, and Grandma Bonaducci's cousin, the presiding judge, dismisses the case! With Frankie, Jo-Jo and many of the neighborhood families in attendance, pandemonium breaks out. Jo-Jo, who

knows more about the truth than most people, wonders why good comes to bad people as well as good people. At least his mother will have less to worry about that Christmas.

XXVI: Thanksgiving Eve, 1971

The pastoral fifties have vanished into memories for the Bonaducci family, and the sixties proved tumultuous. This is revealed almost twelve years later when a now-married Frank returns from out west where he is working. He's back home to help celebrate an award Rocky is receiving. His pregnant wife Maria accompanies him, and they are both met at Newark Airport by Jo-Jo, now a doctoral student, and Donna, now enrolled at Montclair State. As they discuss Marietta's sudden passing a year earlier at only 47, and consider Rocky's unemployed status due to a bad back, it's apparent to all that these days are far removed from the placid memories of their youth more than a decade ago.

Frankie requests a sentimental ride back through the neighborhood, and an emotional stop at the old Shell Station chronicles what has ensued since 1959. The pictorial display on the back wall of Mark Brunello's place of business tells of a local kid being killed in Vietnam, Frankie playing next to Cornell's legendary Gary Wood, Jo-Jo leading Belleville to its greatest football season as a quarterback, Frank's infamous Nutley game decision, Marietta's obituary, and an array of other events evoking memories of days gone by. Frank's comment is relevant: "When you look back, glance, don't stare."

That night Frank speaks on behalf of his dad, since Rocky is too emotional to accept the award commemorating his historic game-tying kick back in the Barringer-East Orange Thanksgiving football game. Aunt Bella makes sure more than thirty family members attended. Frank's comments earn a standing ovation as he credits his mom and dad for their example over the years, and how a day in the sun for Rocky back in 1940 taught them all lifelong lessons.

The emotional night ends with Rocky driving his children and Maria back to his cramped apartment to stay overnight. 711 Belmont Avenue had to be sold the year previous. Jo-Jo talks about a new hit song, "American Pie," that is haunting him. He relates how the singer seems to have experienced growing up in Belleville in the fifties, stunned by the Buddy Holly crash, only to script that that was the day "the music died," and so much change occurred from that day on. A discussion ensues between all as they lament better days gone by. Rocky agrees that the fifties were "the good old days" and reflects on his great times with Marietta. Hoping to soothe some wounds, Frankie ends the discussion with, "When you look back, glance, don't stare."

XXVII: The Rest of the Story

This epilogue chronicles what happened to all, as revealed through Donna's reluctant reveries. We learn how life had dealt its blows, and God had granted His grace. The family, friends, the famous, and infamous each share the spotlight as the reader rushes to the present.

- Pete's sudden death leaves Greenie with his turquoise blue '55 Caddie. He, Two Tones, and Jo-Jo pay annual Christmas Eve visits to the late butcher's grave. Now in the witness protection program, Two Tones leaves Newark Airport for destination unknown. Greenie cruises around the Five Corners on summer days and swears he sees Pete from time to time.
- Marietta's first and final heart attack in '70 has her friends and family still asking questions. Never to see the success of her children and grandchildren, her legacy is enhanced by Antoinette Thatcher's tribute to her dedicated neighbor: "The Marietta Bonaducci Memorial Scholarship" to deserving young dancers with dreams in their big hearts; awarded at Mrs. Thatcher's dance studio, also confirming its owner's sobriety and recommitment to her love of dance, a dream Marietta had for her friend.
- Rocky has a great run in Florida resort real estate with Frankie, only to interrupt it all with a brain aneurysm that almost takes his life at 57. Returning to Belleville, he lives out his life as a proud granddad, making his peace with his Creator at 70. He dies suddenly three years later in his one bedroom apartment in East Orange, surrounded by family pictures, awards, and memorabilia.
- Frank's success as a resort executive comes to a climax with his returning to Jersey. Then he dies suddenly one week after his father of a rare blood disease! Ninety-two cars at his funeral were a testimony to his life, a stunned tribute to the kid with the heart of a lion and the spirit of a saint. He was 57. He left behind Maria and his four children. A couple of years earlier his son Mark wins the Essex County Scoring Championship as a running back at Verona High, just as Frank had hoped for Gino almost forty years earlier.
- Gino has a broken field life in the motel business, but stays out of his father's "thing." He delivers an emotional eulogy at Frank's funeral, reminding his late friend he will never forget what he tried to do for him at the Mud Bowl.
- Sneaks Babula, Gino's dad, gets released from prison, hears of Frank's sudden illness, and starts searching for God. A million dollar check gets him out of the mob with no strings attached. Rededicating himself to his family, he now is retired and advising young businessmen how to prosper legitimately.
- Aunt Bella Bonaducci Bruno became widowed early, but never rekindled her adventurous single life as a dancer and singer. Her nieces and family, as well as the Catholic War Veterans, came first. Eventually ending up in a nursing home where her zest for life could not be snuffed out, she stopped talking when hearing of the deaths of Rocky and Frankie. She died one year later.
- Carmine "The Artist" Bonaducci was forced into retirement by a war between the New York City Commission. From his home in the Florida Keys he made sure his four sons never broke the law, but received their college degrees as cousin Rocky had always encouraged. However, not all of his business went legitimate.

- Craig Francello quickly dropped out of school to write comedy full time with Sean McMahon, his mentor. He later won an Emmy as the lead writer of America's favorite variety show! Marrying a healthy woman, he is the father of three children. He came home for Frank's funeral, his entourage transported in several limos. He told Maria that Frank was the first person at Belleville High who listened to him. He made Frank laugh, and Frank gave Craig hope.
- Connie Ferro made it to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Never lucky with men, her sisters said the one for her was a handsome Belleville running back, several years her junior, named Frank.
- Joe Pelli went back to running numbers on Bloomfield Avenue, then to waiting tables in Little Italy. There he got a part in a fight film. Acclaimed for his first role, he eventually won an Academy Award, portraying a crazed mob guy from Jersey. He told his Director he knew a couple of fellas like that from Bloomfield Avenue.
- Lenny Latore and The Four Loves made it to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Jimmy Quinn never rejoined the group. He just retired from Public Service. He still sings in the shower, but sometimes can't finish the song.
- The fates of the other counterfeit accused were varied: Bad Boy got killed in a NYC restaurant; Crazy Louie is serving a couple of life terms for a couple of hits; Athletic Director Wilhelm retired after countless apologies to his Italian American friends in Belleville for his insulting remarks at the trial; the old Belleville football team members from The Mud Bowl helped bus driver Vinnie Giampietro get his hip replaced, and now he's a grandfather always telling his grandkids about Frankie and Gino; bad cop Mike Manzer got into more trouble and was finally expelled from the Newark Police Department.
- Marietta's spiritual advisors, Queenie and Nora, were rumored to have returned to Alabama after Marietta's death. Frankie claimed they went on vacation, an award by the Lord for their salvation message to his mom. To him they were not humans, but rather angels on a rescue mission.
- Pastor Tony Votolo turned his church over to his son and now travels weekly preaching in prisons and to old friends in the witness protection program.
- Eric Thatcher is now a Professor of Psychology at a small college in the Appalachians, doubling as a disc jockey on Saturday nights playing the sounds of the fifties.
- Bobby Hardy, after a successful naval career, is in the real estate business in New England. His gift of a vintage jukebox to Jo-Jo brought tears to everyone's eyes, with a gold plated label on its face remembering Marietta, Rocky, and Frank.
- Although now a successful leadership development expert, speaking nationwide, Dr. Joseph Bonaducci is having a hard time dealing with Frank's sudden death.

- The last to reappear is Donna. Now fifty years old, she is burdened on this Thanksgiving Day in Jersey. Waiting for her many guests to arrive to enjoy the dinner that has taken two days to prepare, the weight of good and bad memories is heavy on her heart. Her young second daughter snuggles up close to her, requesting a story, "... When you were a little girl." Silently, Donna struggles to fight back tears. Praying for composure, her Creator grants her the courage to answer the little girl's wishes. After all, Marietta had instructed Donna to keep a journal from as far back as Christmas, 1958. So she begins to tell her daughter a story from long ago. The same sentence that begins the book, ends it:

*"In the late fifties, some people did not know what a day off was like,
let alone a week's vacation."*

