





VINCENT SPILOTRO was a teenager the first time he witnessed his father's legendary capacity for violence. In the early 1980s, Vince's dad, the Las Vegas Mob enforcer Tony Spilotro, had been staking the famous poker player Stu Ungar. The gambler was supposed to check in with Tony every day, but he'd gone missing. When he finally showed up at the Spilotros' front door, two days late, he was sweating and carrying a revolver in his waistband. Tony quickly pulled Ungar inside and sat him down in a chair in the kitchen.

"Leave us alone for a minute," Spilotro told his son.

Vince left the kitchen, but he peeked through a crack in the door and watched as his father beat Ungar to the floor.

"Get the fuck back up and sit in that chair," Tony commanded the gambler. Ungar staggered up, but as soon as he sat again Spilotro knocked him off the chair. The enforcer repeated this ritual until blood covered Ungar's face and the kitchen tiles. Ungar was an infamously meek drug addict, and afterward Vincent told his father that he had gone overboard.

"He told me it wasn't about the money," Vince says almost 30 years later, sitting in a nondescript office off the Vegas strip. "Gamblers sometimes lose. It was about him showing up at our house with a gun." Up close Vince's resemblance to his father—the basis for the character Nicky Santoro in Martin Scorsese's classic *Casino*—is unnerving. His gray eyes are calm and unblinking, his face broad and flat—a catcher's face. Like his dad, he is not tall, about 5'7", but beneath his shirt is a built upper body, all bulldog. At times it feels as if Tony is here, pressing out of his son's frame like a vengeful ghost.

Vince seldom gives interviews, but he agreed to reveal details about his father's life—and brutal murder—as part of a wider revelation: a sneak peak at the Las Vegas Mob Experience, a 55,000-square-foot attraction slated to open this month inside a newly renovated Tropicana Las Vegas. A cross between a museum and a high-tech fun house, its creators are billing it as the most technologically advanced presentation of historical artifacts ever devised. For Vince and the other relatives of famous Mafia figures who are providing the artifacts, it means something different: their last, best hope to show the world the real men behind the mobster myth.

A Museum Gets Made

The LVME is the brainchild of Jay Bloom, a 43-year-old former investment banker for JP Morgan Chase. A few years ago, when he learned that space was becoming available at the Tropicana, Bloom rounded up investors in

the hopes of installing a show that would pull in tourists from the Strip. "We looked at animatronic dinosaurs, space exploration, any kind of exhibit," he says. "When we hit on organized crime, we saw how powerful it is in our corporate culture. People can't get enough."

In a city literally built by the Mafia—not to mention a nation obsessed with movies like Goodfellas and TV dramas like The Sopranos and Boardwalk Empire—a Mob museum seemed like a no-brainer, but Bloom and his partners quickly encountered a major obstacle: Where omertà is the rule of law, artifacts are rare. "You don't just go on eBay and buy really juicy Mob memorabilia," says Bloom. "It's really difficult to source." But eventually he tracked down Cynthia Duncan, granddaughter of Meyer Lansky.

Short of Al Capone, there is no bigger name in the history of organized crime. A childhood friend of Charles "Lucky" Luciano and Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, Lansky was a founding member of the Mob conglomerate Murder, Inc. and best known as "the Mob's accountant." In 1982, long after he had successfully organized gambling enterprises in upstate New York, Las Vegas, and South Florida, Forbes listed Lansky as one of the wealthiest men in America, with an estimated worth of \$200 million. Upon his death from lung cancer in 1983, he had only \$57,000 to his name, but he had left behind extensive diaries and artifacts, most of which have never been seen by the public. Virtually all of it had been passed down to Duncan.

"I had been approached over the years by people seeking to buy off pieces of the collection, but I didn't have the heart to break it up," says Duncan, who lives in South Florida. "The fact that Jay Bloom wanted to keep the entire thing together caught my ear."

A year later 20 moving boxes containing Lansky's entire estate arrived at Bloom's office in Las Vegas. As word travels fast in Mob

circles, more families signed on, and soon Bloom had purchased the estates of Bugsy Siegel, Sam Giancana (former head of the Chicago Outfit), and Tony Spilotro. The breadth and scope of the items—and the stories behind them—convinced Bloom that merely putting everything under glass wasn't enough.

"The story is so dynamic," he says. "I knew we needed a high level of interactivity, an immersive environment." Visitors to the LVME will be issued an RFID badge with their name, hometown, and cell phone number. As you enter the main exhibit spaces, you'll be confronted by life-size holographic "apparitions" of famous gangsters who will speak to you personally and may even call your cell later and ask you to perform a task. Depending on your actions, by the end of the visit you'll either be dead, arrested, or a made member. "Try to imagine what you'd get if Disney acquired the Smithsonian," Bloom says. The idea is more Grand Theft Auto than traditional museum.



THE MOBFATHER: TONY SPILOTRO WITH HIS SON, VINCENT.

Inside the Vault

To get an idea of the scope of the LVME's collection, resident historian Chris Cecot and Vince Spilotro lead me to the museum's storage vault, which sits inside a garage attached to the company's HQ. The first things I notice are a pair of M-1 rifles and a .38 revolver sitting on a plywood table. "This one was actually mine," says Vince, picking up one of the rifles. "Dad gave it to me for my seventh birthday."

Shelved on the walls around us are dozens of smaller items. We begin with the Lansky collection, which includes personal diaries as well as home movies, photographs, audio interviews, and clothing. Cecot hands me a small bronze medal with a red ribbon attached.

Made Men

THE LVME'S MAIN SUBJECTS ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST PLAYERS IN MOB HISTORY.



MEYER LANSKY, 1902–1983
JOB TITLE: Mob's accountant; unified Jewish and Italian gangs
ALLEGED CRIMES: Developing a
coast-to-coast gambling empire
MOVIE PORTRAYALS: Lee Strasberg
as Hyman Roth (based on Lansky)
Godfather Part II, 1974; Ben Kingsley, Bugsy, 1991; Patrick Dempsey,
Mobsters, 1991; Richard Dreyfuss,
Lansky, 1999
DIED: Of lung cancer



BUGSY SIEGEL, 1906–1947
JOB TITLE: Mob's hitman; head of Murder, Inc.
ALLEGED CRIMES: Bootlegging, gambling, murder
MOVIE PORTRAYALS: Alex Rocco, as Moe Greene (based on Siegel), The Godfather, 1972; Warren Beatty, Bugsy, 1991; Richard Grieco, Mobsters, 1991
DIED: Shot in head (with one eyeball blown out) while reading the paper.



SAM GIANCANA, 1908–1975
JOB TITLE: Head, Chicago Outfit
ALLEGED CRIMES: Theft,
racketeering, voting fraud, murder
MOVIE PORTRAYALS: Robert
Miranda, The Rat Pack, 1998;
Joe Pesci, as Joseph Palmi
(based on Giancana), The Good
Shepherd, 2006
DIED: Shot through the back of the
head while making sausage and peppers at home.



JOB TITLE: Enforcer, Chicago Outfit ALLEGED CRIMES: Bookmaking, murder, overseeing "the skim" in Vegas
MOVIE PORTRAYALS: Joe Pesci as Nicky Santoro (based on Spilotro), Casino, 1995
DIED: Whacked with his brother in an Illinois basement, then dumped in a cornfield.

"This is the Medal of Freedom that Harry Truman gave Lansky after the war," he says. During World War II, the Office of Naval Intelligence was worried about sabotage at New York City's docks, so they went straight to the men who had run them since Prohibition, Lansky and Luciano. The gangsters policed them so well that Truman awarded both of them the medal. Lansky's relationship with the Feds went downhill after that; tax evasion charges in the early 1970s caused him to flee to Israel. Cecot pulls out two letters. The first is from Lansky to Prime Minister Golda Meir of Israel. In it Lansky offers Israel \$1 million if he can stay in her country; the other is her polite refusal. Apparently, all Jews have the right of return...except Meyer Lansky.

Next we peruse the artifacts of Lansky's good friend Bugsy Siegel. Most of the items are from his house in Los Angeles, where Lansky sent him in 1937 to set up gambling rackets. Among them is jewelry that belonged to his movie star mistress, Virginia Hill. Their relationship raised his profile, but Siegel is best known for building the Flamingo, the lavish and visionary hotel and casino that established modern Las Vegas. Cecot shows me five porcelain flamingos Siegel had made for opening night. They look expensive and hint at the larger tale: Bugsy spent \$6 million building the Flamingo—about \$80 million by today's standards—so much money that his Mob backers grew tired of waiting for profits. He was reading the L.A. Times at Hill's house when a sniper's bullet got him right in the eye.

"It was sad, because they couldn't have hit him without Lansky's sanction," says Cecot. "Keeping that in mind, check out this photo." It's from the wedding of Bugsy's daughter, Millicent. The man walking her down the aisle is Meyer Lansky.

From the mobster who started Vegas, we move to the one who embodied the end of Mob control: Tony Spilotro, Vince's dad. The Chicago Outfit sent Tony there in 1971 to protect its cash cow, known simply as "the skim." Each night bagmen would enter the count rooms of Mob-backed casinos like the Stardust, then skim cash off the top before the profits were officially tabbed. Collectively, it amounted to millions. Within a year of Spilotro's arrival, the murder rate skyrocketed, but Vince wants the world to see that his father had a softer side.

"This hung over my father's bed," he says, holding up a framed print of the Lord's Prayer, in Italian. "He was religious. Every holiday we'd suddenly wind up in church. He knew all the prayers. He was like an altar boy, except he was no altar boy."

The collection of Sam Giancana, the former head of the Chicago

Outfit, has an air of levity. The man who allegedly rigged ballots in Illinois for John F. Kennedy (and, so the conspiracy theory goes, later had him killed) kept a dime slot machine in his office that now sits in the corner of the LVME's vault. "Anyone who worked for him could pull it," explains Cecot. "If they won, they got to keep whatever was in it." He then shows me sheets of mug shot negatives. "Whenever one of Sam's associates got arrested, he paid a guy at the police department for the negatives. He thought they were funny."

Giancana even embraced his nickname, Mooney, a popular term at the time for someone who was a little crazy, which came from his quirky habits. Cecot picks up a letter from Giancana to one of his mistresses. It's signed, "Sugar Daddy Mooney Love."

"After Giancana's first wife died, he was banging everybody, including Kennedy's mistress, Judith Exner," Cecot says as an afterthought.

"That's true," Vince says. "My mom was with him before she married my dad."

Astonishment breaks out across Cecot's face. Giancana met his end on June 17, 1975, when an unknown assailant entered his basement and shot him in the head while he was grilling sausages. Tony Spilotro was a suspect, but up until this moment no one knew that his wife had once been with the man he might have killed.

"Did your dad know about them?"

"Probably. He was in Chicago on the night Giancana was killed, about seven blocks away." $\,$

The Five Families

The next day I gather all the principal artifact providers together around the LVME's conference table. Out of pure coincidence, they turn out to be from five families.

There is Giancana's daughter, Antoinette, 75; Lansky's grandson, Meyer II, 53; Ben Siegel's daughter Millicent Rosen, 79; and Janice Sachs, TK, whose husband, Allan, owned the Stardust and Fremont hotels in the skim days. Vincent Spilotro, 43, and his mother, Nancy, 72, are present, and cued up on the phone is Cynthia Duncan, 59.

Collective body counts aside, their forebears and husbands represent an impressive swath of Mafia and Las Vegas history. But the kids and wives want the museum to show that these men were normal, even generous—at home at least. When Meyer Lansky took off his trademark blue suit and put on his swim trunks, he was a harmless man who liked the beach. Sam Giancana liked to cook. Tony Spilotro once rounded up 52 people, most of them neighborhood kids,

and took them to the Super Bowl. In fact, most of the children grew up totally unaware that the man they saw at home was a mobster.

"It wasn't until I was 12 that I realized Grandpa was famous," says Meyer II. "On the news there was Walter Cronkite, showing a map of all the countries he was seeking asylum in." Antoinette Giancana didn't learn about Sam's reputation until she was 17, when a friend showed up at her high school locker looking to gossip about her dad. Millicent Siegel found out after her father was arrested in California for the murder of mobster Harry Greenberg, a charge he beat.

"Your father came over and told me that mine was in trouble," Millicent says to Cynthia Duncan. "He said that as kids they got involved with bootlegging, but now they were looking for legitimate businesses. He told me to hold my head up."

Stories of the constant pressure from law enforcement swirl around the table. Duncan recalls her grandmother becoming so sick of a pair federal agents parked outside her house that she picked up a broom and chased them down the street. Being under wiretap was the norm, so the men carried pockets full of change and knew every pay phone in town. Janice Sachs offers a story that embodies just how absurd constant surveillance could become.

"The FBI had tapped the phones at all the Stardust properties in this big sting," she says. "Somewhere along the line, they picked up

somebody saying, 'The dough is in the bag, and somebody's carrying it across the parking lot.'" Minutes later hordes of federal agents squealed in and surrounded the two men. "It turned out they were bakers," she laughs. "They were carrying real dough."

Amazingly, none of the families bear any ill will toward the law. Their greatest disdain, it turns out, is for Hollywood.

"I contacted HBO before the movie Lansky, with Richard Dreyfuss, came out," Duncan recollects. "I offered to give them everything that Jay Bloom has today. They refused. It was just a joke."

It was the same story with Millicent Rosen and Bugsy. TriStar Pictures called her and told her that Warren Beatty wanted to meet with her. Her lawyer requested that she receive a consulting fee. "They replied that I should be very happy that Warren Beatty wanted to talk to me, and it should be my pleasure and honor," she says. "My lawyer told them, excuse the expression, to go screw themselves." Millicent found Beatty's resulting portrayal unrecognizable. "The only thing they got right was my name."

The Spilotros have arguably suffered the worst. Casino was hugely successful and critically acclaimed, but Vince and Nancy were kept out of the loop. "They did it all behind my back. I didn't know until it happened," says Nancy, who can't resolve the image of Nicky Santoro running around town whacking everybody with the husband who "stayed home and played cards" most nights. "It was baloney."

Late in the meeting, I broach the subject of the complicated relationships between the families by asking Nancy if it was true that she had dated Antoinette's father. For five seconds the room goes silent.

"Oh, God," Nancy finally says. "Yes." Antoinette Giancana cringes.
"Did you know that?" Lask Giancana

"Did you know that?" I ask Giancana.
"No."

"How does that make you feel?"

"No comment," she replies. Throughout most of the meeting, she is haughty and oddly reticent. "I'm a little different," she says. "I go back to 1984, when my book [Mafia Princess] was published. The public knows quite a bit about my history." A princess indeed.

What about the beef between Bugsy and Meyer? Are the Lanskys

uncomfortable with the thought that their grandfather might have given the go-ahead for the murder of Millicent's dad?

"If there's any accusation against Meyer, I can't really speak to that," says Duncan. "The one time he ever said anything about Millicent's dad was something like, 'Poor Ben. I miss him so.'"

"I'll put it this way—we'll never know," Millicent says of the rumor. "They grew up together. Meyer was older, and he always took care of my father. I do know that my father had nothing but love for Meyer."

Hearing the children can almost make you forget that, to the rest of the world, these men are killers. Giancana, it is said, sanctioned the murder of 200 people; Siegel over two dozen; 22 for Spilotro; and Lansky, through Murder Inc., untold hundreds. In the end, maybe it's true that Meyer acceded to the hit on his friend, then ended up missing him for the rest of his life. Such was the dichotomy of these men. As for their descendants, all is forgotten and the families are back in business together. Though only one of them has firsthand knowledge of the darker worlds in which these men moved.

An Inside Job

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Vince Spilotro isn't like any of the other children at the sit down. Alone in an LVME office, he tells me how he learned up close about the dangers of his dad's line of work when he was 14, after a group of

> Las Vegas Metro intelligence officers shot up his home. They were drunk on whiskey and wanted to send his dad a message. Tony was in Kansas City facing skimming charges at the time, so there was no chance of anyone shooting back.

"My friend and I were going to a soccer tournament, so I was in the laundry room, getting some clothes for the trip, and all of the sudden I saw smoke," Vince recalls. "It was from bullets hitting the drywall. My ma shouts, 'Hit the ground!'"

Nobody got hurt, and Vince went to the tournament the next day. "That was life," he says. "What are you gonna do?"

The truth is, Vince had a hunch what his father did long before that night. As a child he and his friends would burn the betting sheets connected with Tony's gambling racket in a pit in the backyard. ("I'd burn them with my little army trucks, so there were army men melted in there," he says.) After baseball games he ate with Tony's cohorts from the famed Hole in the Wall Gang burglary ring at a Chicago-style pizzeria one of them ran. The family home was raided.

He was even tailed by the cops. "Nothing was hidden," he says. "It's not like the TV or newspapers were shut off."

At first, Vince says, the life seemed exciting. But as neighborhood guys went missing, the consequences became apparent. Sometimes his father would be gone all night, and fear would set in. One night Tony had been shot through the knee. The phone rang at 6:30 A.M., and from the next room Vince heard his mom ask, "How bad is it?"

"Here I am, a little kid, seven or eight, wondering if it was a belly wound, because then we'd have a real problem," he says. "What kind of little kid thinks things like that? He came home immediately and showed me it wasn't bad, though. Patched it up himself."

Eventually, Vince started asking questions. "He was as honest as you're gonna be with a kid," he says of his father. "There's ways you can tell a kid without telling him. I'd ask, like in the movies, 'Is this guy in? Or a friend of ours?' He'd say, 'Yeah, this guy can be trusted."

By the time he was 16, Vince was his father's driver, getting tips from the old man on how to carry himself: Never sit with your back to the door; in crowds where there are cameras, hold your hand in the air to swat them. The pair rarely cruised the Strip, Vince says, but the few times they rolled into the casinos, Tony would sit with the cokeheads and try to convince them to quit. "He'd say, 'Think about your kids. What are you doing?'" Naturally, there were fun moments—he met Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr.—while others were heavier.

"One time I went with my uncle to meet a bagman," Vince says. "He gets out of the car, puts a gun on the hood, and says, 'If something happens to me, drive over there and shoot him.' I was 16, 17."

Vincent's intimate knowledge of his father's world makes Casino all the more ridiculous to him. Scorsese's version of the house shoot-up, for example, reverses the perpetrators and victims—he shows Nicky Santoro's crew shooting up a cop's home, one of many liberties the director took that Vince believes made his father appear more reckless than he really was.

"The whole movie was based on Left's weird fantasy of what he thought happened," Vince says, referring to his father's childhood friend, the sports-betting wizard Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal. In the film Lefty, portrayed by Robert De Niro, comes off as a far more sympathetic than Tony, who betrays his old pal by drawing too much heat to their gaming enterprises and sleeping with his wife. Vince's memory of Rosenthal is far different. "He was like Hitler," he says. "When he'd get pissed at his wife, he'd tie her up naked for hours. She would always come over crying about something he did to her." Vince thinks that his father eventually did sleep with Lefty's wife, but that it was a "one-time thing."

"He did a lot of stuff, I'm not gonna lie," says Vince. What about the scene from early in the movie in which Nicky Santoro squeezes a man's head in a vise until his eyeball pops out, supposedly based on a real event that took place in 1962? "He could have been there," Vince acknowledges. "If he didn't do it, he definitely knew who did it." When pressed, he simply says, "Mad Sam," in reference to Sam DeStefano, one of Tony's associates, a man widely regarded as the most psychopathic Mob enforcer in history. Supposedly, Tony himself shotgunned Sam to death in 1973, putting him down like a rabid dog.

While there is little doubt that Tony Spilotro was dangerous and feared, Vince believes Casino failed to show how effective he was at his job. Even after Tony was banned from entering casinos in 1979, he was still able to police the skim through proxies and off-site meetings. For this reason Vince believes that it wasn't his father's excesses that got him killed: The problem was his uncle Micky.

Micky's character, Dominick, barely appears in Cαsino; he's just a member of Tony's Vegas crew. In reality, Michael Spilotro was part of a crew in Chicago, where he made a lot of enemies.

"Michael was a wannabe gangster, a complete idiot," Vince says. He goes on to recall a Fourth of July picnic by a lake during which his uncle sprayed M-16 rounds into the water, not far from where a group of people were swimming. "He did stupid shit, always acting tough." And the more influential Tony became in Vegas, the cockier Michael acted in Chicago. His passes finally ran

out when he spat in an Outfit capo's face—an unforgivable act that presented a problem.

"If you kill Tony, Micky is no big deal," Vince says. "If you kill Micky, Tony's a big deal. They knew my dad would come after them."

In the most memorable scene in *Casino*, Nicky and Dominick's Chicago bosses summon them to a meeting in a cornfield, then brutally beat them with baseball bats and bury them alive. In real life the

meeting took place in a basement in Bensenville, Illinois under the false pretenses that Micky was going to be made. Vince didn't learn the full details until 2007, when a witness in the infamous "Family Secrets" trial, which exposed activities of the Chicago Outfit, described the murder. But he is certain that his father had an idea what was coming. "Before the meet he took off his wedding ring and his chain and left them on the hotel dresser," says Vince. "The guy who walked down those stairs that night knew he was gonna die. He could smell it." When the brothers entered the basement, Micky noticed that the men downstairs—12 of them—were wearing gloves. He jokingly remarked that "it looked like a hit," at which point everyone laughed, except Tony.

"My dad said, 'Give me a few seconds to pray and say goodbye to my wife and kid,'" says Vince. "He was going out like a cowboy, not like a punk. They had 12 guys with rope and bats. You gotta be really afraid of somebody to do that."

Vince doesn't know if his father ever got the moment he requested, but the brothers were clubbed to death right there. The comfield appears in Casino because that's where their bodies were dumped and then found a week later.

While the movie ends shortly after that scene, Vince had to live with the aftermath. At 22 he was hellbent on avenging his father. He says that over the next three years he put together a team of 13 guys, including an ex-Vietnam helicopter pilot, and acquired C-4 explosives and weapons. His plan was to assault the bar where many of the men who participated in his father's murder routinely gathered. "I didn't care if there were only three of them there," he says. "The whole bar was going down." A couple of weeks before the strike was to take place, one of Vince's friends alerted his uncle John, who then talked him down.

"A lot of bad shit happened to me after that," says Vince, referring to years of alcoholism and resentment. On two separate occasions, Vince says he even sneaked on the set of Casino, hoping to settle a score with Frank Cullotta, a former member of his dad's robbery crew who had become an adviser on the film. While he spotted Cullotta twice, he was never able to get close enough to "clock him over the head." Eventually he left Vegas for Southern California and a job in the construction business. Although he never fulfilled his vendetta, in a way the museum has given him a shot at the biggest revenge of all.

"I'm glad I didn't do it," he says. "I'm glad I could see this moment. People will see a side of my father they've never seen. He was a man just like everybody else, stuck in a situation where he had to take care of his brothers. He apologized to me once: 'Sorry for what you're seeing in the newspaper, but there's a certain life we live.'"

Whack Attack
HOLLYWOOD GETS A LOT
WRONG. BUT FOR BLOODTHIRSTY MOVIEGOERS,
THESE MOBSTER DEATH
SCENES ARE OH-SO-RIGHT.



GOODFELLAS, 1990

Meat truck doors open to reveal a plaidjacketed Frankie Carbone, hanging amid rows of pink cow carcasses, "frozen so stiff it took them two days to thaw him out for the autoosv."



THE DEPARTED, 2006

Sullivan (Matt Damon) comes home to find a tracksuit-and-surgical-booty-clad Dingam (Mark Wahlberg) waiting for him, gun poised at his face. With a single shot through the skull, Costigan is avenged, and Wahlberg goes back to exec-producing every HBO show, ever.



THE GODFATHER, 1972

Just before Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) hits Virgil "the Turk" Sollozzo and Captain McCluskey, we see the cleancut war hero in his nice lvy League suit morph into a cold-blooded killer: A subway rattles, a look of anxious resignation passes over his face, and with three shots Michael becomes a man.



THE GODFATHER: PART II, 1974

Smart guy Fredo Corleone (John Cazale) dutifully recites his Hail Mary while fishing in the early morning light on Lake Tahoe, only to get a bullet in the back of the head. We knew it was you, Fredo, and you broke our hearts. You broke our hearts.