

***Confessions of a Guerrilla Writer:
Adventures in the Jungles of Crime, Politics, and Journalism***

Third Edition

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PREFACE

On taking it

For most of my adult life, I worked as a fiercely independent investigative journalist who had concentrated, for the most part, on investigations of organized crime—a really stupid way to make a living. During my turbulent career—which has now yielded ten true-crime books—I was widely known as one of the most relentless freelance reporters in America.

But, refusing to take a punch without fighting back, I made nearly as many enemies as friends, burning as many bridges as I had built. Along with my probes of the Mafia, I had taken on such powerful institutions as the Teamsters Union, the National Football League, the National Rifle Association, the Los Angeles Police Department, MCA, the Reagan White House, the FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice, along with the U.S. Department of Education, the legal and illegal gambling communities, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, Kenneth Starr and the Office of the Independent Counsel, and both the political left and right wings, as well as a variety of politicians, white-collar criminals, and murderers.

My career-long obsession revolves around the 1975 disappearance of former Teamsters president Jimmy Hoffa during which I exclusively interviewed the top suspects in the case, live and in person. I was also the first reporter to present the case that Hoffa—along with Carlos Marcello, the boss of the New Orleans Mafia, and Santo Trafficante, the Mafia boss of Tampa—had arranged and executed the murder of President John Kennedy in 1963, “a straight mob hit.”

A year after I revealed this in my 1978 book, *The Hoffa Wars*, the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations released its final report, insisting that Hoffa, Marcello and Trafficante had the “motive, means and opportunity” to kill the President. The chief counsel of the committee flatly stated, “The mob did it. It’s a historical fact.”

My subsequent news-breaking books about the contract killing of an Ohio businessman (1983), the Mafia’s penetration of Hollywood and the corruption of Ronald Reagan (1986), and the influence of organized crime in professional football (1989) were equally controversial but also led to wider investigations.

With regard to my 1995 book about the 1968 murder of Senator Robert Kennedy, I did

conclude that the LAPD had arrested the right man. However, because of all the police errors, the existing evidence gave critics of the official investigation, like me, ample opportunity to claim that the senator had been killed by a conspiracy. In the end, twenty-seven years later, I solved that case—because, for the first time, I explained what the LAPD could not: Why the crime-scene evidence had given the illusion that two guns had been fired—when, in fact, Sirhan Sirhan, whom I interviewed extensively, had acted alone.

I later wrote equally solid books, concluding that football star O.J. Simpson had also acted alone when he allegedly killed his ex-wife and a friend of hers in 1994 and that Deputy White House Counsel Vincent Foster had acted alone when he committed suicide in 1993. I published those books in 1997 and 1998, respectively. The O.J. book, which I co-authored with the two lead LAPD detectives in the case, was a national bestseller.

And, in 2018, I published a first-person book about my experiences during the federal investigation of Los Angeles private investigator Anthony Pellicano, aka “The Sleuth to the Stars,” who was convicted in a federal-conspiracy trial in 2008. And, in 2020, I released my tenth book, featuring the stories of whistleblowers and their heroic work while fighting corruption in higher education.

In what many considered an act of journalistic heresy—apart from my 1990-1994 landmark libel suit against the *New York Times*, the newspaper that created, destroyed, and then resurrected me—I served as Larry Flynt's lead investigator for eight weeks during his highly publicized crusade to expose President Bill Clinton's enemies who had conflicting standards of private behavior for public officials: one for those they like, and another for those they don't like.

Specifically, my work for Flynt led to the dramatic resignation of U.S. House Speaker-designate Bob Livingston on December 19, 1998—the climactic moment that derailed Republican dreams and schemes to remove the President from office.

For this, I make no apology. However, my work for Flynt represented a career-altering experience. After years as an independent investigative journalist, I began working as an independent investigative consultant who specialized on opposition research against the radical right of the Republican Party, which, to me, had become as dangerous and nefarious as the Mafia.

Nine years later, I discovered the phone number of U.S. Senator David Vitter (R-Louisiana), another right-wing hypocrite, in the private telephone records of Deborah Jeane Palfrey, the so-called “D.C. Madam” with whom I had worked on a book about her life and times prior to her tragic suicide in 2008.

Meantime, as a favor to a friend, a former CIA case officer, I worked to help spring a KGB agent from a Russian prison. That KGB agent, whose life was in danger, was responsible for exposing Robert Hanssen, a top official in the FBI, as a Russian spy. I considered it my patriotic duty to help save his life and win his freedom.

Yet, despite the chronic chaos and combat that has marked my career, I have worked hard to

establish a solid reputation as an honest, careful, and thorough journalist, author, and investigator. I have never missed a deadline. I have never misquoted a source. I have never taken an off-the-record quote and placed it on the record. I have never revealed a confidential source without permission from the source. Also, no one has ever sued me for any reason for anything contained in any of my books.

Joe the Boss of my own operation, I receive no weekly paycheck, no expense account, no paid vacations, and no pension or welfare plans. I will not get a gold watch when I retire. Because I never had any real business sense, I have spent most of my career overcommitted and underfinanced. And never having any real institutional protection, I have been nearly killed on no fewer than six different occasions. Inasmuch as I am neither naturally courageous nor trained to be brave, I have battled primal fear in any number of situations, trying not to freeze up.

Through all of this, I have become a very tough guy—not because I can dish it out, but because I can take it.

The following story is not simply a series of unconnected anecdotes and vignettes. It is an interconnected succession of events in which one adventure leads to the next, with high-and-low-profile characters who weave in and out of the overall plot.

Also, on a higher level, this is a contemporary history of five decades of crime, politics, and journalism—and many of the news-making events that have occurred during this fascinating period—as seen through the eyes of a fiercely independent man who has taken some hard licks but survived to tell this story.

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