

THE KING OF CON

How a Smooth-Talking Jersey Boy Made and
Lost Billions, Baffled the FBI, Eluded the Mob,
and Lived to Tell the Crooked Tale

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BenBella Books, Inc.
Dallas, TX

PROLOGUE: MAN OVERBOARD

Some motherfucker was trying to kill me.

My new Mercedes 560SEL shot off the highway and into the air like a rocket before nose-diving into the Passaic River—with me in it.

Ten minutes earlier, I'd been downing after-lunch \$200 shots of Louis XIII cognac at a restaurant in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, when this broad I'd been seeing in nearby Passaic called me to come over for an afternoon quickie. This girl was nutty; she used to kiss the windows of my Mercedes and leave red lip prints all over the glass.

Within minutes of leaving the restaurant, I was speeding eighty miles per hour along the highway to get to her, and I was very, very drunk. That's when I noticed a white van on my tail.

It switched lanes and sped up next to me. I looked over quickly and saw the side-panel door swing open to reveal three goons, fumbling around like they was The Three Stooges. One was trying to hold the door open; the second was getting on his knees with a shotgun; and the third stood behind the second pointing a handgun at me. He began to shoot. Yeah, I sobered up damn fast.

I swerved and rammed my car—the heaviest, biggest, fastest tank-of-a-Mercedes you could buy at the time—into the van, knocking the Stooges off their feet while they sprayed my car with bullets.

The van fell behind me and chased me, zigzagging across the lanes, until they sped up to me again. I rammed the van on the side a second time, this time knocking it against the cement barricade.

Fuck! Who wanted me dead? Could be any one of dozens of mob guys I'd done business with. Maybe it was the Nicky Scarfo guys in Philly. Or my partners in my \$100,000-a-week cocaine racket who want to get rid of me and take my connections. Or it could be Little Al and the Lodi crew in Jersey, exacting revenge after I took the money and left them with companies about to crash. It could be a soldier from any of the other "families" in the area I associated with. I was mobbed up the ass with all of them without officially being a "made man" . . . and that made a guy like me the kind of guy they sometimes wanted dead. Never mind that I clipped them all for millions.

Spotting the exit ramp for Passaic, I made a sharp right onto a single lane, jug-handle curve directly over the river.

The van followed. I was doing seventy miles per hour on the curve when they crashed into me from behind, forcing me into a killer spin like an Indy race-car driver. The spin sent me through the guardrail and sailing into the air, over the black water.

The car's airbag inflated when I hit the guardrail and pinned me to the back of my seat as I plummeted into a free fall, hitting the Passaic River bumper first—it was like slamming into a concrete wall.

The airbag burst and my head smashed into the steering wheel. The car sank fast until it hit bottom with a muffled thud, like a submarine landing on the ocean floor. It was dark and quiet; I couldn't see nuthin'. But I could hear something—water rushing into the car.

My head throbbed and my hip was crushed. Within a minute the entire car was filled with freezing water, except for a small pocket of air at the top, in between the half-deflated airbag that had floated up and the car's roof. I stuck my head in the pocket, pressed my lips against the roof of the car, and sucked in air. The doors and windows wouldn't open.

I had only one thought in mind now. It wasn't about what mother-fucker was trying to kill me or that my Brioni suit and alligator shoes were ruined.

It was:

I gotta stay alive for Lauren. I can't let my baby girl grow up with a father who's been whacked. I gotta get the hell outta this car!

And then I remembered the gun. *Frankie's gun!* Hidden under the passenger seat was a stolen .357 Magnum with hollow-point bullets—on the street they called it a “cop killer.” I took another deep breath and dove down and got it.

At the top again, I sucked in more air as I tapped the back passenger window with the gun's barrel to make sure I was pointing it at the glass and not myself. Then I squeezed my eyes shut and fired six times—*boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!* I felt for the glass with my hand—gone. I took one more long, last breath and launched myself out the window, swimming upward toward the light.

A white light? Oh, shit. Was I dead?

I let go of the stolen gun as I rose upward. When I broke the surface and gasped for air, I heard applause and cheers—a crowd of people who'd seen me go over were lined up on the ramp I just flew offa, watching me from above. The white van was long gone.

Never mind the fucking ticker-tape parade. “*Motherfuckers. Help!*” I yelled.

Two construction workers had already climbed down from the highway to the riverbank. Now, they stripped off their jackets and dove in, pulling me to shore.

“An ambulance is on its way,” one said, bunching up his coat under my head.

I tried to sit up and tell them my name.

“We know who you are, Tom,” said the other, covering me with his dry jacket. “We've seen your picture in the papers. And we saw everything. The van that ran you off the road had Pennsylvania plates, and we got some of the license number.”

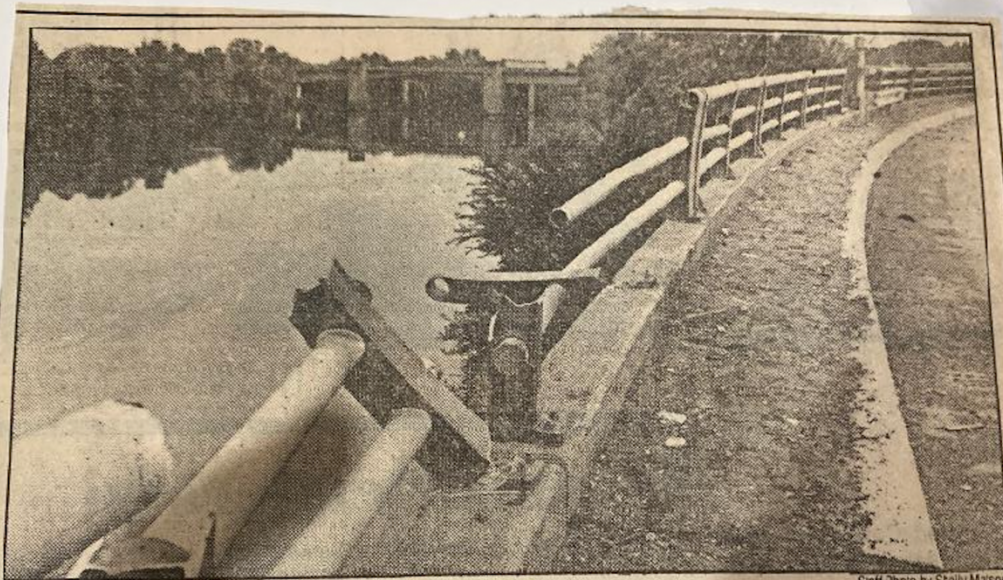
I rested my head back down. I was broken up, bleeding, shaking, and about to pass out. But I was alive; I was not so easy to kill, assholes.

This was an attempted hit, no doubt. I was set up.

And no doubt, I deserved it. I was a stinking rich, arrogant, coke-addicted, narcissistic, money-hungry, alcoholic, power-driven, obsessive-compulsive, son-of-a-bitch liar, thief, con man, bully, extortionist, and sociopathic madman. I caused a lot of people a lot of problems in my lifetime.

But you try to kill a guy like me and miss?

Now *you* got the problem.



Staff Photo by Steffy Mason

TORN GUARDRAIL MARKS the spot where an unidentified man, driving a 1986 Mercedes-Benz, flew off an entrance ramp to Route 21 to land in the Passaic River Thursday. According to witnesses, the man was entering from Route 3 at

3:20 p.m. when the car started "tumbling," ripped through the guardrail and swiftly sank in about eight feet of water. The driver, who was taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Passaic for tests, managed to free himself and swam safely to shore.