



Making Jack Falcone: An Undercover FBI Agent Takes Down a Mafia Family

By Joaquin "Jack" Garcia

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"Petey Chops wasn't kicking up. And if he didn't start soon, he was going to get whacked." So begins *Making Jack Falcone*, the extraordinary true story of an undercover FBI agent's years-long investigation of the Gambinos, which resulted in a string of arrests that crippled the organized crime family.

But long before Joaquin "Jack" Garcia found himself wearing a wire with some of the Mafia's top capos, he was one of the FBI's unlikeliest recruits. A Cuban-born American, Jack graduated from Quantico standing six-foot-four and weighing 300 pounds -- not your typical G-man. Jack's stature soon proved an asset as the FBI looked to place agents undercover with drug smugglers, counterfeiters, and even killers. Jack became one of the few FBI agents dedicated solely to undercover work.

Using a series of carefully created aliases, Jack insinuated himself in the criminal world, from the Badlands of Philadelphia, where he was a gregarious money launderer, to the streets of Miami, where an undercover Garcia moved stolen and illicit goods and brought down dirty cops. Jack jumped at the opportunity to infiltrate the shadowy world of La Cosa Nostra, but how would the Cuban-American convince wiseguys that he was one of their own, a Sicilian capable of "earning his button" -- getting made in the Mafia? For the first time, the FBI created a special "mob school" for Jack, teaching him how to eat, talk, and *think* like a wiseguy. And it wasn't long before the freshly minted Jack Falcone found himself under the wing of one of the Gambinos' old school capos, Greg DePalma. DePalma, who cared for an ailing John Gotti in prison, introduced Falcone to his world of shakedowns, beatings, and envelopes of cash, never suspecting that one of his trusted crew members was a federal agent.

A page-turning account of the struggle between law enforcement and organized crime that will rank with such classic stories as *Donnie Brasco*, *Serpico*, and *Wiseguy*, *Making Jack Falcone* is an unforgettable trip into America's underworld through the eyes of a highly decorated FBI veteran.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jack Garcia spent a total of twenty-six years as a special agent for the FBI. He has received awards from the United States Attorney's offices in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Miami, as well as the FBI's Director's Award for Investigative Excellence and the Federal Law Enforcement Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. Now retired from the FBI, Jack enjoys spending time with family and friends.

Michael Levin writes and ghostwrites in Orange County, California, where he runs www.BusinessGhost.com.

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PROLOGUE

The Battle of Bloomingdale's

Petey Chops wasn't kicking up.

And if he didn't start soon, he was going to get whacked.

In the Mafia, "kicking up" means sharing with those above you in your crime family the money you make in loan sharking, construction scams, gambling, numbers rackets, prostitution, drugs, stolen jewelry, sports memorabilia, Internet pornography, or any other criminal enterprise. Peter "Petey Chops" Vicini ran a highly successful gambling and numbers operation in the Bronx that netted him millions of dollars. As a made member of the Gambino crime family, he was responsible for sharing some of that wealth with his capo, the individual to whom he reported, along with the "administration" of the family -- the boss, the underboss, and the consigliere.

Nobody can touch a Gambino, or a Lucchese, or a member of any of the other families that make up La Cosa Nostra in New York. No one can move into his territory, steal his shakedown victims, or interfere with his moneymaking activities. But operating under the protection of a crime family comes at a price. The Mafia soldier must kick up. He must share what he makes with those above him. A Mafia soldier must also report to his superiors regularly. Some capos insist on meetings every day. And the soldier had better come with money to kick up the line. Failure to do so is a capital crime in the Mafia, and for months now Petey Chops had been avoiding his responsibilities. He wasn't kicking up. He was in hiding from the rest of the Mafia.

The Gambino boss was Arnold "Zeke" Squitieri, an old-style Mafioso who avoided the limelight the way his illustrious predecessor, John Gotti, had sought it. Squitieri was a convicted felon due to his involvement in the narcotics trade; so much for the Mafia's "code" that forbade dealing drugs. Squitieri had assigned Petey Chops to Greg DePalma, another old-school Mafia guy who had been a Gambino capo, or captain, since the 1990s and a made man in the family since 1977. Greg was in his early seventies when he emerged from prison after serving time for shaking down Scores, the Manhattan strip club made famous by radio shock jock Howard Stern.

The Mafia and the FBI both considered Greg a relic, a washed-up has-been or, in the colorful language of the Mafia, a brokester, a broken-down valise. Yet Greg was anything but a broken-down man. Within months of

his release, he was riding high once again among the Gambinos. So high that the boss of the family, Squitieri, assigned Greg, among many other tasks, the responsibility of meeting with and collecting from the prize Gambino soldier and cash cow, Petey Chops.

Petey Chops had become a thorn in Greg's side. He simply wouldn't report. Petey Chops always made excuses. He'd say things like "Greg, I can't meet you. I'm being watched. I'm under investigation. I don't want to take a pinch."

Meaning he didn't want to be arrested.

"Hey," Greg would respond, "we're all being watched! Now get over here with the money!"

Still no Petey.

Months went by. DePalma grew tired of Petey's whining. And then he had an idea.

He heard that Petey Chops and his girlfriend went to eat at the restaurant buffet in the Bloomingdale's department store in White Plains every Monday night at six. On February 21, which happened to be the Presidents' Day holiday, the Old Man, as Greg was called, decided that he, his Gambino soldier Robert Vaccaro, and I would find Petey at Bloomingdale's and straighten him out.

Who am I? An FBI undercover agent who had managed to infiltrate Greg DePalma's crew. Greg thought I was Jack Falcone, a big-time jewel thief from South Florida, and he had made me part of his crime crew. He had no idea that I was only the second FBI agent in history to deeply infiltrate the Mafia on a long-term basis. Joe Pistone, playing the role of Donnie Brasco, was the first.

I knew that the matter had been festering with Greg, because money was important to him. It was also the principle of the thing -- to benefit from your privileged position in an organized crime family and not share the wealth...it's a fatal mistake.

That Presidents' Day, Greg, Vaccaro, and I sat in La Villetta restaurant in Larchmont, New York, when Greg turned to me and rasped, "Listen, we're gonna go for a ride."

As usual, Greg didn't tell me our trip agenda. I always became a little anxious at moments like that because I wasn't in control. I could be taken anywhere -- out on a hit, or even to my own demise. I never knew.

"Where are we going?" I asked, trying not to show my concern.

"Don't worry about it," the Old Man told me. "Let's go to White Plains."

What could I do? I drove a Hummer at the time, as befit my role as a successful South Florida jewel thief. FBI agent Bim Liscomb, a member of the FBI surveillance team, was covering me. Like me, he didn't look like an agent. He was African American, heavysset, and he wore a beard, which was anathema in J. Edgar Hoover's time. Actually, in Hoover's day, that entire package would have been three strikes and you're out. I opted to have him cover me because he didn't look anything like an agent, and because he didn't drive one of those brand-new cars with the tinted windows that always gave surveillance teams away. What do I look like? I'm six foot four, 390 pounds. I don't look like an FBI agent either.

We left La Villetta, and the three of us piled into my Hummer. I couldn't get on the phone and say, "Bim, I'm going to White Plains. Follow me." Instead, I hoped that he would notice us heading away in my H2 and discreetly follow us. I drove slowly, as usual, so I wouldn't lose my tail. My torpor behind the wheel always drove Greg crazy.

"You drive like an old lady!" he complained. "Hurry up, Jackie boy! It takes you a fucking hour to drive what it takes me half an hour!"

"I always go slow," I told him. "I get flashbacks from an accident I had when I was a kid."

If Greg had been in a hurry, he would have told me, "We gotta get there fast. You're not fucking driving." I'd follow him and pretend to get lost, just to zing him. But that wasn't happening this time. We were all in one car, my car, and I still had no idea what we were doing.

On the way, Greg finally explained the nature of our mission.

"We're going to Bloomingdale's," he said. "We're going to find that cocksucker Petey Chops."

Okay, so today's not my day to get killed. That's a positive. But why would we look for a recalcitrant Mafia soldier in a department store? Greg volunteered no more information, and as a member of his crew, I was in no position to inquire.

We arrived at Bloomingdale's and didn't know where the hell the restaurant was. There were housewares and rugs all around us. By nature, we weren't the kind of people conversant with the layout of department stores. Mob guys don't buy retail. The three of us definitely didn't look like shoppers. We looked like Mob guys -- dressed to the nines, manicured and barbered to perfection.

It took us a while, but finally we found the restaurant, and we waited for Petey Chops.

At 6:00 P.M. there was no sign of Petey.

Ten after six. Still no sign of him.

Six-fifteen. Nothing.

That's when one of the waiters recognized Greg. The waiter had the slick look of a guy comfortable leaning on the rail of a racetrack or hanging around a Vegas sports book. If you had any reason to be in contact with organized crime in Westchester County, you knew Greg DePalma, and this guy certainly did.

"You guys want a table?" the waiter asked Greg cautiously. Everybody was cautious around Greg, who, even in his seventies, would reach out and slap someone he considered disrespectful.

"We just ate," Greg explained, disgusted that Petey Chops wasn't there.

At that moment, I felt good because regardless of what was about to happen, I knew it wasn't a hit on me.

Meanwhile, Greg muttered under his breath, "That cocksucker, where is he?" He called the waiter over. Whenever we were in public, he comported himself with stereotypical Mob guy behavior.

"You know my friend Pete that eats here on Mondays?" Greg growled.

The waiter nodded. "He usually comes in with his girl," he replied carefully, not knowing what answer might be the wrong answer.

"When this guy comes here again," Greg told him, "tell him that he is to see me tomorrow at the nursing home in New Rochelle."

The nursing home, the United Hebrew Geriatric Center, was where Greg's son Craig lay in an unconscious state. Craig had been comatose for several years, after a prison suicide attempt. Craig, a made member of the Gambino crime family, had been convicted along with Greg in the Scores case, but he had cooperated with law enforcement in exchange for a reduced sentence. To an old-school Mob guy like Greg, his son's actions were reprehensible. He passed a note to Craig to that effect, and Craig, full of shame, had tried to take his own life. Instead, he had put himself into an irreversible coma. Greg regularly did Mafia business in front of his son's body, on the correct assumption that the FBI would not have the bad manners to bug his comatose son's room.

The waiter nodded.

Greg glared at him. "Tell me what I just said!" he said menacingly.

"Meet you at the nursing home in New Rochelle," the wide-eyed waiter repeated.

Greg nodded, and we figured that was that. Petey wasn't showing, so we left the restaurant and began to make our way out of the store.

Just as we passed the housewares section, there he was! Petey Chops in the flesh...with not just one girl but two at his side. He saw us and got nervous. As well he should have.

"There's that jerk-off!" Greg exclaimed, heading toward him.

Robert and I fell back. Greg walked up to Petey, who kissed him on the cheek, and then turned to Petey's two companions.

"Ladies, do you mind?" Greg asked, to the point as always. "I gotta talk to him."

"Girls, get a table at the restaurant," Petey told them nervously. "I gotta talk to these guys and I'll be right there."

The ladies obviou...

Users Review

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