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Anaheim woman was married to the mob

Anaheim woman is the reason the Yuppie Don walked away from his life in the Mafia.

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FAMILY PORTRAIT: Michael Franzese, far right, has written two books, "Quitting the Mob" in 1991 and "Blood Covenant" in 2003. Cammy Franzese hasn't read a single page. As far as she knows her four children, shown above (ages 22, 21, 18 and 9) haven't read them either. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMMY FRANZESE

The next time you're about to go off on your husband for treating the bedroom floor like a hamper or leaving crumbs all over the kitchen counter or returning home from the grocery store with only half the items on the list you gave him, just take a deep breath and invoke the spirit of Cammy Franzese.

This is a woman who stood by her man to a degree that would make even Tammy Wynette flinch if she were still alive.

But by greeting his shortcomings with – now keep an open mind ladies – love and prayer, she managed to change him.

Cammy Franzese is the reason her husband Michael Franzese – a.k.a. The Yuppie Don – became the first high ranking member of the Mafia to publicly walk away from a life of crime and into a life of Little League coaching and churchgoing.

And if she can do that, there's still hope that you can help your man walk away from a life of crumbs on the counter.

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Cammy grew up in Anaheim, one of seven children born to Irma Garcia, a devout churchgoer, and Seferino Garcia. She graduated from Anaheim High in 1981. While studying dance at Cal State Fullerton, she got a chance to go to Miami as a back-up dancer on the set of the movie "Knights of the City."

It was there in 1984 that she met Michael Franzese, the producer of the movie. He was young and handsome – and 11 years older, to her dismay. But he was sweet. He told her he was Catholic and had once been an altar boy. He didn't tell her that he had already escaped five white-collar crime indictments. Or that he was "heir apparent" in the Colombo family.

Cammy returned to Anaheim when the movie finished shooting, but their relationship continued. One day not long after, Mike's friend Frankie called: Mike had been arrested, something about tax evasion. At this point she still thought her boyfriend was just your average businessman. While the New York papers were having a field day with the Mob charges, it wasn't making headlines here.



When Michael made bail he flew out to the West Coast and told Cammy he wanted to spend his life with her. The day after their engagement party, he was acquitted. They married that July in Beverly Hills and bought condos on Long Island and in Brentwood. Cammy gave birth to a baby girl.

But the good times didn't last long. When their daughter was 7 months old, Michael was indicted for racketeering. This time he went to prison. That same year he was listed as the youngest capo on Fortune magazine's 1986 chart of "The 50 Biggest Mafia Bosses," according to a Life Magazine article. He was 33.

"It was a blessing that I was young and idealistic and naïve at the time," Cammy says. She didn't ask her husband questions, fearing she would hear something she didn't want to. She didn't read newspapers. Or watch the news. Instead, over the next four years, she visited him every weekend – and prayed for him.

Cammy's mother counseled her to forgive him and shared her vision. "He's going to speak to millions," she told her. "And she was so right. My mother was just so loving and forgiving and she believed in second chances and transformation and miracles," Cammy says.

Well, Michael finally came home four years later. Law enforcement wanted him to testify against his "associates." He wouldn't do it. They threatened to throw him back in prison for a parole violation. He wouldn't budge. One morning, after 18

months of freedom, he was back in prison.

By now they had two children. Money was tight so Cammy gave up the house with the elevator and nine bathrooms in Brentwood for a condo in Westwood.

"I just thought 'Oh, my gosh, I can't do this again.' I was angry. Michael was still living for Michael."

But she still loved him. "I used to get on my knees and pray that God would protect him and change his heart ... and make him the husband and the father he needs to be And bring him home."

Back behind bars, the Yuppie Don broke. "My heart hurt so much that night, it was the kinda pain I remember," Michael says. "That night I had nothing but enemies."

A prison guard walked up and pushed a Bible through the slot. It fell on the floor. Michael threw it against the wall. Then he reconsidered. "Ya know, I've got everyone in the world mad at me, I don't need God mad at me."

He opened the Bible. It fell on Proverbs 16.7. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord even his enemies are at peace with him."

He had let down his wife once again. "My life was in direct contradiction to everything that she was about and believed in," he says. He remembered back when they first met and he couldn't take his eyes off of her, and how pretty she was, as she talked to him about God. "Honestly, that didn't really appeal to me at the time," he says. "She could have been talking about anything. I was being polite. I wasn't listening."

Now he was listening.

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"I loved her madly," he says. "I think the main thing is, she knew that I would do anything for her."

So finally he did. Michael Franzese renounced his life of crime. Behind bars, he granted an interview to Life Magazine. When "Quitting the Mafia" hit newsstands in 1987 the Warden called him into his office. "Franzese, do you have a death wish," he asked?

"There's an old saying that the only way to leave the Mafia is in a coffin," the Life article began.

Michael was willing to take his chances. During his four years in the hole this

second time around he read the Bible inside out and upside down. When he got out, the FBI came knocking. "You claimed you turned your life around, prove it," they told him. They asked him to be in a video to warn young athletes not to be sucked into organized crime's web of game fixing.

His videos led to speaking engagements. Today he travels the country, visiting colleges and churches, sharing his story. "Had I not met Cammy, I am certain I wouldn't have taken the path I took and I would probably be dead or in prison," he tells them.

Complete strangers have heard more about his double dealings than wife has. "To this day, I've never sat down and discussed my past life with her," he said.

And she has never asked for details.

Michael has written two books, "Quitting the Mob" in 1991 and "Blood Covenant" in 2003. She hasn't read a single page. "There's probably a lot of things in there I don't want to know about. I see it when he's sleeping and tossing and turning. I can imagine it. I don't need to see it in black and white."

She remembers in the days after her husband got out of prison. "Every now and again someone would ask, 'Are you fearful for your life or your children's life?' And I'd think, 'Oh my God. Why should I be fearful?'"

Next Friday (Feb. 29), Cammy will join her husband on stage at Coast Hills Community Church in Aliso Viejo to speak publicly, for only the third time, to married couples about how they held it together.

"It's definitely easier to say I didn't sign up for this and walk away," she will tell them. "But whatever his old life was, it doesn't matter, because that's not the man he is today. I'm married to this man and I'm in love with this man."

Plus, he's a super clean freak and would never in a million years leave socks on the floor or crumbs on the counter.