



Photos: Camille Franzese

## “The ground at the foot of the cross is level.”

**T**he first time I realized my father was involved in organized crime, I was about 9 years old, playing ball with some friends in front of my house in Brooklyn, N.Y. The ball rolled past me, down the street in front of an unmarked car. An FBI agent got out of the car, showed me his gun and said, “This gun is for your father one day.”

My father’s involvement in organized crime as the underboss of Joe Colombo’s Mafia got him indicted. He then went to trial twice and was eventually locked up for murder in 1967 and sentenced to 50 years.

At that time, my father wanted me to go to school and become a doctor. But once he got indicted, I lost interest in school and Joe Colombo took me under his wing.

In the Mafia, you’re kind of responsible

for establishing yourself in one way or the other. I had a head for business so I made a name for myself as a guy who could earn money. I did a lot of traditional mob activities like bookmaking and loan sharking, but I also owned a Chevrolet and Mazda agency and some restaurants. My major source of income, however, was through a wholesale gasoline scheme I devised. **While the money, success and power were very attractive to me, my main motivation was to get my dad out of prison.** I also wanted my dad to be proud of me. I idolized him and he was very supportive of me. Altogether, I was involved in organized crime for more than 17 years.

One day, I was sitting by the pool in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., on the set of a break-

dance film I was producing (another side business I had), when I met a beautiful young dancer named Camille and learned that she was a Christian. She became more important to me than the mob. **From that point, I started to plan how I was going to move away from the life I was leading.**

Around the same time, however, I was being indicted for a racketeering case in the eastern district of New York. I pled guilty, accepted a 10-year prison sentence and formally renounced my involvement with the Mafia. My renouncement made big news and word got back to New York. My dad disowned me and a death sentence was on me from Colombo. I struggled mightily with this.

After serving my first prison sentence, I was on parole for just 13 months before I ended up back in prison for not paying my taxes on time. The first night they threw me back in prison was absolutely devastating. That night in my little six-foot-by-eight-foot cell, **I hurt so bad that I prayed, God, if you’re really there, just take me away tonight. And I meant it!** A prison guard gave me a Bible. The first verse I saw was Proverbs 16:7: “When a

man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, even his enemies are at peace with him.” Finally, that night I listened to God’s Word.

For the next three years, I lived in solitary confinement and studied the entire Bible and every Christian book

you can imagine. I surrendered my life to Christ. Today, I serve Christ by telling people my story. I tell people that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. Sin is sin and God’s grace truly extends to everyone. I try to tell everyone I speak to that God forgives our sins once we truly repent. Look, if the Lord can get through to me and forgive me, then His forgiveness is truly for anyone.

—as told to Jeannie Choi

Michael Franzese was known as “The Prince of the Mafia” at the height of his mob career. Today, Franzese speaks to churches and young people nationwide and is the author of *Blood Covenant: The Michael Franzese Story (Whitaker House)*.



TO READ AN EXCERPT FROM HIS BOOK, VISIT [OUTREACHMAGAZINE.COM](http://OUTREACHMAGAZINE.COM).