

True Story, Every Word

by Jerry Ratch

So, I see this is story one-upmanship now. You think you've got stories! Here's one for the books. Here goes!

In 1968 I had a day job as a payroll clerk at the Kroger Company, but, to maintain my glamorous lifestyle and my impressive efficiency apartment, I had to work nights as a waitress at a little pizza joint on St. Charles Rd. in Villa Park ... not the Villa Nova where your latest "lady-friend" Jolene waitressed, I think that was her name, wasn't it? (Yes, Sharon and I knew all about her and all those kids. Bet you didn't know that! What were you thinking?) It was a few blocks west of that. It was a nice job, all the food I wanted to eat free, and paid out of the till every night. The owner Mickey and I became friends and on Mondays, when the restaurant was closed, he would sometimes take me out to dinner at some nice restaurant... no strings attached.

One Saturday night after work, Mickey said he was hosting a private dinner at the restaurant on Monday night for some very important people and wanted me to waitress the table for him. It seemed really important to him so I said sure and when I got there Monday night Mickey was cooking up a storm but seemed an uncharacteristic nervous wreck. When his "important people" walked up to the door, Mickey opened it and showed them to their table.

Now I knew why he was about to have a nervous breakdown. About 8 men walked in, long black coats, shiny polished shoes, black Frank Sinatra type hats, and when they took off their coats, expensive suits, black ties, diamond rings ... getting a visual? I didn't know what they were talking about, they only spoke Italian to each other. I managed to serve the dinner without spilling on anyone, and the coffee cups only rattled a little bit on their saucers, but it took utter will power to keep my hands from shaking the coffee out of the cups. I was extremely grateful when Mickey told

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me after dessert had been served that I could go on home. I tried to make a graceful and soundless exit.

The next night, I showed up for work as usual, only to find the door to the restaurant still locked and the whole place dark. Not knowing what else to do, I went home and went to talk to a neighbor in the apartment building, who was a mutual friend of mine and Mickey's. He told me the police found Mickey in his apartment behind the restaurant, laying in bed, shot in the head.

I sat in my apartment all night, waiting for the police to contact me, seeing as how I was the last person to see him alive. But, no, that never happened. So my shivering brain switched over to the possibility I would get a visit from Mickey's "important people." Nope, that didn't happen either.

I bought the local newspaper for a week, waiting to see an article about Mickey's shooting, but that never materialized either.

Mickey's death just ... went away. I guess they were very important people after all.

True story, every word.

And I bet you thought Villa Park was a nice little town, didn't you?

