

THE GANG LADY'S SWAN SONG



GOOD OL' DAYS: Arlyne Weiss when she was young and one of the boys.

SIMON AND SCHUSTER

By **SHERRYL CONNELLY**

Daily News Book Editor

In her new book, Teresa Carpenter, who in 1981 was awarded a Pulitzer for her article on the murder of Dorothy Stratten, tells the story of Arlyne Weiss, a New York woman who spent her life all mobbed up with nowhere to go.

Weiss' shining moment, as detailed in **MOB GIRL: A Woman's Life in the Underworld** (Simon & Schuster, \$21), came in 1986 when her testimony helped convict Anthony Scarpati, one of Carmine Persico's top lieutenants, of **racketeering**. Hers was a long climb

She thought she was a moll, but the boys treated her like a skirt.

to a low summit.

The daughter of a successful Jewish racketeer, Weiss grew up pampered on the lower East Side in the '30s and '40s. Early on, she showed a proclivity for riding in cars with boys. The boys had to be hoods, though, preferably Italian and connected. By the time she was 20, she had slept with 50 low-lives.

Weiss, who claimed Bugsy Siegel's girlfriend Virginia Hill as an inspiration, resisted her parents' attempts to steer her toward respectability (her sister Barbara, by comparison, is a suburban matron). In her heyday, the years before and after a brief marriage that produced a daughter, Weiss' string of luminaries included a Bonanno hit man, prizefighter Rocky Graziano, and for one night only, Joe Colombo, who kept his socks on. As a working prostitute, she took payment in cash or swag.

In her mid-30s, she was gang-raped by three mobsters in the basement of a restaurant off Times Square. Weiss put the word out, fully expecting to be avenged. "She was operating under the illusion that they respected her, even loved her. . . . If push came to shove, they would protect her," Carpenter writes.

No one bothered. Now wise to the guys ("She was an outsider. A broad."), disillusionment came in realizing that she was nobody's moll, just another skirt.

In time, she took up with a Tommy Luca, connected to the Genovese family. With him, Weiss ran a numbers operation through which she happened onto her calling in life. She became an informant, or as she prefers it, "a co-operating individual."

After a 1975 bust for book-

making in Fort Lee, N.J., Weiss turned. For the next 10 years she was a wire-for-hire used by various agencies, including the FBI, the DEA and the NYPD, to bring down minor targets — thieves, sharks and dealers. Through the years those she ratted on included her lover and her uncle. She tried but failed to get close enough to John Gotti to do him harm. Her major case was against Scarpati.

Informing seemed to provide Weiss with all that being a moll didn't. She had the power to command men's attention as well as the freedom to run with the guns with a measure of protection. Weiss' magic ability to absolve herself of responsibility — she dealt drugs but refused to make the connection to her daughter's addiction, though Leslie bought heroin from Weiss' lover, Luca — was useful in plying her trade.

It's over now. Exposed in the Scarpati trial, at 58 she's too old to kiss up and tell. In 1989, she buried her daughter, dead in her 30s of AIDS probably contracted from a contaminated needle. Weiss lives alone in hiding, her defining interest reflected by the three books Carpenter noticed on her shelves: "Wiseguy," "Donnie Brasco" and "Mob Star."

CAPO DI TUTTI-FRUTTI: DEFECTION OF A YUP DON

Reading **QUITTING THE MOB** (HarperCollins, \$20), Michael Franzese's self-serving memoir of how he embraced Christianity and renounced crime, only reinforces the author's standing in the mob pantheon as the Yuppie Con.

Written with Dary Matera, the book (subtitled: "How the 'Yuppie Don' Left the Mafia and Lived to Tell His Story") couches the Long Island Colombo captain's record of wrongs — the body count, the \$150 million tax swindle, the betrayals — in such personal terms.

For instance, in the Afterword his mother reveals that Michael was the actual son, rather than, as believed, the stepson of the feared capo Sonny Franzese. Had he known this, it would have made all the difference, says Michael: "I wouldn't have had to join the mob to please my father."

In the rackets, Franzese excelled at passing the buck, and here he does it again. As a legitimate businessman, he says he was harassed into the Mafia by cops eager to nail a Franzese. Intent on a life of strictly white-collar crime, his hand was forced to murder because higher-ups gave the orders, and what's a capo to do? He doesn't even quit the mob under his own aegis



SONNY'S SON: Michael Franzese joined the mob to please his father.

— God and his second wife inspire him to turn a deal in the face of a 28-count racketeering indictment.

Franzese made millions from businesses that, if no one looked too closely, could be confused with legitimate enterprises. A sometimes movie producer, he cultivated a profile of a new-fashioned gangster — never brutal with the brie — which earned him magazine profiles and helped him obscure his role as an informant.

On-the-record, the 1986 deal called for Franzese to do time and make a \$14 million restitution ("Milken stole less money than Franzese," says one prosecutor, noting the financier paid \$600 million back). Franzese insists the sum is fair, though his hidden fortune — not accessible until the statute of limitations runs out in 1993 — is estimated at a billion.

Paroled in 1989, he made only a few niggardly payments while living high in L.A. Late last year, he was sent back to jail for bouncing checks and obtaining bank loans with false documents. He should watch himself. Petty crimes spoil the image.

— S.C.

HOT OFF THE PRESSES

Maureen Dean, wife of Watergate hero John Dean, is back on the shelves with **CAPITOL SECRETS** (Putnam, \$19.95), a decent if unlikely yarn about a hot-looking, fortysomething congresswoman whose campaign to become Speaker of the House is jeopardized by her secret past.

That's not all that's jeopardized. For Laura Christen's secret has already been responsible for one murder — that of a tabloid reporter — and some of Washington's most successful power brokers could take a fall if it comes to light.

Everybody's hot on the trail of Laura's past — another gossip columnist, a couple of private detectives, a few corrupt capitol biggies, even her headstrong daughter, Catsby, whom she hopes to distract from looking for love in all the wrong places by making her her press secretary.

You know from his introduction that the one who will matter most is Jake Alban, a once-celebrated reporter who is still recovering from a private grief of his own.

Still, a little predictability notwithstanding, Dean's glitzy, fast-moving story is everything a mystery novel should be.

— Fran Wood