

LONG ISLAND

## Priest at Sonny Franzese's funeral Mass: 'He just kept on going'



By Matthew Chayes

John (Sonny) Franzese's coffin is carried from Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on Friday. Credit: Craig Ruttle

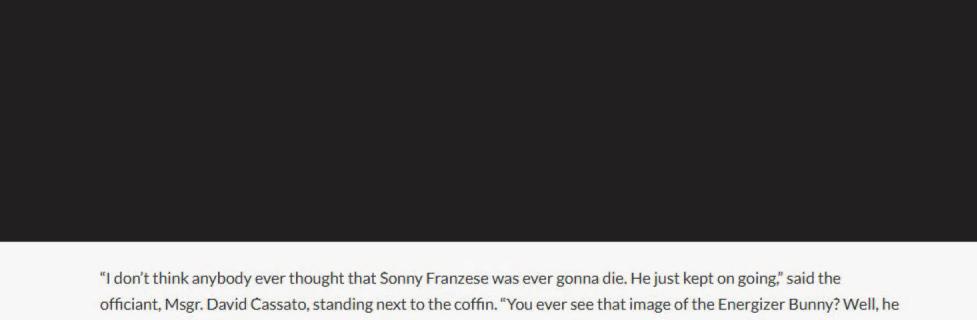
February 28, 2020

SHARE A eulogy for Colombo family underboss John (Sonny) Franzese had just begun Friday when the glass of a paschal

 $candle\ shattered, sending\ a\ thunderous\ echo\ through\ Our\ Lady\ of\ Mount\ Carmel\ Church.$ "See? He is here with us right now, and he wants to make sure I'm not gonna to say certain things. That I promise," said the eulogist, Maurice, who described himself as the "unofficial adopted son of Sonny" and owner of Cinema

World Studios in nearby Greenpoint, Franzese's childhood neighborhood. There was laughter among about 75 people in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, at the funeral Mass for Franzese, the  $charming, menacing \,mobster \,who \,died \,Sunday \,at \,103. \,In \,2017, he \,was \,freed \,from \,prison, the \,federal \,system's$ 

oldest inmate, having served 35 years.



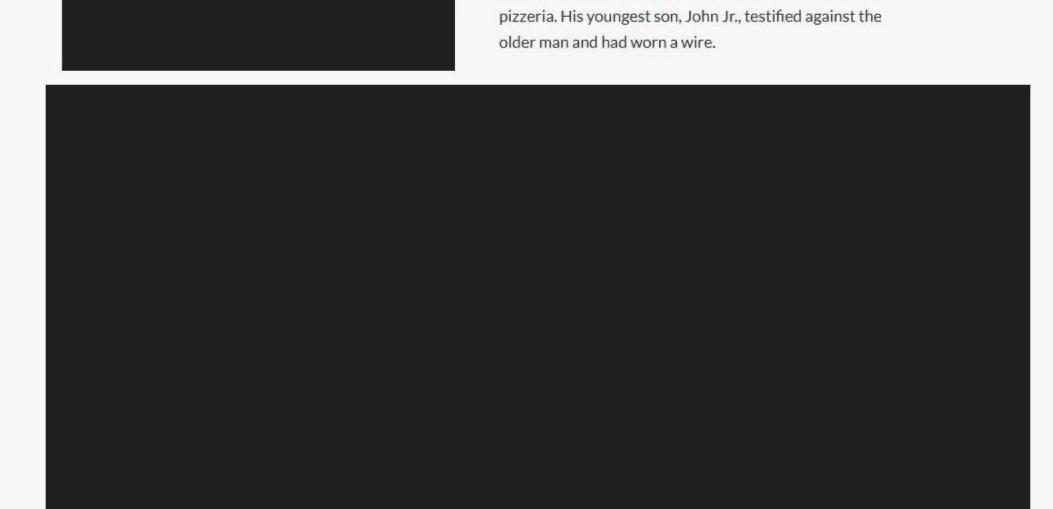
was, in my mind, the Energizer Bunny. He kept going, going and going." In court papers, the government once said Franzese was responsible for 40 to 50 murders by the late 1960s; he was never convicted of homicide.

His Mafia career was interrupted by a 50-year sentence in  $1967\, for\, master minding\, bank \, robberies\, across the nation.$ (He long denied guilt.) He was paroled repeatedly but kept

being sent back to prison for associating with felons.

In 2010, he went back, at 93, for shaking down Penthouse

and Hustler strip clubs in Manhattan, and an Albertson



One mourner read from the Book of Sirach: "What is man, of what worth is he? The good, the evil in him, what are these? The sum of a man's days is great if it reaches a hundred years."

allowed to attend because he was jailed awaiting trial for murder.)

In a recent Newsday interview, Sonny Franzese said of his life: "I never hurt nobody that was innocent."

 $Cassato\ recalled\ meeting\ Franzese\ in\ 2002, when\ he\ came\ to\ see\ the\ monsignor\ to\ thank\ him\ for\ his\ work\ at\ Mount$ Carmel, which Franzese considered his parish. (His own mom's funeral had been there in 1966, although he wasn't



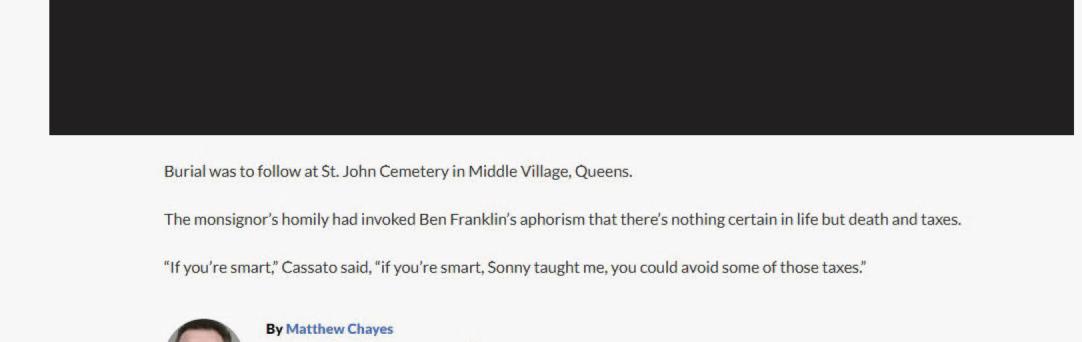
Three mourners delivered eulogies, including a grandson and granddaughter: Both described him as a family man, a doting presence who urged them to pursue their passions, be healthy and get educated.

The traditional Catholic Mass was complemented by gospel singers his grandchildren hired, a homage to Franzese's past: In the 1960s, his friends and family have told Newsday, he was a silent partner of two independent music

"Lo and behold, he went away to school again!" the monsignor said to laughter.

labels and had a booking agency. They said he gave black musicians a chance when some others wouldn't. On Friday, the gospel singers performed "Amazing Grace" as Franzese's coffin, draped in an American flag, was carried out of the church. (Franzese served in the Army but was dishonorably discharged for "homicidal tendencies"

in 1944, according to court records.)



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