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BIOGRAPHY

Uncle Al Capone: The Untold Story from inside His Family
Deirdre Marie Capone
Recaplodge
978-0-9828451-0-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

Gangster Al Capone once commented that "This American system of ours…gives each and every one of us a great opportunity if we only seize it with both hands and make the most of it." Despite the fact that it's coming from a known gangster, it says a great deal about the mind of the man. He sees himself as an average, successful American businessman, even if his comment understates the whole picture. It's this human quality that Deirdre Marie Capone evokes in *Uncle Al Capone,* a fascinating book that's one part biography, one part memoir, and one part remembrance of Public Enemy Number One.

As the grand-niece of Al, Capone recounts how she hid her family name for years. When a school research project leads her to come clean to her kids, she begins recalling the rich family history she once knew. It's a tale that starts after the family emigrates from Angri, Italy to Brooklyn, New York. Capone shows that Al and her grandfather, Ralph, weren't always members of a crime syndicate. In fact, their childhood is fairly normal, with Al finishing high school, and Ralph working odd jobs to help support the family. Everything changes when their father dies and Prohibition becomes law. Forced to earn a living for his family, Al, and eventually Ralph, head to Chicago and down the path to criminal celebrity.

Throughout the book, Capone tries to reconcile what she knows about her family with recorded history. Early in the book she writes, "I will not pretend to be able to paint a rosy picture of my uncle Al. I cannot make him out to be a perfect man, or even a good man. But what I want people to know is that he was a complex man. He was human and he had a heart."

Capone succeeds, balancing both the public history of Al, from the Valentine's Day Massacre to his incarceration at Alcatraz, with personal photos, family recipes, and her own memories. The author recalls how loving certain members of the Capone family were, particularly her great-aunt Maffie who helps the author to see good in the men. It's not always an easy task as the author recounts losing friends, jobs, and other opportunities, once people learned she was a descendant of the notorious Al Capone.

Overall, *Uncle Al Capone* is a memoir that is as complex and human as the man that it's about. It brings a fresh perspective to the other Al Capone biographies, and finally gives the larger-than-life gangster the one thing that may have eluded him in life: to be seen as simply a human being.

Katerie Prior