

Worth Remembering

Revised May 12, 2025

By Jim Caldarella and Jim DiSilva

Forward

When Joanne DiSilva died in 2017, my cousin Jim handed me a document. It was a history of DiSilva Transportation, the trucking company built by Tom, his dad, and Vinny DiSilva, his uncle. It also contained references to the DiSilvas' first years in America. I was interested in both stories, but Jim's retelling of the early years fascinated me. It also provided the framework on which I could hang family anecdotes.

But it wasn't the full story of that time. The first DiSilvas—Civita, Vinny, Tom, Joanne, and Sandy—had been sphinxes for almost a century. I always thought they just didn't want to talk about those grim times, but there was more to it. The trauma of their shared experiences had left them with a kind of unspoken non-disclosure agreement; talking casually about those tough times was somehow an irreverent violation of trust.

So, I put fictional flesh on the bones of their story. I don't feel bad about this. I had enough context and tidbits to understand the gist of what had happened. More importantly, I knew all the players. The story that follows, *The First Half (1900 to 1950)*, is guided by these inputs. Some would call this tale of the early years "inspired by a true story," but I prefer to think of it as one version of what actually happened to the DiSilvas. Whatever you call it, it's probably as close as we are going to get to the truth about that time.

The Second Half (1951 to 2000) is Jim DiSilva's retelling of the events and people involved with the DiSilva companies from 1950 forward. Unlike *The First Half*, which contains my best attempt to fill in the gaps, Jim's story is a first-hand account and 100% true.

Every successful immigrant family has its origin story of which they are justifiably proud. I don't hold the DiSilva story out to be any more important, heroic, or harrowing than theirs. I do believe, however, it is far too interesting for our family to forget. These five people, this first generation of American DiSilva's shaped our lives.

Jim Caldarella, 2025

The First Half (1900 – 1950)

By Jim Caldarella

The Don's Death (1909)

Alessandro (Sandro) DiSilva sat staring numbly at the coffin.

He felt ashamed that all he could remember about his father were the bad things, but he blamed it on the room. The heavy drapes over the windows, the dim bulbs shining through ancient, yellowed lampshades, the suffocating Napolitano heat, the cloying smell of dying flowers all contributed to a somber oppression that leached dark memories from him like beads of sweat. The ushers had already escorted several swooning old women in heavy black dresses and lace headscarves outside for air, and many of the old men looked as if they were on the verge of joining the old man. It's almost as if we're all in the crypt with the bastard being smothered to death for offending him.

"*Bastardo*," Sandro whispered under his breath. He was the don's elder son, but he had more than his fair share of grievances against him, disputes that had driven him to travel to America years before. He was bitter about it. As the first son, he should have stayed and inherited his father's estate, but the lack of respect the old man showed him had forced him to leave. By law and by will, Augusto was the sole heir now, it was a serious break with tradition but it was done, Sandro was out, Augusto was in.

This was how families survived and became powerful in Italy. By leaving the estate to one child rather than dividing it among all the heirs, the family wealth remained intact and it prospered over time. Dividing it among the children diminished the fortune and diluted their power. Everyone, even the disenfranchised children, agreed it was a necessary evil. A necessary evil...; whatever, he would raise his own family and fortune in the New World, in America.

He took a deep breath then immediately regretted it. The sweet smell of the flowers around the coffin filled his lungs like poison gas. He coughed as discreetly as he could to purge the vile air.

Why did people send flowers to a wake, he wondered. Was it to mask the smell of death? Was this really necessary anymore in these modern times. The old man had already been embalmed; it would be days before his body started to decay and stink. He coughed again and the priest from the *la chiesa*, the Cathedral of Saints Erasmus and Marcianus and St. Mary of the Assumption, looked up and stared at him. He didn't like anyone to distract his audience when he was leading the prayer...even to cough. He had once seriously disparaged a parishioner who had died in the middle of his sermon.

Santos stared back defiantly—he had nothing to lose anymore—then turned back to the coffin and focused on a particularly beautiful array of yellow roses. A black banner with the words “Dearest Husband” split the roses in half. His stepmother, Filomena, sniffled and he glanced at her. She was about the same age as his wife, Civita, and only a few years older than him. Dr. Brancaccio, the renowned Dr. Salvatore Brancaccio, her father, was comforting her with his arm around her shoulder.

What a major shit-show of hypocrisy, he thought bitterly. The don had wanted a young wife; Dr. Brancaccio had wanted a substantial man for his daughter; and Filomena had needed a husband to avoid becoming a spinster. They were all self-serving hypocrites.

Now, she was free, a respectable widow free to marry someone of her choice, someone younger and more like her. She and the don had been from different worlds. She was a sophisticated aristocrat from Rome; he was a rough businessman from the provincial town of Gaeta. She was clearly better off with him dead...so why the tears?

What devil had possessed his father to marry her? What besotted advisor had convinced him it was okay to marry a rich girl from Rome, 14 years his junior? People around the town had whispered that he had done it “for the family.” Marrying a Brancaccio was a real coup for a DiSilva, they said. The Brancaccios were prominent Italian nobility; they lived in a palace in the center of the city; they were favorites of the church; they sponsored the arts; they...

What good did that connection do us now, he wondered? Dr. Salvatore was here for his daughter, to bring her home. He wouldn’t even speak with any of the DiSilvas. Sandro knew they would never see him or her again. The Don should have remained loyal to my mother, Sandro thought. Any decent man would have honored her memory for a few years, grieved over her premature death at 39 for a longer time. After all, they had been married for almost 30 years. Marrying Filomena so quickly diminished Vincenzina’s memory. At least, that was the way he saw it. Augusto had disagreed of course, which is another reason he was out and Augusto was in.

He gritted his teeth in hidden frustration and rage.

Don Tomaso Nicolo Daimiano DiSilva enjoyed being with younger women. It was obvious and everyone knew it. It was one of the reasons he and Sandro had argued, and why Sandro had gone to America. Don Tomaso was always careful in public about his reputation, his name, what people thought of him and his family, but in private he was selfish, especially when the matter involved his pleasure. The inescapable truth was that the don was a jerk. No one, not even Sandro, ever said this out loud of course; he was a powerful man and the DiSilva's were a well-respected family in Gaeta, but it was true.

He thought defiantly about the day he had just packed his things and walked out to join his brother Salvatore in America and felt a tinge of pride. Since 1902 America had been his

home. He and Salvatore had worked hard and saved their money. It was almost time for him to bring his wife to the new land, almost time for him to start a business, his own business. Everybody had a dream in America, and anything was possible.

He had only returned to Gaeta because his father had been sick. Luckily, the old man had died before he had returned to Boston. Coming back to Gaeta a second time to attend his funeral would have been a financial disaster, but he would not have had any choice. Funerals were important obligations; they bridged the gap between the past and the future. Even the Brancaccio's had felt it necessary to attend the Don's funeral. The widow, surely ecstatic on the inside, even had the decency to shed a few "sorrowful" tears.

More hypocrisy, he thought suddenly.

This was surely the end of Italy for him. Now that his father was dead, he and his new wife would travel back to America and start a new life, a better life. Civita was pregnant and due next month; once the child was old enough, he would move both of them to America. At this point, all his family obligations were finished.

"Don't be sad, Sandro," Civita whispered. "The don was a great man, a man of enormous respect. God will welcome him into his kingdom."

"Ah huh," Sandro answered with the appropriate degree of melancholia in his voice. If God took an old lecher like Don Tomaso into his kingdom with open arms, then he was finished with God as well.

He looked up at Civita and smiled. For all his father's vices, he had arranged a good match for him with Civita. The Agresti's of Formia were a good family and she was beautiful. She had been 23 years old when they married—mature but still adventurous, he liked to say. In many ways, the don's illness and his sudden death were a blessing for their marriage. It had given them an opportunity to confirm the promise that they would be together in America.

There was little opportunity in Italy, he thought again. People were born, they lived, they died, and nothing ever changed. Society had its rules, and everyone was expected to live by them...for generation after generation. Moving from one town to another, for example, or from one occupation to another was rare. Moving from one social level to another, as his father had attempted with his Brancaccio bride, was even rarer. America was different. Americans welcomed change. They respected someone who improved himself, who advanced by his own merits. It was, as they said, the land of opportunity, a chance to build a better life.

Civita knew these were clichés, overworked promises designed to encourage workers to emigrate, but she also knew there was real hope in America and none in Italy. This was why she

had overcome her fears and suppressed the sadness of leaving her family. Unlike Sandro, she would be sorry to leave them, but the dream of America was more powerful.

“You should go and comfort your mother,” she whispered in his ear.

Sandro turned towards her with anger written across his face. “My mother is dead, Civita. This lady is someone my father acquired to decorate his arm. She is a sop to his ego. She’s not my mother.”

Civita stared back at him in disbelief, wondering what America had done to him.

“Stop being a child, Alessandro. Filomena is your mother, your stepmother, your father’s widow. Show her the proper respect. Otherwise, people will think you are an animal, *un disgraziata!* Is that what you want for your family, for us?”

Sandro stared at her for a moment then realized she was right. This farse was all about respect and tradition. The truth was a distant third. It was true—respect and tradition—they were the reasons he had spent the time and money to sail back to Italy to see his sick father, why he had stayed until he died. He smiled and moved his hand gently over her bursting belly.

“We will call him ‘Vicente,’ after my real mother, he said quietly. ‘Vincent’ in English. It means ‘one who conquers.’”

Civita’s angry face melted back into a smile.

“Shouldn’t we name him ‘Alessandro’ after your grandfather if it’s a boy,” She turned her head towards the coffin, “or perhaps Tomaso after your father?”

A vicious epithet formed in his mouth, but he managed to swallow it before it came out. He was angry with his father, not Civita.

“Vincenzina would not have wanted us to break with tradition,” she whispered, “just so you can show everyone how angry you are at your father. I say we name him ‘Alessandro’ after your you and your grandfather.”

Sandro stared at her then extended his hand. “This isn’t the time. We’ll talk about it later.”

He stood up and helped her to her feet then began walking towards Filomena. He had no intention of naming his son after his father or his grandfather. His father had denied him his inheritance and disrespected his mother by marrying Filomena too quickly, now he would have his revenge by breaking with family tradition and naming his son after his mother.

Vicente...Vincent ... it was a strong, American-sounding name...Vinny! Naming his son after his mother was the least he could do for her. It was also a good way to stick it to these Italian DiSilvas. He was an American now.

“Come, my love. You’re right, we need to pay our respects to the grieving widow. These old traditions will end soon enough for us. We will make our own traditions...in America. When our son is old enough to make the trip, I will send you the money and you will join me in America, in our new and beautiful home. You will leave this old, sad place behind and we will find happiness in our new country.

“*Si, Sandro,*” she said smiling, “in America.”

Brickbottom (1911)

An eerie stillness settled over the deck as the *SS Canopic* sailed slowly into the Harbor. There was no talking, no sad cries, no shouted promises; even the infants were strangely quiet as if they sensed the solemnity of the moment. Somehow, everyone knew the arrival of their ship in Boston was a milestone in their lives. The spire of the Old North Church like New York's Statue of Liberty's seemed to beckon and welcoming them. At least that was what people had whispered when it was first sighted.

Suddenly, a long blast of the ship's horn startled everyone. Frightened, Civita squeezed Vinny's little hand until he screamed in protest. Sandro laughed and reached down to rescue him, lifting him to his shoulders so he could see over the ship's rail.

He was scared as well but trying to put on a brave face. He knew the challenges they faced better than she did. For nearly ten years, he had worked in low-paying, backbreaking jobs to save enough money to bring her to America. Now that she was here, he had his doubts; it was tough enough for a man to survive in this country but a man with a family...?

What good would it do to show his concern, he thought? Civita was full of her own fears and her own brand of blind optimism. Vinny was too young to understand. He was concerned that Salvatore, his brother, would dispirit her by voicing his doubts when they arrived. He had argued that they should use their modest savings to go home and to buy a small business in Gaeta, but Sandro had refused and cautioned him to remain quiet about the idea around Civita. For better or worse, their future was in America.

Slowly, the tugs inched the giant ship against the dock and a final sigh from the ship's smokestacks signaled they had arrived. He lifted their one piece of luggage and shepherded them into the crowd towards the gangplank. Civita clung to his arm as if she was drowning. They had dreamed about this moment for so long, it seemed unreal had it was finally here.

For many men, this moment never arrived, he remembered. They either gave up and returned to their extended families in Italy or just forgot their promise to send for their wives and kids. Italy was full of "wailing wives" and "American orphans" these days. He thought fondly of Gaeta for a moment. It was an incredibly beautiful place, an idyllic seaside village, but there was no way for a man to improve himself there. His only option if he returned would be to sponge off Augusto. This was unacceptable to him; he would rather starve in America than beg for scraps in Italy.

Vinny settled into his arms as they joined the long immigration queue. One last hurdle, he thought, one last obstacle before their dream became a reality—*l'immigrazione*. He had coached Civita for weeks on how to answer the agent's questions, how to stand, how to look, how to smile, how to....

“Are you or any member of your family sick now or have you been sick in the last six months?” the official asked in a bored voice. “Is there any history of illness in your family, any insanity?”

Sandro suddenly realized the man was speaking English. He had expected an Italian-speaker. This was new. The last few times he had passed through immigration, the agents had all spoken Italian. It's the numbers, he realized, there are too many of us now to have Italian-speaking agents.

His face turned white as he handed Vinny to Civita and stood at attention in front of the barred window. Even after nine years in Boston, he still didn't speak enough English to deal with *l'immigrazione*.

“*Alessandro DiSilva, mia moglie, Civita, e nostro figlio, Vincenzo tutti di Itri, vicino a Gaeta,*” Alessandro said nervously trying to sound strong and confident. He knew the most important thing was to speak up and look the man directly in the eye. Americans expected this. Looking down, or worse, looking stupid or dull was dangerous. The Americans rejected those who they thought were slow. He opened his mouth to try again.

“I don't speak any frigging I-tie,” the man interrupted angrily. “Don't you think you shoulda learned some 'merican before coming to 'merica...?”

Irritated, he raised a red flag by his window and stopped talking. Sandro stared at the flag as a spike of fear went through his heart—was the immigration agent rejecting them? Was this the purpose of the red flag?

“*ITRI, Itri, Italia,*” Alessandro repeated more loudly. Even if the flag didn't mean rejection, any amount of “special attention” was trouble.

He desperately kept trying to answer the question he thought the man was asking. “*Un traduttore* (a translator),” the agent said grudgingly in terrible Italian pointing at the flag. Sandro suddenly realized the flag signaled the need for an interpreter.

He smiled and nodded agreeably. American innovation, he thought with respect. The Americans were always looking to do things cheaper and faster. The agent glared at him as they waited. Sandro stared back wide-eyed with a frozen expression of compliance on his face, terrified that the man saw something objectionable in his inability to speak English after being in the country for so long.

A harried little man appeared at his side and immediately launched into the standard immigration questions.

“Sei o qualcuno della tua famiglia malata ora o sei stato negli ultimi sei mesi; c'è qualche storia di malattia nella tua famiglia, qualsiasi follia?”

Alessandro shook his head--no, they had no sickness or insanity in the family; they were all perfectly healthy and sane.

Why would anyone answer “yes” to such a question, he wondered silently? Perhaps it was a trick. Only someone truly stupid would cross an ocean to answer “yes, I am insane.” Was this a test, a kind of reverse logic? He stopped talking and just stared. He and Civita had practiced this interview many times, now he was screwing it up. He knew the entry process would be different when he brought his family into the country, but this added pressure of an American agent was terrifying.

Americans had always been scared of insanity, of disease, of catching something--the flux or TB or something worse—but this was much worse than in the past. The numbers...

“No, stiamo tutti bene,” he answered firmly, trying to hide his trembling hands.

“Hai famiglia o amici in America?” (Do you have family or friends in America?)

“A Some-a-villa,” Alessandro answered, hurriedly, encouraged that they were moving on. He pulled a worn envelope from his coat pocket. It was a rent receipt from Salvatore’s apartment. He shared a one-room with his brother. The interpreter glanced at the return address.

“Somerville,” the interpreter told the agent who diligently wrote it down in an enormous journal. “They have, ah ... family ... here ... in Somerville.”

They all knew the family part was a lie, but the agent continued to write. Sandro stared blankly at the translator. There was no way the man could tell that they had a family contact in the U.S. from the rent receipt. The agent looked up from his journal and stared hard at Sandro for 30 breathless seconds then he lifted a stamp and banged it down on the immigration form.

Sandro took his first full breath and squeezed Civita’s hand. America had accepted them.

The ride in the horse-drawn trolley from Commonwealth Pier to Somerville was like a journey into hell for Civita. The streets of Gaeta shone in the sun; they were made of thousand year-old, sun-bleached, white stone laid down by the Romans. Every wall, every garden, every shop was immaculate, pristine with the loving care of generations of owners.

Somerville Massachusetts could not have been more different. It was a dirty overcrowded city, full of the litter and the other detritus of a manufacturing area. Factories and warehouses were everywhere. Sandro tried to ease her shock by explaining that the railroads owned most of

the land and either rented it to entrepreneurs or used it themselves for Boston's rail distribution centers, switching yards, and maintenance facilities.

She nodded and even managed to smile weakly, but the stunned expression in her eyes didn't leave. She clung to the hope that the residential area where they were to live was fit for human habitation. It wasn't. If anything, the long rows of ramshackle tenements were even worse than the factories.

Sensing her growing panic, disappointment, and depression, Sandro tried to defend the place. "This is called Brickbottom. It's where all the railroad and factory workers live and work. We need to be near the work. If we lived farther away, we would need to commute, and commuting is a waste of time and money.

"In America time is money and money is everything.

"You will understand this soon enough."

Civita wasn't stupid. She knew life in America wasn't going to be easy. She knew that in 1911, all the newly arrived immigrants—Irish, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Jewish. Armenian... all lived near their work in low-cost housing. There was an enormous difference, however, between reading about a place and finally immersing yourself in it. The one thought that kept her on somewhat of an even keel this first day was the thought that things could only get better.

She would be wrong about this as well.

Sandro got them off the trolley on Medford Street and silently led them to number 42 then to a one-room apartment on the fifth floor. Salvatore was at work, but evidence of him was strewn everywhere. The room had no private toilet, just a small sink, a stove, and an icebox. One narrow window faced the brick wall across the alley. The prior occupant had installed a rope pulley outside the window to hang clothes.

"Salvatore is at work. He's a bit of a slob," Sandro said apologetically, sweating. "The room gets a little hot in the summer, as you can see, but everyone sits on the front steps. There's usually a nice breeze on the street."

Civita nodded numbly then began to pick up Salvatore's clothes, folding and piling them in a corner.

"We will need another apartment, Alessandro, one with two rooms. We will use the money my mother gave me."

There was finality in her voice, a tone that warned against argument at this moment. A single undivided room might be fine for two men, two brothers who were working 14 hours a day, six days a week, but it wouldn't do as a place to raise a family.

Wisely, Sandro just nodded and began to help her clean the apartment. Vinny watched from the floor.

The next day, the manager of a nearby boot factory, desperate for workers, hired Sandro as a cutter's assistant. A week later, Civita started a job making woven hosiery. They left two-year-old Vinny with a neighbor for four-bits (fifty cents) a day not including food. A week later, Sandro made a deal with the tenement's owner for a two-room apartment.

Like thousands of other immigrants in 1911, the Alessandro DiSilva family needed to work to survive. Welfare was still half-a-century in the future. People worked or they starved, and everyone was okay with this harsh reality. Fortunately, there was plenty of work. The American economy was booming, supplying everything from shoes to ships to an insatiable world market. Despite the inscription on the Statue of Liberty about giving us your poor yearning to be free, it was the prospect of cheap immigrant labor that made America so welcoming.

Sandro and Civita quickly settled into American life. It was not easy, but their earnings allowed them to buy shelter, food, and clothing. Their savings, however, were miniscule. Civita, still terrified of the poverty she saw all around, managed to save a dollar a week, secretly hoping that one day she would have enough to return to Gaeta to see her mother. She would accomplish this 20 years later when she visited Italy on the SS Saturnia accompanied by her 9-year-old daughter Alessandra.

A Decade of Despair (1912-1923)

Civita stared down at two-year-old Tomaso and fought back her tears. The boy had the measles and had been sick for two weeks. It was a serious illness but not fatal; at least, that was what her neighbors kept saying. Still, she worried; the laryngitis he had developed in the last few days seemed to be getting worse, which concerned her enough to call the doctor.

She didn't know if he was really a doctor, she only had recommendations from people in the neighborhood, but he was dressed in a suit, he carried a doctor's medical bag, and he spoke Italian, albeit it a Milanese accent.

"He will be fine, Mrs. DiSilva. There's no cure, but this medicine will make him more comfortable."

He handed her an unlabeled brown bottle, smiled, and held up his other hand with all his fingers extended—five dollars, two days' pay. She reached into her apron pocket and handed him five singles.

"He'll be alright...?" She asked, needing him to repeat the diagnosis.

"Keep the other children away from him," he warned, ignoring her question.

She nodded and tried to smile. She didn't need the doctor to tell her to keep others away. Measles was highly contagious, it could spread through contact or just by being in the same room with an infected person. She has sent Sandro to live with Salvatore and was paying one of their neighbors to take care of Vinny and their three-year-old baby, Maria. They couldn't afford another illness.

"He'll be alright...?" She asked again. She wanted some reassurance for her five dollars.

"Just continue with the medicine," he said, again refusing to answer her question.

His face told her that Tomaso's condition was more serious than he was saying. Immigrant doctors were reluctant to give bad news; it was bad for business. He turned and left.

She wet a cloth in the basin and used it to soothe Tomaso's brow knowing her efforts were woefully inadequate. A hospital might help, she thought, but American hospitals demanded payment before admitting immigrants. That kind of medical care was for the rich; they simply could not afford it. She used a spoon to get most of the medicine into his mouth then waited. In a few minutes he calmed, and she assumed it was having the desired effect.

Her helplessness made her feel physically ill. At least Vinny, Maria, and Sandro appeared to have escaped infection, she thought. When an entire immigrant family fell ill to disease, the

chance that some of them would not survive was high. It was simply a matter of care, no one this poor could afford to get sick, and consequently, no one was in a position to help. She was on her own.

In 1915, diseases like measles were often “family annihilators.” Her duty as a mother was to care for her son and to protect the rest of her family at all costs. She sat back in the rocking chair Salvatore had found in a used furniture store and closed her eyes. She had not slept for more than 48 hours and found it almost impossible to keep her eyes open. But he seemed better...sleeping more peacefully. His quiet wheezing was hypnotizing, and after a time, she closed her eyes and slipped off.

The silence woke her.

She couldn't hear any wheezing and assumed Tomaso was better, that the medicine had worked. She reached over and touched his forehead. It was cold. Terrified, she touched his chest—no movement, no breath sounds, no heartbeat.

She sat back in the chair, frozen, and stayed that way for more than an hour. After a time, she went to the apartment door and yelled across the hall.

“MARIA...! Maria, please sent Mario to fetch Salvatore...please.”

Maria stared at her white face and numb expression and knew immediately what had happened. Death was something they lived with all the time. She walked across the hallway and took Civita by the hand and led her away, closing the door to her apartment.

Five years later, Civita heart still ached. She missed her boy. He had lived long enough to develop a personality, and it still hurt to think about him, to remember what he was like.

She had been scared of illness and injury before Tomaso's death, now they terrified her. A simple cold could become pneumonia, influenza struck every year, tuberculosis was everywhere, a minor cut could become infected, death from diarrhea, enteritis, scarlet fever, measles, heart disease, cancer...was an everyday event. Death was everywhere.

What made it even worse was that they had almost no protection. Not only was the medical care and medicine available to immigrants often ineffective, but the cost made good care unattainable. One of the most obvious issues was that there were few medical facilities—hospitals, doctors, clinics, rehabilitation centers—in the ghetto. Somerville Hospital existed, but the need for hospital services far exceeded its capacity. The facilities that met the need were located near the people who could pay for them. Building a hospital in the ghetto was a prescription for financial disaster.

The city and the church tried to help, but the enormous flood of immigrants made it almost impossible to provide even the most basic medical care to everyone. It was just a fact of life that immigrants died.

“Mama, I have a stomachache,” Maria said.

Civita stood motionless, terrified but trying not to show the girl her fear. Vinny, now 13 and in the seventh grade, moved to his sister’s side and put his hand on her forehead.

“She’s fine, Ma ... just trying to get out of going to school tomorrow,” he said, cuffing her gently on the side of her head.

Civita wanted to believe him, but her terror was deeply rooted. Still, Maria was a healthy, vivacious 4th grader who loved school. She glanced again at Vinnie, unsure, but willing herself to believe his totally uninformed diagnosis.

She and Sandor worked 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week. Vinny was the day-to-day caretaker for his siblings—Maria, 10, Thomas, 7, and Joanne 3. What he said about their wellbeing carried more weight than a normal 13-year-old.

“You think..., Vinny?”

Vinny smiled and nodded.

“She’s always trying to skip school.” He glanced at her again, she was pale, almost white. “Maybe something she ate. She’ll be better by tomorrow.”

Vinny didn’t mind being the kids’ caretaker. In 1922 parents expected anyone not working, anyone not bringing home a paycheck to help in any way they could. In the DiSilva household even 3-year-old Joanne, the baby, had chores.

Civita looked at him again for reassurance then nodded her agreement. The girl was clearly out of sorts, but someone in the family was always complaining of some ailment or other. Food poisoning, accidental injury, sudden illness, were part of their lives. Responding to each complaint would have been a full-time job.

“Go lie down, Maria,” she said. “You’ll feel better in a while.”

She returned to crushing her tomatoes in the strainer.

Dinner once again was pasta and red sauce. It was inexpensive and easy to prepare after a hard day in the factory. She tried to break it up sometimes with pasta fagirole (pasta and beans) or

pasta and escarole, but most nights it was pasta and red tomato sauce. Vinny sat down at the table and opened his book; immediately he began scratching his head, looking confused.

He was a serious but uninspired student. Maria was the one with all the academic promise. She breezed through her studies effortlessly. Civita looked up from her work and studied the girl's face. Yes, she was pale...maybe she was getting a cold.

She continued to strain the tomatoes. She would feed the kids now and make Sandro a fresh batch when he came home from work at 10:00 p.m. Perhaps even check the cupboard for another can of beans. He needed his strength; he was working all the time to support them.

"Thomas, set the table please."

That evening around 3:00 a.m., Maria began screaming. When they arrived at Somerville Hospital, the wait for treatment was four hours. It took almost an hour for a triage nurse to even look at her, and by that time, she was dead.

Maria's death was even more traumatic for the family than Tomaso's had been. Maria was the family's spark, the bright light that brought joy into their lives, that made the suffering and privation worthwhile. Her passing took the breath out of them.

For Civita, it was a personal catastrophe. If she had acted sooner; if she had not been too tired to do the right thing, the girl would have survived. Yes, the hospital's emergency room was always crowded, but if she had taken her the night before, she would still be with them. Tomaso's death had been bad, but it had not been the result of parental neglect.

She was still suffering from what would ultimately be called PTSD when an even more terrible thing happened, Sandro died.

There was no warning, no time to adjust or to compensate. One day he was fine, the next day he collapsed at work. Civita with help from Vinny managed to get him home where he died that warm April night.

"Kidney failure," the coroner said casually. "He was young, but it happens. Sorry."

There was no other explanation, Sandro DiSilva was just 45 years old.

Civita, who was still grieving over Maria and Tomaso, was five months pregnant with her sixth and last child, Alessandra. In the weeks that followed, the grief and despair nearly destroyed her, and that would have certainly destroyed the entire family. It was 14-year-old Vinny who saved them.

The loss of the breadwinner was a tragedy for any family in 1923. For poor immigrants without any life insurance, a supportive family network, family shelters, or any plan-B, it was a catastrophe. There was no social security or social services. Welfare had not even been invented.

The church was often the only “safety net” available to immigrants. But again, the huge numbers were overwhelming, and addressing even the most basic need for schooling, medical care, and family services like orphanages was problematic. The aid the destitute and now headless DiSilva Family needed was far beyond the capability and the capacity of any social service available at the time. They were on their own.

Even worse, Civita was a basket-case. Even if she had known how to deal with such a calamity, her physical and mental health made it impossible for her to cope. Her husband and two of her children were dead, she had no money to return to Italy and to beg her family for help. Sandro’s brother, Salvatore, had his own family and his own desperate problems. She still only spoke a few words of English. She was a laborer, earning minimum wages, in a strange country with no savings, no skills, and no profession. In desperation, she hid away in her inconsolable grief. Vinny watched all this for a few days then he stood up.

“*Lo lascerò la scuola, Ma, e mi metterò al Lavoro.* (I will quit school, Ma, and get work.)” Vinny told his weeping and inconsolable mother.

Civita looked up at the boy. His face was set in the same determined way as Sandro’s had been, but his determination made her even more miserable, angrier. He was old enough to understand the disaster that had befallen them; why wasn’t he scared, and grieving like her?

She screamed her response, “*Vedi che sono incinta, Vicente! Vedi i tre bambini piccoli che devo curare. Capisci che non posso lavorare, che non abbiamo risparmi, che...* (Do you see that I am pregnant, Vicente! Do you see the two small children I have to care for. Do you understand that I cannot work now, that we have no savings, that...).”

Vinny stood his ground. He had always been determined, now he was like stone.

“*Va tutto bene, Ma. Andrà tutto bene.* (It is okay, Ma. Everything is going to be okay).”

Somehow, despite all the problems they faced, she believed him. She stared at Thomas and Joanne huddled in the back of the room, scared. They would try, she decided; they would put their fate in Vinny hands. What choice did they have? They were Americans now and their destiny was here no matter how bleak the future looked.

The next day Vinny quit school and began to look for work in the nearby warehouses and truck yards. There was no time for depression or extended mourning. Civita, inspired by him, pulled herself together as well, fighting to free herself from her depression. Even the kids contributed. It was as if everyone understood, their survival hung in the balance.

The Birth of DiSilva Transportation (1924)

Vinny waited, stamping his feet on the cold ground. The Commonwealth Fish Pier was a cold place at 5:00 a.m. in Boston Harbor, even in May. Two-dozen rough looking men, all wearing hats and threadbare jackets, milled around the loading platform trying to stay warm. A single truck, a Ford Model Double-T, had backed into the platform. Fishy-smelling ice water dripped out of its drain holes.

They could hear the warehousemen loading heavy boxes inside the truck's body. The men were looking for work—sometimes, drivers hired helpers so they could get back faster and perhaps get another load. There was money in trucking, but only for those who hustled.

Vinny lifted his collar and paced around the crowds outside edge. He had wanted to finish high school, he was a decent student, but there was no way his pregnant mother could support the family by herself. He didn't have any choice.

No big deal, he thought. Lots of kids quit school early to work. He was strong; he spoke English like a native; and he was prepared to do whatever was necessary to earn money. Finding work, however, was more difficult than he had expected. Jobs went to the men with connections first then to those with experience; he had neither. Not only that, but there was an unwritten rule that the men with families would get preference. Even though he was big and looked strong, he was clearly too young to have a family.

His mother did the best she could to help, but her pregnancy exhausted her. Ten-year-old Tom did most of the work around the house. Her lingering depression, however, was the worst part--she tried to hide it to put it aside, but she still mourned Sandro's and Marie's passing. The deep wound left by Tomaso's early death had never fully healed either. It was as if they were cursed.

Vinny noticed that more men were walking through the gate and joining the crowd waiting for work. He had read somewhere that more than 23 million immigrants had come to the U.S. in the latest wave, and that four million of them were Italians. It made for a lot of job competition.

The truck's driver stepped out onto the loading platform and stared down at the crowd. The men shuffled with each other to get to the front and be noticed. "TEN BUCKS...!" a man shouted. Immediately, someone else yelled, "Eight and a half," "Eight," "Seven-fifty." Vinny was confused--were they talking about a day rate? \$7.50 for an entire day's work? That was madness. They must be saying \$7.50 for just this load. That must be it.

"FIVE ... I'LL DO IT FOR FIVE," he shouted, still not sure what he was agreeing to for \$5. All he knew was, the family needed that \$5 to eat today.

Several men turned angrily in his direction. Suddenly, the man behind punched him hard in the back, in his kidney. The pain was excruciating, and he fell to one knee.

“The kid’s crazy,” the man who punched him said, laughing as if it was a joke. “He’s going to work the fish for a whole day for \$5...! He’s crazy, I’m tellin’ ya.”

Vinny rose to painfully his feet. His hand was still in the air with all five fingers extended.

“Five...I’ll do the load for five,” he shouted hoarsely, still trying to catch his breath.

“The load...? Another man said. “We’re talking about the day. It might be three loads that you’re signing up for...for \$5! What ‘re ya, soft in the head, kid?”

A job, even a job that only paid five dollars for a day’s work, meant food on the table for the four of them. He was thinking specifically of his little sister, Joanne. Vinny kept his hand in the air.

The driver pointed at him. “You...!”

The man jumped down from the loading platform and walked Vinny to the truck’s cab. Vinny, still feeling the pain of the punch, stumbled along then climbed into the cab and collapsed into the helper’s seat. The driver moved hurriedly inside behind the wheel. The men in the crowd were grumbling over this violation of “the rules.”

“You got balls, kid,” he said as he stomped on the floor starter and adjusted the truck’s choke. The engine sputtered and caught; the driver let it warm for a minute. The crowd was still mumbling their objections but dispersing, moving out of the chilly wind. Several men were still glaring at Vinny. They needed work to support their families. What would a kid like him use the money for...the movies? The cardinal rule on the trucks was always, “family men worked first!” The kid was bucking the system big time, and bucking the system often got you killed or badly hurt.

“I’m George,” the driver said. “They call me, ‘the Greek.’ One of these days, one of them is going to teach you a lesson, kid,” the driver said ominously as the heavy truck pulled out of the yard. “I wouldn’t let them get behind you. They got families to support, you know.”

“So do I,” Vinny said quietly as the overloaded Ford moved slowly away from the pier.

A year later, Vinny stood in front of his mother. His time on the trucks had made him hard--physically and mentally. He still had a baby-face, but the quick smile that had made him so

popular in school was gone, replaced by a serious expression that was quickly settling into a permanent scowl.

“Ho bisogno di \$ 500, Ma, per comprare il mio camion. C'è un ragazzo disposto a vendermi il suo vecchio Rio per \$ 500. (I need \$500, Ma, to buy my own truck. There's a guy willing to sell me a Ford straight-job for \$500.)”

Civita raised her eyes from the baby, Alessandra, surprised to hear Vinny making a joke. Suddenly, she realized this was no joke. A spike of fear rose up in her--was he crazy? ...\$500! She turned away, put the baby down, and walked back to the table where she had been kneading dough.

Vinny followed her; it was clear he wasn't leaving without an answer. Civita punched the dough hard, harder than necessary. Five hundred dollars wasn't something to joke about; it was all the money she had left. In the last year she had spent everything they had saved for a decade to keep a roof over their heads. She couldn't believe that Vinny was being so selfish.

“Sei pazzo! (You are crazy!) Non sei abbastanza grande per ottenere la patente di camionista! (You're not old enough even to get a truck driver's license!)”

Vinny didn't answer. He had no intention of arguing with his mother or pleading. Either she gave him the money, or she didn't. Civita saw the resolve in his eyes and it made her even angrier.

“Non sai guidare. Non puoi ancora ottenere una licenza. Mi hai detto che eri troppo giovane per ottenere una patente. (You are a helper. You don't know how to drive. You can't get a license yet. You told me you were too young to get a license.)”

She stared at him, her mouth set. He stared back. This wasn't about the \$500 or a driver's license; this was about trust. Did she trust her 15-year-old son to make critical decisions for the family? The answer wasn't obvious--Vinny was supporting them; he was already earning three or four times on the trucks what she earned in the factory; the children, especially Joanne and Alessandra, thought of him as their father.

“Zio Tore (Uncle Salvatore) is going to drive,” he answered her in English. “He already said okay. I'll do the loading and unloading until I can get my license. Tom can help when he's not in school, in the mornings and at night.”

He knew she understood more English than she let on.

“Zio Tore...,” she hissed scornfully. *“Ha una licenza ufficiale? (Does he have a real license?)”*

Vinny didn't answer. He didn't like anyone questioning him, even her. Salvatore had shown him something that looked like a driver's license, but he couldn't be sure if it was valid. It didn't matter. Zio Tode looked old enough to drive, that was all that counted. The police were lazy and corrupt; they didn't care about driver's licenses.

Nine-year-old Tom DiSilva moved closer to the door to hear better. Joanne was playing noisily with Alessandra.

"Quiet, you two," Vinny yelled.

Tom moved to the kids and herded them out of his brother's wrath. He loved and trusted Vinny, but he sided with his mother this time--what Vinny was saying was crazy. Buy a truck...? They couldn't even afford to buy tomatoes for the sauce. Half the time, Ma just poured a little olive oil over the macaroni. He stared at Vinny. Like all kids, the idea of change scared him ... still, it was Vinny.

Suddenly, Joanne tried to run to her mother. Tom caught her in his arms and dumped her roughly back on the bed. She squealed in delight at the new game.

"Quiet, Joanne!" he said. "They're talking about serious stuff, and I'm trying to listen."

He would never say anything to Vinny about his fears of course. Vinny might see it as a lack of support even disloyalty. The last thing he wanted to do was to let his brother down. Still, his idea sounded crazy. He moved back to the door. The gentle banging of the kitchen table's short leg on the floor had stopped. Civita had put aside the dough she was kneading. This was a bad sign, he thought.

She turned away from Vinny and sighed. She knew Vinny was serious--he really wanted her to give him the \$500, everything she and Sandro had saved in 12 years. Even if he succeeded with this lunacy, with his truck, there would be no money for clothes, for school supplies, for lunch money.... His failure might condemn them to a life of destitution on the streets. Not one of them would survive on the street, and she would never return to Formia.

What he was asking was impossible! She could not agree ... never. She stared hard into his eyes again trying to see a flaw in his plan ... a flaw in him. It was impossible...! She opened her mouth to say no but couldn't form the word. Even at 16, Vinny was already a hard man to stand against.

"Vicente, per favore...! (Vincent, Please!)"

He continued to stare without smiling, waiting for her answer. She knew if she said no, she knew he would turn away without arguing. He was the most stoic person she had ever known; nothing seemed to get to him.

Mannagia! (Damn), she thought. If anyone was entitled to be cautious, it was her. Her life in America had been a rollercoaster; one more tragedy, like the loss of their savings, and they would be finished, done as a family.

“Per favore... (Please...)”

He didn’t move or even blink. She stared at him for a long time. Vinny was their salvation, the rock to which the family was anchored in this terrible storm. He had never let them down...never! Her shoulders slumped in defeat.

“Va bene, Vicente. Mi fido di te. Andremo in banca al mattino. (Okay, Vincent, I trust you. We will go to the bank in the morning.)

Tom squeezed his lips together in the other room. His knees were shaking; they were literally knocking into each other. He couldn’t believe his mother had agreed to Vinny’s insane plan. If his brother failed, it would ruin them. He stood for a long time thinking about Vinny then he turned back towards the girls and began to tickle them. Soon their giggles drowned out the sound of Civita’s desperate kneading.

Va bene, Tom thought. It’s done, no sense worrying about it. Silently, he promised Vinny his help. There was no way he was going to abandon him. He didn’t agree that Vinny needed his own truck, but he would help as much as he could.

Two days later, Vinny handed over \$500 and the truck was his. A day later he paid a street lawyer to file papers of incorporation for DiSilva Transportation. Tom’s promise to support him was the unofficial start of a partnership between the two brothers that would last more than 60 tumultuous years.

Watkins Glen (1931)

Watkins Glen State Park in upstate New York is the most beautiful of the Finger Lakes' parks. The stream that runs through the glen descends 400 feet in a mile, falling over 200-foot cliffs and creating more than 19 waterfalls along its course.

"This is too beautiful for words," Gladys said, holding Vinny's strong arm in hers.

"Ah huh," Vinny answered, his mind on the loads he was missing because of their honeymoon. He was trying hard to be with her, but it was hard for him to break away from work this long. His mind was always on his trucks.

In the last six years, he had worked like a dog to make his new company successful, but they were still struggling. The stock market crash of October 1929 had depressed prices so low that they were practically working for nothing. On the other hand, he had saved his cash and was in a position to buy two more trucks from desperate owners for almost nothing. Still, the Depression was a tough time to make a living, let alone to grow. Low hauling fees and high-cost repairs and maintenance were killing him.

The one bright spot, he thought, was Tom's graduation. For years he had been waiting for his 16-year-old brother to finish high school and join him on the trucks; but now the kid wanted to go to college...to become an engineer.

"You don't need to go to college to drive frigging trains," Vinny said when Tom had told him.

"I don't want to drive trains, Vin. I want to build things, bridges and buildings. I'm good at it. I can make a lot more money as an engineer than I can as a truck driver. It will be better for Ma, for the family."

Vinny had snorted and turned away, but he didn't say no.

Tom would have listened if he had shut him down, he thought, but he hadn't. Vinny didn't want to kill the kid's dream. The struggling company was his responsibility not Tom's. He might not even have to worry about free family help from Tom if he couldn't find a way to make more money with their three trucks.

And he also had Ma to worry about...

She had suddenly become obsessed with the idea of returning to Italy to visit her family. He needed every penny they earned to keep the business alive, and she wanted to pack up and go back to Gaeta or Formia or wherever the hell they were from. Her father Antonio Agresti had died last year, and she was afraid her mother was going to die before she saw her again.

“Let’s walk through the gorge, Vin. They say it’s spectacular.”

Then there was Gladys! He had just married Gladys Lombardi, now DiSilva. They had known each other for three years, but he had been way too busy to think about romance or, God forbid, marriage, but she had forced his hand. Everyone thought she was so sweet...

“I’m 22, Vin, like you,” she had told him in her no-nonsense voice. “It’s time for me to start a family. I want to do that with you, but if you cannot get your head out of those damn trucks, I’ll find someone else. Just let me know what you want to do...okay?”

What choice did he have? He was screwed.

Glad wasn’t kidding, she didn’t mince words. The truth was, he knew she was right and he certainly didn’t have time to look around for another wife. Starting his own family while he was still responsible for Ma, Tom, Joanne, and Sandy (Alessandra’s nickname) was going to be a problem. It didn’t matter that Gladys had said she understood his obligation to his family and that they would work it out. No woman wanted to share her home with another.

She took his hand firmly in hers and led the way towards the path through the gorge. Vinny smiled and followed...for her sake. He felt good about her, about starting his own family, but the responsibilities weighed on him like a ton of bricks. One of these days, he thought, I’m going to be free of all these obligations ... one of these days.

Tom (1934)

Tom stared at the tuition bill from the University of Massachusetts. There was no way he would be able to find the money for another semester. He was doing well with his grades, but the financial burden was killing them...killing Vin.

Vinny's business was on the edge of bankruptcy. His brother was doing all he could to handle the work without him and to help with the tuition, but the pressure was breaking him. And Ma...she was working her fingers to the bone, struggling to keep 14-year-old Jenny (her nickname for Joanne) and 9-year-old Sandy clothed and fed. Gladys had just had her first baby, a girl they appropriately named "Dolores" (sorrows).

He was doing his best to help. He spent every spare minute working on the trucks for no pay, trying to help Vinny make the next payroll, to pay for the next repair. In normal times, the revenue earned by his three trucks would have been more than enough to sustain and grow the business, but these were not normal times. The depression had gotten even worse--50% of the American workforce was under-employed and half of those under-employed were out of work altogether.

"You know how to drive a truck, right Tom? You got a license?"

He turned around. It was Vinny's friend George Enagnos ("the Greek"). Behind him was Bob "Gimpy" Bertolucci. Bertolucci had a bum leg from a childhood bout with polio.

"Yeah, I've been around trucks since I was nine. My brother owns..."

"Yeah. We need someone to help us move a load from Chatham to Boston. It pays \$50 for each man."

Tom opened his mouth to refuse then closed it without speaking. There was only one kind of load that paid this well—booze. He stared down at the tuition bill in his hand. Running tax-free booze from the Cape to Boston was illegal, but the cops were happy to look the other way for a hundred bucks. The real problem was the competition. The major distributors, all mob connected, didn't enjoy sharing their profits. The easiest way for them to disrupt a competitor's supply was by stealing a shipment and roughing up the drivers. After all, who was going to complain?

Tom crumpled the paper in his hand and stood up. He was a handsome boy, big and strong. He was tired of working for nothing, tired of studying after an exhausting day on the trucks, tired of finding time to attend class, and most of all, he was tired of being poor.

"Okay, I'm in."

This was the start of Tom's "wild time." He spent the next four years working part-time for Vinny, part time for other trucking companies such as Highway Express, which paid a hard cash salary, and part time involved with "the Fearless Five," a local crew who took on work in the legal gray space.

During this time, Tom also helped grow the Teamsters union, specifically Boston's Local 25, as an organizer and union leader. Ironically, in later years, disputes with Local 25 would become one of his biggest headaches.

In 1938, Tom cleaned up his act and married a beautiful and feisty Irish woman, Eleanor O'Neil. In 1940, they had their first child, a son whom they named Thomas. Tom continued to work with Vinny whenever he was needed, but his other driving jobs paid better and his work with the Teamsters was more interesting.

By the end of 1941, the two brothers were on different paths. It took a world war to bring them together again.

Joanne (1936)

BANG...!

Joanne slammed the apartment door as she left, enraged at her mother's old-fashioned demands. She was beautiful and there was no shortage of boys desperate to take her out on a summer night. Her mother had grown up in Italy of the 1800s; how could she possibly understand what it was like for her? She could still see the wooden spoon waving in the air, she could still hear her mother screaming from the top of the stairs.

"JENNY, puttana, vieni qui! (JENNY, you whore, come back here!)"

Joanne hesitated for a moment. She wasn't afraid of her mother or her spoon, but Vinny scared her silly. If he heard about them fighting, he would have no hesitation slamming her against a wall until her eyes rolled back in her head. Vinny wasn't as subtle as her mother...or anyone. He preferred a more direct approach. Even Tom, who was considerably more civilized and modern, would not tolerate any disrespect of their mother.

Fortunately, there was little chance that either her mother or Gladys would tell Vinny. Neither of them wanted any more trouble, and when Vinny got mad, there was always trouble. He had a violent temper.

Anyway, it was better that they handle this situation themselves. Vinny was more concerned about his precious trucks and his own family these days. As for Tom, well, who knew where Tom was? He would go off for days then come back with presents and cash for all of them. Tom needed to settle down with his own family, she thought, and Vinny needs a boy in his. He and Gladys just had another child, another girl, Marie. That made two girls. Vinny needed sons to take the load off him one day.

It was hard to feel sorry for him, though. She could still remember the pain from the last time he had "roughed her up."

She spied Richie Capabianchi waiting on the corner and waved. He was handsome ... her mother called him "un truffatore" (a con man) just because he took numbers bets on the street.

She wasn't being fair; people did what they needed to do to survive these days. Running numbers for his father was Richie's niche. What did she expect him to do?

Richie was the reason for tonight's altercation. Ma had called him "un truffatore" again to her face and she had screamed back a baseless accusation against Vinny and Tom. Neither of them talked about their business and she had no idea how they earned their money, but they were both in with a rough crowd. It was easy to assume they were doing something wrong; neither was an altar boy.

Ma had gone nuts and started beating her with her wooden cooking spoon when she said it. No one, not even her could talk about her precious darlings that way.

The old woman was losing it! Joanne thought.

The truth was, she really did not have any idea of what her brothers were up to, but she knew it wasn't kosher. Tommy was certainly skating along the edge of the law and who knew what shady things Vinny was doing to keep his business afloat. To Ma, though, they were still her *angoli*, her angels, her bambini *preziosi*." To everyone else, they were "*uomini duri*" (hard men), not the kind of people you ever wanted to cross. She had the bruises to prove it.

"Where you been, Joanne? I was beginning to think you weren't coming," Richie said, annoyed.

"My mother was complaining about you again. She, ah, she doesn't think it's right that we go out together ... alone, you know?"

"She wants us to have a chaperone...?" Richie asked.

Joanne stayed quiet. Civita thought of him as a sleezy mafioso creep and didn't want him anywhere near her daughter, chaperoned or in any other way. Joanne took his hand and began to walk towards the drawbridge. They were going dancing ... in Boston.

The real danger for Richie wasn't her mother, she thought again, it was her brothers. If news of her mother's displeasure got back to either of them, Richie would end up with broken bones. Neither of them would tolerate any disrespect to her or to their sister. They were old school when it came to family.

"Let's not worry about my mother, okay, Richie. I just want to have fun tonight."

The boy smiled and slicked back his well-oiled hair. Joanne was desperate to get out from under the oppressive rule of her mother and brothers. Their wives might have to endure them, but she didn't. She was going to make her own living, to make her own life. She had already saved enough to pay for secretarial school. She was starting in the fall despite her mother's objections.

"Screw them all," she thought. "No one is going to stop me from doing what I want, no one."

Pearl Harbor (1941)

DiSilva Transportation continued to limp along during the Depression, but Civita had been right--starting a business on a shoestring in 1924 was nuts. Businesses were for Wall Street tycoons and big companies like the railroads; they were not for 16-year-old high-school dropouts from a Somerville tenement with two families to support.

But Vinny didn't care what anyone, even his mother, thought. He was happy to own his own company even if it was only marginally successful, even if he had to work like a dog to keep it. He pulled his collar higher around his face. Most mornings he would get up around 3:30 and drive one of his trucks to a rail yard or warehouse to be the first driver in line for a load. Sometimes, when loads were especially tough to find, he would sleep in the truck all night, starting the engine every couple of hours to keep from freezing.

Once he had loaded his first truck, he would drive another onto a new line. By the time his drivers arrived for work around 6:30, he would have a couple of trucks loaded and ready to roll. With luck, they could make it back in time for a second load. It meant 14-hour days, six days a week for him, but they were still alive.

When Tom was around, it was easier; but Tom had his own ideas of how to make it in life and his own plans for doing so. His help with the trucks was more out of love for his brother than any conviction that they could make anything out of their struggling business.

Vinny watched the night sky get lighter. He had four children now, three girls and a boy, and a fifth on the way; six mouths to feed and support. He also had his mother, now 63, and his sister Sandy, 17. Joanne was still living at home, but incredibly she was supporting herself with her secretarial jobs. As small as that contribution was, not having to worry about her was a big help.

He could see a light inside the yard. Someone from the warehouse was inside the building, probably stealing for the black market. Thieves, he thought, disgusted. He had plenty of opportunity to steal. The goods they carried were always getting "lost" or "damaged." He could be taking a small amount off the top every day without anyone ever noticing, but he just couldn't do it. People trusted him to carry their stuff; he couldn't live with himself if he threw that trust in their faces. It didn't pay the bills, but he was proud of his growing reputation for honesty and integrity.

He was also becoming known for fast delivery and reliability. The big bosses were noticing that his loads arrived on time and intact. It wasn't easy--many of the drivers he hired were lazy or crooked; the trucks broke down all the time; and increasing traffic made the poor roads around Boston impossible--but he worked at it and watched everything.

One day it would all pay off, he thought.

He shivered then started the engine for some heat. He hated to waste the gas but freezing to death wasn't going to help anyone. It was strangely cold weather for early December, but maybe it was just a cold snap. He took a sip of his now-cold coffee wishing for a better year in 1942.

"You need to be nicer to Ma, Joanne," Tom said sternly.

They were in a coffee shop on Boylston Street, just a few blocks from the law offices of Attorneys Francis E. Kelly and Elizabeth M. Foley, where Joanne now worked as a junior secretary. Kelly was a prominent Boston attorney, a former member of the Boston city Council, and the former Lt. Governor.

"I'm 23 years old, Tom. I want to have my own life. She stifles me, she stifles all of us."

Tom stared at his sister. She was beautiful, smart, and fearless. She would go far if she could only control her mouth. She and their mother fought all the time. Civita was not the same risk-taker who had sailed from Naples. (Who could blame her after the loss of two children and a husband?) Joanne, on the other hand, enjoyed taking chances. He knew their conflict would never be fully resolved.

"Listen, Vinny wanted me to talk to you, to get you to take it easy on her. She's been through a lot. You know that."

Joanne smiled at the comment. She had heard the same words for half her life.

"Vinny asks you to talk to me because he's just as bad with her as I am. I know you feel the same way, you just keep quiet. Anyway, who are you to give me advice on being 'good?' What do you do with your time? How do you earn your money? I'll bet if Ma knew what you were up to, if she knew what kind of a tyrant Vinny was, she wouldn't be so mad at me all the time."

Tom sat back. She was right--there was a double standard. He and Vinny could not do anything wrong in her eyes, but Joanne and Sandy—they couldn't do anything right. Ironically, the all three women still lived together in the same apartment; he and Vinny now had families and apartments of their own.

"I'll tell you what, Tom," Joanne said sweetly. "If you and Vinny get off my back, I won't move out. Believe me, having me as a buffer saves you two an infinite amount of grief

from Ma. In return, you two let me lead my own life without any of your sanctimonious sermons.

What do you say?"

Tom didn't know what to say. The little girl he and Vinny had raised had always been a handful. They had hoped when she grew up she would calm down, but just the opposite had happened. She was more of a hellion than ever. No one was ever going to control her.

"I don't know why you want to cause trouble, Jew-an-nee."

He always pronounced her name the Italian way when he wanted to be nice. Joanne stood up and put two dollars on the table, which paid for their lunch. She didn't say anything, just smiled and walked away. Tom knew she was serious. This was 1941 and they were both modern, progressive thinkers, but even in modern times, Italian women didn't lay down rules.

Joanne walked back to her office unbothered by the ultimatum from her brothers. Vinny had an awful temper and Tom could charm anyone, but she was determined to lead her own life. Growing up through the depression with all their tragedies, without a father had made her just as hard as either of them. Frank Kelly was waiting for her in the office.

"Joanne, I'm glad you're back. I need to meet Judge Abramson at the Parker House; can you help Elizabeth out with this Benevento case?"

She had no doubt that Attorney Kelly was going to the Parker House to rub elbows with important people, but she also knew that he was going to drink; he took advantage of every opportunity to politic and that meant heavy drinking. He was Irish after all, she thought, with all the anti-Irish prejudice her mother had taught her.

"Of course, Frank, I'll take care of it. Elizabeth is overwhelmed."

"Good girl. She'll be here if you need any help. I've got to go ... don't want to be late for the judge."

She smiled beautifully the way he liked, and he rushed out. He had hired her for her looks, but every day he became more dependent on her for her abilities. Elizabeth was a good lawyer, perhaps even a great one, but she was doing the work of two men given Frank's other interests.

Joanne didn't mind. She saw his predispositions as an opportunity. She picked up the case file and read Frank's brief margin notes. They outlined the work that she needed to do. She picked up the phone and called a doctor they used for car injuries then she called Mr. Benevento, the victim of the accident.

“Mr. Benevento, my name is Joanne DiSilva I work with Attorney Francis Kelly. We would like you to visit Dr. James O’Neil today at 3:00 p.m. I’ve already briefed the doctor’s assistant and arranged the appointment. He just needs to look at your shoulder ... write a report, you know?”

“No, tomorrow is no good,” she said tersely. “It needs to be today. The pain associated with the kind of injuries you’ve sustained is too excruciating for you to wait another day. I’ll call the claims adjuster tomorrow and see if we can get a settlement to you right away. The doctor’s report will be critical for that...”

“You steal from me...?”

Vinny stood behind the man with an air of disbelief as if he was truly surprised. He was always amazed at the lack of gratitude in some of the men he hired. For him, a good job was precious, something to be grateful for, to appreciate. He did not understand anyone who felt entitled to the job.

The man turned and partly closed the car’s trunk. He was a giant Armenian named Alexon. He just stared at him blankly for a moment then calmly closed the trunk lid.

“I’m not taking anything from you, Vinny. These boxes fell off the truck. We just need to report them missing. Maybe they were never on the truck in the first place ... it was a short count, you know. No one is going to know the difference. They lose boxes all the time. These could still be somewhere in the warehouse, no one knows.”

Alexon’s arms were as thick as most men’s legs. Vinny reached over and opened the truck. He was a foot shorter than the Armenian and weighed 50 pounds less. It didn’t matter.

“You’re fired,” Vinny said tightly, holding back. “Don’t ever let me see your face around here again. People use my trucks to haul their stuff because they know they can trust me. Now back off and get out of my sight.”

Vinny reached over and lifted a box out of the trunk. Confrontations were nothing new to him. He had been in countless arguments and fights since he started his business. Trucking had

always been a rough business; the emerging power of the unions had made it worse by emboldening those who were predisposed to steal or slack off. Alexon shoved Vinny away with one hand and pushed the trunk lid down with the other.

“Just report the boxes as missing,” he growled.

The drivers at the other end of the yard looked up. Most of them knew something bad was happening. Vinny never let anyone get away with anything and he didn't hesitate to use his fists when needed. A fistfight with this giant, however, was not going to work.

Vinny knew this instinctively, so he lowered his head and charged, driving Alexon into the building's brick wall. The man's head slammed against the bricks with a sickening thud and he collapsed. Vinny stood over him for a moment then retrieved the boxes and walked away.

The other drivers tried to revive the giant and when they could not, they called the police who called an ambulance. Alexon was in the hospital for a month. The incident would have been forgotten except the Armenian's brothers raised a stink.

The police arrested him for assault; Tom bailed him out that same day, but Vinny refused to plead guilty, claiming at his arraignment he had been within his rights--the man was stealing. No one, however, had witnessed or documented anything about the boxes in the trunk. A trial date was set for the next month, January 1942.

At 7:48 on the morning of December 7, 353 Japanese planes attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor Hawaii. The next day, President Roosevelt declared war. Three weeks later, Vinny DiSilva stood before Judge Grayson Abramson charged with first-degree assault; Attorney Francis E. Kelly, a prominent Massachusetts lawyer and Joanne DiSilva's boss, represented him.

"Sidebar, your honor...?" Kelly asked in his deep officious-sounding voice.

"Look, judge, he was attacked. The other guy, one of his drivers, was stealing from his trucks. Vinny has a family, a wife and four kids with another on the way. He also supports his widowed mother and two sisters, one of whom is my secretary, Joanne. I think you know her."

Abramson nodded solemnly mostly for the benefit of those in the court. He and Frank had already discussed a solution, but he was still hesitant. This was a bad time to be making deals.

"Can you see your way clear to giving him a break today?"

Abramson looked out over his glasses. Even though they were drinking buddies, Frank Kelly was a Democrat. A republican governor had appointed him to the bench.

"There's no evidence of him preventing a theft. Is that your defense...?"

"I'm hoping we won't need a defense, your Honor, that you will see this as a miscarriage of justice, that..."

Abramson held up his hand.

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“Look Frank, I know we talked about this, but there’s a man in the hospital with a fractured skull. The only evidence is that they got into a fight and your client pushed him into a brick wall. What do you want me to do--shake his hand and let him go? The best I can do is let him enlist if he’s willing...in the Marines. They are going to need tough guys like him who know how to handle logistics.”

Kelly looked offended. The choice was unfair, but it was better than a year in jail. Maybe this was the best answer; the war with the Japs would be over soon and...

“I need your help. Tom,” Vinny said. “I need you to take over for me until I finish my enlistment. The judge is being a hard ass. If I don’t enlist, I’ll be spending some time in jail. I’d rather spend my time in the Marines...”

Tom stared at him. He was earning a decent living and his work recruiting for the Teamsters was promising. He was already moving into the inner circles of Local 25. He also had another son on the way. He desperately wanted to refuse.

“I will probably lose the business if you don’t agree.”

“No pressure right...?” Tom said sullenly.

He had been helping Vinny since he was ten years old. Now, at 26, he was just beginning to hit his own stride. Vinny’s eight trucks didn’t make the company big enough to compete with the large truckers, but it was big enough to have the same kinds of problems ... especially with the unions, hiring, and maintenance. Vinny, always a penny-pincher; had pushed his fleet of ancient relics to their limits. The only thing keeping his business alive was his unblemished reputation for honesty.

He opened his mouth again to say no. Vinny’s baby face was set in the stoic expression he always adopted when asking someone for something. If he said no, Vinny would find another way. He had been making personal sacrifices for a long time to keep the business alive.

“Okay, Vin, I’ll do it, but while you’re gone, I want to be in charge. Things are changing fast: I don’t want to have to consult with you over every decision.”

Before Vinny could agree, Tom added, “And I want DiSilva to become a union shop. There’s no way we can prevent it, and it’s good for the men.”

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Vinny stared at him. He had actively resisted the Teamsters; the idea that someone else would be laying down rules for his employees (and for him) went against the grain. The steely look in Tom's eyes, however, told him the time had come to bend on this.

"Okay, Tom, but once you're running things, you're going to see that the unions are nothing but trouble...a lazy bunch of bums looking for a free ride."

Tom just smiled. Arguing with Vinny was a losing proposition in the best of times. They shook hands.

"I need to go, Ma..."

Civita stared at Vincent with cautious eyes. She still didn't speak much English—perhaps she had misunderstood him. It was better to stay quiet at times like this; Vinny was increasingly short tempered. Little wonder, she thought. With two families to support and a difficult business to run, he was constantly under pressure.

"Chi è questo, questi 'Marines?' Non capisco. (What is this, these "Marines?" I don't understand.)

"Sto parlando degli Stati Uniti Marines. C'è un modo, Ma. Devo andare. (I'm talking about the U.S. Marines. There's a war on, Ma. I have to go.)" He said impatiently.

She began to cry. He didn't yell at her very often and she didn't cry much, but they both knew that this was something important, something potentially devastating. Suddenly, the prospect of losing another child hit her and she began to shake her head as she cried. Tom, Joanne, and Sandy, sat quietly at the kitchen table, scared ... again.

"Perché, Vicente, perché hai bisogno di andare a combattere? Sei troppo vecchio; hai un lavoro, obblighi, familiari, impiegati ... non capisco. (Why, Vincent, why do you need to go and fight? You are too old; you have a business, a family, obligations, employees... I don't understand.)

He just stared as she continued to weep in the way only Italian mothers can weep. He did not intend to give her or anyone an explanation. Even Tom, his brother and closest confidant, didn't know the specifics behind his deal to enlist ... and why he had "selected" the Marines, but he could guess. Somehow, Vinny's deal to stay out of jail had gone terribly wrong.

During most of 1942, the Marines only took volunteers. After Pearl Harbor, everyone understood that joining the marines meant combat. Only the most aggressive and patriotic young men were signing up for this branch of the service. Vinny was neither of these. It was impossible

that he would voluntarily leave his family, his mother, and his even more precious DiSilva Transportation out of patriotism.

“Ma ... Tom si prenderà cura di te e delle ragazze. Gestirà gli affari mentre io me ne vado. (Ma ... Tom will take care of you and the girls. He will run the business while I’m gone.)”

Civita wiped her eyes then glanced across the room at a grim-faced Tom. He looked older than 27, more mature. They had all aged during the Depression.

She had no doubt that Tom was up to the task. He was just as smart, just as strong, and just as determined as his brother. He stood up and moved silently to his brother’s side. The message was clear--he supported him.

“Andrà tutto bene, Mama. Abbiamo tutto sotto controllo,” Tom said soothingly. (It will be okay, Mama. We have everything under control.)”

Joanne and Sandy looked at each other across the table. They were scared for Vinny and for themselves. Once again, the specter of loss hovered over the family. Vinny turned and walked out. He didn’t have much tolerance for debate.

The War Years (1941 - 1945)

Vinny stared into the thick jungle that made the road a tunnel. The Japs were sneaky bastards; they liked nothing better than to ambush his trucks when they were full. They were starving; American rations and supplies were like manna from heaven. He had argued for more protection, but the captain had said no.

“Just keep moving fast Vinny and you’ll be okay.”

Keep moving fast... The captain, a 26-year-old, just graduated from Princeton, didn’t know the first thing about trucking. They could only move as fast as the slowest truck in the convoy. Otherwise, they would just be handing the Japs a free meal, not to mention the lives of two good Marines.

They turned a corner and a fallen tree branch appeared suddenly in the middle of the road.

“Don’t stop,” Vinny growled at the driver, “go faster, it’s not big enough to stop us.”

The marine behind the wheel turned to him, scared. Vinny grabbed the shift lever.”

“Clutch...CLUTCH I said, you moron!”

The boy, who was barely 18, slammed his foot on the clutch and Vinny shifted into a lower gear then stomped his foot down hard on the boy’s foot which was hovering over the gas pedal. The sound of protesting gears and a roaring engine shook the trees. Suddenly, they hit the tree, the sound of tree limbs cracking echoed back down the line of trucks. They were through.

“When I tell ya to do somethin’, you follee my instructions,” he screamed at the frightened marine.

The boy nodded dumbly and concentrated on the road ahead.

Vinny sat back, relieved. If the Japs had been trying to stop them, they would have raked the first truck, theirs, with a machine gun. So either the tree fell by accident or they were too surprised to react. It didn’t matter, they were through and still alive. He sat back continuing to point his Thompson out the window.

For all the fear and stress of war, he rather enjoyed the Marines. For 17 years, he had been struggling to make a living, to take care of his family and his mother, to deal with all the troubles of running a trucking company with no capital and no help. He had been forced to put all of that aside for the war.

All he had to do these days was to stay alive and to keep these Marines supplied with what they needed to win. Compared to what he'd gone through in Somerville, the South Pacific was a piece of cake, almost a vacation.

Tom stared at the antique pickup that was pulling the jalopy of a truck into the yard. He could see the burned paint on the hood--another blown engine. The driver had pushed the machine beyond its limits, ignoring the warning signs. Engines don't just blow; they let you know a hundred different ways. A feeling a rage boiled up in his chest and suddenly he knew exactly how Vinny felt at times like this.

Business was booming, but with their antiquated equipment, they were failing to take advantage of it. Something needed to give. They had eight trucks, four were in decent shape; four were on their last legs. If he sold the four that were ailing, he might have enough for a down payment on one used vehicle in good condition.

Vinny would never approve, he thought. He didn't have the mindset to take a risk like this. He had worked his ass off to grow to eight trucks; he would not reduce his "fleet" for any reason; but Vinny wasn't here, he was. What difference would it make if he lost his brother's business because he was too cautious or too aggressive? He needed to do what he thought was right. He picked up the phone in the shed and dialed.

"Sal, it's Tom DiSilva. I got three working trucks I want to sell you and a fourth with a blown engine. Can you come over here and give me a price? If it's good enough, I want to buy one of your best used straight jobs, maybe something four or five years old."

There was a long silence on the line.

"Vinny's not going to like this, Tom. He uses a truck until the wheels come off then he buys new wheels and runs it for another hundred thousand miles. I got a good engine here, we can have your truck back on the road in a day if you want for a fraction of the cost."

Tom listened. He always listened, but like his brother, he knew what he wanted.

"Thanks Sal, but we're doing this. I can't compete in this market unless I have trucks I can depend on. We got the business now; it's time to show we're not just honest, but that we can deliver consistently. Vinny would agree if he were here."

There was a loud guffaw on the line. Vinny would never agree. He was tough and determined and relentless, but he was not a strategic thinker.

“Right... I’ll be over this afternoon. I wouldn’t want to be you if this doesn’t work. Vinny spent a long time getting every one of those trucks and getting the loads to make them profitable. If he comes back and finds that you messed that up, well, the words “raging bull” come to mind.

“I’ll see you this afternoon,” Tom said, replacing the receiver in its cradle.

He was right. Vinny would never forgive him if he screwed this up, but he knew it was the right thing to do.

“How do you know how he feels, Mr. Ashcroft?” Joanne said angrily.

John Ashcroft was the head of Mass Mutual’s adjustment department.

“Our client’s doctor says his back is screwed up. If you don’t want to settle, we’ll just take this to court and let a judge decide.”

“‘Our client’s doctor,’ gimme a break. This doctor is Frank’s personal shill. Where is Frank anyway,” Ashcroft asked angrily. “I thought I was meeting with him not with his frigging secretary.”

“Mr. Kelly is down the street meeting with Maury Tobin (the mayor of Boston). Mayor Tobin wants him to run his election campaign. He’s going to run for governor against Cahill you know.

“I can have them page him if you want...?”

“Where’s Miss Foley then?” Ashcroft sputtered. “What the hell is going on around here?”

“She’s in court. I can probably have her pulled out as well if you’re feeling slighted. I’m sure neither of them wants you to walk away mad at us.”

Ashcroft stared down at Joanne, his face a mask of rage. Joanne looked appropriately impressed but not intimidated. She had grown up with Vinny DiSilva; it would take a lot more than Ashcroft to intimidate her. Suddenly, there was a flash of cunning in his eyes.

“So, you have the authority to speak for them is that it...?”

She shrugged her shoulders--a dumb blond guarding the office.

“Look, ah, Miss, ah, DiSilva, we both know this injury is ... exaggerated. I’m sure Mr. Kelly doesn’t want me to prove this in court. There’s no way your client will walk away with \$100,000, I guarantee it. He will probably get nothing. If I walk out of here today that’s exactly what’s going to happen, and you will be responsible.”

Joanne looked appropriately cowed.

“I tell you what, I’ll approve a payment of \$12,500 right now and we can all walk away happy. Would Frank go along with that do you think?”

Joanne shrugged again. “I’m sure he wants to be fair to the insurance company, Mr. Ashcroft. I think he would probably be okay with a \$50,000 settlement.”

Ashcroft looked as if he had swallowed something vile. It would cost his company \$25,000 to hire an attorney and take this case to court. He would also have to leave a \$100,000 lawsuit on his open-case list perhaps for years.

“\$40,000,” he said with finality. “That’s what this case is worth to me. Get me a settlement letter by 5:00 and I’ll sign it.”

He began to move to the door.

“I can have it for you right now, John, if you care to wait,” she replied, moving quickly into Attorney Kelly’s office.

In a moment, she was back with a letter signed by Kelly and notarized by Elizabeth Foley.”

“You had this ready?” Ashcroft asked.

“Of course, Mr. Kelly prepared it before he left. I can notarize your signature if you want.”

Ashcroft knew she was lying about having the letter ready. She had just signed for both Kelly and Foley out of his sight. He stared at the signatures; they looked authentic. What did he care if they were or not? He had a notary’s signature and stamp and he had a settlement he could live with. He smiled broadly.

“That was smart of him to leave a letter,” Ashcroft said, signing his name below Kelly’s.

“Perhaps we can discuss my company’s other cases ... over lunch ... tomorrow?”

Joanne smiled sweetly. Her silver-blond hair and her amazing figure made her popular with the men who visited the office, but Ashcroft was special. He had the authority to settle cases and they had dozens of open cases with his company.

“That would be nice. Should I ask Frank to join us, Mr. Ashcroft?” she asked innocently.

“There’s no need to bother Frank. He’s so busy as you say with his, ah, political interests... It’s impossible to nail him down. I’m sure we can reach agreement on the issues ourselves then you can lobby for me with him. What do you say?”

Joanne nodded and smiled shyly. As she was discovering, a pretty face mixed with courage and competence was worth more, a lot more in the real world than a Suffolk Law School degree.

“I will look forward to our lunch, Joanne.”

She smiled again and crossed her legs. It would mean working all night to familiarize herself with the details of their cases, but that didn’t matter; settling a dozen Mass Mutual cases would make the firm a million dollars.

Sandy (Alessandra) smiled across the counter at the handsome soldier then blushed furiously. He saw her difficulty at once and came to her rescue.

“Big family...?”

“What...?” she said, surprised by the question.

“You come from a big Italian family with lots of older brothers and sisters, right?”

“Yes,” she answered, her blush turning into another smile.

“...Me too, two boys and two girls.”

Sandy smiled, “Yeah, one of my brother’s in the Marines, the other runs a trucking company.”

“Jim Caldarella,” the soldier said, extending his hand over the counter. “My real name is Vincent, but everybody calls me Jim ... I don’t know why.”

“Sandy,” she said, daringly reaching out her hand to his. “My real name is Alessandra, but I had it legally changed to Sandra ... easier to say, more American, you know.”

He smiled.

“That’s a good thing these days...being more American.”

They held hands a moment more than appropriate then she pulled away.

“Do you want these laundered or dry cleaned,” she asked, avoiding his eyes.

“Dry cleaned but only if you will go out with me tonight. I’m shipping out in two weeks...to Europe. It would be nice to have someone to eat with, you know?”

She stared at him dumbfounded. If Vincent was around, she would have refused out of hand, but he was 10,000 miles away in the Pacific. Tom was too busy with the trucks to keep a close eye on her. Joanne was ... who knew what Joanne was doing every night? Anyway, she reasoned, this was wartime; it was the patriotic duty of every young girl to be nice to the soldiers, especially one who was headed for the fight in Europe in a few days.

“My mother is very strict, she said, shocked that such bold words could be coming from her mouth. “I’d need to be home early,”

Jim smiled. He really was handsome.

“That’s not a problem. I’ll have you back whenever you need. I promise.”

By the time Jim Caldarella left for Europe, they were engaged. They married in June 1946. Vinny DiSilva, who had just returned from the Pacific war. gave the bride away.

Staff Sergeant Vinny DiSilva walked out of South Station and put on his sunglasses. He was trim and tanned, more so than he had ever been in his entire life ... or than he ever would be again. For all the horror of the Pacific War, he had thrived. He spied the taxi line and walked quickly to the first car.

“Somerville, take the Mystic River Drawbridge,” Vinny said to the cabbie.

“A Marine,” the driver said, “And a staff sergeant, we don’t get too many of those. Where did you serve?”

Vinny looked up at the man and removed his glasses. His eyes were hard. He wasn’t used to having conversations with subordinates. Even in the best of times, he wasn’t much of a talker and almost never engaged in casual chit-chat. Still, this was America, and the war was over.

“Take the drawbridge, okay?” he repeated, ignoring the question.

The driver nodded. He had seen that look before on returning soldiers. It wasn’t that they were unfriendly, they just had no talent for, or need for social graces. He turned back to the front and carefully pulled away from the curb.

Vinny knew his first stop should be home--his mother and sisters would be there waiting. They knew he was coming home today; they just didn’t know the exact date and time. However,

he did not intend to go home first, all he could think about since landing back in the states was Tom and the business.

They had corresponded some in the last three years, but it was mostly personal stuff. It was obvious that Tom was avoiding specifics about the company. He didn't push him; he was concentrating on staying alive. They had had an agreement, but now that he was back. He wasn't expecting much. All he wanted to do was to get DiSilva Trans back in the same shape he had left it.

The cab pulled up to a truck yard filled with a dozen straight-jobs and half a dozen tractors. He could see a line of empty trailers parked neatly in the back. Someone was huddled over a desk inside the shed. He paid the driver and stepped out dragging his duffle bag behind. It was Tom inside the shed.

Vinny stepped inside and stood in the doorway. Tom looked up at his brother and smiled. They were men now, with different personalities, different values, different in almost every way, but they were still brothers. Tom stood up and they embraced.

Vinny wasn't much for showing emotion, but he loved Tom. He told himself for the thousandth time that no matter how much Tom had screwed up the business, he would understand. He should not have left the kid with such responsibilities. It wasn't fair.

"Is Ma okay?" he asked, "...the girls?"

"I wrote you," Tom said.

In fact, most of what he wrote was about Ma and the girls.

"Joanne is doing okay. She works for Frank Kelly now; she's thick as thieves with them.

Sandy is engaged to a nice guy from New York; she wanted to wait for you before they married. Gladys and your kids are all okay. My family is okay. I have two boys and a girl now."

Vinny smiled and nodded. He already knew all this; they were both avoiding the question they needed to discuss.

"How's the business, Tom?"

Tom stepped back and faced his older brother. For all his loyalty to family and to him, Vinny had always been the all-powerful, intimidating older brother, but something was different now. Tom faced him as an equal.

"I made a few changes while you were gone, Vinny. It was necessary."

Vinny nodded and tried to smile. He almost did, but the trucks were too important to him. He would forgive Tom for a disaster, but he wouldn't be happy.

"I sold all the trucks you had, and I bought new ones. They are a lot more reliable and people appreciated that ... business has exploded in the last year or two. I had trouble getting good drivers, but I found them. I used most of the profits to buy even more new equipment."

Vinny turned towards the window and stared out at the yard.

"How many of these are ours," he asked, disappointed and trying to hide it.

"All of them, and we still don't have enough to handle the demand," Tom said quietly.

Vinny continued to stare out the window. Tom had doubled, perhaps tripled the fleet he had left him, and they were better trucks. He had always known his brother was smart and capable, but he had never given him much of a chance to show it. He turned back to him.

"We're partners now, right Tom...equal partners?" Vinny asked.

Tom turned to him. There had never been anything legal or formal about Vinny asking him to run the business. Vinny could have just said "thanks" and resumed his place as owner.

"We're going to need a garage and a bigger lot," Tom said quietly. "A lot of men will be looking for jobs next year. There are going to be plenty of good drivers around."

Vinny nodded. They had never spoken as equals before. This was something he was going to have to get used to.

"The unions are going to be a problem," he added.

"I thought you were tight with the Local," Vinny said, grinning.

"I am, that's why I'm telling you this. We can grow if we can figure a way to work with them. Otherwise, it will just be another war for you to fight."

"That will be your department," Vinny said taking his brother's hand. "I'll handle the men and the day-to-day operation; you deal with the politics and growing the business."

Tom nodded. Every good partnership came with a sensible distribution of responsibility. He was the right person to handle the unions and the clients. Vinny was the right brother to handle the drivers and the enormous day-to-day problems of running a trucking company. Their responsibilities would overlap of course, but they both knew this was clearly a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

Big Business

“Can you handle our coffee and tea, Tom? Our losses from damage are huge. We’re also having trouble finding people to haul our cans—tomatoes, sardines, pineapple, oranges...tuna, the loose stuff.”

Harvey Cohen was doing the talking for First National Stores (FNS). His colleagues Joe Laffey and Charlie Arbing sat silent, watching. Tom stared back at them across the table. He knew this meeting was about more than a few bags of coffee.

Coffee and tea arrived at the Boston piers in hundred-pound bags. Men moved them around and loaded them onto trucks by hand using hooks. It was backbreaking work and the turnover in drivers was enormous. The canned stuff was also difficult to handle, especially the tomatoes. They came in 40-pound boxes; after loading 200 of these onto a truck, most men were physically finished for the day.

“No problem, Harvey,” Tom answered.

This was the break he and Vinny had been waiting for. FNS ran the largest chain of supermarkets in New England. A long-term contract with them meant big business for DiSilva Trans, hundreds of trucks and drivers rather than dozens.

There had to be a catch. He waited for the other shoe to drop.

“You will need to work something out with Market Express and the Local,” Cohen added, almost as an afterthought.

Tom nodded. This was the catch. Market Express handled this business for FNS and Harvey Cohen couldn’t afford to alienate them all at once; nor could DiSilva Transportation take on so much new business so quickly. They needed someone to work out a solution and they had selected him.

“No problem, Harvey,” Tom repeated more forcefully.

Otis Young, the working foreman of Market Express, picked the meat out of lobster claw. Jimmy’s Harborside Restaurant was a favorite for truckers in the early-50s before it began to cater to the carriage trade.

“What’s up, Tom? I know Jimmy gives you a break here, but lobster is still two-bucks a pound. This is more than a social call.”

(Tom was friends with Jimmy Doulas, formerly Demetrious Christodoulas, the owner of the Harborside Restaurant.)

“I heard you were putting a group together to buy Market Express. I got a different proposition for you,” Tom said directly.

“How do you hear that?” Otis said with angry eyes, wiping his hands on his napkin.

Tom shrugged. Harvey Cohen wanted him to fix the problem FNS was having with Market Express, but he also expected him to keep his mouth shut about who was behind the move.

“I want Market Express and DiSilva Transportation to merge, Otis, as part of a new company called Webster Trucking. Together we can handle everything First National throws at us. On our own, nether of us can succeed with their business and they will just drift towards one of the big national carriers.”

“Cohen sent you, right?” Otis asked. “He doesn’t think we can do the job alone, right?”

“Can you...?” Tom asked bluntly, ignoring the question.

Otis stared at him for a moment. The owners of Market Express were tired of the trucking business. They were willing to sell out to him now that they were on the ropes, but if they knew DiSilva was proposing a merger, that deal would be dead. They would go for a killing direct to DiSilva.

“You know the owners are selling at a fire-sale price, Tom; why not just go to them? You’ll get the company for a lot less money.”

Tom picked up a claw and broke it in half not worrying about the juice slurping over his hands.

“I’m looking for a partner, Otis. Someone the men trust, someone they will follow. If I just wanted more trucks, I’d go over to Superior and buy them.”

Otis stared at him for a long time then nodded. Tom held out his hand and the other man gripped it unworried about the lobster juice. Their partnership would last 50 years until First National Stores went out of business. It would also produce one of the largest privately-owned trucking companies in New England.

Frankie Piazza stood in the hallway behind the DiSilva drivers. He knew them all—Coco Johnson, Bill Loveless, Frank Hazelton, Walter McBay, John “Baldy” Latta (the shop steward), Frank Sullivan, Tommy O’Connell, Tom Rose, Buster Thompson, Joe Senesi, Jackie Silkes—and he was friends with most. Many times, he had considered selling his truck and joining DiSilva, but he couldn’t shake the idea of starting his own trucking business.

Frankie was a lot like Vinny when Vinny started DiSilva Trans—young, strong, desperate, ambitious, hard-working. He even looked like him.

“OKAY, shut the hell up,” Vinny said. “Who wants a load of sardines coming off the pier for the packing house in Framingham?”

The silence in the hallway was deafening. Fish to Framingham was just about the worst possible load they carried. The fish was packed in wire-and-wood crates that were heavy and hard to handle. The wire cut hands and arms even with gloves. The boxes needed to be filled with ice which made them even heavier. The slick-when-wet truck floor was also dangerous.

And the smell... By the time the end of the day rolled around, the truck, the driver, and anything else that was in the vicinity would smell like a garbage can full of rotting fish.

Vinny glowered at the drivers. Most of these men had been with DiSilva for years, but they had all joined the Teamsters, Local 25. They had no choice, DiSilva was a union shop. Despite this, Vinny saw their silence as an act of disloyalty, a personal affront to him.

He turned to the biggest man in the crowd and opened his mouth to order him to take the load. Vinny seemed to find pleasure in picking out the biggest in a crowd and challenging him. Frankie knew there would be trouble.

“I’ll take it, Vinny,” he said easily.

Vinny turned towards him and scowled. It was almost as if he had been looking forward to another confrontation. Normally, loads went to company drivers first then to the subcontractors, the “ten-percenters.” Today, with a load of sardines in the offing, no one complained.

Frankie could see the pile of load sheets on the shelf. Vinny had started with the fish, the most difficult load in the pile.

“Okay, you take it,” Vinny muttered. He picked up the stack of load sheets and began to shove them rudely at the drivers. “Here...here take this. You, take this and get back here by Noon for another load... Here, you, get the hell out...”

The drivers left quickly once they had their loads and truck assignments. Frankie stood back waiting. He wasn’t looking forward to today’s job, but he didn’t want to be part of another “Vinny incident.” The guy was pushing 50--too old to be blowing his top every morning.

“Come inside, Frankie, I wanna talk to you.” Vinny said.

Bob Stocki, his son-in-law, picked up his gloves and squeezed past the two men. Bob was a part-time bookkeeper, office manager, and driver. Today, he would handle the overflow in the work.

“Frankie, I want you to come and work for me. I need guys who want to work. The rest of these bums are just looking for an easy buck. You’re different; you’re like me; you appreciate the work.”

Piazza stared at him. They weren't friends exactly, more like kindred spirits.

"Vinny, most of these guys have been with you for years. They break their backs for you every day. They didn't have any choice but to join the union if they want to drive. You know this. Even your own kids need to join the union to drive. That's just the way it is."

Vinny stared at him, his eyes blazing. He hated the unions; they were bloodsuckers, taking his money without offering anything in return except complaints and trouble. He much preferred the ten-percenters like Frankie; they worked hard for their money and didn't have overblown expectations like health insurance and pensions.

"I would love to fire all of them and just use you guys," Vinny said. "I want people around me who want to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Is that too much to ask? With all these fringing bloodsuckers on the union payroll, it's like having to pay two men to get one day's work. It's frigging communism."

Frankie smiled then rolled up his load sheet and nodded. Vinny opened his mouth he had something more to say.

"Listen, you're like me, Frankie, a bull when it comes to work. I'll try to help you out as much as I can, but what you really need is your own Tom DiSilva--you know, someone who can handle the business stuff. Tom's not tough enough on the men, but he's smarter than we are; he knows how to make things happen, how to get people to do what he needs them to do without giving them a kick in the ass. That's what you need. I'm tellin' ya."

"You're right, Vinny. Tom is not going to mix it up with the drivers over a load of fish, but this business also need people like us. Who else could handle the load planning or the mechanical breakdowns; who else would make such good use of the ten-percenters? As far as I know, DiSilva is the first trucking business using owner-operators like me. It was a brilliant idea; it lets you operate like a union shop and still have the flexibility of outsourcing the work when you need."

Vinny nodded. He appreciated complements, unfortunately, not many people were brave enough to give them to him.

"I'd say the big-picture guys like Tom wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for people like us," Frankie continued.

Vinny stared at him for a moment.

"Yeah, maybe," Vinny answered, "Anyway, he's the kind of guy you need to grow a business, smart ... you know?"

"The Swede" swaggered confidently towards the office surrounded by a gaggle of drivers, all union members. Vinny DiSilva watched them approach from his desk.

The DiSilva drivers met every morning in Dunkin Donuts then walked together to the garage to get their day's assignments from Vinny. It was safer to approach Vinny in a group. No one ever knew what was going to happen with him, like this morning.

The heavy metal door banged as Vinny rushed out into the truck yard literally foaming at the mouth. He was like a battleship bent on destruction.

"Get the f**k out of here you f**king piece of s**t and don't ever come back."

The Swede (Vinny's derisive nickname for the man) was a foot taller and a hundred pounds heavier. He stood rooted to the ground like a statue as Vinny charged. Suddenly, Vinny was throwing roundhouse punches, pummeling his arms. The big man stood still; he seemed overwhelmed and confused by the blows. The other driver stood in shock off to the side, paralyzed. Finally, the Swede raised his arms to fight back.

The rumble of heavy footsteps was like distant thunder as Tom ran down the stairs. Once again, the heavy office door slammed, shocking the crowd a second time. Tom ran to his brother's side with blood in his eyes. He didn't know the reason for the fight all he knew was that Vinny needed his help. No one was going to hit him while he was around.

In a keystone cops-like parody, Tom delivered a swift kick to the Swede's ass. Now both Vinny and Tom were beating him. It was too much, and the Swede turned and ran shouting about union rules and the police.

Tom turned towards Vinny shaking his head. The reason for the altercation was unimportant; all that mattered was that once again, Vinny's temper had put them in hot water with the union. Vinny turned towards the stunned pack drivers and threw the load sheets in their faces. Papers flew over the yard.

"You are all a bunch of f**king bloodsuckers," he snarled. "Now get the f**k out of my sight," he added, turning back towards the office.

Tom waited until the door slammed again then turned to the drivers.

"Just distribute the loads among yourself," he said evenly. "Vinny's clearly having a bad day."

Baldy Latta stepped and squared off against Tom.

"What's his problem, Tom? The least little issue and he comes down on us like a ton of bricks. This isn't the frigging Marines. The Swede is going to make a big deal out of this...so damned unnecessary."

"He doesn't like unions or union rules, Baldy," Tom said lamely. "The Swede takes every sick day he's entitled to whether he's sick or not. Vinny can't stomach that kind of thing."

“Well, he better get used to it ‘cause the union is here to stay. You know this, Tom. Can’t you talk to him, make him understand?”

Tom smiled and shook his head. He knew Vinny wasn’t going to change; for better or worse, he was who he was. Ironically, he thought, Vinny was just the kind of man you wanted on your side when things were going badly and just the kind you wanted to forget when they weren’t.

“He’s the boss, Baldy. It’s hard to convince the boss that he’s wrong.”

“Sure...”

Joanne pointed her pink Eldorado convertible into the space and turned off the engine. She had parked kitty-corner in a parallel space; the car’s rear end was at least a foot from the curb. It didn’t matter, the state-house insignia on her license plate kept her ticket-free in Boston.

Frank Kelly, now Massachusetts Attorney General, and those around him were immune to most violations of the law.

She ran Kelly’s state-house office and his 11 Beacon Street law office. No one cared that there might be a conflict of interest between the two; no one cared that Elizabeth Foley continued as Kelly’s courtroom cutout; and no one cared that Joanne still negotiated most of the insurance torts at the same time she managed the AG’s day-to-day business.

Frank didn’t really participate actively either in the AG’s business or the law office.

When he wasn’t at the Parker House drinking with his friends, he was at the local office of the “Committee for a Massachusetts Lottery.” As the founder and chief spokesperson, he hoped to use the lottery as a springboard into the governor’s mansion.

A dozen heads turned as she walked up the state house steps. She knew they were watching her and she enjoyed it. She was the wild one in the family. She loved her brothers and her sister, but they had aligned themselves emotionally with the past. She was the future. She would ride the Democratic Party bandwagon with Kelly right into the governor's mansion or into the White House with Jack Kennedy.

She had met Jack several times at party functions and found him charming, the life of the party. The one thing she worried about was his youth--Frank was pushing 60 and Kennedy was only in his mid-forties. When it was Kennedy’s time to fly, would he still want aging politicians like Kelly around. Kelly was part of the old Saltonstall and O’Neil generation.

Whatever she thought, politics certainly makes strange bedfellows. There was a note on her desk to call Tom.

(Frank Kelly never ran successfully for governor. However, Massachusetts enacted the

lottery he pushed for decades in 1971. Today, it is a major source of funding for many states.)

“What’s up, Tom?” she said.

“I need you to call the MDC (Metropolitan District Commission) commissioner and tell him to back off. The Local is pressuring the MDC cops to give tickets to any company that pushes back on the new union contract. The violations are all bullshit, but they take a lot of time to resolve.”

“I can’t do that, Tom,” Joanne answered quietly. “The AG has no authority over the MDC. Frank would be furious if he found out. He’s trying to play nice with the Kennedy’s right now and he doesn’t want...”

“What’s he going to do ... fire you? Aren’t you bringing them a fortune in settlements you arrange with the insurance companies? If Kelly lost you, the firm would be bankrupt in a year the way he spends money.

“I hear he’s buying a new 45-foot yacht by the way ... he’s quite a genius to afford a new yacht every few years on a public servant’s salary.”

Joanne was silent. There was no percentage in arguing with Tom. He never asked for a favor unless it was important and, when he did ask, he never let go. More importantly, he was asking for Vinny. They both knew without saying that they owed Vinny ... now it was time to pay him back.

“Okay, I’ll give it a try.”

“Thanks.”

“By the way, I’m looking at a house in Watertown on Francis Street. It’s a two-family about a mile from Lovell Road. (Vincent had recently moved his family from Somerville to Lovell Road in Watertown.) Sandy and Jim are also looking in Watertown on Darch Road. I was thinking that you and Ma could take the first floor on Francis Street. It’s a big place. There’s shopping within walking distance and an Italian bakery, Steve and Vin’s, around the corner.”

Joanne hesitated for a moment. Ironically, for all her sophistication, she still lived at home with her mother. She was the wildest of the four DiSilva kids and her mother’s nemeses. If she moved out, the old lady would be alone. Why go, she reasoned; she had no plans to marry and she didn’t really need her own apartment to have the lifestyle she wanted.

“I’ll mention it to Ma. Maybe we can stop by and look at it on Sunday.”

“...And you’ll take care of the other thing ...today, right?”

“I will, Tom.”

A Trucking Empire

“The brewer’s picket line is blocking the entrance,” Little Tommy said quietly, trying to emulate his father’s outward calm.

The brewers and the teamsters were in a jurisdictional dispute that had DiSilva’s customer, United Liquors, trapped in the middle. The union was not allowing United to transport their product to their stores. The fight had escalated from shouted epithets and threats to broken windows to rock throwing. The only time there was relative calm was when the police stood between the antagonists. Tom had tried to mediate the dispute, but there was no room for compromise on either side.

"We can't get a single truck out...," Little Tom continued.

Big Tom (DiSilva) stared at his son with a blank expression as everyone in the room waited. Tom had a habit of pausing in the middle of a crisis. He had mastered the trick while Vinny was away. It forced him to think through his actions, to weigh consequences and make deliberate decisions. It was the exact opposite of Vinny's behavior; he reacted instantly and instinctively to most crises.

“Ray Tye is a friend of ours and these assholes are going to break his company,” Tom said quietly, thinking out loud. “Is that okay with us? Should we just let it happen?”

Little Tommy just stared. Getting in the middle of a fight between two unions was sure to result in both of them coming down hard on DiSilva Trans.

“Maybe we should just call the cops again...” he said.

Big Tom shook his head then turned towards the milling drivers.

“You men get in your trucks, lock the doors, and follow me,” he ordered.

The men stood still. It was serious business to break through a picket line. Finally, Little Tommy moved out and a dozen men followed him to their trucks. The brewers watched angrily from the sidewalk.

Big Tom turned and climbed into the cab of a nearby snowplow. In seconds, a conga line of trucks had formed behind him. Slowly, he drove through the picket line, using the snowplow to push the furious, club-wielding strikers to the side. He had tried negotiation and diplomacy; he had tried to cajole the principals into a settlement, but no one wanted to cooperate. Someone needed to do something.

There were many broken windows and dented fenders, but the loaded trucks made it to the street and delivered their loads. The next day there was an angry meeting of the principals followed by the restarting of negotiations, which eventually resulted in several important work rules being.

The next day, the Local 25 union rep called on him to restart negotiations. The strike was over.

Epilogue

Although everyone respected and some even loved Vinny DiSilva, he continued to have little tolerance for those he called "bums," people he defined as expecting "something for nothing;" who tried to coast through life. He saw them as a threat—as crooks, cheats, con-men, or pretenders trying to take advantage of him.

For him, labor unions, government regulators, the police, and many other institutions were organizations intent on taking from him what he had earned.

He mellowed some with age, but Vinny's rigid view of the world, formed during the dual crises of family tragedy and the Depression, didn't change much. It was during this time that everyone, admirers and enemies, began to refer to him as "the Smiler" -- a sarcastic reference to the fact that he hardly ever smiled. It was not an affectionate nickname; it was more of a title.

Tom DiSilva was just the opposite. He was an intellectual—well-spoken, reasonable, professional, and a diplomat—all the things Vinny was not; and, unlike his brother, he made friends easily. He was also physically strong, tough, and fiercely loyal to his family, but unlike Vinny, he was a gentleman. It was as if the brothers had agreed that Vinny would be the bad-cop in life and Tom would be the good. This good cop-bad cop partnership was no act. It was the natural evolution of their personalities. Their shared family experience and their unfailing obligation to each other made them inseparable and formidable.

In short, everyone feared Vinny and loved Tom. They were the ultimate odd couple. A perfect example of the synergy of opposites. It was a partnership that was well-suited to the challenges of the time.

For all of Vinny's outrageous behavior, DiSilva Trucking (a catch-all name for the many companies he and Tom started) was well run. their growing customers (mostly food chains opening new supermarkets everywhere) valued the reputation they had built in the 1940s for reliability, honesty, and efficiency. Through the 2nd half of the century, they worked tirelessly to expand into the trucking empire it became.

During this time, the brothers also became known for their innovations. For example, they introduced the use of Owner/Operators to supplement their work force; they implemented the use of pallets at their work sites which changed the way products were handled; they applied the shipping industry's "Stevedore" model of labor to the trucking industry resulting in the practice of labor leasing, now known as Professional Employment Organization; they linked these with management and human resource components to create an integrated supply-chain solution, which today is known as "Dedicated Logistics."

Vinny died in 1995 at age 86; Tom died in 2005 at age 88; and Joanne died in 2017 at age 99. The DiSilva Companies continue to grow and flourish today, providing a full range of modern, dedicated logistical services to customers.

The Second Half (1950 – 2000)

By Jim DiSilva

DiSilva Transportation was founded in 1924. This is a history of the company and the people who made it a success.

DiSilva Trans post war growth was modest, concentrated on First National Stores (FNS) and pier work. The company was always a well-run profitable business and as the less well-run one-, two-, or three-truck operations folded, we were there to accept the business. Our big customers were also growing.

All the imports into Boston were part loose freight. This was years before containers. We handled most of the canned goods for Stop & Shop and FNS. Italian tomatoes, sardines, canned pineapple, mandarin oranges and tuna fish were some of the commodities. FNS had a manufacturing component and we handled bags of coffee and chests of tea. We spent a significant part of our workweek on the Boston waterfront.

The need to find people willing to do this very physical job was always present. Our solution was to employ drivers who owned their own trucks, but didn't have customers or the authority needed to transport certain goods. DiSilva Trans made a deal with these men to work for us and we would give them 90% of the revenue. They were all non-union and had a different overhead structure than our company drivers and trucks, so the deal worked for them. We referred to them as "10 Percenters." They eventually became known as owner-operators and to the best of our knowledge were the first owner-operators in the country. We also probably invented "backhands" in which drivers called Vincent for work after their delivery! He reimbursed them daily for phone calls.

DiSilva Trans consisted of a hard-working group of company drivers and our owner-operators. This makeup enabled us to have the legitimacy and appearance of a union carrier, but also have the flexibility to do odd jobs. Local 25's cost structure was very competitive versus other union carriers, but to do the unusual things we did it would have been economically impossible.

Most of the grocery chains used DiSilva Trans., several wholesale groups and a few manufacturing plants also employed us, not only for their normal business, but also for the unusual events.

A few unusual events... Our Owner-Operators would cross a picket line. Some of them seemed to enjoy the adventure. Need a freight car unloaded quickly in Albany, Athol, or Allston? We could accomplish that. Need a regular team to unload hanging meat? We had the manpower to do it. Have a weekend or emergency shipment? Not a problem. Everyone in this area knew that somehow, someway DiSilva Trans would get your special job done. This certainly spurred our growth. We added American Sugar, Revere Sugar, and Gillette to our growing steady-customer base.

Gillette Blades was our first big non-grocery chain customer. McSweeney Trucking, an in-house trucking company that had serviced them since their beginning, was from South Boston and had 10 to 12 straight jobs (box trucks), but refused to make the change to tractor-trailers. We had made this change years before and eventually DiSilva Trans replaced McSweeney. Our

initial responsibility was to make certain that Gillette's production lines were always supplied with raw materials to prevent manufacturing shutdowns. Their lines included the high value blade production, Foamy, Right Guard, and after-shave lotions. When Gillette outgrew the South Boston facility, they built a one-million square foot manufacturing and distribution facility in Andover, Mass. We also supplied that facility.

One of the major responsibilities was getting the high value blades from South Boston to Andover to be shipped worldwide. Two or Three times a day we conveyed the blades from South Boston to Andover. Each trailer had a retail value of two- to three-million dollars. These extraordinary values led to some very unusual circumstances.

First, during the early 70's, there was a very active hijacking gang operating in New England and the police and FBI were certain we would be targeted. However, nobody ever bothered our trucks, a very graphic example of the value of using DiSilva Trans and of having Tom DiSilva as a friend.

Another interesting bit of our history was honesty. Over the 50 years of our relationship we never had an employee disciplined for stealing Gillette products. Several companies that Gillette employed were dismissed for honesty issues. We always had good, honest drivers we could trust.

A third Gillette story was the insurance we carried to haul the high value blade loads. Our cargo insurance was designed for these shipments. First, we had policies on a per trip basis if we did nine trips in a day the premium was more than if we did eight. These premiums were also extremely high based on value. But the strange fact was the policy was based on the retail value of the product not the cost of the product. Gillette was willing to compensate us and pay the extra insurance premiums for this "retail value" because they did not want to divulge what it cost to make the blades and razors.

Early Years 50s-60s

As Tom and Vincent tried to grow their business they both realized that reliability was key. If someone needed a load delivered DiSilva Trans had to provide that service or perish. They were hindered somewhat by the Local 25 contract, but not that dramatically because most trucks on the road were signed to a Teamster contract and 100% of the chain and wholesale groups were in the union.

DiSilva Trans maintained a very solid core of company drivers. Coco Johnson, Bill Loveless, Frank Hagelton, Walter McBay, John “Baldy” Latta our Steward, Frank Sullivan, O’Connell, Tom Rose, Buster Thompson, Joe Senesi, Jackie Silkes and many more.

One of the amazing groups of people behind DiSilva’s success was our mechanics and part suppliers. DiSilva ran a very aged fleet that required constant attention. Our night guy was Dominic DiBenevento and our day-mechanic was Al Menns. Al could find any part at the many junkyards in Chelsea and Everett and he was insane when towing you home from a serious breakdown. I never recall us using an outside tow company either Al Menns or Tom DiSilva showed up with our specially made tow bar or a chain. Disney could never make a ride as harrowing as being towed home by either Al or my father.

Equally as fascinating was when our night mechanic, Dom, got an aging truck that was towed into Somerville fixed and on the road by 8:00 a.m. Dom was truly a magician. He would get his parts from “Broadway Charlie” at Broadway Brake in Somerville and repair these trucks time after time. My uncle, Charlie O’Neil, worked as a night dispatcher/watchman for a couple of months while he was on I.A. and he named Dominic, Houdini. Not only did the name stick, but also it was accurate.

The relationship between Broadway Brake and DiSilva Transportation probably should be cited in Harvard Business School textbooks. Day and night, we would get parts from Broadway Brake’s facility and we would accumulate a stack of unpaid green invoices that Vincent would closely check. With the age of our fleet the pile of invoices grew rapidly. About once every three or four weeks, Broadway Charlie and Vincent would meet on a Saturday and settle what was owed. I am convinced Vincent paid by the pound of invoices. I am also convinced there was a bottle scotch involved on those Saturdays. It is a tribute to the two of them and the times that we never stopped doing business and still do business with Charlie’s son, Phil.

Produce Market

A part of the early DiSilva Transportation makeup was produce work. Since we always were involved with chain stores we always hauled produce. The next time you go to Faneuil Hall, picture imagine the traffic, chaos, and confusion of the local restaurants, bars and stores supplying the produce used by Boston's merchants. The system was amazing--box trucks, push carts, horses, and buggies would squeeze into the very narrow spaces. Someone picking up an order with a truck either waited or got their two-wheeler and walked back and forth through the chaos. When these merchants finally moved to a regular dock and platform operation in the mid-50s, it was an amazing difference.

During this time, the First Nation Stores' produce was being shuttled from the vendors by a company called Market Express. They had four or five box-trucks and made multiple trips and pickups every day. They had a very capable dependable group of produce drivers led by their working foreman, Otis Young. Eventually the owner wanted to sell to Otis and Otis and Tom founded an alliance which they called Webster Trucking, which became the produce carrier for F.N.S. This lasted for probably 45-50 years until FNS closed their last operations in New England at Windsor Locks, Connecticut, awarding C&S their entire distribution operation. We, in fact, are still doing this work from Chelsea, Massachusetts to C&S Produce Distribution in North Hatfield, Massachusetts.

While all this was going on, DiSilva Trans. became the exclusive produce company for Star Market, which at its peak was 20 to 30 trailers per day. This originally was Chelsea to Watertown, Massachusetts, but when Star Market expanded to a new facility in Norwood, Mass., we followed.

Over the years we became the back-up emergency carrier for Purity Supreme, the sole carrier for James Ferrara Wholesale Grocers, Stop & Shop, and many others. One of the more interesting produce chapters was Vincent buying AAA Produce Packing from Chuck Gilfenbain. AAA was a regional packer of mostly potatoes and oranges. I don't think anyone is certain of how and why this took place, but it proved to be a very well run and profitable business for Vincent's family. They eventually sold it to Jim Cipriano and his family, who are a very significant packer in the Northeast. They pack under the Arrow and Gold Bell labels and I believe they still pack under the DiSilva Fruit Company label.

To this day DiSilva Transportation still has a presence in the produce world. We shuttle for C&S and Stop & Shop and still deliver produce trailers from the rail yards for a number of West Coast shippers.

We also operated produce railroad operations for three Stop & Shop districts, which lasted many years.

First, as a vendor to Stop & Shop we used our straight jobs to deliver directly to their stores. Every Monday in the winter, a train of potato ten or so cars arrived from Maine and we direct-store-delivered the potatoes. We two-wheeled them from the freight car into the straight jobs. It was efficient and saved handling and costs for the warehouse.

Second, watermelons in freight cars covered in soot from the Southern stables. This was our summer Monday morning project. It usually lasted around 6-8 weeks surrounding the 4th of July. The trains would be set in the South Bay Rail facility and we would unload maybe 10-12 cars per day into mostly straight trucks. Occasionally, a store sale or holiday would call for trailers. This was perhaps the most difficult, dirty, and nasty work we ever did. The rail was strictly coal driven at this time and when the cars arrived the watermelons has a layer of black soot on them. They were individually packed in straw and we pitched them along a chain of men and restacked them in straw in the trucks. If it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger comes to mind.

The third straight-car operation was to combine several types of Stop & Shop fruit from a series of cars onto our trucks and deliver directly to the stores. We would have a variety of products depending on what items Stop & Shop had on sale. Strawberries always seemed to be on the list, but apples, broccoli, carrots, etc. all were included. When the railroad was on time and being cooperative this was a very efficient cost saving operation. One of the best people I knew was Sal Tollo, who was in traffic and in charge of this operation. One morning when the railroad was not cooperating Sal left his office and visited about 15 of us truck drivers waiting for the correct cars. After a 15 minute lecture on railroad punctuality Sal told everyone to "synchronize their watches." Everyone waited until Sal walked away and then burst into laughter that lasted years. Any conversation about time no matter what customer, what mode of transportation, etc. someone would reference "synchronize your watches" with a big grin. Sal never knew of this contribution to our history.

Three Strikes

As referenced earlier, DiSilva Transportation always seemed to be getting involved in strikes; three stand out. One was a United Food and Commercial Workers strike that lasted from Mother's day to Father's day. This strike was against First National Store Somerville's store and completely shut it down. This was in the 70's. FNS decided to keep the larger stores open and DiSilva employees and owner operators delivered product directly from a very large and varied group of both perishable and non-perishable suppliers. This was probably the catalyst for FNS becoming second to Stop & Shop in the Boston market. Shoppers shifted their alliances and after six full weeks plus time to restock and reacquire customers, it was almost impossible to recapture the market share.

The second strike worth noting was in the early 1980's involving Stop & Shop and 443 at their North Haven Distribution Center. Stop & Shop had a warehouse full of perishable goods and asked us to move them out. They also asked a New York group to help, but these guys never left their motel rooms and were of no help. Our group of guys consisted of 3 segments. We had people from our Somerville drivers, a group from our C&S operations and about 15 drivers from a labor replacement company in Boston run by a local group headed by Bob Katz.

The Bob Katz replacement drivers were all Boston guys and had a special outfit. They all had black t-shirts with the Teamster logo circled in red and a red line going through the logo, which was different enough if you are going through a Teamster picket line, but the real dazzle was all the shirts had "Scabs R Us" in bold letters on the back.

We assembled at about 2 A.M. in the Yalesville Inn, off Rt. 91 South in Wallingford. I gave the usual set of instructions: No contact, keep moving, keep quiet, and be safe. We had a series of vans that we used to transport drivers. The product and the tractors for us to use were on the Stop & Shop complex property in North Haven. We arrived in North Haven and were greeted by every union member in Connecticut. I was in the front van and I never heard that many angry people in my life. However, the Teamsters at some point must have offended the North Haven Police because the North Haven Police truly protected our guys and prevented the warehouseman from getting themselves hurt.

This was the key to us being able to do what Stop & Shop wanted. It took a couple of days to empty the warehouse and once that was accomplished, the excitement was over. We were supplying these stores with a combination of our C&S drivers from Brattleboro, Vermont and our owner operators from Somerville. On Saturday that same week they had an agreement and the warehouse reopened and the peace was restored. However, as always, there were no winners. The accepted deal was five or ten cents more than the original offer and the company, between lost sales and the excess costs, certainly would never recoup their expenses. At an additional five to ten cents an hour the strikers never made up their lost wages either.

The third strike in the early to mid-1960's, was between two unions, Teamsters vs. Brewers Union. I am not even sure it can be classified as a strike because it involved a Teamster local and a brewery union. United Liquors was the customer and the two locals were Local 25

Charlestown, which was who we were aligned with and Local from Braintree, which had a contract with United. United was located in Braintree and wanted to get into Boston. It found a location in Charlestown about ½ mile from Local 25's offices and started to negotiate with Local 25. The Brewers Local took great exception to this because they claimed this was their work and the distance between Braintree and Charlestown did not allow Local 25 to gain jurisdiction.

My father assigned my brother Tom to spearhead our team and efforts. Of all our strike situations this was the most contentious and lengthy. There were rocks thrown, tires cut, cars damaged, several fights and everything else that used to occur in the beginning of the labor movement. The Local even followed trucks to their deliveries and fought and harassed, each truck eventually had a police detail when making deliveries.

The Saturday before the strike my father and Billy Mc had four guys show up at Mac's office to officially make them the first four on the list. John J, George's son, Ken Call, Henry's nephew, my brother Tom, and someone nobody can remember. They drew numbers from a hat. John J. got #1, Ken Call #2, Unknown #3 and Tom got #4, and so they were officially on the top of the list.

The Brewers were a determined group and this situation dragged on for months. This was all occurring while United Liquors was supplying East Massachusetts with Carling's Black Label Beer from the brewery in Natick. This brewery honored the Local picket lines and we were traveling to Cleveland supply United Liquors with enough products to keep up with demand. This was way beyond any area DiSilva had ever previously covered! However, as usual peace was eventually made between the 2 Locals and we became United Liquors' truck men for many years.

I am sure my brother Tom did not know what he was getting into, but he did an amazing job. He handled this most unusual group of drivers and negotiated the ensuing labor contracts that changed the liquor industry nationwide. Probably the most dramatic contractual change was the elimination of helpers on the delivery trucks. Traditionally it was a two-man job, but the helpers were eliminated in the Webster Trucking contracts and eventually in everyone's. Tom ran this operation until the Tye family decided to take it in house and then he rejoined our companies. The experience he acquired served our companies very well in many future negotiations.

Before, during and after this situation, my father and brother developed a wonderful relationship with Ray Tye. Ray Tye was an incredibly successful businessman, but even a more incredible friend to our family. Ray's charitable endeavors are legendary.

Stop & Shop

The relationship between our family, the Rabb family, the Goldberg family and our multiple business dealings began in the early to mid-fifties. Tom had a relationship with John McCarthy Sr. who I believe introduced our family to Mr. Sydney and Norman and Irving Rabb. At that time, Stop & Shop was not the powerhouse it became, but a good size grocery chain with its distribution on “D” Street in South Boston. Tom quickly developed a lifelong friendship with Mr. Sydney and his brothers. As in all of Tom’s relationships, your handshake and your word were the most important part of any deal. It is an amazing tribute to everyone involved that almost 70 years later our companies are still doing business with each other.

Vincent, Tom and a friend of Tom’s, Tom Taverna, established a company called Contract Haulage and began to do all the trucking for Stop & Shop. This happened in approximately 1956. Vincent for the most part, ran Somerville and the First National Store operation, while the two Tom’s ran the Stop & Shop operation. First National Stores, at this time, was the dominant retailer in New England groceries. A lot of their success was due to the number of smaller locations they had for many years, but their dominance was also helped by their alliance with S&H Green Stamps. Shoppers received stamps when they made purchases and then could redeem them from the very fancy Sperry & Hutchinson Green Stamps catalogue. It probably was the forerunner to today’s rewards programs.

Eventually, Stop & Shop also acquired a trading stamp provider. They partnered with a company called Top Value Stamps. Top Value was very good at marketing and with their “Pink Elephant” logo, soon had Stop & Shop making major strides in catching First National Stores.

As Stop & Shop grew, DiSilva Trans’ Somerville location became more involved and did a tremendous amount of jobs for Stop & Shop. We started doing trailers of hanging meat from the railroad yards. We were doing the freight cars of potatoes from Maine direct to the stores and the weekly distribution of a variety of produce from the railroad yards to the stores. We also did a seasonal freight car operation of watermelons. We provided labor replacement drivers several times over the years. In general, it can be said we had their back for any odd emergency that occurred in the grocery business. Most of the above examples will be elaborated on in other parts of this story.

Stop & Shop eventually out grew their small warehouse in South Boston and moved to Readville, Massachusetts. The trucking reverted John McCarthy’s companies and our participation shrank dramatically. During their growth, Stop & Shop had opened stores in Connecticut and we had formed a company called Chain Haulage that Tom Taverna ran, this continued in the Readville years until Stop & Shop opened a distribution center in North Haven, Connecticut.

Our lesser role encouraged Tom D. to start several labor leasing companies that supplemented Stop & Shop’s main operation. Labor leasing is an entity that allowed not only Stop & Shop, but others to concentrate on their core business, while the labor leasing provider

could concentrate on drivers and warehousemen and their issues i.e. mostly union related. We ran several union and non-union operations for Stop & Shop and their sister company Bradlees.

With one of these union labor-leasing companies, we opened a very large HABA called Universal Distributors, were for both Stop & Shop and Bradlees in North Haven, Connecticut. These employees were all affiliated with Local 443 in North Haven. Our partner in this venture was a Connecticut native Henry Criscuolo. Henry and my brother Tom not only ran the HABA operation, but also very successfully ran and developed a grocery operation in Wallingford.

Because of Stop & Shop's tremendous rapid growth in the Connecticut market their North Haven Facility was choking on volume. Wallingford was the relief valve by receiving and shipping fast moving items, circumventing the bottlenecks in the warehouse. This proved very economical and so practical that we moved to Chicopee, Massachusetts and became a chain-wide distribution center. The Massachusetts employees were members of the Springfield Local.

Both of their operations, Universal Distribution and Chicopee, were very beneficial to the now called Ahold USA. Ahold had other U.S. operations and first centralized the HABA in Buffalo, New York. This allowed them to distribute centrally to their entire Northeast group. The second change to affect our operations was that they built an enormous warehouse in Freetown, Massachusetts.

Chicopee, North Haven and Readville were all too small and were choking on growth. The new warehouse needed the pieces to justify the economics. This ended our operating warehouses for Ahold.

However, while our warehouse operations were running, we also were doing the bulk of the trucking for Stop & Shop at their brand new central meat packing plant in Marlboro, Massachusetts that opened in 1972. This facility was a very sophisticated and unique plant, especially in the Northeast. This plant chain received their meat products as approximately 50% boxed meat and 50% carcasses, which required in store butchers to cut and process these pieces of meat into usable cuts of table ready meat including roasts, steaks, hamburger meat, etc. The economics were justified by the reduction of personnel at the store level and it was a very successful operation until the Middle East fuel crisis hit in approximately 1980-1981 and the cost of freight for moving the railroad trailers offset the gains. The Midwest meat packers became much more sensitive to the consumer needs and eventually the plant was sold to Rich Foods Buffalo.

A couple of notable items about this operation; First, it was the basis of the first trucking operation that Bob McCullough and I collaborated on. It was a Webster Trucking operation and it eventually became the Webster Trucking that serviced C&S Wholesale. Second, it became home to the strangest collection of drivers and warehouse people that our two companies ever collectively managed. Usually, there were a couple of drivers and warehousemen that were different, in Marlboro the ratio reversed and we had to search for the regular guys. Third, because we spent so much time in Marlboro, Bob McCullough and I established lifelong friendships with Jack Rogerson and Dave Hancock from Stop & Shop. Finally, these drivers were assigned to Readville and became the official Stop & Shop milk delivery drivers. That was

a compromise between Local 25, the McCarthy Industry operation and DiSilva Transportation. Many of these drivers survived Marlboro, Readville milk and eventually retired from Freetown.

Stop & Shop People

The Rabb Family was hardworking, honest, fair and civic minded. Our Contract Haulage operation was located on D Street, the Stop & Shop offices were also there. Tom struck a life-long friendship with Mister Syd, I am not sure the basis, but I know Tom spoke very well of them, always praising their business acumen and fairness.

When Avram Goldberg married Carol Rabb, Mr. Syd wanted to get Avram some grocery business experience, so he called Tom and asked if Avram could ride on a truck for a summer at First National Store. Everyone had two men on a truck back then, so the helper was not a problem, but the Goldberg surname would be. So, amongst the three of them, Mr. Syd, Avram and Tom, Avram was christened Murphy and during his summer as a helper, he was “Murph.” I met Avram with my brother and father at about 20 years of age and Tommy, Myself and Avram’s secretary were all taken aback when my father greeted Avram as “Murph.” My father and Avram shared a big laugh over the memory.

John McCarthy Sr. was a giant and an innovator in the New England trucking industry. I am not sure how or why, but I know he and my father were in agreement when we started Contract Haulage and began hauling for Stop & Shop. Senior was truly a visionary. His companies delivered for Stop & Shop, A&P and U.S. Post Offices. He was a part of a group that founded Associated Transport. His vision to develop labor leasing was truly extraordinary. His labor leasing was virtually on a top 25 list of New England companies. As well as grocery chains the list included Raytheon, H.P., Hood, Polaroid, International Paper and Gillette Road Operations. He was also one tough man. I only remember him in his 70’s and he still was tough. However, he and my father had a solid and honest relationship and in 2000 we purchased a much smaller version of the Labor Leasing from his son, John McCarthy II.

Dave Fine, Vice President of Labor and Sam Mandell, Corp Counsel, were early contracts of Tom DiSilva. Our current labor leasing company is Manfi Leasing, which is a combination of those two names. I can really dip into ancient history and mention Dave MacDonald, V.P. of Distribution, and Joe Feeney, Transportation executive, who lasted longer than most. Joe was one of the first people I met who didn’t appear to have developed in this industry. He was more of a businessman than a transportation executive. Joe Slattery and Mary Hostermann. If they did not invent backhauling, they certainly were on the ground floor.

Tom Taverna, a longtime friend of my father’s, was brought into the picture, when the Stop & Shop business was acquired. My father and Vincent partnered with Tom Taverna and Contract Haulage and eventually Chain Haulage, which was the interstate arm. Tom was much more than a business partner; he was a close friend and confidant of my father. They socialized in town, on hunting trips, on cruises and most other non-work activities. Tom was a tough demanding boss and probably exactly what was needed in that operation at that time. His presence and ability allowed Tom the freedom to establish relationships that served us well over the years.

Tom's wife, Alice, was a dear friend to my mother, my family and everyone else she encountered. A wonderful woman in a very difficult industry. It would be hard to write enough good things to say about Alice. She died earlier than she should have, but she had a ticket punched to heaven.

Sal Tollo was a Stop & Shop/Bradlees Transportation V.P. that truly had more book knowledge about our industry than anyone I knew. He could quote laws, opinions and transportation solutions on all subjects related to our industry. He was a wonderful, sincere and honest friend to our family and myself. He was so fair he never wanted to finalize a decision because he did not want to offend any of the parties involved.

Bob Tobin, Lou Shannermann and Bill Griese, the Connecticut Chain Store Mafia, were three very smart grocery executives that came from the Connecticut division and rose to lead the Stop & Shop companies for many years. All were very appreciative of our efforts and treated us fairly. They all were major contributors to Stop & Shop owning the Connecticut market and being #1 in Massachusetts. While these three were at the helm, Stop & Shop clearly surged to prominence, not only in New England, but also through Ahold in the Mid-Atlantic States and the Metro region. The next level of management was probably Dan Donegan, Bill Vaughn, Eddie Cummings, Jack Rogerson and Dave Hancock.

Dan Donegan was a great leader and a friend of my father. Tom kept in touch with Dan for a number of years after Dan retired. He was in charge of both transportation and warehouse during a great growth period. He was very significant in normalizing union relationship between Stop & Shop and the Teamsters.

Bill Vaughn has been around the longest of all the Stop & Shop people whom I have known. Bill arrived from Washington, D.C. and was groomed to be a warehouse and transportation executive. He certainly held those titles and over the years he was in labor relations, contract negotiations, warehouse planning and anything else that touched distribution. He also was the employee rep. on the New England Teamsters Pension Fund until a couple of years ago. Bill and Tom DiSilva spent a lot of time discussing and solving Teamster issues.

Eddie Cummings was a Connecticut transportation and warehouse leader who had a tremendous set of people skills to enhance his transportation and warehouse skill sets. Eddie's people were as good a team of middle managers as this industry has seen. They were all fiercely loyal to Eddie and Stop & Shop. Eddie gave them leeway to develop and grow and they certainly did. Eddie died of cancer, in his 50's, way too young, but his guys always remember and remain loyal to him.

Jack Rogerson was heading warehousing and was a friend of my brother because of their involvement in the growth of Universal Distribution and Wallingford Warehouse. Jack was a protégé of Eddie and an excellent leader and warehouseman. He always had his own ideas and style and his warehouse was always well run with very few union issues. Jack learned early that if treated respectfully you could get 443 and 829 to cooperate and in some cases help solve issues. My contact with Jack was through Marlboro Meat. As Marlboro came on line I was transitioning to management and Bob McCullough and I started a division of Webster Trucking

to help service Marlboro. Bob, Jack and Dave Hancock and myself started lifelong friendships surrounding our servicing Marlboro. To complete Jack's trifecta, later in his career he also developed a friendship with my father. They frequently had dinner and Jack always learned from those friendly suppers.

Dave Hancock was running Marlboro's Meat facility when I first met him. Dave was an excellent warehouse manager. Amongst Dave, Jack, Bob McCullough and I, it was a general consensus that the employees in the warehouse and driving our trucks were the most unusual group of people either company ever employed. Dave had 20+ years with Stop & Shop and then had about 10 years running warehouses for C&S Wholesale.

Bradlees

Bradlees was a wonderful dry goods, small appliance and go-to store that grew from a couple of local stores to a major dry goods player between Maine and Virginia. Because of our relationship with Stop & Shop and the fact that the dry good stores are so dependent on imports, DiSilva Transportation was a relevant part of the Bradlee story from start to finish.

As Bradlees grew, our container business grew. During certain seasons it was not unusual to deliver 12-15 containers a day to a variety of Bradlee locations. The product was a wide variety of everything, but clothing. The clothing was handled and labeled in New York and reshipped to the Braintree distribution center. We handled fans, blinds, wicker furniture, dishes, small appliances, toys and a variety of other products.

There were delivered to the Braintree distribution center, mainly, but we also delivered to the Bradlee satellite warehouse at 245 University Ave, which was the most lasting, but Campenelli Drive was also a frequent destination. These were two facilities that were manned by DiSilva employees working for Manfi Leasing. That was another manifestation of our flexible use of an overflow warehouse to relieve pressure on the main distribution center.

Bradlee's was a typical retailer that relied on seasonal sales and the manufacturers could not respond to their needs in the short seasons. For example, for summer furniture, the many hundreds of containers had to start arriving in February received, processed and made store ready or else the main warehouse would literally not be able to ship their mainline product and only ship seasonal products.

This created an opportunity for Bob Stocki and I to open a public warehouse in Everett called Advanced Warehouse. Advanced Warehouse was a clearinghouse for a tremendous amount of Bradlees seasonal and future buys, especially toys, wicker furniture and plastic summer furniture. Toys actually arrived as early as October and November for shipment for the following year's Christmas.

The outbound Bradlee relationship was also very interesting. The Stop & Shop Readville fleet delivered Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. They only used DiSilva Transportation as a backup. However, our companies handled the Maine and Edison, New Jersey warehouse and eventually Virginia. Chain Haulage did a lot of this work, but as the volume grew DiSilva's owner operators came into play in a very large way.

The first most prominent operations were the shuttle between the Braintree distribution center and the Bradlee distribution center in Edison, New Jersey. This was a significantly large operation that had as many as 10-12 round trips per day between the facilities. The challenge was between the time we were notified of the number of trips and the delivery window in Edison was very short. We needed to often scramble to keep up with the volume.

While the shuttle was ongoing, Bradlees opened six or seven stores in Virginia. Webster Trucking and DiSilva Transportation's owner operators serviced these. This was a major shift in operation for us because it was the first full scale operation that required us to layover on a

regular basis. Basically, we were making a store delivery in Virginia, laying over, making a regional backhaul and coming back to Boston. Peanuts for Leavitt and paper bags for Stop & Shop or Bradlees were the two most frequent backhauls. With the newness of the operation, the miles driven and the layoffs all considered, it was a remarkably smooth operation.

At one point, Bradlees declared chapter 11, but we still serviced them. Because of the bankruptcy rules we were being paid quicker during the bankruptcy than normal. We provided yard service right until they finally shut down the Braintree facility.

Leasing Companies

As previously described, DiSilva Transportation was always a self-maintenance company. This changed when we began with C&S in Worcester/Brattleboro. C&S had a lease with Hertz Truck Rental for 25 tractors and being the gentleman he was, Lester Cohen felt we should honor that lease. Tom agreed and we became lessors for the first time in our history in late '79 and early '80. It really was a history changing and positive decision. We never would have been able to keep up with C&S if it wasn't for our leasing partners, Penske and eventually Ryder. Our first district sales guy was Steve Robinson, who was with Hertz. There was really no pressure until the early 1990's when C&S started their incredible growth.

By that time, Penske had acquired the Hertz Leasing and our main guys were Frank Mileto, Carl Augsburger and Scaramaster. With Frank and Carl's help, we to quote Carl, engaged in the "deal of the century," and we replaced the Purity Supreme fleet with a fleet of 100 Penske Freightliners. This probably put us at 175 tractors, all from Penske and all Freightliners. Penske and Mack had a warranty issue and we were willing partners in helping Penske get Freightliner established in New England. The Penske, Freightliner, DiSilva partnership moved along very well for several years.

However, Lester Cohen had a relationship with the owners of A.M.I. Leasing, a Worcester company, and soon Webster Trucking became an A.M.I. customer and Brattleboro Haulage remained with Penske. Our guy at A.M.I. was John Meyers. John was also an effective and helpful partner until Ryder, who by that time was also a leasing partner, eventually purchased them.

Before our Ryder agreements, we established a brief deal with Ruan Leasing at W.L. Connecticut. Ryder also bought Ruan, but after we had ended our deal. Edart Trucking was Ruan's successor in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. This grew into a very solid relationship until once again Ryder purchased Edart.

Edart was a well-run family business that we enjoyed a great business and personal relationship with. All through our history we always attempted to pay what we owed and our dealings with the Edart Leasing Company was generally between Howard Siegal and Bob McCullough and Frank Wentworth on our side. Bob and Frank drove poor Howard crazy. They discussed every bill at great length until Howard either gave in or turned the issues over to his brother Mark and myself. Howard was taken from all of us way too soon. I am sure Howard and Bob McCullough are going to resume their discussions when Frank Wentworth meets them in a rental garage in heaven.

Ryder came late to the DiSilva leasing world. It is a mystery to Ryder and ourselves as to why we never had Ryder leases until the late '90s or early 2000s. It started because C&S incorporated an A&P operation on Long Island that had a fleet of tractors that still had several years on their leases. We had zero use for the Long Island tractors, but C&S Aberdeen was opening and we needed equipment in Maryland. Coincidentally I had met a terrific Ryder Regional Manager, Gaylon Morris. We had several long Ryder precedent setting conversations

and the useless fleet on Long Island went away and we had a wonderful new partner in Maryland.

This was amazingly fortunate because as Ryder went into acquisition mode C&S and DiSilva Trans. always seemed to be part of it. As our relationship developed our main Ryder guy became Marc Thibeu. He is a terrific Corporate V.P., who really understood our needs and together we forged several arrangements that proved beneficial to Ryder and the DiSilva, C&S partnership.

Two of our best hires came via leasing companies. Frank Wentworth worked for everyone i.e. AMI, Ryder, United Truck and Lily, usually as an onsite manager. Fred Allen came to us from A.M.I., when Ryder bought them. Both were special guys who helped us navigate leases and the subtleties of leasing procedures. No one would ever believe how much this “inside knowledge” saved in dollars for C&S. I know our rates were less expensive than anyone in the food industry.

Webster Trucking

While DiSilva Transportation was evolving Webster Trucking was also developing. I believe the original Webster Trucking was the partnership between my father and Otis Young. This involved hauling the produce from Faneuil Hall and eventually the New England Produce Center to First National Stores. Together Tom and Otis took over Market Express and formed Webster Trucking.

The second emergence of Webster Trucking was the aforementioned Carling's Beer Strike. This led to a 25-year relationship with United Liquors, which was managed by my brother Tom. Tom led Webster United's transportation company as well as their labor negotiation. This was Tom's forte during a very early negotiation the helpers were eliminated from the delivery runs. After United decided to take this work Tom returned to our family's core business and ran the multifaceted Webster Trucking from Medford. Tom was ably assisted by Al Santamaria in the office and Bob McCullough in the shop. Webster Medford still owned equipment and Bob was always our head mechanic.

Webster Medford had a tremendous amount of Stop & Shop and Bradlee work. When Marlboro closed, those drivers evolved into Stop & Shop milk drivers out of the Stop & Shop commissary in Readville. That may have been Albert's biggest challenge. Not only was it a very difficult job, but the lead time between receiving notification and start times was only a few hours. Most of the starts were covered by Local 25 list drivers from the old Marlboro drivers, but the remaining 6-8 starts needed to be covered quickly. Albert forever was juggling drivers from other parts of his work force and begging them to cover a milk start. It was not an unusual day to have more than one driver with a questionable background filling these spots, however, because of the respect everyone had for my father they never caused us any problems and actually were good truck drivers.

The Bradlee to Edison shuttle and the Bradlee to Virginia store deliveries were dispatched out of Medford. A Virginia delivery, after we became familiar with the schedules, was a pretty routine regular operation. Between old bread drivers and owner operators, the loads were covered without the chaos of many of our other operations. Basically these guys made a Virginia Bradlee store delivery, a layover, a previously scheduled backhaul and a return trip. On a sad note, during this operation our family experienced our first fatality. We lost a very nice young man, Tim Sorensen, who it appears fell asleep in Auburn, MA on the Pike and drove off the road.

The Bradlee Braintree to Edison, NJ shuttle was another fire drill because of the notification to dispatch time, but more importantly the volume was always fluctuating wildly. The only saving grace was it was an easy drop and hook operation that was scheduled when NYC traffic was at its' most bearable. As an aside, one of the semi-regular drivers was Tom's friend, Dan Costa. Dan really enjoyed the Edison shuttle because he always made a layover in Farmington, CT to visit a friend. Dan was very creative about why he was slow getting back to Braintree. He was Tom's friend and had a special status, by the way, one helluva truck driver.

For a while, we also did some Zayre Team drives out of Medford. This was short lived, but truly a learning experience for both my brother and Albert. Suffice to say, it is difficult enough to get one truck driver happy, never mind trying to match two of them, another test of dispatching skills.

My father and Vincent had a lot of old friends who were also in the trucking business. One man is George Enos. George had a partner named Bob Bertini and they did Sealy Mattresses and cement from rail cars in Framingham, MA.

I am not sure of the financial arrangements, but George also was delivering the interstate bread for Stop & Shop under some kind of deal with Tom and Vincent. George believed in ownership and maintaining his own equipment. He had a well-maintained fleet of GMC tractors, however, sometime in late 1978 it was determined that Webster would start delivering the bread on January 1st, 1979. Nobody is quite sure why, but the equipment Webster received was not as perfect as advertised and proved very challenging for Bob McCullough to keep running.

However, the bread drivers we inherited from George were truly amazing. Henry Crosby, Dale Hardy, Willie Robinson, Gene Crowell and Norman Forbes were a few of the drivers that we inherited. These guys were always early, enjoyed driving a truck, took care of the customer and to Albert's delight, never booked off. All of that is on a job where they actually worked a part of all seven days.

Their work schedule and the length of the runs had them touch all seven days, Sundays being their first workday. Monday they delivered, but got back early Tuesday. Tuesdays there were no loads. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were regular days with them finishing up Saturday AM. We could never find guys as dedicated as that group. They did have a few quirks, but always showed up!

Insurance

I am not sure that any company/family was more concerned with insurance than we were. As long as I can remember our insurance reps. were integral parts of our business. It began with Lester Young a very local insurance man. Lester was at DiSilva Trans. every Saturday. I didn't know it then but he was collecting some form of payment. His company insured everything the DiSilva's owned from trucks to all our cars, homes and even life insurance. This continued through Lester's sons Bob and Edward. I still have a couple of policies with their successor firm.

As we grew at DiSilva Trans, Tom became our insurance guy and he found an old experienced insurance rep. from Liberty Mutual, Paul Shannon. Paul was our guy until we opened in Vermont. Once in Vermont we were introduced to an insurance agency in Rutland. They did a pretty good job, but when our growth exploded they were not able to provide us adequate coverage in multiple states. They also lacked the appropriate leverage with the bigger national insurance carriers. For a brief period, we dealt directly with Liberty Mutual, but we clearly lacked the expertise to get adequate coverage at good pricing.

Recognizing these problems led us to A.O.N. Providence. This was the best insurance decision we ever made. A.O.N. Providence was an amazing group of insurance experts led by Paula Mercurio's team including Mike Murray and Tom Groth. They soon led us from high deductible inadequate coverage at very expensive prices to very reasonable deductibles at very competitive prices. At our peak with Providence we probably had 400 tractors and were only in New England locations.

Something internally happened in A.O.N.'s corporate world and A.O.N. Providence was disbanded, but Paula asked us to talk to another A.O.N. group that specialized in large trucking companies. This was A.O.N. Little Rock, so Paula not only led us from "Insurance Hell" to a very favorable well protected position, but it was her suggestion that led us to Little Rock.

This was another terrific decision for our company and our customers. Paula was 100% correct, A.O.N. Little Rock knew trucking companies' needs. In Little Rock we met Mark Brockington's team led by Steve Jones. Steve was truly an expert on our insurance needs. Steve reduced our costs and increased our coverage in all our insurance lines; liability, both parts and general, both workingman's comp, physical damage, excess and anything else we needed.

For several years we were covered by an insurance subsidiary of United Van Lines called Vanliner from St. Louis. C&S, in those years, had their premiums reduced approximately 2 million dollars and went from very large deductible in W.C. and Auto Liability to first dollar coverage. These allowed us to reduce our insurance costs per mile from teens to single digits.

Another factor in this wonderful group of people was they were unflappable in their job as we were in ours, the perfect partnership. No matter what C&S asked us to do and how quickly they wanted it done A.O.N. Little Rock performed.

Steve Jones is an excellent partner, who has developed into a wonderful friend. Steve, Tami, Elicia and Luke are certainly adopted into our family. However, Steve would be the first

to admit he had a terrific team including???? Our relationship is still ongoing even as Steve changed jobs to Steven Group in Little Rock.

Saturdays

No other company in transportation history treated Saturdays like DiSilva did. Two things you need to understand. First, in 1965 through 1985 Local 25 was a much bigger and aggressive union and actually watched even a small company like DiSilva Trans. closely. Secondly, Saturday was not busy, but an overtime day for DiSilva regular drivers. It was also optional for regular list drivers. We probably had 15-18 non-family union list drivers, most did not work on Saturday, so we would fill in with family members. At this time we had Jack Mac Donnell, Bob Stocki, our cousin Bud, Al Santamaria, Steve Conley, a former brother in law and myself. My brother Tom was still at United Liquors.

We all would deliver a local produce load, Codman Square to Norwood, Sudbury to Wellesley and a variety of Boston, Cambridge and Somerville stops. We also were delivering F.N.S. bread runs most of them were long and easy, so our best drivers took them. The bread runs required picking up empty bread cartons, which the family drivers would need to unload, so no overtime was incurred by list drivers.

After our AM, we had a few options laid out by my father and uncle. That is all of us, but Bob Stocki, he was our billing clerk, as well as a driver and every Saturday he and Vincent did the bills! It wasn't optional and no social event was big enough to stop this process. The bills were done, no exceptions. It was truly amazing. Bob would start with all of us at 5 AM deliveries and not finish with Vincent and the bills until 6 or 7 PM.

The rest of us would first unload any salvage on the few loads that the list group delivered and then go down to the railroad yards on Foley Street and unload a couple of cars of canned goods for F.N.S. This was actually a unique experience, not only did we unload the freight cars, but we all played the football cards and gambled on a variety of sporting events. There was no Internet and our bookie contact was the yardman for F.N.S., Phil Cantorne. Phil was a part of our family/company for years. Today's world would call all this as bonding or team building, we just called it work.

We unloaded cars most Saturdays, but one of the options was delivering a F.N.S. grocery load. F.N.S. had their own union drivers, Local 829 and they had first choice of the loads. There were three types of loads, Pallet loads, Elevator loads, and Hand deliveries. I am sure, it is no surprise the F.N.S. drivers left us mostly hand delivery loads. On a busy Saturday, it was not unusual for my father to take a load. One of the memories we all have is Bud trying to out-manuever my father for that last pallet or elevator load. T.D. was the winner every Saturday, but Bud never stopped trying.

While all these options were going on we had to put all the tractors that we wouldn't be using into a very small garage, straighten out all our straight trucks and trailers in the yard and finally account for our trailers. How many 250's, how many 270's or how many 290's makes no sense to most people, but it did to us. You weren't going home until they were all accounted for.

I rest my case, Saturday was an adventure for all of us and we didn't even know it. One of our Saturday mysteries was why did John Stafford drive to Somerville every Saturday hoping Vincent would not give him a load?

Portsmouth Sugar

For a few years, maybe 1978-1982, Revere Sugar was part of a government program that involved refining sugar from the Caribbean and shipping it back in 110-pound burlap bags. This was a US Food Aid program. They did not use containers because it was also designed to increase employment in the islands.

The work was also a supplement to Revere Sugar's regular local sugar work, so it was very beneficial to Revere, but it was time sensitive. Once the sugar was ready to ship it had to move to New Hampshire.

The process was a ship arrived at the Charlestown refinery, unloaded very quickly, and was refined in a few hours, so it didn't choke the regular production. Revere was a small facility with very little storage space. Our owner operators would immediately load, drive to Portsmouth Pier, which you can see from the large green bridge on 95, unload, and return. They probably could get 2 trips a day and maybe get loaded for the next day. This hectic activity lasted until that ship's cargo was refined and bagged. Probably a week or 10 days and then a 2 or 3-week lull until the next ship arrived and we started over.

Some oddities that accrued were the number of wooden pallets going north was probably 3 to 4 times the amount that made their way back to the refinery. Also, the #2 diesel fuel supply for Revere's building was much greater during the busy shipping periods and another was, I had my first encounter with an FBI agent.

It was fairly common for our guys to load at night, park their trailer and go home for the night. This allowed them to get an early start in the morning. One morning one of my guys called me and said his trailer was missing and because it was an interstate shipment, the FBI investigates. This particular driver had a record and we were giving him another chance. My conversation with the FBI revolved around the value of the cargo, which was about \$30,000 in the legitimate world, which I figured after discounts, being in burlap bags and accomplices. My guy was risking a lot for \$6,000 to \$8,000 dollars. The FBI guy enlightened me and informed me the hijacked load was going to some moonshine stills in Rhode Island that increase the value 2 or 3 times because they couldn't get bulk sugar without drawing attention. We never used that guy again, but he didn't do time for the caper and he made himself a score of probably \$20,000. The FBI's estimate, not mine.

Owner Operators

Julius Chisholm was our first worker of color. He had a straight job and was a very loyal hard worker. Julius was always available and always got the job done for us. Julius and Vincent were Saturday and Sunday pals and Julius ended up buying a couple of Cadillacs from Vincent. He also ended up with a black lab from me. Julius also introduced Jake Lee and another straight job driver. All three were terrific, honest and reliable workers.

Alex Marini was a great owner operator who showed up in Somerville one day and was an instant favorite with Vincent. Alex's family had a working farm and farm stand in Acton and on occasion he would bring Vincent vegetables, an automatic pass into Vincent's "good guy" list. The truth is Alex was a good guy and a great owner operator. I cannot remember anything we did that didn't include Alex. He did grocery loads, produce loads, containers, Bradlees local, Virginia and Edison work. He crossed picket lines, he shuttled sugar to Portsmouth, NH, and he did local and long runs.

He also was a tinkerer and enjoyed making things. He, actually, made milk hooks for everyone. These allowed all of us to hook onto a stack of milk crates and move those 5 at a time. However, this tinkering got him into a little trouble with Charlie Arbing and Stop & Shop. It seems a lot of Alex's raw materials were coming from Stop & Shop dumpsters and Stop & Shop objected to this. I am not sure if he was barred from Stop & Shop or suspended, but he certainly survived. Alex was an outstanding owner operator and person. You could always count on Alex.

Doug Levinson was an owner operator who was actually a real hustler. He would and could and actually did most anything to hustle a dollar. Doug and Alex conned Vincent into letting them actually live in an old office trailer in the Somerville yard. Doug, also, did produce, groceries, containers, Bradlees Virginia, Portsmouth Sugar, crossed an occasional picket line, etc.

Two incidents involving Portsmouth Sugar that had Doug's fingerprint were the number of loaded pallets going to NH was 3 or 4 times the number of empties returned to Revere Sugar, and, the amount of diesel fuel to heat Revere's building went up while Doug never seemed to have to stop to buy fuel. The most humorous story was that Doug was a cab driver in Boston before he came to us and on occasion he would deliver Chinese food from Chinatown. He claims he had a staple remover and a stapler and would open the brown bags, eats a little Chinese food, and reseal the bags. If it wasn't Doug I would be skeptical, but in this case, I believed it!

DiSilva Trans Somerville

DiSilva Trans was not your average trucking company. We did an amazing amount of work for a broad spectrum of companies and we had an incredible group of company drivers and owner/operators that worked for us. We also were a very quirky company. A few things that happened on a regular basis in Somerville that probably did not happen in a lot of other companies were:

1. The very first task Vincent performed every day when he arrived at about 6 A.M. was to get an 8.5" by 11" piece of paper, his ruler and a #2 pencil and created the daily dispatch sheet. I am sure he thought Bob Stocki and I were insane when we had this sheet pre-printed.
2. Having a row of tractors and straight jobs show up in Somerville and line up on Middlesex Ave waiting for their daily assignment. This process was called "waiting on the fence" because our property was fenced and parallel to Middlesex Ave. It should have been named "waiting in Dunkin' Donuts" because that is where everyone congregated.
3. Getting the mail without fail every day. It was a very important job to get handed the key and sent to the Somerville P.O. Box to get the mail. I do understand that we often needed the checks, but it was an obsession to pick it up. One of the odd things was we were a very frugal company, but Vincent chose to pay for the P.O. Box rather than have the postman deliver for free.
4. While we were shuttling the very expensive loads from Gillette South Boston to Gillette Andover, we had an alarm system supplied by a company called Babaco Alarms. They were a fairly large and well-known national firm that Gillette selected. However, the system required a set of keys to turn it on and off and it needed to be tested every 90 days. The fascinating part of this was the Babaco facility was in the heart of the North End across from the wise guys favorite restaurant, Giro's. The restaurant actually used the Babaco lot for parking in the evening. It was always a fascination to all of us who actually had access to the master keys to the setup.
5. I know I have referenced this before, but billing was king. One of Vincent's quotes was "No sense doing all the work if we don't bill it." He was always ready to "push out a few bills." Saturday was the billing day, but it was not unusual for Bob Stocki and Vincent to spend a couple nights during the week "pushing out a few." Years before Bob, there was an office person named, Joe Villano that did billing, payroll and other regular office functions. The fascination with Joe was he was a chain cigarette smoker and he created the longest ashes of all time! I was pre-licensed age wise and Joe's ashes were Guinness Record size.
6. We were not a very I.C.C./D.O.T. compliant company. We were a company that had minimal accident and log violations, but for different reasons. Our trucks did not go very fast and we did not go very far. Also, nobody wanted to go to Vincent and report an accident. As far as hours of service, you couldn't work 60 hours because we were obsessed with not paying overtime! However, the I.C.C. occasionally would give us a lengthy warning and do an audit! The time between their phone call and the visit always was a hectic time of creating, recreating and on an occasion fabricating the proper

documents. As the I.C.C./D.O.T. became more sophisticated we did develop the necessary programs and safeguards and were a much more compliant and safe company.

7. Saturday has been covered previously, but the highlights were getting work done without calling a Local 25 driver accounting for all our trailers i.e. how many 250's, 270's and 290's which by the way were purchased from Stop & Shop and ran 15-20 years, squeezing all the tractors into our very small garage, watching John Stafford arrive from Easton, MA approximately a 40 mile drive each way, hoping Vincent would not find a job for him.

DiSilva Trans People

Salvatore Capobianco was a gentleman in a very tough business. He was the lead mechanic and salesman for a company that my family owned for a few years. It was a truck dealership named Superior G.M.C. Sales and Service. For some unknown reason, Vincent and Tom were not very interested in the sales part of the dealership, but we did service the DiSilva Trans. Equipment and a few other outside accounts. Eventually G.M.C. revoked the dealership because not enough new trucks were being sold. While this was going on Salvatore started an owner operator company called Capo's Express. He drove for a while and eventually trained and hired his successor, Joe Cabuzzi. Most people believed Joe was the real Capo's son and everyone referred to Joe as Joe Capo and that is how DiSilva Transportation inherited one of our longest lasting, most colorful owner operators.

Joe Capo was probably the longest tenured owner operator in the family's history. I know there were some before and after Joe, but for longevity there was Joe. I cannot remember anything we did out of Somerville that Joe wasn't involved in, first with a straight job and then a tractor. Joe was a very hardworking hustler. He always had an angle or scheme going on one side of the law or the other. I do not know whom Joe had for a lawyer, but on more than one occasion we all had Joe going to jail and Joe's lawyer got him off. Joe also had a tendency to inhale Miller Lite on many an occasion. "Miller Time" was a big part of Joe's Day. Joe and several other owner operators drank at Flynn's bar in Sullivan Square after work, but to their credit they all showed up the next day. Joe did pier work, bread loads, First National Store's meat loads, a lot of watermelons, Stop & Shop potato and DST team truckloads. He also worked Gillette and Braun at the end. He also was involved in the strikes we were involved in. I don't think Joe missed much in his 30-35 years with us.

David Murphy was a personal favorite. David came to us from Danny Costa. His work career with DiSilva was pretty short because David always wanted to be an owner or a boss, which is really surprising because he was a fantastic truck driver. Most of David's work life was produce related, but he also dabbled in labor replacement in an Athol beer distributor and some construction and real estate near Sebago. Many people shield away from David because he had a tendency to embellish almost any story he told, but when needed, David always was straight with me. Some colorful stories are that Vincent sent him to drop a trailer in Hyannis, so it could get transshipped to Martha's Vineyard and David ended up forgetting the drop part and made our one and only Martha's Vineyard trip. He low bridged our trailer one day and sold the semi-destroyed trailer to a junkyard and swore someone stole it from him. I also vaguely remember an exploding boat in Boston Harbor. He was a very smart owner operator who was only happy when he was creating some scheme.

For Frankie Piazza, Eddie Sacco and Richie Sacco, it is impossible to capture their histories with our companies. The simple stuff is they worked as hard as anybody we employed. There was nothing too difficult or inconvenient, as long as they were getting paid they were all in! The more colorful stories involved their hustling abilities. Frankie was the first to arrive. He pestered Vincent for months until Vincent was stuck with a watermelon load one day and the only two people in sight were myself (age 16) and Frankie. The load was going to F.N.S. stores

in Cambridge, Belmont and Watertown, where I lived. Vincent instructed me to show Frankie where to go! It must have been a success because Frankie became a DiSilva driver from that day forward. Frankie and Vincent became close friends. Shortly after Frankie got married, he needed an operation and ended up in Mass General Hospital. Vincent went to visit and gave him \$300, which in 1958 was a lot of cash. Vincent told Frankie the terms, which were a \$1.00/week deduction on his paycheck for 300 weeks. I actually have some old pay stubs from Frankie showing the deductions. Things were different then! After a while Frankie got the 10% bug and with the 2 Saccos, Eddie and Richie, formed Arlington Motors and became a 3 truck owner operator. They hustled as hard as they worked. We were still doing a lot of pier work and they had deals with all of the clerks and checkers. I do not believe they ever left the piers with an accurate count. They had a cellar full of Italian tomatoes for sale. One Christmas season they had some “extra” liquor to sell and their best deal was \$2 a bottle or \$25 a case! You are right, the math is a little curious.

Eventually they left us and Arlington Motors became a freight consolidating company for a VT company, Rouse Transportation. They built a platform in our garage and consolidated freight in Somerville. The money was never great and all 3 got jobs. Richie went to work for my brother at Hutchinson Industries working out of Stop & Shop meat in Marlboro. His career ended when there was no logical explanation as to how the cases of canned hams ended in his truck. Eddie left and became a starter for the M.T.A. He lasted until a very large, irate lady jumped off the bus onto Eddie and he had permanently disabled back. Frankie ended up making the list at Star Market Norwood and eventually retired with a full Teamster pension. Frankie’s choice of retirement destination was Bethlehem, N.H, which is a Hasidic Jewish community. It is always a question as to why there? Frankie’s story is Vincent advised him to go there because New Hampshire was going to allow casino gambling and Frankie is near the Mount Washington Resort and his property would become very valuable. I will close with my favorite hustle story about Frankie and Eddie. Allegedly in the early 1980’s they were offered \$10,000 cash if they could get rid of a tanker full of very contaminated liquids. For \$10,000 they agreed. Their solution was to wait until a very rainy night to drive to Route 1 in Danvers, open the pet cocks on the trailer, drive to Newburyport, turn around and arrive back in Danvers with an empty trailer. The rain would dispose of the “stuff.” True Story, who knows? But a wonderful myth if it isn’t.

Phil Cantorne started out as the yardman at First National Stores. He was part of a very large Italian family. One of his brothers was a large old-fashioned bookie with an actual office on Milk Street in Boston. It was fairly common for most truck drivers to play a football card every week. Phil was the distributor, treasurer and collector of their betting devices. Unfortunately, our Saturday freight car crew was pretty lucky with the cards. The cards eventually led to actual bets, which Phil was glad to take for his Brother. This did not turn out as well as the cards and at my father’s request Phil would not take any more action from my relatives. When First National finally closed, Phil became a Webster employee. He worked out of the produce market and delivered produce to First National in their new warehouse in Connecticut. We had a limited supply of working reefers, so Phil borrowed from a fleet of reefers in the produce center that belonged to U.P.S. West Coast division called Mar Trac. These were very well maintained, and the reefers worked. However, they also were well monitored, so

Phil was always using a different trailer. Phil called this process getting a “fresh one.” Since then, the phrase “fresh one” meant swapping a reefer.

Tom “Tiny” Thompson came to us as a part of a package deal from a small produce trucking company that was hauling A&P at the time. The company was Raia Trans. and it was located in a small garage near City Square in Chelsea. Tiny was a large African-American gentleman who was a terrific worker, driver, produce market guy and friend. When Tiny came to us he stayed in the produce market and became our working foreman for the Star Market account. Tiny knew everyone in Chelsea and was respected by all. We never had a shortage or damage claim while Tiny was our foreman. He started most conversations regardless of subject with the phrase “you say for instance,” most times the phrase had nothing to do with the conversation that followed.

The second half of the Raia purchase was Jimmy Mancuso. Jimmy was the exact opposite of Tiny in everything. Tiny was large and Jimmy was so small he was nicknamed, “The Jockey.” Tiny was a gentleman, Jimmy was brash and demanding. Tiny was polite, Jimmy was pushy. Tiny could hold his liquor at Flynn’s, Jimmy could not. Jimmy had a lot of quirks, one was all 5 feet and 5 inches of him preferred to drink a shot of whiskey and a “Hienicker”, correct spelling with the R on the end. Jimmy also never owned an automobile and Tiny drove him home and literally deposited him on the steps of his house in East Boston. Jimmy always carried a doubled up #3 grocery sack that contained 4 or 5 of the best “sangwiches” ever! Also correct spelling with a “G.” The sack also contained gloves, aprons, an extra shirt and who knows what else. When Jimmy backed into a produce company he never did any work because everyone wanted to be in his favor and get a sangwich. Jimmy was as loyal a friend as you could find. He was also well respected by everyone in the Chelsea Market. Because of Jimmy’s career and connections before his truck driving, Jimmy would often be in the owner of the produce companies’ office while someone else loaded his truck. Jimmy was not a patient guy and one day while hauling a container to Gillette the bale of steel collapsed its’ shipping platform and the regular Gillette receivers could not move it. Jimmy became very irate while waiting for someone named “Bill Wright,” when in fact he was waiting for the in house “Mill Wright Team.” He called Somerville several times trying to get help finding “Bill Wright.” He was certainly in my top 5 DiSilva employees. If you paid attention you could learn a lot from Jimmy Mancuso.

Union Friends of TD

Billy McCarthy was a longtime friend of my father's. They both were early and long members of Local 25. Local 25 was formed and organized in Charlestown, not far from their current building. Billy was a Charlestown kid and T.D. lived 3-4 miles away in East Somerville.

They both drove over the road to NYC, Billy for M&M Transportation and my father for Highway Express. This was pre-WWII and the NYC trip was an 8-hour drive with a layover in NYC with plenty of free time between trips. They also were stewards of their companies and organizers for Local 25 in the spare time. I often wondered if Vincent wasn't drafted would my father have stayed on the union side of the industry.

While Tom was becoming more involved in the management side, Billy Mac was becoming an elected official in Local 25. He eventually became president of Local 25 and turned it into the best run and most successful Teamster local in New England. He was most certainly a terrific leader that solidified the jobs and job security for his members.

Tom and Billy Mac had a shared set of values that helped a lot of people. Many Saturday P.M.'s they met at my father's office and discussed ways to protect jobs from both the union and management perspective. Even as young as I was, I recognized two very smart concerned men and their ability to solve problems.

Billy was a friend to my father in many circumstances. Their loyalty to each other is hard to understand unless you come from Charlestown or Brick Bottom and rose to their heights. Billy rose to President of the International Teamsters.

One other important fact was they were both very loyal to their friends.

Carmine D'Angelo and his friend Angelo were the principal officers from the Teamsters Bakery Division, both great friend of my father. They had their offices in NYC. Carmine didn't fly, so Angelo and Carmine drove to visit my father at Loon Mountain in New Hampshire and Palm Aire in Florida. My father talked to Carmine almost every day. Again loyalty, honesty, your word and integrity were the kind of qualities that bound this friendship.

Other Boston Teamsters were all friendly with my father, the older group included Gus Manning, John "Honky" Call, Ken Johnson and Jackie Carnes. Joe Conlon was in this group, but he had a falling out with Mac and faded out of the inner group. The most notable of the next generation of Mac's Lieutenants were Freddie Singelais and Frank Hackett. Freddie and my father were very good friends. They met for lunch and dinner and Freddie also visited Tom in Loon and Florida.

Geo Cashman was part of the later group, but he had some disagreements with Mac that became so serious they had a permanent falling out and George ran and beat Billy to become the principal officer at Local 25. It was a very sad day to see Billy Mc leave the Local he had built and nurtured on his terms.

Despite my father's unwavering loyalty to Billy Mac and Freddie Singelais' loyalty and friendship with Billy, Freddie brokered a peace between Geo Cashman and my father. Part of the reason was Geo became President of Local 25, but Billy's guys won all the other offices on the ticket and both Geo and Freddie had served under Mac for several terms. Geo and my father actually became friends and my father mentored Geo on many occasions. They developed a truly honest and sincere relationship that survived some tumultuous times in their lives.

Family, Friends and Acquaintances

Charlie Arbing

Charlie Arbing was a Stop & Shop VP of Manufacturing, Commissary, Bakery and eventually Transportation. In all of Charlie's positions, we had a trucking operation to one extent or another. I believe it was always a fair, honest relationship that benefited the DiSilva Companies and Stop & Shop Companies. Charlie was a numbers guy and very successful at making operations successful. His numbers skills were second only to my father's.

One of Charlie's bigger achievements was in the milk plant. He inherited a tired facility and transformed it into a state of the art modern and efficient facility. He had an energy solution installed that was using the steam and heat from pasteurizing milk into enough electricity to not only power the milk plant, but also sell electricity to their electric supplier. Charlie enjoyed the milk plant because it was in his DNA. His father was an executive with a major Boston based milk company, Whiting Milk and Charlie actually spent some time working for Whittings.

Charlie was a success at all the tasks Stop & Shop gave him including purchasing equipment, labor relations and contract negotiations. At one point he was appointed to represent employers on the Teamster Health and Welfare board and his common sense and ability to understand numbers quickly brought the fund out of the red into the blacks.

It shouldn't be hard to tell that I thought Charlie was one of the most capable people we ever worked with. Charlie is a native Marblehead resident and can be found on his boat "Seldom Seen" for at least 8 months in a calendar year.

Bob Stocki

Bob Stocki was Vincent's Son-in-Law. He married Marie, Vincent and Gladys' 2nd daughter. Bob came from a farming family in Deerfield, Mass. His manner, ethics, work ethic, sense of humor, toughness, etc. were greatly influenced by his family's farming history. No matter how hard we worked, and believe me we worked hard, Bob always said farming was harder and less rewarding.

I know Bob had no idea what he was getting into when he started at DiSilva Transportation. He started like all of us as only driving a truck. He was as hard a worker as you will ever meet, but eventually he was drafted by Vincent to do some office work as well as his truck driving. So after doing a full day's work Bob would spend countless hours in the office typing bills with Vincent. He was the first of all the relations to start spending more time in the office than on the trucks.

Because my brother Tom was still at United and Cousin Bud was in Windsor Locks with First National I joined Bob in the office. My temperament was not quite ready for that task, but Bob's steady, unflappable attitude quickly adjusted my attitudes and temperament. Part of our week was racquetball in Waltham and I became very aware that if I was a jerk in the office, Bob drilled me with that racquetball! I know Bob was the single biggest influence on my attitudes and

temperament of anyone in our business. I am very grateful for the countless hours we spent in that tiny office. “You can only pick your friends and not your relatives” and I will always be grateful for Bob being my friend.”

Alexander P. DiSilva

Alexander P. DiSilva or as everyone knows him, Buddy. Bud was Vincent’s only son and he was one of five of us driving for DiSilva that had a college degree. Bud graduated from St. Anselm’s in Manchester, NH.

One obvious element of Vincent’s personality was he didn’t play favorites. Bud was treated like everyone else in Somerville. He was never given a status as the “Boss's Son.” He was expected to do all the menial tasks everyone else did. Bud, however, on occasion took advantage of being a DiSilva. Remember the casks of olives at the pier; Bud always drove that forklift. The flour and misc. grocery rail cars, somebody ran the jack and it might as well be Bud. How about Saturday First National Store grocery loads. Bud maneuvered very hard to get a pallet or an elevator load and he was successful unless my father was going out that day. Tom spoiled many a Saturday plan of Bud’s by showing up and taking the last pallet or elevator load.

When F.N.S. moved to Windsor Locks, Connecticut, Bud went with them to be our man on site. In anticipation of this, Bud and Bob Stocki formed a company called Windsor Lock Trucking, which was going to operate out of Windsor Locks for F.N.S. They hired a very eclectic crew of driver and developed some customers that certainly had freight outside of our conventional DiSilva areas. How did that First National Trailer show up in Miami? Windsor Lock didn’t last long, but their experiences probably are worthy of an entire chapter. Super Trucker! Johnny Chicken Bones the Miami delivery! I spent one day a week explaining to some customer why their trailer was so far off route.

Eventually the Connecticut Teamsters convinced F.N.S. to do away with DiSilva Trans and Windsor Lock and Bud moved on to our startup at C&S in Brattleboro. We will get into that in a later chapter.

No one will deny we had an incredibly difficult boss and job, but we all got along very well for a lot of years. Unfortunately for all, Bud developed some bad habits that cost him and his family a lot over the years.

Tom A. DiSilva (Little Tom)

Tom A. DiSilva, the A differentiated him from my father. Tom was a Boston College grad that like all of us was quickly raising a family, surviving week to week on a truck drivers’ paycheck. Again, no favoritism, he was expected to and did everything our drivers did. However, Tom got a great opportunity when Local 25 and The Brewers local squabbled over jurisdiction of the Carling's Beer distribution. My father needed someone he trusted to run the operation and he sent Tom to be his guy on the scene. It was the craziest, most difficult and longest of all our strikes. Tom did a great job. When after years of difficult times United Liquors acquired the account Tom and Webster Trucking were ready. We had a wonderfully successful relationship

with Ray Tye and United Liquors.

Tom became our union guy and negotiated contracts, arbitrated grievances and established relationships with many difficult New England teamster locals. It was a job he was made for and he did it very well. When United finally wanted to take their trucking in house Tom came back to perform the same duties for our in-house labor leasing companies.

Jack MacDonnell

Jack MacDonnell was the 2nd of Vincent's Son-in-Laws working in Somerville. Jack certainly fit the mold. He was a B.U. grad, had a very rapidly growing family and was willing to work very hard. All the crazy jobs we had; watermelon, potatoes, meat loads, pier work, freight cars, etc. Jack did his share. On occasion his stubbornness got him into a little beef with my father, but not too serious.

Before I had a license, I was Jackie's helper on the trucks. Every summer trip Jack took I was with him. It was quite an education for a 14-15-year-old youngster. One of my favorite trips, a late afternoon trip from FNS's Somerville warehouse to FNS East Providence where Jack was a big trotter fan and Foxboro, Mass, about halfway between Somerville and Providence, had a harness track. Jack would pull into the parking lot he had a reserved parking spot and he would bet 3 or 4 races and the leave. It was fun to watch. Not a clue if he won or lost. His wife didn't know either.

When Vincent bought AAA packing, he selected his Son-in Law Jack to run it and it did very well. Eventually Jack retired from DiSilva Fruit Company.

Henry Thompson

Henry Thompson was a character right from central casting of "Guys & Dolls." He was hardworking, gruff, slaughtered the English language, but sincere, honest and dependable. Henry came to us from a small company called D&O Trans. D&O was a straight job only operation that did mainly pier work for Stop & Shop. I am not sure how Henry finished up at D&O and became an Owner Operator of ours. I think D&O went out of business and Henry bought a tractor. Because of all of D&O's pier work Henry was familiar with all the Custom House brokers and became our in-house courier service. He also provided Bob Stocki and myself with very funny stories and expressions.

Henry alleges he was drinking with a Somerville Policeman one night and at the end of the night the Policeman asked Henry for a ride home. When Henry started the car the Policeman arrested Henry for D.U.I. and locked him up for the night. This prompted Henry to coin the phrase, "Dirty Double Crossing S.O.B." which Bob and I still use when referring to some people.

Richard Ruth

Richard Ruth was a mechanic in Somerville as we transitioned from owning equipment to leasing. Richie was a military veteran who came to us from Louie Poto. Richie had a fascination with military things like cannons. He had one at his house and fired it on occasion.

He had several pistols and rifles and loved all the martial arts apparatuses especially if it was potentially lethal.

One Richie story is we were having some trouble with kids breaking into containers stored in our yard overnight. Richie took two old storage trailers and placed them nose-to-nose and rolled the wheels up, so the trailers were severely pitched down. He then heavily greased their roofs, so anyone climbing our fence and getting on the roof would quickly slide down to the space between the two trailers. He then heavily salted that space with a multitude of sharp spiked stakes. So at the end of the slide you most certainly were going to get cut!! I do not remember anyone being maimed! I wonder what our liability would have been!

Bob Stocki had a snow blower that needed to be delivered to his house and asked Richie to make the delivery. Before that happened, David or Chris asked Bob if he really wanted Richie to know where he lived. It didn't take long for Bob to get Jeff to deliver the snow blower.

No Story of DiSilva Somerville is complete without the mention of Uncle Tony and his nephews, Paul, Rick, Joe, Bruce and Wayne Griffin. Uncle Tony was working for Al Santamaria and he probably was the introduction for his nephews to become Owner Operators at DiSilva.

They came in all sizes and shapes, but all were hard workers who never refused anything. Paul was a very quiet kid whose personality was very different from his cousins. Paul overthought everything to his detriment in later years. The other 4 were just the opposite and had a "bull in the china shop" approach to work, after work and life in general. They were definitely a big part of our ability to say yes to any job offered to us.

The Griffins all owned aging tractors, so their range was limited. Their specialty was containers. It would be impossible to calculate how many containers that crew unloaded. I know it is Guinness Book of Records worthy. And without question they unloaded more Bradlees blinds than all of the rest of us combined. They were the best family group we ever hired. Once in a great while one of them spent too much time at Flynn's in Sullivan Square, but within a day or two the cousins got him back on track and back to work.

Lumpers

DiSilva Trans had arrangements with the Midwest meat packers to not only deliver the piggybacks of meat to First National, Star Market and Stop & Shop, but also to get them unloaded in a timely manner. The trucking was fairly normal. The meat packers sent us trailers at B&MRR in East Cambridge and delivered and dropped the trailers at the chain store warehouses.

The unloading was the tricky part, at each facility there was a crew of unloaders who were called Lumpers. All 3 facilities had their own crew and they all had different personalities. F.N.S. and Stop & Shop both had a member of the Tuttle family. Mike handled the F.N.S. and Al was in South Boston at Stop & Shop. The Star Market crew was all very large, very hardworking men of color. All 3 crews had pretty much permanent guys. It was a very well paying job and mostly cash. As well as our R.R. pigs they unloaded over the road tricks, which were all cash. All of these guys made a very hard job look easy. They had a system of rails and meat hooks that they connected to the chain store warehouse system and generally could unload 45,000 of swinging meat in an hour!

At F.N.S. Mike Tuttle was in charge. He and his guys would unload the beef in the A.M. and then Mike would head to his day job at the Boston Fish Pier, so a 12-14 hour day for Mike was normal.

At Star Market, we did not have as much interaction because we dropped the trailers before the Lumpers arrived. However, one day they were protesting the money and did not show up. Vincent sent Bob McCullough and myself to unload the trucks! What a disaster! We did manage to get a couple of piggybacks empty, but the regular crew proved their point and were back in place the next day. To this day every time I see the Star Market Transportation V.P. Herb Johnson, he rides me about how Bob McCullough and I were so awful that day. Bob and I always agreed with him.

The best for last, the Stop & Shop Lumpers have a longer history with us. Al Tuttle, Bob Frizell and Mickey Acierno all could have their own chapters in our book.

Al Tuttle was a fantastic worker who certainly had a great imagination. Stop & Shop South Boston shut down and moved to Marlboro, Mass and the Lumpers moved with them.

Al not only retained his lumper job, but also worked for us as our yardman. His shift was 10 PM to 7 AM as a yardman and at 7 when receiving opened he unloaded beef. As a yardman he had to go into the shipping offices frequently and on many a very hot night all Mike wore was a pair of work boots and a meat cutters apron. An image that to this day is way too much info. There are a lot of stories about Mike, all crazy and all true.

Bob Frizell was one of the best employees our family ever hired. He was smart, loyal, hardworking and never refused to help our family. As these businesses wound down, having to let Bobby go was one of my most difficult tasks. There will only be one "Mister" in this history. He worked everywhere and did everything for us.

A couple of lumper stories worth noting. The R.R. trailers always were identified by a set of letters and 6 or 7 numbers; CNWZ, UPZ, BNZ, BMZ, etc. Well, Bobby and Mike decided that all the road trucks were CNW, not Canadian North West, but “Cash Never Waits.” If you had a R.R. trailer and an over the road trailer showed up the over the road guy went first and they paid cash because “C.N.W.”

The Lumpers billed Vincent on Friday A.M. Vincent made their checks out to Cash and they took their check to one of the original check cashers in Chelsea. Eventually, the I.R.S. put a stop to that and the checks needed a name. So very clearly from then on all the Lumpers checks were made out to Charles River. It has often been said that to qualify as a lumper your hat size and your I.Q. had to match. Not true for our guys they were pretty sharp operators.

The godfather to all of these guys was Mickey Acierno. I do not know how my father and Mickey became so close, but I am very glad they did. He was truly amazing in his value and contribution to our success. He was our eyes and ears and peacemaker in Marlboro and when we moved to Vermont he was even more important. As we stumbled along in Vermont, Mickey held every imaginable title in this industry. He was a yardman, a recruiter, our eyes and ears in the early union years, he was a babysitter for Buddy, David, Michael and his own Michael, my nephew Tom for a while, Gregory and probably 1000 non-related employees. It was a pretty common to hear someone talk about “Father Flannigan.” We knew they were talking about something Mickey did for them or their family. He, also, found time to run Webster Trucking Brattleboro for us. This is probably the perfect segway into our C&S years.

George Jouvelakous, “George the Greek”

George was the foreman at DiSilva Transportation, who knew we needed one? He was a longtime friend of Tom’s. George was as strong as anyone we ever employed. One of his skills was his ability to get us to load his truck. I guess those skills were honed at night when he tended bar at a joint in Cambridge called the Cantab, which Tom and L.T owned. George, also, was a horseplayer, owner. We spent a lot of nights going to racetracks to bet on George’s horses. I don’t remember any winnings, but the memories and laughs more than made up for the few dollars we could afford to bet.

Daniel Costa, “Danny”

Certainly, a character from any chapter in U.S. history, Danny was an East Somerville guy whose father had a real estate office in Somerville. I am not sure how Danny ended up with a fascination for trucks, but he did. I do not know many people that loved Macks as much as Danny.

Danny, also, had the Cadillac, the cruising and European trip infatuation that L.T and my father did. There are some very old cool James Bond tuxedo pictures of the 3 of them on such exotic places as Monaco, Rome, S.S. France Ballroom and Caribbean Islands.

Danny was always well dressed even when driving his precious Mack Truck, which was named “Capo Vento.” One of Danny’s quirks was his overuse of aftershave. Many people recognized Danny by his cologne no matter what time of the day.

My father and Danny were friends until their end of span of probably 70 years! Not many will top those numbers.

Frank Volpe

Frank was a later in life friend, but a true friend to Tom. Frank was born and raised in the North End and eventually became a President of The Teamsters Bakery Local. Frank was a constant companion and always visited Florida and Loon. Frank was also the world’s most loyal Democrat especially in his adopted town of Natick. He must hold the record for holding signs on bridges on Route 9. If there was an election Frankie was holding a sign and organizing for any Democrat.

Henry Criscuolo

Henry was a partner, friend and a great admirer of Tom’s. My father and Henry met and became business partners when Bradlees/Stop&Shop opened the Universal Distributors Warehouse in North Haven. This Partnership rapidly developed into a solid friendship. Henry went on to become a good friend of Maureen and I. Henry was a very religious person and could and did offer a lot of prayers for Maureen and Jenn as they battled cancer.

Harvey Cohen

Harvey is another person who deserves mention when you reference my father. Harvey was a hard worker truck guy who like Danny Costa has a fascination with Mack Trucks. Harvey was a very successful airfreight truck man who I am certain was an innovator in airfreight as we were in grocery trucking and labor leasing.

I am not certain of the circumstances, but I know my father helped Harvey overcome some difficult times. The fact that I don’t know speaks volumes about Harvey and my father and their friendship. When one friend needed help, the other responded, problem resolved. I am jealous because those bonds are a casualty of our media driven society.

Thomas A. DiSilva

As I have expressed a million times, I have been a very lucky guy. Other than Jenn's passing, what could I possibly complain about. I have a fantastic wife, children, their spouses, grandchildren, parents, etc. I had a very successful business life. Oh yes, my father certainly established a road for our companies to travel, but we did travel the correct path.

But, probably the best part of all of this was having a true friend and partner as my older brother. You do not need to go very far too see most family businesses destroyed by sibling rivalry. Tom was always my big brother and while we disagreed on style, mannerisms and policy, it was always respectful and business-like. Never nasty or personal. He was the best brother I knew. I know a lot of families of siblings that imploded over B.S. issues. Tom and I were friends right up to his way too early passing. That is my personal side of my brother.

The business Tom was excellent at his job. His first assignment was The Carling Strike that I referenced earlier. Remember that was when Tom was maybe 24 or 25. He managed a gang of Teamsters that were tough, hardcore and hard-nosed guys not used to taking any orders never mind from the Boss and his young son. Our company and family came out with a lifelong relationship with the amazing Ray Tye and United Liquors because of Tom's leadership.

One of Tom's other unique talents was his ability to negotiate very well. His negotiating led to a lot of favorable contracts for our friends and customers. One of the biggest changes was the elimination of helpers on trucks in the liquor industry. His negotiating and warehousing skills were the major component to our success in the Wallingford, North Haven and Chicopee warehouses that we ran for Stop and Shop and Universal Distributors for many years. With hindsight, my family probably did not take advantage of Tom's skills. We should have developed a more aggressive sales and contract division where Tom would have shined.

I hope it is apparent how much I thought of my brother. It is truly amazing how much non-family members thought of him. In his family's eyes, his personal friends and in the business world, he is well respected and sadly missed.

Family wise you only had to watch Val and her children at holidays and/or Wells to see their love and respect for Tom. Wells was where his grandchildren were able to show their admiration for their grandfather. Even my children two full summers later look for Uncle Tom grilling or smoking on the back porch at Wells. It will never be the same without Tom.

I could probably write a book about Tom and Wells. He loved Wells and Wells loved him. His personality was perfect for Maine. A man of a few words suited the natives and he became a Down Mainer very quickly. Arthur, Mike, Stanley, Pat, Marge and Billy DiNardo are a few of the Wells friends, but truly everyone I have ever met in the Wells area had a story about how Tom helped them in some way.

If Tom befriended, you it was for life--Bob Leonard and Tom went to grammar school together and he was still hosting a Lobster Bake in Wells for him and other Watertown grammar school classmates when he died. George, Joanne, Joseph, Geo and Tommy met some 40ish years ago, the group of guys from Union Market met 35-ish years ago, the Alpine ski group 25 years and even current friends, Joe Laffey, Harvey Cohen, Charlie Arbing, etc. 20/25 years ago. I think

you get the value that Tom put on friendship and loyalty. It is safe to say I was the lucky one with longest friendship of 75 years. Tom is truly missed by all.

The Cohen Family

Without question the most significant customer/story of our history is our relationship with the Cohen family, their companies and their employees. This all came about because of the relationship between Geo McGraw and my father that developed while George Warehouse and Transportation for First National Stores in Somerville, MA.

George began at FNS in East Hartford, CT as our accountant. He transitioned to warehouse and transportation and eventually became the Vice President in charge of both areas and was transferred to FNS headquarters, which were in Somerville.

When Geo got to Somerville, DiSilva Transportation had been servicing F.N.S. no matter what the problems were. FNS was 100% union. The UFCW, retail clerks and meat cutters had contracts with the stores. Teamsters Local 29 had the contracts in Somerville for both the warehouse and drivers. By the way all of FNS' competitors had the same contracts and locals.

George quickly noticed that my father had a wide array of friends that could help not only at the negotiating table, but also at a picket line. Plus, we did pier work, piggybacks produce, meat, grocery loads. unloaded freight, cars, etc. In other words, whatever George needed Tom delivered. It was a fair and honest relationship between both established companies.

However, through a series of management changes, layouts and consolidation George's role was becoming very pressure filled and eventually Geo needed to take care of his health and he resigned. He was only in his mid 50's and did not want to retire. Very quickly he was employed by a modest sized union grocery wholesaler in Worcester, MA. C&S Wholesale was a family run company that was formed in 1915? by ?? and Al Siegel, but by the time Geo arrived it was owned by Lester Cohen and his Sons, Jim & Rick. They were in a very difficult union position because the bigger wholesalers in their local, Local 170, were playing ball with the Teamsters. Both the competition and the Teamsters were together trying to put C&S out of business.

When Geo arrived, C&S had already made overtures to relocate to Brattleboro, VT, but they had no chance of leaving the Teamsters. Geo used the solution that was so successful for FNS. He introduced my father to Lester Cohen and his sons. They had a few meetings, but I am not sure the Cohens were "all in" until one day Geo called me in Somerville to ask what we could do if all the 170 drivers called in sick. I told him Somerville guys would deliver the whole days work. That day came about a week later! Our guys all showed up on time and completed all the deliveries and backhauls by mid-afternoon. I know that was the clincher for Lester Cohen. I know this because he has told me so many times over the years. The meetings, conversations and commitments all became more intense and eventually led to a deal.

The deal was basically a hand shake between Lester, Rick, Geo and my Father. We promised to run an operation as if it was our own money. They promised us exclusivity in their trucking as long as C&S Wholesale existed.

Late 1979 and early 1980 came very quickly and once again, some of Tom's friends came to our help and C&S their contracts and operations in Worcester and opened as the first non-union wholesaler in New England in Brattleboro VT. Nobody was more surprised than Lester and Rick. We emptied Worcester and 170 never put up a picket line. Truly Amazing.

As all this was happening FNS, now in Windsor Locks, CT, was being bullied by the Connecticut Teamsters to eliminate us from Windsor Locks. This is relevant because it left my cousin, Bud, available to run our new customer, C&S. We started in a very tiny dispatch office downstairs in a motel on Route 5 in Brattleboro. It began with approximately 25 C&S Worcester Tractors, which were all yellow Macks that were leased from Herty. Fortunately, there were a lot of unemployed, hungry truck drivers available in Southern Vermont. Bud ended up with a very loyal, hardworking and honest group of drivers. History will show that Bud had his flaws, but getting people to be loyal and work hard for him was not one of them. The original Brattleboro drivers were a great group of guys. Several lasted until the end and still keep in touch with members of our family.

Once C&S was moved in and we started to deliver to their customers, the grocery world would never be the same. Geo's warehouseman and our drivers did what everyone said was impossible. We delivered the correct product on time and at the same pricing as Worcester and in most cases with a friendlier, more helpful driver. That is the overview. The real story is amazing, but true. The expression "you can't make this stuff up" certainly comes to mind.

THE END

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