

I never met Frank Sinatra. But I am an authority on the subject. I grew up in Buffalo. It was the fifties. We had Eisenhower in the white house and Sinatra in Hollywood. In Buffalo we took our cue from Sinatra.

Some men are granted a license to live their lives as children—from the day they are born until they drop dead 80 years later—the concept of instant gratification. The opposite is delayed gratification—life as an adult.

For example: Picasso. Picasso is the classic. Picasso would say: I want to paint—and he would paint. I want to eat—and he would eat. I want to fuck—and he would fuck. Etc etc.

And Sinatra qualifies as well. What was the Rat Pack—Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, etc--but a group of men, 45 years old, who reject the concept of delayed gratification? Another word is fun. It was fun, fun, fun and the rules be damned. There were no rules. Its hard not to like that.

Lets talk about the voice. He was called “The Voice” for a reason. Bing Crosby had a joke. He said “A voice like that comes along once in a lifetime. But why did it have to be my lifetime?” There was something about it—a flavor—exciting and intimate--that produced an extraordinary compelling effect--a narcotic. This was the voice I used to seduce my second wife.

There was a bar on the west side, the Campus Lounge, called such because two blocks away was Buffalo State Teachers College. But the name was misleading. The Campus didn't draw the collegiate preppy types. It drew the neighborhood greaseball types like yours truly.

Inside it was the shrine concept and the object of worship was Frank Sinatra. There was a jukebox with 50 records, 40 by Frank, pictures on the wall, movie posters, framed newspaper clippings featuring photographer punchouts, etc.

That was The Campus—Franks place. We talked like him, we dressed like him, we drank like him (Jack Daniels on the rocks.) Now we needed to get laid like him. If Sinatra decided to play Buffalo and pay a call at the Campus it would have been a cosmic event. The place would have gone up in a puff of smoke—vaporised. It cannot be explained. You had to be there. We were Sinatra junkies and it was at the Campus we gathered to get our fix.

I mention all this because I have just returned from a Sinatra memorabilia exhibit on display at the Doheny Library at USC. Sinatra was a pack rat type, nothing was tossed and during a career in show business spanning 60 odd years, especially this career, you tend to accumulate a lot of shit. His daughters decided to divert a fraction of it to present this exhibit.

Its well worth a visit. Its all there sorted into categories: Sinatra the crooner, the actor, the TV performer, the radio star. There is Sinatra the family man with the kids and grandkids, Sinatra the humanitarian, Sinatra the presidential intimate. The only missing categories are Sinatra the Mob crony

and pussy hound. There is the young Sinatra, the human golf club, with this amazing head of hair, to the old Sinatra, complete with jowls and meticulous rug cemented in place. There are the awards: citations, commendations, proclamations. There are the honorary degrees, The Medal of Freedom, by act of Congress, and an American flag that went to the moon, compliments of Gene Cernan, the guy from NASA ground control. There are notes--from Eleanor Roosevelt and Winston Churchill and Jackie K. Letters from Truman, Nixon, Johnson, Reagan. There is the Rat Pack—and a Rat Pack glossary of lingo. (“gasser”—*noun*, an exciting thing: “the act is a gasser”. “Charley”—*noun*, a man, very square, non-exciting. “Let’s lose Charley”. “duke”—*verb*, meaning to tip: “I duked him \$20”)

You name it, Frank did it, and its all there.

They have a DVD player set up and I watched part of *Pal Joey*, the quintessential Sinatra film with Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak. He plays himself—a singer/pussy hound type—in a bit of a slump career-wise but he has a dream—his own club. Enter Rita Hayworth, a society dame, recently widowed, needs to get laid. He makes a pitch—a partnership, her to provide the bread and he runs the club, and also, by way of a perk, an offer to resurrect her dismal sex life. She replies by slapping his face, there is a pause and he says: “You can hit harder than that—partner”.

I loved that line.

Maybe you don’t like Sinatra. I have friends, younger friends, younger women friends, and the subject pops up from time to time and the verdict is non-flattering. He was 1) a pussy hound; and 2) a bully.

Both true—and they tend not to dilute with a brilliant fame and the accumulation of wealth. But as I say, it was Buffalo in the fifties, he was Sinatra and there was a saying: “Its Franks world, we only live in it”.