

VC: Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

KK: And I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: With us today is Dom Perruccio, author of *Stomping Ground*. In this memoir, he describes his life of crime growing up in Greenwich Village in the 1960's, and the day that changed his life. Welcome to the podcast, Dom. Nice to have you.

DP: Hi. Thanks, ladies, for having me on your podcast.

VC: So let's start from the very beginning. Why did you want to write this book?

DP: Basically to, I guess, get my life out there kinda before I forgot it. It was basically a tribute and dedication to my mother who suffered through all of the turmoil that I put her through, that life put her through and I want to thank my family and I want to give a big shout out to my co-author of the book because he was very instrumental, Charles Messina, getting it done.

KK: Well, one of the things I wanted to ask you was what was the process of writing the book?

DP: About 5 or 6 years ago, maybe 7 years ago, I got this idea in my head to write a book, so I said, I'd better put down some notes, so I wrote about 200 pages of handwritten chapters or notes, whatever you want to call them, tried to assemble them together in the form of a book, and then after I retired I shopped around for a publisher or someone even basically to clean up the book because it is my first book and I'm not savvy on writing books.

VC: So at this point, enter Charles Messina, correct?

DP: Yes, yes, it was kind of a strange situation. I had seen one of his books that he had written previously, and I didn't know him because he's about 15 years younger than me. But I reached out to him through his publicist. It was just amazing that he had gotten back to me so quickly. So I explained to him what my lifestyle was because he didn't know me either because of the age difference, although we grew up maybe, on either side of the Village. The Village is kind of divided by Sixth Avenue so I was on one side, he was on the other. But I

knew his family and he knew where I used to stay, my friends, so that's where it all started and about a year and a half later we finalized everything and we published it.

KK: You have so many things in the book that you speak about and so many things that you have overcome. For people who have not read the book, can you tell us more about as a young man, what kind of a lifestyle did you have?

DP: Well, as I previously said, the book was a tribute to my mother. She was estranged from my father because he had a terrible gambling habit and ran up a lot of debts so we came across a powerful mob figure that my father had owed money to. And I don't know how it happened because I was a little young at the time, I was only ten years old, and my mother and this mob figure kind of made a relationship out of it so basically, at ten years old, I was introduced to this different kind of a lifestyle. The Village had all of these mob figures in them and he kind of influenced my life.

VC: So tell us about some of the things that you did as a kid growing up. You maybe got involved in some criminal activities?

DP: It was a normal upbringing. I went to a Catholic school, I came from a middle class family, and I graduated from grammar school. All throughout grammar school and into high school we played a lot of sports, but we were always into a lot of mischief because we never stayed home.

VC: What kind of mischief?

DP: Just normal kid stuff, throwing water balloons at people, doing funny things like that, playing pranks on each other, firecrackers, lighting firecrackers,

KK: Dom, as you got older you really went into more than just prankster kind of games with kids. Can you tell us when you were a little more of an adult what you went into with this background?

VC: How did that escalate?

DP: It probably escalated from getting a little bit older, getting more bored, and once we started getting involved with alcohol probably at a young age, maybe 16 years old or something like that, then things started to

happen as far as getting into illegal activities, or escalating with fights, or stuff that you can get into trouble with because you go from juvenile delinquent to possibly a criminal at that point in time.

VC: What kind of, and I'm quoting you here, illegal activities were you involved in?

DP: Well, just being introduced to the mob figure at ten years old, at 13 years old I was carrying policy slips for him because my mother was...

VC: What's that, what's a policy slip?

DP: The Italian lottery when you play the number, at the end of the day, either the bookie owes somebody or... it's all tallied up and my mother was kind of like working for them at night after she came home from her regular job. She would tally up all the slips that came in and they would figure out who owed who. After school I would be running these slips back and forth from my house because that's where the stuff was being tallied up and at 13 years old basically that's when I got my start in these minor things.

KK: All right, that was when you were 13. Now jump to like you're 17.

DP: At 17 years old I was done with high school. I didn't—I went, this is a funny story, I went one day to college. I was going to go to City College, Bronx Community College. I took the ride one day for orientation and I said I'm never gonna do this again because it was A, too far, and B, I thought it was a waste of time so I didn't go to college. So I basically got a job, a legitimate job, and on the weekends we would just get into trouble. It was kind of like Saturday Night Fever. I mean we worked all week long, actually lived for the weekends. This way we would have fun, parties, and girls, and drinking, we had a social club, and that all brings about rowdy, you know, raucous behavior.

KK: That still doesn't sound too criminal. I mean kids do this all the time. What was that switch that you had that you were involved in some criminal activities, as you say?

DP: I was always looking to enterprise one way or another. So enterprising you could go in a couple of different directions. You could do it legally or illegally. As you get older you have a car, you need more money, so you decide to take chances and do different things.

KK: All right, you talk about in your book something that happened on 47th Street at one point where you totally changed your life around. Do you want to describe what happened?

DP: Yeah, basically I was working for two of my lifelong friends. They were in the jewelry business; they had a legitimate and illegitimate business going on at the same time. They had a booth on 47th Street where they bought precious metals and sold jewelry and basically they needed people to ... people, they needed me to watch their booth when they weren't around. They hired me as, really wasn't a bodyguard, but it was more like an extra pair of eyes. We're dealing with high amounts of cash and there's always jewelry and gold and diamonds around so it was a dangerous situation up there even though the NYPD tried to keep it in check and they had private security up there but back then in those days it was kinda like the wild, wild west and it could be very dangerous. That's where we got into trouble one day. They had a client and the client didn't want to deal with the transaction downstairs so they had an apartment upstairs. So we had dealt with them in the past and we went upstairs and they held us hostage at gunpoint, robbed everything that we had on us and let us go, but before they let us go they were, I don't know what their game was, they were maybe playing Russian roulette with us, putting the gun to a pillow, we were gagged and we were handcuffed and then after that they let us go. And I was very surprised, and I always felt that that incident was part of the divine intervention that I dealt with a couple of times in my life and I'm around to talk about it. Myself and one other person could have died that day.

VC: So after that incident what road did you decide to take career wise?

DP: Well, after that incident I started to take a hard look at my life, my new profession there, and I said well, I'm not really a partner in this business and I said to myself, this is a little too dangerous and I decided to get out of that situation because I didn't want that to happen again and it could well have happened again. So I went into the wholesale meat distributing business with my brother in law. We had set him up previously, two or three years before I left 47th Street. He had his established business going and there was room for growth there so I went to work with my brother in law as a partner and we made a go of it distributing meat to restaurants, meat and provisions.

VC: So he had the business originally and you joined in as a partner, is that right?

DP: I joined in as a partner. We set up the business for him. He needed money; they gave him the money free of charge because they knew him and liked him...

KK: But who, “we”? When you say “we”, tell us who “we” is?

DP: The two other people I was working with, Raymond and Charlie were their names. Raymond and Charlie had given him the money on my say-so and they knew him as my brother in law, and they knew him as a nice guy, and they actually did him a favor, they lent him, I believe, \$20,000 to buy a truck and to have the truck outfitted with the, all kinds of air conditioning and to get his business jump-started. And maybe they had hopes of making that into a major, like, distributorship for themselves. But it was never big enough to grow, for them at least, but it was big enough to grow for me to come in as a partner

KK: I know your mother was so important to you and influenced you and obviously she was dating this gangster when you were ten. She must have been very happy that you decided after this fiasco on 47th Street to change your lifestyle.

DP: Obviously, she didn't know about this fiasco and I'm not sure, I don't even know if my wife knew about it at the time. You know, it's not something you want to brag about because, you know, we never reported it to the police or anything like that and we just...and we just chalked it off to hey, we survived it. They probably will never get caught even if you do report it, so who needed the headaches? So, she was happy that I was working in the meat business with Andy. Andy was my brother in law, that was his name and she loved Andy and she was very happy about that.

VC: So then you also worked in construction for a time, is that right?

DP: Right, so this transpired around 1984 when I left 47th Street and got into the meat business with my friend Andy. It was called GBA Meats, God Bless America Meats, and it was a very interesting concept that he had. He had this truck; it was all decked out with an American eagle, American flags on it. It was very patriotic, because he was a very patriotic guy. So after I was with him for about four or five years, we saw that the growth of the business wasn't gonna go the way we planned it and it would be better off that I stepped away from the business. So he bought me out. He made me a payment every week. And that year that he was paying me off, I went to learn the construction business as an apprentice for some kind of minimal wage. So I'm going to work for people and they're thinking like I'm crazy because I have a wife and child and a house and I'm working for them for like \$8.00 an hour. But they didn't understand that somebody was subsidizing my income.

KK: So you did this until your retirement?

DP: Yes. Yes. I did the construction. I reverted back to a company that I worked for where I did construction and installation of banking equipment. It was Diebold Safe Company at the time. That was the name of it, they're still around. They make ATMs. I went back to them and approached them and I said, when you have an ATM project I can install the ATM and make the wall opening, do the electric. So I did that for them for about 25 or 30 years.

VC: So let me just backtrack a little bit. So you had said at one point, and this was actually your phrase, you guys went from "pranksters to gangsters." So can you talk a little bit about that transition and what were some of the specific activities that you guys were engaged in that were more in the gangster category?

DP: The basics of the jewelry business or the social club, that was all semi illegal or illegal activities. So you could go to jail just for that. There were many beatings that went on in the Village and there was many fights and things of that nature. There was an actual riot in Washington Square Park and people died there and friends of mine went to jail for it. Things of that nature, where you could just be around one day, you don't plan anything, and then something really bad happens and then you're running for cover.

VC: Are you still in touch with any of the people that you knew back in those days from the old neighborhood?

DP: Yes, several of them, if they're alive I'm in touch with them obviously, some of them are on Facebook. In the book, the book starts out early on with our little group called, core group of 12, we called ourselves the Dirty Dozen and it was pretty much the mob figure was the head of it and there was like 11 of us in that group and he enjoyed staying with us on weekends so he named us the Dirty Dozen. So at this point in time, only five or six of the Dirty Dozen are still alive. And I'm only in touch with two.

KK: Have they read your book yet?

DP: Yes, yes. They read it, they love it. They liked the parts that I wrote about them. I tried to be as honest; it was a very honest book. Whether certain people didn't like it or not, that's up to them.

VC: Do you ever go back to the old neighborhood?

DP: Not that often. When my mother passed away, and this was a long time ago, like in 1993, that was pretty much me stopping going back to the Village on a regular basis. A lot of people moved away and Covid has caused a lot of problems. The general nature of New York City has caused situations of parking and driving and pretty much everything else, so I've made a life for myself in New Jersey for 45 years now, or more.

KK: What do you suggest for aspiring writers?

DP: I would say write the book, try and find a publicist, try and self-publish because it's difficult to make money with a book if nobody really knows you. By happenchance I ran into my co-author who's a very talented writer and he got interested in it.

KK: Now for all these people out there who want to buy the book, where can they get it?

DP: It's on Amazon, if you google Stomping Ground or my name it'll come up on Amazon right away, I think it's at Barnes & Noble. A lot of stores don't put books on shelves any more so you order it, you know, through the Internet and you'll get it in a couple of days.

VC: And I'm sure they could also order it through their local independent bookseller.

DP: Yeah, you would help out the local vendor if you bought it locally. I just want to say one other thing. There's a book coming out next year, there's no name to it yet. A friend of mine is an established writer and he's putting together a collaboration of 40 individuals, 40 stories or chapters from people who grew up in the Village. So I wrote one chapter recently and my chapter is called "The Summer of 1968." It should be very interesting with stories about artists from the 1960's that were in the Village and my chapter about the summer of 1968.

KK: You'll have to let us know when this is happening and what the name of the book is.

VC: Definitely keep us posted on that. We'll be on the lookout.

DP: OK.

VC: Thank you so much, Dom for joining us today.

KK: We really appreciate it Dom, thank you.

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