

MUSICAL SOUNDS

By Cindy Peters

My husband and I took our first trip to Las Vegas in the early 1990's. This was a low budget road trip to meet up with friends from Denver Metro and South Dakota. In order to save money, we stayed at a Vegas Motel 8 which was a few blocks off the Vegas Strip. Next to the motel was a casino and café which the local residences raved about. As we wandered into the hotel casino, we heard beautiful music and the ching-ching of money flowing from the casino machines. The casino was exceptionally clean even though it was brimming with crowds.

I sat down in one of the few empty Poker Machines. Next to me was a heavy set, elderly Italian man. He was smoking a cigar and he had a coarse laugh. He seemed to be winning as a lot of coins were flowing from his machine. I asked him the secret to his success, and he said that the owner of the casino was his friend. This cigar smoking man proceeded to tell me the history of Las Vegas. He told me that Vegas was a great place until the big corporations took over all the casinos. He told me Vegas was a wonderful place to visit and live when the casinos were owned and operated by what he called the Casino Families. He told me that in those days compulsive gamblers that lost never went hungry or without shelter as it was provided for by the Casino Families.

As this man began to tell me stories my blood turned cold as I began to figure out that these Casino Families were actually Italian Mobsters. He told me that the Rat Pack were great guys and great tippers. They were protected by these families. He told me that these Casino Families kept crime down with hundreds of dead bodies in the desert to prove it. He told me that once a car was stolen from a casino owner and it was returned within the hour. The thief was never heard from again. This man continued to tell me more graphic stories and how wonderful life was before corporations took over Vegas.

I suddenly realized that to the degree this man knew all these graphic details of the Casino Families that he obviously had to be part of the mob at one time. I felt a chill run through my spine and my face grew pale with this knowledge. I made an excuse to leave. I left in such a rush that I left my drink and never cashed out my money that I had in the Poker Machine. As I left the casino, I heard the musical ching-ching of the money flowing from my machine that this man now operated. Viva Las Vegas!