OL’ BLUE EYES IS BACK

Gay Talese's seminal essay on Frank Sinatra, printed for the first time in letterpress, with pictures from Phil Stern

“He is the champ who made the big comeback, the man who had everything, lost it, then got it back, letting nothing stand in his way, doing what few men can do...”

— Gay Talese

Frank Sinatra in front of his Learjet with fellow Rat Pack member Dean Martin, 1965 (John Bryson).
Gay Talese. Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“Phil Stern’s photographs are so deeply insightful that they can evoke the most intimate reactions from even the most self-possessed subject.”

— Henry James, New York Times Book Review

The first edition of this book is limited to 5,000 numbered copies, each hand signed by Gay Talese.

The type is set in Miller Banner and letterpress printed on natural uncoated paper.

Facsimile reproductions of the author’s notes from November 1965 to March 1966 are tipped in at the opening of each chapter, including this colorful draft for scenes 3–6 of Frank Sinatra Has a Cold.
Gay Talese. Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“This book is copy number 0066 in an edition of five thousand copies plus two hundred fifty artist’s proofs.” —Nieman House

“The 15,000-word story is as finely crafted as Sinatra’s (and Talese’s) custom-tailored suits.” —Nieman House
Gay Talese. Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“His childhood was one of loneliness and a drive toward attention, and since attaining it he has never again been certain of solitude.” — Gay Talese
This chronicle is kept in an ever-expanding series of cardboard folders containing such data as the places where I and my sources had breakfast, lunch, and dinner (restaurant receipts enclosed to document my expenses); the exact time, length, locale, and subject matter of every interview; together with the agreed-upon conditions of each meeting (i.e., am I free to identify the source, or am I obliged to contact that individual later for clarification and/or clearance)?

And the pages of the chronicle also include my personal impressions of the people I interviewed, their mannerisms and physical description, my assessment of their credibility, and much about my own private feelings and concerns as I work my way through each day—an intimate addendum that now, after nearly thirty years of habit, is of use to a somewhat autobiographical book I am writing; but the original intent of such admiscptive writing was self-clarification, reaffirming my own voice on paper after hours of concentrated listening to others, and also, not infrequently, the venting of some of the frustration felt when my research appeared to be going badly, as it certainly did in the winter of 1965 when I was unable to meet face to face with Frank Sinatra.

After trying without success to reschedule the Sinatra interview during my second week in Los Angeles (I was told that he still had a cold), I continued to meet with people who were variously employed in some of Sinatra's many business enterprises—his record company, his film company, his real estate operation, his missile parts firm, his airplane hangar—and I also saw people who were more personally associated with the singer, such as his overshadowed son, his favorite bodyguard in Beverly Hills, one of his bodyguards (an ex-pro lineman), and a little gas-hoiced lady who traveled with Sinatra around the country on concert tours, carrying in a satchel his sixty hairpieces.

From such people I collected an assortment of facts and comments, but what I gained at first from these interviews was no particular insight or eloquent summation of Sinatra's stature; it was rather the awareness that so many of these people, who lived and worked in so many separate places, were united in the knowledge that Frank Sinatra had a cold. When I would allude to this in conversations, citing it as the reason my interview with him was being postponed, they would nod and say yes, they were aware of his cold, and they also knew from their contacts within Sinatra's inner circle that he was a most difficult man to be around when his throat was sore and his nose was running. Some of the musicians and studio technicians were delayed from working in his recording studio because of the cold, while others among his personal staff of seventy-five were not only sensitive to the effects of his ailment but they revealed examples of how volatile and short-tempered he had been all week because he was unable to meet his singing standards. And one evening in my hotel, I wrote in the chronicle:

... It is five nights before Sinatra's recording session, but his voice is weak, sore, and uncertain. Sinatra is ill. He is a victim of an addiction to medicine that most people would consider in record, but when it goes to Sinatra it may plunge him into a state of anguish, deep depression, panic, even rage. Frank Sinatra has a cold.

Sinatra with a cold is Pavarotti without point, Fermont without flair—only worse. For the next week he is, in fact, one of the most unpleasant persons I have ever met or known. His voice is wavering, his eyes darting, his demeanor collapses. People and things go wrong and it is clear that the man who is the center of this production is not only his own manager but also seems to be a kind of psychological advisor for the great singers he works with. The film, with him, has been delayed; his own voice is the only reason they have not pressed on. They are at the end of their tether and available.

A singer with a cold is a small thing, and everything through the entertainment industry and beyond as well as a President of the United States, suddenly sick, can shake the national economy...

The next morning I received a call from Frank Sinatra's public relations director. "I hear you're all even town seeing Frank's friends, taking Frank's friends to dinner," he began, almost anxiously.

"When a page has been typed, I pin it... to one wall that's covered with red felt... the Sinatra piece ran to so many pages that the wall looked like a clothesline before I got done." — Gay Talese
Gay Talese. Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“I was never part of his inner circle, but for some reason Frank trusted me.” — Phil Stern
Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“There is no such thing as the perfect picture. I was always striving for perfection, even though I knew I could never achieve it. But it kept me reaching for something—you know what I mean?” —Phil Stern
Gay Talese. Phil Stern. Frank Sinatra Has a Cold

“Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Frank—they’d be sloshing drinks and harmonizing tipsily together. But Frank was at the center—he was chairman of the board.” — Phil Stern
All or nothing at all

Gay Talese recalls how he turned a cancelled interview into a triumph of New Journalism.

During the winter of 1965 I recall being sent to Los Angeles by Esquire for an interview with Frank Sinatra, which the singer’s publicist had arranged earlier with the magazine’s editor. But after I had checked into the Beverly Wilshire, I had reserved a rental car in the hotel garage, and had spent the evening of my arrival in a spacious room digesting a thick pack of background material on Sinatra, along with an equally thick steak accompanied by a fine bottle of California burgundy. I received a call from Sinatra’s office saying that my scheduled interview the next afternoon would not take place.

Mr. Sinatra was very upset by the latest developments. I was feeling better, the caller went on, and perhaps if I would also submit my interview to Esquire, an interview could be rescheduled. I politely explained that I was obliged to honor my editor’s right to be the first judge of my work, but I did ask if I might telephone the Sinatra office later in the week on the chance that his health and spirits might be so improved that he would grant me a brief visit. I could call, Sinatra’s representative said, but he could promise nothing.

For the rest of the week, after apprising Harold Hayes, the Esquire editor, of the situation, I arranged to interview a few actors and musicians, studio executives and record producers, restaurant owners and female acquaintances who had known Sinatra in one way or another through the years. From most of these people, I got something: a tiny nugget of information here, a bit of color there, small pieces for a large mosaic that I hoped would reflect the man who for decades had commanded the spotlight and had cast long shadows across the fickle industry of entertainment and the American consciousness.

As I proceeded with my interviews, I rarely, if ever, removed a pen and pad from my pocket, and I certainly would not have considered using a tape recorder had I owned one. To have done so would have possibly inhibited these individuals’ candor or would have otherwise altered the relaxed, trusting, and forthcoming atmosphere that I believe was encouraged by my seemingly less assiduous research manner and the promise that, however retentive I considered my memory to be, I would not identifiably attribute or quote anything told me without first checking back with the source for confirmation and clarification.

After trying without success to reschedule the Sinatra interview during my second week in Los Angeles (I was told that he still had a cold), I continued to meet with people who were variously employed in some of Sinatra’s many business enterprises—his record company, his film company, his real estate operation, his missile parts firm, his airplane hangar—and I also saw people who were more personally associated with the singer, such as his overshadowed son, his favorite haberdasher in Beverly Hills, one of his bodyguards (an ex-pro lineman), and a little gray-haired lady who traveled with Sinatra around the country on concert tours, carrying in a satchel his sixty hairpieces.

In total, I stayed another three weeks and had spent the evening digesting a thick pack of background material. I received a call from Sinatra’s office saying that my scheduled interview would not take place.

“While I was never given the opportunity to sit down and speak with Frank Sinatra, this fact is perhaps one of the strengths of the article.”

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“Frank Sinatra was tired of all the talk, the gossip, the theory—tired of reading quotes about himself, of hearing what people were saying about him all over town.” — Gay Talese
Gay Talese’s crystalline portrait of Frank Sinatra, first published in 1966, combined faithful fact with vivid storytelling in a triumph of New Journalism, revealing as much about celebrity at large as it did about Sinatra himself.

In this Collector’s Edition, Frank Sinatra Has a Cold is published in letterpress, complete with an introduction by Gay Talese and facsimile reproductions of manuscript pages, correspondence, and other papers from the author’s archive.

The text is brought to life with pictures from the legendary lens of Phil Stern, the only photographer granted access to Sinatra over four decades (from the 1940s to ‘70s) – along with classic moments from top photojournalists of the ‘60s, including John Bryson, John Dominis, and Terry O’Neill.

Collector’s Edition of 5,000 numbered copies, each signed by Gay Talese.

TASCHEN’s literary books take great works of nonfiction and pair them with photography from the golden age of photojournalism. Further titles will include The Fight by Norman Mailer, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test and The Right Stuff by Tom Wolfe, and The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin.

– Limited edition signed by Gay Talese
– Silkscreened hardcover with an embossed paper case
– The text is letterpress printed on a natural uncoated paper
– Facsimile reproductions of Gay Talese’s original storyboard and manuscript pages

“Snap up one of the 5,000 signed collector’s copies.” – Bloomberg