


I graduated in:

1996	▲
1986	▬
1976	▬
1966	▼

 classmates.com

TIME

FROM THE MAGAZINE

Monday, Mar. 24, 1930

Coming Out Party

(See front cover)*

When the United Fruit Liner Pastores docked in Manhattan one day last week, ship newsmen singled out one passenger to ask one question. The passenger was Pennsylvania's Governor John S. Fisher. The question: Would he sign a certain official paper which would release from his State's Eastern Penitentiary a certain convict? Governor Fisher told them: "I'll sign it in the routine way when I get around to it." He went on to Harrisburg, unmindful of the crescendo of public interest in the release by the State of Pennsylvania of its most famed prisoner, the No. 1 underworking of the U. S., Alphonse Capone, known to good citizens no less than to gunsters throughout the land as "Scarface Al."

If Governor Fisher did not get excited about signing the release papers, many another individual did. Before dawn the next day a curious crowd began to collect before the great grim wall of the Eastern Penitentiary at Philadelphia to watch the Capone coming-out party. Policemen appeared, formed lines. When two closed vans rattled out of the prison gate, the crowd pressed forward with a common question, "Is Capone in there?" The Philadelphia Record spread a scare-headed story that Chicago gunmen were in town to "get" the prisoner when he emerged. The Warden informed newsmen that Capone had had scrambled eggs for breakfast. This fact was flashed over the country. From Harrisburg came word that Governor Fisher had signed the necessary papers for Capone's release at 11:07 a.m., that a special courier was carrying them to the penitentiary. A rumor spread that an airplane awaited Capone at Camden.

Hours passed. Capone did not appear. Newsmen grew restive, suspicious. There were grumblings among good citizens who had turned out to see a real "bad man." Darkness came. Finally Warden Herbert Smith announced his trick:

Capone had been smuggled out of the Eastern Penitentiary in one of the two vans during the morning, carried to the new State Prison at Grater Ford (pop. 180), 25 miles northwest of Philadelphia. There he had been freed four hours earlier. A blue Buick sedan, it was reported, had streaked away into the underworld. "Al" Capone was again at large.

No desperado of the old school is "Scarface Al," plundering or murdering for the savage joy of crime. He is, in his own phrase, "a business man" who wears clean linen, rides in a Lincoln car, leaves acts of violence to his

hirelings. He has an eleven-year-old son noted for his gentlemanly manners.

Last May Capone stopped off between trains at Philadelphia as he was returning from a "business meeting" at Atlantic City where he had helped arrange a peace pact for Chicago's liquor gangs. Outside a cinema theatre he was arrested for carrying a revolver. Immediately he pleaded guilty, accepted a year's sentence with such apparent relish as to give rise to the belief that he was really seeking refuge in a Pennsylvania jail from hostile gunsters (TIME, May 27).

His ten-month imprisonment had not been as unpleasant as he had anticipated. Free from his "business" cares, he had found time to have his tonsils removed in the prison hospital. During the summer he played baseball in the yard and felt better for the exercise. Always generous, he gave away to charity what his prison-mates estimated at \$25,000. This openhandedness was responsible for the unconfirmed rumor that he had occupied a special cell with chintz curtains at the window, easy chairs, cozy bed and mattress. Some Philadelphians interpreted his generosity as a bid for hospitality when he got out.

In Chicago, made infamous by his rackets, Capone's friends awaited his homecoming. He was still the acknowledged boss of his wide-flung interests. But business, lacking his expert guidance, had been poor during his absence. Beer deliveries had fallen off sharply. The price of protection had risen exorbitantly. Gambling had had to take to cover, while brothels were being harassed by an active police. Chief Detective John Stege had begun an inconvenient practice of giving "house parties" at headquarters for all known gangsters picked up on sight. Capone was ready to face these changes when he returned to Chicago. He had left short, stocky, moon-faced Jake Guzick, who hides shrewd ability under a spunkless whine, in charge of the Capone gang. Guzick would make his "business report." Capone would do whatever reorganizing was necessary. The peace pact negotiated at Atlantic City was still in force. Such gang killings as had occurred were sporadic personal affairs, no part of the wholesale slaughter committed by organized under-worldlings.

His allies were confident that Capone would go straight to his brick house at No. 7244 Prairie Ave., the "little home" which he used to give substance to his story of being "out of the booze racket." Three years ago newsmen called upon him there. He opened the door to them, wearing a pink apron, carrying a pan of spaghetti.

Many of the old Capone friends and enemies would be absent when "The Big Fellow" returned to town. He might have seen them had he been released from jail a week earlier, for they were on hand (by special permission of the police) for gangland's latest, grandest funeral, that of John ("Dingbat") Oberta. Joe Saltis, retired beer chief, came down from his place at Saltisville, Wis., to brag of the \$100,000 he had invested there in a nine-hole golf course, a clubhouse "that sleeps 26 people." George ("Bugs") Moran, who lost seven of his north side hirelings in the St. Valentine's Massacre (TIME, Feb. 25, 1929) informed Chief Stege that he was now "out of the booze racket," that he was running a \$125,000 dry cleaning plant. Newsmen, familiar with "blind activities" of gunsters,

smiled wisely at these claims.

It was not Capone who started the murderous Chicago rackets which put the Underworld in Rolls-Royces and furnished their coffins with \$15,000 orchid spreads. But he had had a large hand in racketeering's perfection. Born in Brooklyn of an Italian family, he was a "good boy" until he was 17. Then, in a Greenpoint pool room, he knocked down a stranger, thought he had killed him. A cousin in Brooklyn's "Five Points" gang hid him away from the police. When the stranger recovered, young Al was already at work on small "jobs." In a Coney Island fight he was slashed across the left cheek, though later he like to insist that the scar came from War service with the Lost Battalion.

In 1921, Capone went to Chicago as bodyguard for Johnny Torrio, hired by Jim Colosimo, big restaurant and brothel man. Prohibition started to create a public demand for liquor. Gangs were formed to supply the demand, to beat off rivals. Capone began as a brothel keeper, which started his police record with a \$50 fine. In 1923 Colosimo was murdered. Torrio took command of the liquor and vice gang, Capone becoming his No. 1 assistant. Fierce was the hostility between the South Side gang under Torrio and the North Side gang under Dion O'Banion. In 1924 O'Banion was shot down in his florist shop. A few months later Torrio was mangled with slugs, fled to Europe. It was then that Capone took charge, pushed his program of expansion; and then that "Bugs" Moran, supposed successor to O'Banion, became his bitterest gangland enemy.

With expansion, as in any well-run business, came prosperity. Capone took over the cross-roads village of Cicero, outside the city limits, made it a special gambling and vice resort. He started dog-racing. He developed his liquor trade in every direction. When men got in his way, his hirelings shot them down. A famed Capone saying: "It's bootleg when it's on the trucks but when your host hands it to you on 'a silver tray, it's hospitality."

Capone became a marked man. When he went to the theatre he would buy out almost a whole row and string blue-jowled body guards out on each side of him. He made millions, spent millions, thought nothing of losing \$100,000 in an evening's crap game. His income became a subject of U. S. scrutiny. Last week he faced charges of evading his Federal tax on enormous profits.

A sporty dresser, he used to put on mourning when any of his own men fell in battle. He wore flashy diamonds, a rose in his lapel. The sight of photographers used to drive him into a profane rage. Legends grew up about him: that he traveled in an armored car, wore a bullet-proof vest. With every gang murder that occurred in Chicago, his name was automatically connected. But the police could never fasten upon him even the semblance of legal guilt.

Chicago finally became too small for him. He went to Florida where officials did not receive him cordially. Through a dummy he purchased for \$65,000 a great white stucco house with a Nile-green tiled roof on Palm Island between Miami and Miami Beach, built a wall around it like a fortress. He attempted to win local favor by enormous dinners to all who would come, \$20 tips to tradesmen. He served champagne regularly, barely

sipped his own glass. About him were always seven swart Sicilians, his bodyguard. He collected his family about him, his Irish wife Mae, his brothers Ralph ("Bottles") and Matthew, tried desperately to live the life of a retired gentleman.

Last week, as he emerged from Pennsylvania, Miami officials announced that they would oppose to the limit his return to Palm Island, branded his presence as "a detriment to the whole community."

*Photographers' credit-line omitted by request.

Copyright © 2006 Time Inc. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

[Privacy Policy](#)