

BURRELLE'S

For Giancana nephew, family history is an object lesson

By Al Sichertman/Staff Writer 5/7/81

If weren't for the fact that it's Sam Giancana's nephew talking, it'd be kind of a nice little civics lesson: "Pay attention to what's going on in your government and the world, and don't trust everything you see on the surface. It is important to ensure that your government is clean."

But it is Sam Giancana's nephew, and it's hard to know quite what to make of that.

Sam (Mooney) Giancana was the Chicago gangland boss until he was gunned down in 1975. In a book by his nephew and godson, also named Sam Giancana, Mooney is quoted as claiming credit for the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy (in part, Mooney said, because they weren't going along with the deals made with the mob by their bootlegger father — deals that helped get John elected president), the murder of Marilyn Monroe at the CIA's behest, and practically everything else rotten that you can think of.

The book, "Double Cross," recollections by Mooney's brother Chuck (young Sam's father) of conversations with Mooney over 50 years, details Mooney's claims that the government was riddled with corruption — including Supreme Court justices, presidents and especially the CIA. In a 1936 exchange, for example, Mooney explained to Chuck that Franklin Roosevelt

was on the gang's side, and pointed to the assassination of Louisiana Sen. Huey Long (by the mob — Dr. Carl Weiss was a patsy) as an example of what would have happened to Roosevelt if he weren't cooperating. "You know, Chuck, you'd think people would catch on." He shook his head in amazement.

Although Chuck maintained at least a nominal distance between himself and the more repulsive mob activities, he was fascinated with Mooney's power, and he hung on his brother's tales of extortion, racketeering and murder. But in the end he wearied of trying to have a normal life in his infamous brother's shadow, and he changed his last name, in part to give his children a chance at untainted lives.

What young Sam, 38, the book's author, makes of his heritage is even less clear. He was 14 when his name was changed. He continues to use the new name in private life, he uses Giancana only in connection with the book.

He went to Marquette University (he was the first Giancana to earn a college degree, but it doesn't say "Giancana") and went on to a career in marketing and public relations, eventually opening his own communications firm specializing in written materials on health care.

He was in Minneapolis Monday to plug the



Sam Giancana

release of the paperback version of "Double Cross" (Warner Books, \$5.99). He is well-spoken, pleasant, far from intimidating. A nice guy, it appears. And he refers to the story of his uncle's power and its abuse with directness, but without shame.

It's an object lesson, he says. And he accepts every bit of the staggering stuff that Mooney told his father. "I believe it's 100 percent true. None of these people had to impress anybody. Mooney wasn't the kind of guy to embellish and never one to say he did things he didn't do.

"When you consider the historical record as it is known, there is no question that he was involved. And whether you want to say that Sam Giancana played a minor role or a major role, the fact is that there's a role that was played, and I think the American public needs to know that. If we deny that, we deny our own past and we could likely have it happen again."

These days, he said, he sees mobsters as a dying breed. "The influence of the Italian mob is diminishing. Our government has found ways to get rid of them. They have ways to put them behind bars now."

Although the book is about nothing but Mooney and the mob — and some would say it is a retelling that lacks any moral view — the real lesson of the book, Giancana said, is not about the mob at all.

"It is that we need to elect officials and have people in office who are going to do the right thing," he said. "But if you look at the recent past — Iran-contra, BCCI, Noriega, the Marcos regime — we see questionable tactics used by elements of

our government. It proves to us we aren't really in control of some of the things that go on. And whether the mob is involved in that or not is another story; it's just that we as citizens need to know what our history was . . . If the book helps people look at things a little differently, that would be a positive result."

What of his own feelings about being a Giancana? When he was growing up, he said, "It was hard for me to understand how somebody could steal and kill and murder. My parents told me early on about what the mob was and so forth. My childhood was a constant juggling of ethics and morals. On the one hand I'd hear it was OK to steal a little bit and 'he did this' and 'he did that' and it was all OK and people were getting ahead, but I was never to take anything, never steal, because it was not the right thing to do.

"My parents told me he was a criminal, that it wasn't right and that I was never to do anything wrong. More I think my parents wanted to be sure that I didn't cause any pressure on him. They used to tell me when I was a young boy, 'Don't ever get in trouble, because if you're with people in trouble, they're going to blame you because you've got the name. And then if your name is in the paper, it's going to put the light on your uncle and he doesn't want that publicity.' So I lived this model childhood. I never got in trouble."