A Journey Fueled by Wonder, Purpose and Possibility

By Craig Cronbaugh

Imagine, if you will, being handed a dream you had quietly carried in your heart for decades, a dream so extraordinary it scarcely seemed possible. Yet three months ago, that dream became reality when my wife, Marlene, and I embarked on a journey to sunny San Diego. This was where an unforgettable chapter awaited us at the home of the late legendary singer Frankie Laine and his widow, Marcia, who uses Frankie's given surname "LoVecchio."

Frankie Laine

Frankie Laine, the late legendary singer, left an indelible mark on the music industry, reaching far beyond his iconic *Rawhide* theme song on the CBS television network. As an avid admirer of Frankie's work, I have spent years building a comprehensive Frankie Laine career library.

Throughout his illustrious career, Frankie Laine amassed an impressive collection of achievements. With 21 gold records and a repertoire of approximately 1,000 songs spanning jazz, upbeat renditions, ballads, cowboy tunes, country music and early rock and roll, Laine's talent was truly versatile. His worldwide record sales range from 100-250 million copies, depending on the source. Laine graced numerous television shows as a guest, acted in films and even starred in his own variety shows. He lent his captivating voice to the title themes of seven motion pictures, including *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* and *Blazing Saddles,* as well as four television shows, most notably *Rawhide.* To honor his contributions, Laine received two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for recording and the other for television.

My friendship with Frankie Laine dates back to our first meeting in San Diego in 1985. Over the years, I had the privilege of visiting Frankie at his home in Point Loma, San Diego, on three occasions.

As part of my passion for collecting Frankie Laine memorabilia, I had the opportunity to host a radio special and make television appearances to discuss his incredible

career. In 2003, I had the honor of receiving a research screen credit and appearing in Frankie's documentary, *Frankie Laine: An American Dreamer.* In 2005, I wrote *Reaching for a Star,* a book that chronicles my friendship and experiences with Frankie Laine.

From 2013 to 2015, I organized a series of presentations called *Remembering Frankie Laine* to entertain senior citizens and baby boomers in the Des Moines area. These sessions provided a setting where we could enjoy Frankie's music, watch videos, listen to radio shows and share highlights from his remarkable career. Starting in 2015, I contributed monthly blogs to the Team Frankie Laine website, which is affiliated with the American Jazz Institute. These blogs allowed me to share my various encounters and experiences with Frankie Laine.

My Frankie Laine Library now includes the entire Laine collection from Frankie's former manager and videographer, Jimmy Marino, a remarkable archive of videotapes, photographs, memorabilia and even one of Frankie's 21 original gold records.

I have also been entrusted with treasured collections from two important estates: Frankie's longtime secretary, the late Muriel Moore, and his final secretary, the late Mary-Jo Coombs, both wonderful women whom I was fortunate to know personally years ago.

Adding even greater meaning to my archives are priceless keepsakes from my dear friend and fellow Frankie Laine devotee, Tony Cooper of England, whose friendship I cherished since 1986. Tony sadly passed away last summer, but his widow, Pam, has shown extraordinary kindness and generosity by sending many of Tony's treasured Laine items.

Marcia

Frankie Laine married the love of his life, former actress Nan Grey, in 1950. Their loving marriage lasted 43 years, until Nan's passing in 1993. In 1999, Frankie found love again when he married Marcia Kline. Although Marcia was in her 60s and Frankie in his 80s, their marriage was built on genuine love, companionship and happiness. They shared seven wonderful years together in Frankie's longtime San Diego home until his passing in 2007. It was the very same home I had the

privilege of visiting during my trips to San Diego to spend time with Frankie. Today, Marcia continues to reside there, preserving the warmth and memories of Frankie's cherished home.

Our Journey

In December, I sent Marcia LoVecchio a Christmas card, followed by a letter on January 2. In that letter, I asked whether she might have any of Frankie's personal items she would be willing to share for inclusion in my Frankie Laine Library.
A week later, I received a reply from Marcia containing a paragraph that left me both stunned and overjoyed in the most surreal way imaginable: "Rather than sending you bits and pieces, why don't you and Marlene plan another trip to San Diego for a week's vacation? You can stay with me, and I would be happy to load a U-Haul with Frankie's belongings for you to drive back to Iowa."

Reading those words was truly overwhelming. It was an extraordinary gesture of kindness, trust and generosity, one that represented not only Frankie Laine's treasured belongings, but also the preservation of his remarkable legacy.

Marlene and I agreed that there was simply no way we could pass up such an extraordinary offer. We arranged to fly to San Diego on March 9, spend one night at a hotel, rent a U-Haul truck and drive to the Laine home the following morning.

I had initially met Marcia in 1999 at the Laine home shortly after she married Frankie. Marlene and I returned in 2000 after I taped my segment for the documentary, giving Marlene the opportunity to meet both Marcia and Frankie Laine. We saw Marcia again at Frankie's 90th birthday celebration in San Diego in 2003. In 2007, Marlene and I attended Frankie's viewing and funeral, where Marcia graciously invited us to a private luncheon for family and close friends at Frankie's favorite Italian restaurant, Trattoria Fantastica (now Nonna), following the funeral service.

Our first order of business upon arriving in San Diego was to have dinner at Nonna in Little Italy, Frankie's beloved restaurant, as a celebration of our late friend. I had wanted to go there because outside of the restaurant is a bronze statue of Frankie Laine dedicated by Team Frankie Laine in 2021.

We had invited Marcia to join us for dinner. However, after I wrote to her outlining our itinerary, she strongly insisted that we not stay at a hotel. Instead, she offered to pick us up at the airport herself, warmly telling us, “I want you both with me.”

We boarded our plane in Des Moines on the morning of March 9. Our plane arrived in San Diego early in the afternoon. After I’d phoned her to inform her we had arrived, Marcia and her handyman, Ron, soon were there to greet us. The moment felt both warm and surreal. Within minutes, we were winding our way back to the familiar Point Loma home that had once belonged to Frankie Laine.

Our Visit

Ron carried our suitcases upstairs to the bedroom where Marlene and I would be staying. As I looked around, I could hardly believe it. I had visited this home three times before to see Frankie—once with Marlene—and now we were actually going to spend two nights there ourselves. The experience carried an almost dreamlike quality, as though cherished memories from years earlier had suddenly come full circle.

After dressing for the evening’s dinner gathering, Marcia invited us out onto the patio. Directly before us was the small circular pool, where a dolphin statuette sprayed sparkling streams of water into the shimmering blue surface below, creating a gentle and soothing soundtrack. Perched high above the city, the Point Loma home overlooked a breathtaking panorama of San Diego and its harbor. It was easy to understand why Frankie treasured this view so deeply. During interviews over the years, I had often heard him joke that he would sell the view alone for ten million dollars and “throw in the house for free.”

As the late afternoon sun cast a golden glow across the harbor, Marcia offered us a glass of wine. The three of us sat together on the patio, reminiscing and chatting comfortably while the city sparkled below us. It was one of those rare moments in life when time seemed to slow down, allowing us to fully absorb the beauty, history and emotion surrounding us before leaving for the dinner party at Nonna.

Joining us for dinner was famed teen sensation Dodie Stevens, who recorded the 1959 gold hit “Pink Shoe Laces” at just thirteen years old. Known earlier as child prodigy Geri Thorr, she had performed with Frankie Laine on *The Frankie Laine Show* in 1954 at the age of eight. I created five music videos for Dodie during the late 2000s, and we remained close friends after producing my first video for her in 2016. Marlene and I had met Dodie and her daughter, Stephanie, for the first time at the Surf Ballroom during the 2024 “Winter Dance Party.” Since they both lived in California, I invited them to join our dinner gathering.

I also invited Frankie’s longtime manager and video producer, Jimmy Marino, whom I had known since my interview for the Frankie Laine documentary in 2000. He arrived with his daughter, Monette.

Another special guest was Valerie Tate of California, a devoted Frankie Laine fan who had known Frankie personally. Valerie and I had been email pen pals since the early 2000s, frequently sharing our admiration for our favorite singer. Because Marlene and I had never met Valerie or her husband, Jay, in person, I was especially thrilled to include them in the celebration. Greeting us warmly at our outdoor table was the restaurant’s longtime owner and founder, Joe Busalacchi.

The evening was nothing short of marvelous. Marlene and I treated everyone to dinner and drinks as we enjoyed the warm San Diego night surrounded by our cherished “Frankie Laine friends.” At one point, I offered a toast in Frankie’s honor, reminding everyone that if not for him, none of us would be gathered together that evening in celebration and friendship.

It was wonderful to see Frankie Laine’s bronze statue standing proudly beside our table.

Marcia then gave an emotional speech that deeply moved everyone at the table. Fighting back tears, she shared how much peace she felt knowing that Frankie’s treasured memorabilia would be preserved and appreciated. “When he [Craig] asked me if I would donate something to his library,” she said, “my heart was

relieved to know that his [Frankie's] life would continue through Craig Cronbaugh."

I had promised Marcia that my entire Frankie Laine Library would someday be donated to a respected music archive institution, ensuring that future generations of musicians, historians, and music lovers would always have the opportunity to research and celebrate one of the greatest entertainers in music history.

After the dinner festivities ended, it was time for Marcia to take Marlene and me back to the Laine estate. Since Dodie Stevens and her daughter, Stephanie, had reserved a hotel room for the evening, Marcia kindly offered to drive them there first. We all climbed into her car and headed out into the warm San Diego night, the city lights glowing around us like a scene from a classic film.

When we arrived at Marcia's home, the three of us drifted out onto the patio almost instinctively. The view before us was mesmerizing. I had never experienced the estate at night before, and the beauty of it all felt almost surreal. The sparkling San Diego skyline stretched endlessly in the distance, while below the hills of Point Loma, the dark waters of the sea shimmered beneath the moonlight. The entire setting carried a quiet magic that seemed suspended in time.

For more than an hour, Marlene and I sat talking with Marcia beneath the peaceful night sky. Eventually, Marcia excused herself and retired to the master bedroom, and soon afterward Marlene went upstairs to the bedroom prepared for us. I remained alone on the patio, soaking in the silence and the warm ocean air.

As I sat there in the darkness, an overwhelming feeling of peace settled over me. I was sitting at the home of Frankie Laine—the very place where he and Marcia had shared seven years together, and where Frankie had built a life with his beloved wife, Nan, from the time the house was built in 1985 until her passing in 1993. It was almost impossible to comprehend that I was about to receive an extraordinary collection of Frankie's personal treasures and memorabilia.

There I was, seated on Frankie Laine's own patio, preparing to spend the night in the home of one of my lifelong heroes. Marcia's warmth and generosity made Marlene and me feel completely welcome, as though we were family friends rather than guests. In that moment, surrounded by memories, history, and the beauty of the California night, I realized I was living a dream I never could have imagined possible. Sharing that unforgettable journey with Marlene made it even more meaningful, and I felt profoundly blessed.

The next morning, I awoke to the unexplainable aura drifting through the magnificent Laine estate. As I made my way down the fabulous staircase from our upstairs bedroom, I found Ron already seated with Marlene, coffee cup in hand, sharing stories that instantly transported us back to Frankie Laine's glory days.

Ron, now in his late seventies, had been part of Frankie and Marcia's world for many years. Listening to him reminisce about life at the Laine residence was like hearing chapters from a living Hollywood memoir. At one point, he motioned toward a pair of ottomans nestled together in the sunken living room and smiled. "Frankie used to stretch out right there and take his naps," he told us. Suddenly, the room seemed even more alive with Frankie's presence.

Before long, Marcia joined us and cheerfully announced that we were all heading to Denny's for breakfast. Even something as simple as breakfast felt special in the company of people who had shared so much history with one of America's legendary entertainers.

After returning to the Laine residence, the excitement truly began. Ron announced that it was time for him to drive us to pick up the reserved U-Haul truck. Before we left, he handed me the key to the automated gates guarding the exclusive Point Loma properties—a surreal moment in itself. Soon, Marlene and I returned with the truck and parked it in the driveway before the stately home overlooking San Diego.

Then came the moment I will never forget.

Ron led me into the garage and proudly revealed stack upon stack of carefully packed boxes filled with Frankie Laine memorabilia and personal possessions that Marcia had lovingly gathered. Although I had no idea exactly what was inside them, I knew beyond question that these boxes contained treasures far beyond anything I had ever imagined. The sight before me was breathtaking; there were rows of history waiting to be discovered.

But the surprises kept coming.

Ron next guided me into another room overflowing with leftover Frankie Laine merchandise from the days before Team Frankie Laine had shut down their website a few years earlier. Smiling, he told me I could have it all. I was stunned. It felt as though every few minutes another unbelievable door was opening.

Then he took me downstairs to a storage area packed with even more boxes. Ron explained that I could sort through everything and select whatever I wanted. To a lifelong Frankie Laine admirer and collector, it felt less like walking through storage rooms and more like uncovering buried treasure in a private museum dedicated to one of music's greatest voices.

Back on the main level, Ron opened the garage door facing the driveway and instructed me to back the truck up for loading. Towering stacks of boxes sat waiting like piles of gold bullion ready to be transported. Once I carefully maneuvered the truck into place, Ron sprang into action. Box after box disappeared into the truck with astonishing speed. I did my best to help, but there was no keeping up with this energetic super-handyman, whose enthusiasm matched my own excitement over the incredible treasures we were loading.

When the truck was finally packed to the brim with the garage treasures, Ron escorted Marlene and me back into the room overflowing with Frankie Laine merchandise. It felt like stepping into a forgotten archive of musical history. Shelves and boxes were filled with CDs, records, and DVDs that once connected fans around the world to Frankie's unforgettable voice and legendary career.

After looking through the collection, we agreed that I should take several boxes of the recordings with us. At the time, I honestly had no idea what I would ultimately do with them, but I knew they were too special to leave behind. One by one, we selected boxes filled with musical treasures that had once been part of the Team Frankie Laine operation before the website had closed years earlier.

As I sorted through the recordings, I was reminded of an earlier experience that had brought me tremendous joy. Years before, Jimmy Marino had gifted me boxes of Frankie Laine CDs and DVDs. Rather than keep them stored away, I donated them to senior living facilities and Easter Seals in Des Moines so residents and patrons could enjoy Frankie's music. The project became far larger than I had anticipated, but seeing these treasured recordings find appreciative new listeners made every bit of effort worthwhile.

Standing there in the Laine residence surrounded by yet another mountain of Frankie's music, I began to think perhaps history was about to repeat itself. Maybe these newly acquired gifts would once again bring Frankie Laine's powerful voice, warmth, and timeless songs into the lives of people who would cherish them most. The thought made the entire experience feel even more meaningful—as though Frankie's legacy was continuing to travel forward, one listener at a time.

Next, Marlene and I followed Ron down to the ground-level storage area, not quite knowing what awaited us there. Ever-prepared, Ron had brought along a sturdy two-wheeled dolly so he could haul my selections back upstairs to the growing mountain of treasures already filling the truck.

At first glance, the storage area looked much like any longtime family storage space might appear. Lawn chairs were stacked against the walls. Fishing poles and tackle boxes rested in corners. Household items long retired from everyday use filled shelves and containers. But hidden among these ordinary belongings were dozens upon dozens of mysterious boxes—each one holding the possibility of another remarkable discovery from Frankie Laine's extraordinary life and career.

Ron told me I was welcome to go through everything and take whatever I wanted for my library. For a collector and lifelong Frankie Laine admirer, those words were almost unbelievable.

One by one, I opened boxes like an explorer uncovering buried treasure. Many were packed with Frankie's 45 rpm records and LP albums, each one representing another piece of his legendary musical journey. I carefully selected several of them, imagining the stories behind the recordings and the generations of fans who had once played them on turntables across America.

But the discoveries went far beyond records.

There were trophies honoring Frankie's accomplishments, personal letters, vintage fan club materials, magazines and treasured scrapbooks filled with memories from decades of stardom. Every box seemed to reveal another fascinating glimpse into the life of one of America's most beloved entertainers. It felt less like sorting through storage and more like stepping through the pages of entertainment history itself.

Hours passed as I carefully examined box after box, deciding which treasures would become part of my Frankie Laine Library. Meanwhile, Ron and Marlene tirelessly loaded the dolly, wheeled it back upstairs, emptied it into the truck and returned for another load. The truck outside was rapidly transforming into a rolling archive of Frankie Laine history.

The deeper I searched, the more surreal the experience became. Here I was, inside the Laine residence, personally uncovering artifacts connected to a man whose music had meant so much to millions of people around the world. It was thrilling, emotional and utterly unforgettable.

When the truck was packed, Ron left for home. Marlene and I got ready for another evening dinner outing with Marica.

That evening, Marcia drove us to a charming old Italian restaurant, one that held special memories for her and Frankie. It was one of the places they had enjoyed

together over the years, and as we settled into our seats, it felt as though we were, once again, stepping into a small piece of their shared history.

A humorous moment had occurred during our first night in San Diego at Nonna during our dinner party when Marcia discovered that Marlene had ordered exactly the same meal she had. Throughout our visit, the two seemed to be kindred spirits. Their personalities clicked instantly, and before long they were chatting and laughing like sisters who had known each other for years rather than days.

As we enjoyed our dinner, Marcia was in a wonderfully reflective mood. The stories flowed as easily as the conversation, and she treated us to fascinating glimpses of her life before she ever met Frankie. One revelation left both Marlene and me astonished. In her younger years, Marcia had been a Las Vegas showgirl.

Suddenly, the elegant woman sitting across the table became even more intriguing. She went on to tell us that she had appeared in a brief scene in the classic 1960 film *Ocean's 11,* starring the legendary Rat Pack: Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop and Peter Lawford. She even described the costume she had worn during filming. The story fascinated us so much that after returning home, Marlene and I purchased a DVD of the movie and eagerly searched for the scene. Sure enough, there was Marcia, a young dancer among the glamorous performers of that bygone era.

The conversation then turned to Sinatra himself. Marcia told us that he had always been one of her favorite singers.

"You could understand every word he sang," she said admiringly. "His enunciation was wonderful."

Yet she also shared a memory that had diminished some of that admiration. During the filming of *Ocean's 11,* Marcia and a group of fellow dancers were standing together on the set when Sinatra walked by accompanied by the director. According to Marcia, he glanced at the assembled showgirls and casually remarked, "Who are these broads?"

The comment caught her by surprise and left a lasting impression. It was a rare glimpse behind the curtain of Hollywood glamour, revealing that even the biggest stars could disappoint those who looked up to them.

As the evening continued, I found myself captivated by Marcia's stories. Each memory seemed to open another door into a fascinating world of entertainment, history, and personal experiences that few people ever have the opportunity to witness firsthand.

After returning to Marcia's home that evening, the three of us made our way out to the patio overlooking the beautiful San Diego landscape. The air was cool and peaceful, and the city lights twinkled in the distance like scattered jewels. As we relaxed and talked, Marcia's two lovable Goldendoodles, Molly and Maggie, bounded happily around us, occasionally stopping to nuzzle up beside us for attention. Their playful antics added warmth and laughter to an already magical evening.

The conversation drifted effortlessly from one subject to another until Marcia finally announced that she was turning in for the night. She explained that she had an early-morning appointment and would be leaving before we awoke. Before long, Marlene also retired to our room, leaving me alone with my thoughts and the realization that our extraordinary visit was rapidly drawing to a close.

During our stay, I had wandered into what had once been Frankie Laine's music room. On my three previous visits to the home, that room had always filled me with awe. The walls had been adorned with gleaming gold record plaques, while cassette tapes, photographs, and treasured mementos offered fascinating glimpses into Frankie's remarkable career. Standing there years earlier, I had often imagined the countless hours Frankie spent surrounded by the music that made him a legend.

Now the room had taken on a new purpose as Marcia's office. Though much had changed, one detail immediately captured my attention. Hanging on the wall across from her desk were three beautiful gold records. I admired them each time

I entered the room, never imagining they would soon become part of an unforgettable surprise.

The next morning—Wednesday, March 11—sunlight streamed through the windows as the house slowly came to life. Ron and Marlene were already engaged in conversation when I made my way downstairs in search of coffee. As I descended the staircase, something resting on the edge of the landing overlooking the sunken living room caught my eye.

It was an envelope. My name was written on it in Marcia's hand. Curious, I picked it up and opened it. What I read left me absolutely speechless.

By this point, our visit had already delivered more surprises than I could have imagined, yet somehow Marcia had managed to astonish me once again.

In her note, she explained that before Marlene and I departed for home later that afternoon, I was to take the three gold records hanging in her office with me. For a moment, I simply stood there staring at the letter in disbelief. The words seemed almost impossible to comprehend. The very gold records I had admired from across the room—the treasured awards that had once hung in Frankie Laine's home—were now being entrusted to me. It was one of those rare moments in life when reality feels more like a dream.

One of the gold records was for "Mule Train," the landmark 1949 hit that further propelled Frankie Laine to national stardom and introduced his powerful voice to an entirely new audience. With its unique western flavor, galloping rhythm and unforgettable delivery, the song became one of the defining recordings of Frankie's career and helped cement his place in American music history.

For me, this particular gold record held a special significance long before it came into my possession.

During my visit with Frankie in 1999, I had posed for a photograph sitting beneath this very plaque. That treasured photograph later appeared in my book "Reaching

for a Star.” At the time, I could never have imagined that the same gold record would someday belong to me.

The plaque also carried a remarkable story of its own. Renowned novelist Joseph Wambaugh, whose home was located just up the drive from Frankie’s residence, once told Frankie that “Mule Train” had been the very first record his parents bought for him as a child. Deeply touched by the story, Frankie presented the gold record to Wambaugh as a Christmas gift.

Wambaugh never forgot the gesture. Reflecting on it years later, he marveled at the unlikely journey that had brought the award into his hands:

“Who could have predicted it? I was a kid in the steel town of Pittsburgh listening to an old Victrola, and the first song I heard was ‘Mule Train.’ And now I get the gold record. Imagine that.”

It was the kind of full-circle story that seems too perfect to be true. Yet the journey of the plaque was not over.

After Joseph Wambaugh passed away in 2025, his widow returned the treasured gold record to Marcia. There it hung once again in Frankie Laine’s home, carrying with it decades of memories, friendships, and history.

And now, in another twist that I never could have foreseen, it rests in my Frankie Laine Library. Sometimes an artifact becomes much more than an object. This gold record has traveled from a recording studio to Frankie Laine’s wall, from a legendary singer to a bestselling novelist, back to Frankie’s family and finally into my care. Every time I look at it, I am reminded not only of a great song, but of the extraordinary journey it has taken and the remarkable people whose lives it touched along the way.

When Marcia returned home, I was still trying to absorb the reality of what had just happened. The three gold records she had entrusted to me represented far more than music awards—they were pieces of Frankie Laine’s remarkable life and career. I thanked her repeatedly, but words seemed wholly inadequate to express

my gratitude Marcia listened and then gently reminded me why she had made the decision.

“You’re the one person who will keep Frankie’s legacy alive.”

Her words struck me deeply. They carried a responsibility far greater than the physical treasures she was giving me. In that moment, I realized that she was placing her trust not only in me, but in my commitment to preserving and sharing Frankie’s story with future generations.

Before long, Marcia, Ron, Marlene, and I headed out for breakfast together. It was our final morning in San Diego, and every moment felt precious. As we sat around the table, conversation flowed easily, but beneath the smiles was the unmistakable realization that our unforgettable visit was coming to an end. The past few days had been filled with surprises, laughter, memories and gifts beyond anything I could have imagined. Just when I thought our incredible San Diego adventure could not possibly produce another surprise, my phone rang. It was Jimmy Marino.

Jimmy explained that he wanted Marlene and me to stop and see him before we left San Diego. He told me he had some additional Frankie Laine memorabilia that he wanted me to have. Not wanting to inconvenience him, I asked if he could simply ship the items to Iowa and assured him that I would gladly pay all the expenses.

Then Jimmy revealed the real reason for his call.

Among the items he wished to give me was another of Frankie Laine’s gold record plaques. I was stunned. Throughout our visit, one unbelievable surprise had followed another, and now yet another piece of Frankie’s history was being offered to me. There was no way I could let an opportunity like this pass by.

Marlene and I quickly wrote down Jimmy’s directions and arranged a time to meet him later that afternoon before beginning our long journey home to Des

Moines. As remarkable as our visit had already been, it appeared that one final chapter was about to be added to an adventure we would never forget.

Back at the house, reality began to set in. Marlene and I climbed the stairs to our bedroom and started packing for the journey home. Suitcases were filled, boxes were secured and Frankie's treasures were carefully loaded for the long trip ahead. Each item seemed to carry its own story, making the task both exciting and bittersweet.

It was hard to believe that only a few days earlier we had stepped off an airplane in San Diego. The flight from Iowa had seemed almost effortless—a brief passage across the country.

Now an entirely different adventure awaited us. Parked outside was a U-Haul truck loaded with history, memories, and priceless pieces of Frankie Laine's legacy. Ahead lay nearly 1,800 miles of highways, deserts, mountains and endless stretches of open road.

As I packed my suitcase, I looked around the room one last time and reflected on the extraordinary experience we had just enjoyed. We had arrived hoping to spend time with Marcia and learn more about Frankie's life. Instead, we were leaving with treasures beyond measure and memories that would last a lifetime. The journey home would be long. But the story Marlene and I were carrying with us was even greater.

With our departure drawing near, Marlene and I carried our suitcases out to the waiting truck and loaded them aboard. Then we stepped onto the back patio one final time, taking in the view and reflecting on the extraordinary days we had just experienced.

Marcia had informed us that she and Ron needed to take Molly and Maggie to a grooming appointment. Before leaving, she asked only one thing of us: carefully remove the gold records from the wall, secure them for the journey, and close the garage before we departed. It was a simple request, yet it spoke volumes.

For a brief time, Marlene and I found ourselves alone in the quiet Laine estate, entrusted with this wonderful home. The trust Marcia had placed in us was both humbling and deeply moving.

Carefully, we removed the treasured gold records from the wall where they had hung. Each plaque was wrapped in blankets and nestled securely in the back of the U-Haul, joining the growing collection of Frankie Laine memorabilia we were carrying home. Once everything was safely packed, we closed the garage door, locked the front door, and set off for our final San Diego rendezvous.

Jimmy Marino arrived at the meeting spot at precisely the same time we did. As if our truck wasn't already overflowing with history, Jimmy appeared with several more boxes of Frankie Laine items and one final treasure—yet another coveted gold record plaque wrapped carefully in a blanket.

We loaded the items into the already bulging truck, exchanged our farewells and prepared to begin the long journey back to Iowa. Before we pulled away, Jimmy paused and looked at me. Then he smiled and said words I will never forget: "You now have all of Frankie Laine's things. You are the man!"

As we drove away, those words echoed in my mind. The trip had begun as a visit to spend time with Marcia and preserve a few pieces of Frankie Laine history. It had become something far greater—a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that had entrusted me with a remarkable portion of a legendary entertainer's legacy.

Marlene and I settled into the rhythm of the long drive home. Our first overnight stop was in Victorville, Nevada, just west of Las Vegas, where we stayed at the Primm Casino and Hotel. The journey through the mountains was breathtaking. Towering peaks, winding roads and dramatic vistas made for unforgettable scenery, even if the steep grades and endless curves slowed our progress.

By Friday evening, we had reached Rifle, Colorado, where we spent the night at the Comfort Inn east of Grand Junction. With Iowa now within reach, our sights were firmly set on arriving home the following day.

Waiting for us was an eager reunion with our two-year-old husky, Kodi. This was the first time in his life that he had ever been separated from us for more than a few hours. Fortunately, our granddaughter, Payton, and her boyfriend, Adam, had stayed at our home during our absence, making sure he was well cared for and thoroughly spoiled while we were away.

Late Friday evening, Marlene's son, Matt, arrived at our home to relieve Payton and Adam and take over caring for Kodi until our return. Later, Matt shared something remarkable with us.

Although he had never said a word about our soon return, Kodi somehow seemed to know we were on our way home. As the evening progressed, our husky became noticeably more alert and excited, frequently checking doors and windows as if he were expecting us to walk through them at any moment. Matt was convinced that Kodi sensed our impending arrival long before we pulled into the driveway.

Perhaps it was simply a coincidence, but anyone who has shared their life with a beloved dog understands that they often seem to possess an uncanny awareness of things we cannot explain. Dogs have a remarkable intuition, and Kodi's behavior that night was yet another reminder of the special bond they share with the people they love.

Throughout the journey, Marlene proved to be an indispensable navigator, expertly guiding us across deserts, mountains, and plains. I handled most of the driving, although Marlene graciously took the wheel for about 200 miles through Nebraska, giving me a much-appreciated break.

Home

At approximately 1:30 a.m. on Saturday morning, we finally pulled into our driveway. Our adventure had begun on Monday, March 9, and concluded on Saturday, March 14. We were tired but grateful that the trip had gone exactly as planned. There had been no breakdowns, no mishaps, and no unexpected detours—just mile after mile of memories.

The following evening, as Marcia had requested, we called her to let her know we had arrived safely. She was delighted to hear that both we and Frankie's treasures had made it home without incident.

The real adventure was only beginning. Over the next two months, I spent an average of at least two hours every day cataloging the extraordinary collection that Marcia had entrusted to me. Box after box revealed new surprises. What I had initially believed to be a remarkable assortment of memorabilia gradually revealed itself to be something far greater.

As I carefully inventoried every item, an astonishing realization began to dawn on me: no one in the world possessed a larger collection of Frankie Laine memorabilia than I now did.

My Frankie Laine Library had become a treasure trove unlike any other, filled with rare and unique pieces that existed nowhere else. Much of this was possible because of the generosity of Marcia LoVecchio and Jimmy Marino, whose trust and friendship had made it all happen.

Yet the greatest surprises were still hidden away. As I began opening the many boxes Ron had packed before our arrival, I discovered that some contained items far more significant than I had imagined. One by one, their contents revealed stories, memories, and pieces of Frankie Laine's life that had been tucked away for years—waiting to be rediscovered.

As I began sorting through the countless boxes, I quickly realized that I wasn't simply cataloging memorabilia—I was uncovering a remarkable archive of American entertainment history.

Among the most fascinating discoveries was a handwritten letter to Frankie from actress Betty White. There were also personal letters on private stationery from an impressive array of notable figures, including Clint Eastwood, J. Edgar Hoover, Pat Boone, Kay Starr and Mitch Miller. One especially intriguing item was a thank-you note signed by Robert F. Kennedy following President John F. Kennedy's

funeral. I surmised that Frankie and his wife, Nan, had likely sent flowers or expressed their condolences to the Kennedy family.

The collection also contained personally autographed glossy photographs from a host of celebrities, including Johnny Carson, Matt Dennis, Pete Fountain, Joseph Campanella, Milburn Stone ("Doc" from *Gunsmoke*), Mike Douglas, Bob Braun, and Virginia Grey.

Yet these were only the beginning. There were rare 78-rpm acetate recordings produced by Frankie Laine's very first fan club, "The Valley Lainers," dating back to the late 1940s and early 1950s. These recordings offered a fascinating glimpse into the enthusiasm that surrounded Frankie during the earliest years of his rise to stardom.

Then there were the scrapbooks. Dozens upon dozens of them. Spanning more than half a century, from the late 1940s into the 1990s and beyond, each scrapbook was packed with newspaper clippings, magazine articles, photographs, reviews, advertisements and personal mementos documenting Frankie's extraordinary career. Together they formed a near-continuous historical record of his life in the public eye.

The deeper I explored, the more astounding the collection became. I even saw that Frankie's Rolodex was included, and my name and contact information were listed! I was also happy to discover a few published Frankie Laine articles I had written and sent to him.

There were books, concert programs, promotional leaflets and virtually every Frankie Laine record and LP ever released. Included were scores of radio interviews and broadcasts preserved on cassette tapes, along with a large collection of reel-to-reel recordings and master tapes from various albums throughout his career. I discovered scripts to Frankie's acting episodes on both *Rawhide* and *Perry Mason.*

Many portrait-sized photographs and original drawings of Frankie were included, as well as wedding albums documenting his marriages, family photographs and

treasured items connected to his parents and relatives. Awards, trophies, certificates, proclamations and official resolutions issued by state legislatures and cities, honoring his achievements were in boxes.

Then the deeply personal items: pairs of Frankie's shoes, socks, scarves, neckties and shirts.

There were original orchestra scores used in the recording of many of his classic hits. And perhaps most touching of all were letters and cards Frankie had written to his beloved wife, Nan—intimate expressions of affection that revealed the man behind the legendary voice.

With every box I opened, I felt as though I was stepping deeper into Frankie Laine's world. What Marcia and Jimmy had entrusted to me was far more than a collection. It was a lifetime of memories, accomplishments, friendships, and personal treasures—an extraordinary legacy preserved piece by piece, waiting to tell its story once again.

Marlene and I had become guardians of a legacy.

Somewhere in the quiet rhythm of that long journey home, I realized something even more profound—that the most extraordinary treasures we brought back from San Diego were not the gold records or the archives themselves, but the trust, friendship and responsibility that had been placed in our hands.

Frankie Laine's voice had never truly left the world. Now, it was up to me to make sure it never would.