

THE SWITCHBLADE KID

By Francis Galliano

NOTES

Sal Mineo is an American icon. In the late 1950's, Sal Mineo was one of the most successful movie stars in the world. Twice nominated for an Academy Award for the films, "Rebel without a Cause" and "Exodus," Mineo's career spanned over three decades. Not only was he a Hollywood heartthrob, he also maintained a prolific and acclaimed stage career both on and off Broadway. In his explosive docu-drama, playwright, Francis Galliano gives us a glimpse into the secret life of one of Hollywood's most accomplished stars. This first-person confessional should be performed by a male and be entered in either Dramatic Interpretation or Prose Interpretation. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are visible to simply show the performer when to turn his pages in the manuscript.

Life is full of irony, isn't it? Especially if one is in show business, such as myself. (*Pulling out a switchblade from his pocket*) Have you ever really looked at a knife and thought, "Hello, there beautiful!" It's funny. I had never even *held* a knife until I entered show business. You see, everyone in show business is typecast. Sure, I played your typical child roles when I was a little kid, but when I became a teenager—I was typecast as the "lost boy." You know the one: The rebellious teenager, the depressed young man, the kid with so much angst it would take a miracle to turn his life around. In fact, I got cast in so many rebel roles where my character, for whatever reason, always seemed to have a switchblade knife on him...that I earned the nickname: *The Switchblade Kid*.



My parents came over to the States from Sicily in the mid 30's. My dad, Sal Mineo, Sr.—he was casket maker. He'd always say that he was more of an artist than I was, because people were literally dying to see *his* work. (*Laughs*) He was a visionary. He knew he could make a better life for our family in the good old US of A, but it was my mother, Josephine, who was the real visionary. Even though we lived in the Bronx, my mother knew my destiny was to someday live in Hollywood, so she enrolled me in dancing classes and paid for me to take acting lessons, as soon as I was old enough to walk and talk. And do you know what? My mother was right, because I was appearing in local TV shows by the time I was 10. My first real break, though, came when I got cast in the Broadway productions of Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* and the musical, *The King and I*, playing the young Prince opposite Yul Brynner.



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Now, growing up in New York, I learned to be tough before I even hit puberty, so it was no big deal me to move across the country to California and try my luck in the film industry as a young teenager.

I was just 16-years-old when I landed the role of Plato, a soulful, abandoned teenager in the film, *Rebel Without a Cause*. The movie was great and earned me an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor, but the best part was just hanging out with my co-stars, James Dean and Natalie Wood. Everything you ever heard about James Dean is true! Seriously, he was of one of the coolest guys in Hollywood. I remember, we'd be on the set, and between takes, I had this switchblade given to me by my agent. And Jimmy and I—well, that's what his friends called him. Jimmy and I—we'd go out behind the lot and play chicken with my switchblade knife. Now, for those of you who don't know how to play "chicken," here are the rules: You stand a few feet apart from one another, and you take turns throwing a knife at the other one's feet. You're allowed to spread your feet, in order to not get stabbed; but then again, the farther you spread your legs, the more likely it was that you would fall. The first one to make the other one fall wins! And we were in it to win—both of us! It was so funny. Here we were throwing knives at each other, and around the corner comes Natalie Wood. Well, she sees us, sees what we're doing, and she starts screaming and threatening to go tell the director. Then Jimmy gets her to calm down by promising to take her out for ice cream later, if she won't tell on us. (*Laughs*) I'm not going to tell you who won, but let's just say—I'm one of the few people in the world who's ever seen the iconic James Dean do the splits! (*Laughs*) Man, we had a lot of fun.



I made another film with Jimmy later that year—*Giant*, in which Jimmy played a ranch hand and was nominated for Best Actor. (*Pause*) It was during the filming of this movie that Jimmy told me, “*Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die today.*” It's prophetic, because Jimmy died in September—shortly after we wrapped up the movie. Jimmy had been racing cars for a couple of years at that point, and after the filming ended for *Giant*—he was driving from Los Angeles to Salinas to enter a race. Unfortunately, Jimmy's Porsche hit another car head on. He was pronounced dead on the scene.



You know, Hollywood is one of the saddest places in the world, yet we, who work in Hollywood, seem to make millions of movie-goers happy. It's ironic, isn't it? I suppose I'm one of the lucky ones. I've managed to keep my career span the better part of three decades. I suppose one of my biggest successes came while filming the classic film epic, *Exodus*. Not only was I nominated again for another Best Actor in a Supporting Role, I also met and fell in love with one of my co-stars, Jill Haworth. Many would say it was a whirlwind romance, but that romance lasted many years. As a couple, our faces graced the