

# AL CAPONE SHINES MY SHOES

I Still Live Here



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**GENNIFER CHOLDENKO**

Author of Newbery Honor winner **AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS**

# 1. THE CREAM OF THE CRIMINAL CROP

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*Monday, August 5, 1935*

Nothing is the way it's supposed to be when you live on an island with a billion birds, a ton of bird crap, a few dozen rifles, machine guns, and automatics, and 278 of America's worst criminals—"the cream of the criminal crop" as one of our felons likes to say. The convicts on Alcatraz are rotten to the core, crazy in the head, and as slippery as eels in axle grease.

And then there's me. Moose Flanagan. I live on Alcatraz along with twenty-four other kids and one more on the way. My father works as a prison guard and an electrician in the cell house up top. I live where most of us "civilians" do, in 64 building, which is dockside on the east side of Alcatraz—a base hit from the mobster Al Capone.

Not many twelve-year-old boys can say that. Not many kids can say that when their toilet is stopped up, they get Seven Fingers, the ax murderer, to help them out, either. Even simple things are upside down and backwards here. Take getting my socks washed. Every Wednesday we put out our dirty laundry in big white bags marked with our name: FLANAGAN. Every Monday our clothes come back starched, pressed, folded, and smelling of soap and flour. They look like my mom washed them for me.

had nothing to do with that flat tire, but it won't hurt you to give Darby a hand, Moose," is what he said.

When I first moved here, I thought all the bad guys were on one side of the bars and all the good guys were on the other. But lately, I've begun to wonder if there isn't at least one officer on the free side who ought to be locked up and maybe a convict who isn't half as bad as he's cracked up to be. I'm thinking about Al Capone—the most notorious gangster in America, the worst guy we have up top. How could it be that he did me a good turn?

It doesn't make sense, does it? But Al Capone got my sister, Natalie, into a school called the Esther P. Marinoff where she'd been turned down twice already. It's a boarding school for kids who have their wires crossed up. It's a school and not a school . . . a place to make her normal.

I don't know for certain it was Capone who helped us. I mean the guy is locked up in a five-by-nine-foot cell. He's not allowed to make a phone call or write a letter that isn't censored word for word. It doesn't seem possible he could have done anything to help us, even if he wanted to.

But out of desperation, I sent a letter asking Capone for help and Natalie got accepted. Then I got a note in the pocket of my newly laundered shirt: *Done*, it said.

I haven't told anyone about this. It's something I try not to think about, but today, the day Nat's finally leaving for school, I can't keep my mind from going over the details again and again.

The thing that stumps me is *why*. I never even met Al Capone . . . why would he help me?



cons did a pretty good job. Only the belt is bugging Nat. She pulls at it, weaving it in and out of the loops. In and out. In and out. Nat's mouth puckers to one side. "Moose school. Natalie home," she says.

"Not today," my mother says brightly. "Today is your big day. Today *you're* going to school."

"*Not* today," Nat tells her. "*Not* today. *Not* today."

I can't help smiling at this. Natalie likes to repeat what you say and here she's repeating my mom's exact words with a change of inflection that makes them say what Natalie wants them to say and not at all what my mother meant. I love when Natalie outsmarts Mom this way. Sometimes Nat is smarter than we are. Other times, she doesn't understand the first thing about anything. That's the trouble with Natalie—you never know which way she'll go.

The first time Nat went to the Esther P. Marinoff School she pitched a fit the size of Oklahoma and they kicked her out, but I don't think that will happen this time. She's getting better in her own weird way. I used to say Nat's like a human adding machine without the human part, but now she's touching down human more days than not. And each time she does it feels as if the sun has come out after sixty straight days of rain.

"Tell her, Moose. Tell her how wonderful it's going to be," my mother says.

"Tell her, Moose. Tell her how wonderful it's going to be," Nat repeats, picking up her button box and holding it tight against her chest.

"You get to take your buttons, Nat. Mom said," I say.

I almost think I see her smile then—as much of a smile as

The sequel to the *New York Times* bestseller

## AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS

*"You gotta watch cons like Al Capone. Starts out innocent enough. He shines your shoes. Pretty soon, he wants something for his efforts. You gonna give it to him? Well, you owe him now . . ."*

Praise for



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