

Michael Martone

### **CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTE**

Michael Martone was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he was known, in the womb, as Missy. At birth, Michael Martone was named Michael Anthony Martone, the Anthony being his father's name and the name of his grandfather on his father's side. Names his parents called him, recorded in the extensive Baby Book (he was a first born), included Dolly, Peanut, and Bug. His grandfather on his mother's side called Martone Gigi-tone (the "g" is hard) all of his life. He was known as Tony's boy or as Patty's boy or as Junior's (Martone's father being known as Junior or simply June) or as Tony and Patty's boy. He was baptized at age six weeks as Michael or more exactly Michaelus, the Latin version of Michael. Though he was named Michael, Martone was soon being called Mickey by his parents and then by his grandparents and his aunts and uncles and cousins. As a child growing up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which is also known as the Summit City, he assumed he was named Mickey by his father after Mickey Mantle, the New York Yankee baseball player, as a kind of homage to Mickey Mantle or a charm to aid Martone as he inaugurated his own peewee baseball career. It turned out that Martone's father – he told Martone when Martone asked – had named him Mickey after a good friend of his, Mickey Allen, who lived across the street from Martone's father's boyhood home on Brandriff Street and who died when he, Mickey Allen, was fifteen. Martone's father had been a pall bearer for Mickey Allen's funeral, the first time Martone's father ever served in that capacity. In the summer, then, when playing Little League and later Pony and Colt League baseball, Martone was known as Mickey by his

friends and teammates and by their parents and by the coaches and people who lived near the parks and watched the games. His family called Martone Mickey all the time, not just in the summer, but in school Martone was known as Michael because that was Martone's official name, recorded on his records. It was shortened to Mike by his teachers and Martone wrote "Mike" in the top right hand corner of his papers all through school. To this day, a few of Martone's classmates from fifth grade still call Martone not Mickey nor Mike but Monk when they see him. At all his high school reunions when he is called Monk by someone, Martone will be reminded of that afternoon years before when on the playground he imitated a monkey to endear himself to a group of kids and got called Monk for the first time. The name Monk began as a teasing joke but turned into a certified nickname after Martone drew a simple monkey character based on the Kilroy graffiti and then doodled a whole pantheon of Monk character variations from history, literature, and popular culture. General Monkarthur, Sir Monkalot, St. Francis of Monkssisi, the Monka Lisa, Monkinham Lincoln, Monkleberry Finn, Marilyn Monkroe, and even the Monkles before the Monkees debuted. At the reunions, the few men and women who remember Martone as Monk don't remember why they remember him as Monk, and every five years Martone reminds them of the story. Martone chose the name Joseph for a confirmation name after reading through lists of saints' names and their stories. At North Side High School almost everyone except for those few still calling him Monk from elementary school or Mickey from summer baseball leagues, called him Mike. Martone discovered Janine Burke liked him when in Mr. Humphrey's English class he, Mr. Humphrey, caught her writing Mrs. Michael Martone and Mrs. Janine Martone and Janine Martone on the inside cover of a notebook and made her read what

she had written to the whole class. Mr. Lewinski, Martone's brilliant and very formal senior year English teacher, called Martone Mr. Martone and did so even when, years later, Martone visited Mr. Lewinski, who was completely blind and slowly dying from diabetes, in the hospital. When Martone graduated from high school, his diploma read "Michael Anthony Joseph Martone." All of those names were read by the vice principal, who was annoyed by the number of names and told Martone so during the commencement rehearsal. But Martone didn't know of any other time when he would ever use all of his names and submitted them again on the forms for his undergraduate and graduate diplomas. In college, Martone belonged to *The Mikes of America Club*. For a nominal fee, the club, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sent Martone a certificate and a quarterly newsletter. For years, Martone, a member in good standing, carried a card he would produce at parties that said his name was Michael "Mike" Martone. In college and graduate school, Martone would always answer "Michael" when a professor asked what he went by. He had thought of himself as a Michael, really, ever since Mr. Lewinski's class in which he, Martone, first thought he might like to write and had thought about his *nom de plume*, his pen name, and practiced (as Janine Burke had done in another English class) a signature, his signature with the upward looping "h" "l" and "t." His family still calls him Mick but will force themselves to refer to him as Michael when speaking about him in third person to people who ask. For years now, since graduate school, where he met his wife, who always has called him simply Martone, Martone has thought of himself as Martone. Friends call Martone Martone, a strangely intimate construction in the way children in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where Martone lives now with his wife who still calls him Martone, call Martone Mr. Michael, that mix of formality and familiarity. Martone

got married in a civil service at the Story County courthouse, in Nevada, Iowa. Along with his soon-to-be wife, Martone had to sign papers and register at the clerk's office before going into the courtroom. There was actually a big, ancient book both of them had to sign. Martone was not surprised to see that there were places that needed to be filled in labeled "Bride's Name Before the Marriage" and "Bride's Name After the Marriage." His wife, who has several pet names she calls Martone but refuses to let him share or use them in public, kept her name. Martone was surprised to discover that there were also spaces that asked for "Groom's Name Before Marriage" as well as "Groom's Name After Marriage." The possibility that there was this possibility of taking on a new name had never occurred to him. At that moment, he couldn't think of what to call himself and simply signed Michael Martone twice. Martone and his soon-to-be wife and their two witnesses waited their turn in the courtroom, sitting in the jury box while the judge, who was going to conduct the service, sentenced someone to the county lockup. After the prisoner was led away, the judge asked Martone if there were rings and said he hadn't thought so when Martone said there weren't. Then he said, "Do you..." prompting Martone, with an urgent head nod and a raising of his eyebrows, to answer, to fill in that blank he had left floating in the air with a name, any name.