When Albert Francis Jr., died at 85 in July 2004 in the small northern California town of Auburn Lake Trails, his obituary in the local newspaper mentioned his years in the area, his education in South Florida, funeral arrangements and surviving relatives.

What it did not mention was Albert had changed his name and lived most of his life in obscurity to escape his family shame. He had, to most of the outside world, carried his secret to his grave: he was born Albert Francis Capone Jr.

"Al Capone has been dead a long, long time," widow America Francis said by telephone in June 2005. "His son had nothing to do with him. Let him [Albert Francis, Jr.] rest in peace, for crying out loud. He suffered enough in his life for being who he was."

Alphonse Capone was more than a sometime snowbird in Palm Beach County and South Florida. The gangster nicknamed "Scarface" reportedly bought a large ranch in Jupiter Farms in 1923 that was later bought by Burt Reynolds. He bought a palatial home in Palm Island, an exclusive community near downtown Miami, but reportedly was considering property in Boca Raton after Miami authorities and community leaders let him know he wasn't welcome. He reportedly had an option on a 56-acre island in the Hillsboro Canal, south of Boca Raton on the Broward County side. Long called "Capone Island," it's now Deerfield Island Park. The state took it over in 1934 when Capone went bankrupt.

The man considered one of the most ruthless gangsters in American history had a soft spot for his son.

"I don't want to die shot in the street," he once said. "There's business enough for all of us without killing each other like animals. I've got a boy. I love that kid."

Sonny

"Sonny" was born December 4, 1918, in Brooklyn, the son
of Capone's Irish wife, Mae Coughlin.

At seven, he developed an infection in his mastoid, the bone behind his ear. The family consulted specialists in New York. Sonny survived the radical surgery, but was left partially deaf and had to wear a hearing aid.

His deafness, coupled with his infamous surname, caused him no end of trouble with classmates, and he bounced from one school to another. He attended St. Patrick School in Miami Beach, where he was good friends with a young Cuban named Desi Arnaz. Sonny attended Notre Dame University from 1937 to 1938, then returned to South Florida and received a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami in 1941.

Sonny had married Ruth Casey in Miami in 1941. The two had four daughters. They later divorced and Sonny remarried. A brother-in-law was a Miami police detective, and Sonny met other officers. He was an expert marksman and joined the department's pistol team, becoming a member of the National Pistol Association of America and the Florida Peace Officer's Association.

His father, meanwhile, had been sentenced in 1932 to an 11-year term for tax evasion that would include stints in Atlanta and Los Angeles and at the infamous Alcatraz prison. Capone served only seven years before he was released, his body racked with syphilis.

In 1942, when applying for an aviation school, Sonny listed his father's occupation as "retired."

And he was there when Scarface died at his Palm Island home at age 48 on January 19, 1947.

Sonny's first job after World War II had been as a used car salesman. But the son of an underworld legend had quit after learning his boss was turning back the odometers on the cars. He became an apprentice printer and hoped to buy into the business but his mother declined to back him. For a while, the two ran a Miami restaurant called the Grotto, with Sonny as head waiter, but it eventually closed.

He and his mother lived quietly until 1959, when they filed a $1 million lawsuit against the producers of "The Untouchables." The TV series detailed the exploits of 1930s Chicago cop Eliot Ness and was groundbreaking and controversial for what was then considered excessive violence. The family claimed the show was using Capone's image for profit. The Federal Communications Commission reprimanded television network ABC, but the family eventually lost the suit. The show's producer: Sonny's childhood friend, Desi Arnaz.

"... SICK AND TIRED OF FIGHTING THE NAME"

On August 7, 1965, the son of the great mob boss found himself picked up like a common criminal. Police said he'd pocketed two bottles of aspirin and flashlight batteries, totaling $3.50, from a North Miami Beach supermarket. He reportedly said, "Everyone has a little larceny in them."

Sonny, then living in Hollywood and working as a tire distributor, pleaded no contest and was sentenced to two years of probation. When it was lifted in 1967, his probation officer said he'd been exemplary and the store manager said he'd been a steady—and paying—customer.

One thing he no longer was: Albert Francis Capone Jr. The previous year, he had gone to court in Fort Lauderdale and had his name legally changed to just Albert Francis. His lawyer said he was "just getting sick and tired of fighting the name." Sonny was 47, about the same age his father had been when he died.

By then, all four daughters were living in California. Some time in the 1980s, records show that Sonny moved from South Florida to California, living in Los Altos, between San Francisco and San Jose, and later in Cool, a small community northeast of Sacramento. In 1988, at 70, he took a three-week African safari with friends.

At his death, on July 8, 2004, he left his four daughters and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Well-wishers were asked to donate to the Alzheimer's Association. Services were private.

- SFH