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My Life with Mickey by Jane Spillane

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Abstract
Adam Bowman of Coastal Carolina's Kimbel Library reviews *My Life with Mickey* by Jane Spillane.

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This book review is available in South Carolina Libraries: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/scl_journal/vol1/iss2/10
My Life with Mickey is Jane Spillane’s first book. Her late husband Mickey Spillane, on the other hand, not only published over 40 books, but was widely recognized as one of the most successful and lucrative crime fiction writers in history. Aside from his literary success, Spillane gained notoriety as a circus performer, soldier, prominent late-night talk show guest, Miller Lite spokesman, occasional movie actor, and most notably, creator of the hard-boiled detective Mike Hammer. Mickey Spillane lived a fascinating life, and Jane has a few more tales to tell about it.

During the 1950s, Spillane was one of the original “Northerners” relocating to the Grand Stand, beginning a new life in Murrell’s Inlet, South Carolina, and in time, Spillane and the Grand Strand became synonymous. On his various late night talk-show appearances, Spillane educated America about the splendors of Murrell’s Inlet and the Grand Strand, unintentionally influencing the arrival of tourists and additional residents, a circumstance he later regretted. Nonetheless, in Murrell’s Inlet Mickey Spillane established a home where he would spend the rest of his life. He also found something he wasn’t pursuing, marriage, spending the last 23 years of his life with former neighbor, beauty queen, and native of Marion, Jane. My Life with Mickey depicts their life together, a life relatable to the majority of “Northerners” and “Out-of-towners” drawn to South Carolina’s coast, a life reinvented in the sand.

My Life with Mickey is the first in Coastal Carolina University’s Athenaeum Press chapbook series. The concise book is complemented with pictures taken by Coastal Carolina photography students of the Spillane household, the same home where Jane still lives today. Few books have dealt with Spillane’s personal life, let alone his South Carolina experiences, and My Life with Mickey focuses on these later years through five private stories told by Jane. Jane knew Mickey as few knew him, providing new insights into his character, the home they shared, and his adopted hometown. The stories include Spillane transforming into his Mike Hammer character to stop a robbery, the destruction of their home in Hurricane Hugo, his faith as a Jehovah’s Witness, a mythic tale involving Ernest Hemingway and Key West, and additional poignant recollections regarding his kindness and personal morality. Whereas Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer books were gritty and full of sex and violence, Jane’s recollections tell of a man who was the furthest thing from the grittiness he created, recounting a supportive husband, a kind man, and an aging writer.
I recommend this book to any library interested in the man responsible for transforming the Grand Strand into the tourist destination it is today. Since the book is intended for Spillane fans, readership of those unaware of Mickey Spillane and the Mike Hammer series would be minimal. Intended audiences are crime fiction fans, fiction theorists, Grand Strand area residents, libraries with Spillane collections, and those interested in mid-century popular culture.

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