

FRANK SCIOSCIA (1922-1993)

From the day we launched this firm our catalogues have sailed forth under the benevolent banner of the original Joseph the Provider. But so saddened were we this summer by the death of Frank Scioscia, cherished friend and worthy colleague, that we have chosen to dedicate this catalogue to his memory. It is Frank's likeness which appears on the front cover alongside The Provider – as for years his knowing presence informed our catalogues.

Who can forget what it was like to visit Frank at his home in Hastings-on-Hudson? Early in the morning you proceeded up the Hudson River Valley. With a view of the Palisades on the Jersey side you crossed into Westchester County and made your way up the steeply-sloped streets of Hastings to the last house in a cul-de-sac, where Frank and his wife, Mary, a woman of unforced graciousness and endless patience, would be waiting.

Crossing the Scioscia threshold you entered a bookman's dream world. Good books were everywhere – on shelves in all the rooms not excluding the bedrooms, on the floors, in the hallways and basement, even in the garage from which cars had long been displaced. The house held more books than could possibly be viewed in any one visit, and there were thousands more in the warehouse Frank rented in the next town to house his American fiction holdings. Not enough? Frank maintained not one but two general book stores in downtown Hastings. An estimated 300,000 books in all and you never knew where the ones you were looking for would turn up.

Though a bountiful breakfast was hardly a top priority, Frank and Mary made sure to feed you before you were turned loose. Then off Frank would scurry, usually to the downtown stores, though throughout the day he would make brief and impromptu appearances before racing off again somewhere else. He might suddenly turn up in the warehouse, looking for Sixties novels a customer had requested; or you might be in the house when Frank would dash in barely in time to drive Mary to an appointment; or sometimes he would arrive and whisk everyone off to lunch at a local restaurant. (Frank always paid.) Later you would go looking for him at the main store only to find that he had zipped off to a book sale in Irvington; or was he making a private purchase in nearby Dobbs Ferry? More likely, of course, there were those unpredictable times he and local pal, author Steve Kanfer captured unwary visitors and spirited them off for a game

of boccie down near the river.

Over the years the complexion of Frank's stock inevitably changed. Many of the choice, older items had long ago been siphoned off by the many dealers for whom Frank was a source of sources. Vintage titles of then-unproved writers whose books Frank had cellared found their way from his care into rare-book catalogues at first-growth prices. Still, there were treasures to be dug up – for instance, a copy in the rare dust jacket of Nathanael West's "Miss Lonelyhearts" found stashed away on a bottom shelf in a hallway -- an out-of-the-strike-zone area where Frank probably hoped no one would look.

About 12 hours after your arrival with the sun long dropped below the Hudson's horizon, you brought all of the books that you had garnered from the various book locations into Frank and Mary's living room and placed them in their disarray on the floor. Getting down on his hands and knees while blithely puffing away on his pipe, Frank sifted surely through the amorphousness and in jig time he had reconfigured the books into meaningful stacks.

"These are \$10 each, these are \$25, these \$50, these \$100, and that one over there is \$500." There were usually two piles Frank did not identify. Asked about these, he would mumble something like: "That stack, oh, just take those," and of the other, "these I don't want to sell just now."

It took some years to figure out what was going on here but it finally dawned on us that Frank held these books out because he felt he had overpaid for them and he did not want to embarrass you by asking more than you could pay. Once we discerned this nicety we were sometimes able to liberate a sacred cow or two by making preemptive offers. Frank, wise soul that he was, might then relent, recognizing fools even more profligate than himself.

In the final analysis you went to see Frank not for his books, plentiful and wonderful as they were. You went, really, out of love for the man's essential decency – you never heard Frank run down anyone in our incestuous little world of book people. You respected his awesome tenacity in pursuing books and appreciated the unalloyed generosity with which he passed them on to you and to so many others. You basked in the fireplace of Frank Scioscia's warmth. It's colder out there now.

**Joseph the Provider / Books, 1993
(co-written with Larry Moskowitz)**