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(from mug)

MASTER FALCONER

*I would plunge from the highest mist
Down to the lowest deep,
Or I would from my maker's wrist
Die with the falcon's sweep*

*I would know the ecstasy
Of unhooded hunting lust,
A power dive from sublimity
Down to the groveling dust.*

*Unerring should my death-cast be
But, obedient to his nod,
Swift I'd soar to my hood once more
Back to the hand of God.*



VINCENT D. CASSONE

1926-2007

Stamford, Conn., and Tipton, Mich., Colorado Springs, CO
Favored birds: Peregrine falcons and goshawks

Vincent Cassone was part of the “old school” of falconry in the U.S. who strongly believed falconers should adhere to the classic, medieval techniques. Likewise, he did not think highly of using electronics to track birds or even of the purchase of falcons.

Born in 1926, Cassone came from the era of American falconers who were fascinated with falcons and hawks and were intrigued by the same National Geographic article that inspired many of that generation. He was well-read and became familiar with other writings such as the Craigheads, and classic literature, especially “De Arte Venandi cum Avibus” (“On The Art of Hunting with Birds”), a Latin treatise on ornithology and falconry written in the 1200s by Frederick II, a powerful, Holy Roman Emperor from the House of Hohenstaufen.

Cassone also loved to trap falcons on Assateague Island, off the Maryland and Virginia coast. The island is famous in the lore of falconers before the age of regulation and the decline of populations due to DDT.

His son, Vincent M., himself a biologist who has studied birds and is head of the Department of Biology at the University of Kentucky, remembers those trips to Assateague.

“When I was a kid, he would take my brother and me on the annual trek to ‘The Island,’ where we would camp with a great group of falconers,” he said. “It was a long time ago, but I can’t forget Corny McFadden, Heinz Meng and Dr. Jim Gerlach (who stitched my hand together one year after I was injured). Ed Riley and Vernon Seifert were also close falconry friends of my father.”

His son was also his major apprentice — this was, of course, long before today’s formal and legal system of apprenticeships — but he occasionally took on others, such as Jackie Bleuler and Kent Christiansen. He also gave talks on the sport at least once a year, his son said.

Cassone was the first falconer to import the Argentinean peregrine subspecies *F. peregrinus cassini* to the U.S. He had an exotic bird permit to bring the birds in, but Fish and Wildlife confiscated the birds, claiming them to be *F. peregrinus anatum*. F&W wanted to put the birds in the Bronx Zoo, but after much haggling and legal jousting, the birds were given to Tom Cade’s breeding program at Cornell. He was promised an F2 or F3 but never received one.

He was also a collector. He particularly liked the 19th Century bronzes made by French sculptor Pierre J. Mene, who had several

statues of falconers. The first of those was of an Arabian falconer on an Arabian horse with a falcon on his wrist. Over the course of his career, Cassone was also an inventor who went from the family bakery business into sales and manufacturing, then back to the bakery business at the end of his career.

He was a partner with his brothers in Stamford, Conn., at Cassone’s Bakery, where he invented a bread crumb machine. Today, the bakery is owned by Pepperidge Farm, but is still active in the Northeast. He left the bakery to become an international salesman for a tool and die company, Easco Sparcatron in Ann Arbor, Mich., which built electrical discharge machines (EDM). He became president of the company, but soon started a new company, Axon EDM, a competitor of Easco. During that time, he was instrumental in the invention and design of a tabletop EDM called the Sparkdrill.

Eventually, Cassone became frustrated by the nature of the financial aspects of the business, which was based on large lines of credit and accounts receivable, which could be frustrating when dealing with international clients. When Axon began to flounder, he decided he wanted to get back into an industry that was recession-proof and based on cash sales. Clearly, his experience in the bakery business fit the bill, and he started a bakery in Brooklyn, Mich., called Stonehearth Bakery. His eventual goal was to franchise the company, thanks in part to a new invention/design of his — miniature bread-baking equipment for use in small-market bakeries that utilized high-tech ceramics that were lighter than stone but simulated the stone-baking process that creates Old World style breads.

“He will be remembered as a very creative man, someone who was certain of his opinions and willing to argue about — I mean discuss — anything with anyone,” said his son, who described him as a bit of a gadfly. “He was known to pose uncomfortable questions and make unpopular statements in the presence of people who usually did not agree with him. This was true throughout his life, although it increased as he aged.”

But, as with all falconers, it always comes back to the birds. He loved peregrines and goshawks. And he had many birds over the years. Of course, there were problem birds — a Harris’ Hawk that wouldn’t work for him or an Ornate Crested Hawk-Eagle that was “dumber than a rock” — but then there were all the others.

“All birds liked him,” his son said. “I had a Red-tailed Hawk for a long time (maybe 15 years) named Sam that would fly for me very well, but who was enamored with my father. I mean inappropriately enamored. And my father could get parrots to talk more quickly than anyone I know. He just had a way with birds.”

— *Reminiscences: Vincent M. Cassone (son)*

Falconer’s Plunge

There lies Riley; dashed to the rocks

His backyard full of empty blocks

A fitting end for a man so absurd

Who’d climb a cliff to steal a baby bird

-Vincent D. Cassone

Background of Riley’s Plunge Poem per Vincent Cassone (Vinny’s son):

Riley is Ed Riley, one of Vinny’s best friends in Colorado. Ed’s brother Jim was Vinny’s good friend in Connecticut. Ed and Vinny would ham it up at the eyries. Vinny would ice skate down the rivers in Connecticut to search for peregrine eyries!

He loved peregrines
and goshawks.

“All birds liked him....
He just had a way
with birds.”



Aug 48
Eyes tired 49
Lyle & Tlauwe
Broomfield, Colo.
September, 1949
V. Cassone

