

HOLLYWOOD HEAVY

(THE STORY OF TOM SHORT)

by David Robb

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Tommy Short and his brother Dale sat in a booth with their mother, having lunch in the dark, wood-paneled lounge at Don's River City Cafe, a semi-swank seafood joint just outside of Cleveland, only a couple of miles from where they were born and raised. The food was good, but Tommy and Dale didn't care about that now. Their father had died only a few weeks earlier, on September 30, 1987, and they'd come to discuss family business: they wanted their father's slush fund. The money was theirs, they figured, and they weren't going to share it with their mother. So after lunch they told her how it was going to be: they would see to it that she got her husband's severance pay from the union, and they would get the slush fund.

The money had been raised by their father, Adrian "Junior" Short, to finance his campaign for re-election as second vice president of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), one of the most powerful labor unions in the entertainment industry. Junior, however, had died 10 months before the 1988 election, and the money he'd raised was now up for grabs. So Tommy and Dale grabbed it. There is no mention of the money in the probate records of Junior's estate, and no one but Tommy and Dale knows for sure how much cash their father had stashed away to finance his re-election bid. Their sister, Debbie, however, believes that it was more than \$10,000.

Legally, she believes, the money belonged to their mother, Anne Short, a tanned, diminutive woman, who had just buried her husband after 41 years of marriage. Anne, who'd been at Junior's side during his many years as the lord of a labor fiefdom in Cleveland - and who had been with him in their hotel room a few weeks earlier when he died of a heart attack while attending to union business in New York City - had been named the sole beneficiary in his last will and testament.

But Tommy and Dale had other plans for their father's war chest: Tommy was plotting his own run for an IATSE vice presidency, and according to his sister, "This money would have boosted Tommy when he ran. Tommy and Dale met my mother at Don's River City Cafe in Rocky River and told her that she was not entitled to that money," Debbie says. "They said they would do with it what they wanted. My mother is very hurt that they would cheat her. I think it was illegal. It wasn't their money."

Tommy went on to win the vice presidency a few months later at the union's 1988 convention in Reno, running a well-financed campaign in defeating a weak incumbent. Tommy, his sister recalls, even flew their mother into Reno to help him win the "sympathy vote" of the many old-time convention delegates who were still loyal to Anne and to her late husband. Debbie, however, says that he showed little gratitude. "Tommy hasn't talked to our mother in two years," she says. "She's brokenhearted."

After the election, on the last day of the convention, Tommy strode to the podium to the applause of the union delegates. “This is a very proud day for my family,” Tommy said that day in Reno, “and I am sure it is equally proud for a person that is looking down on this convention, and that person is Adrian J. Short Jr., and without his guidance, his teachings and his knowledge, I would not be standing here today.” Tommy’s brother Dale, the delegate who had nominated him for the post, also paid tribute to their father, saying that Junior was “our mentor, our friend and the boss.”

Today, Tommy Short is the boss, having been appointed international president of IATSE in December as the old president lay dying. Later this month, he will preside over the union’s 1995 convention in Miami, where he is expected to win election to a full two-year term. At 46, Tommy is the union’s youngest president.

If you don’t work in the entertainment industry, chances are you’ve never heard of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, or “the I. A.,” as it’s called. The work done by its 78,000 members, however, is familiar to almost everyone; they are the behind-the-scenes workers in the film and TV business. They are directors of photography and makeup artists; they are sound technicians and costume designers, grips and script supervisors, accountants and carpenters, art directors and ticket takers, stagehands and projectionists. They do just about everything but write, produce, direct and act in the movies. The union is headquartered in New York, but the highest concentration of its members are employed here in Hollywood—some 20,000 workers in more than 20 different locals. By and large, theirs is an honest union that adequately represents its members.

The I.A., however, has a dark past: it was once dominated by some of the most dangerous gangsters in American history. Beginning in 1934, the union was taken over by Al Capone’s Chicago mob. For the next seven years, the gangsters used the union to dominate the film industry, raking off union dues and extorting more than \$1 million from the major motion-picture studios. It was the biggest scandal in the history of Hollywood.

Tommy Short also has a dark past. From the beginning, his career was marked by fits of violence and binge drinking. He associated publicly with known organized-crime figures, and in 1980 was indicted on federal charges, later dismissed, of embezzling from his own union. Tommy Short came up in the union ranks the old-fashioned way through a family-run, mob-and-pop operated local union in Ohio. He grew up in a union-run family, in a union town. The family was dysfunctional. The union was corrupt. The town was Cleveland.

Cosmopolitan and green, Cleveland is a beautiful and friendly city, not unlike San Francisco, only it’s located on the banks of Lake Erie at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. And as in the City by the Bay, the performing arts are big in Cleveland. It has a world-renowned orchestra, a highly regarded ballet troupe, an opera association, two first-class concert halls and several prominent theater groups. This cultural bent creates a lot of jobs for stagehands, about 100 of whom are employed in various jobs around town

on any given day. These workers, in turn, are represented by a powerful union—Cleveland’s Stagehands Local 27 -- which has been ruled by Tommy’s family for 30 years.

Tommy’s ties to Stagehands Local 27 go all the way back to 1920. His grandfather, Adrian “Glue” Short Sr., and his great-uncle, John “Monk” Short, were both Local 27 stagehands. His father, Adrian “Junior” Short, was the local’s business agent and undisputed boss for many years, and Tommy’s younger brother, Dale, is the business agent now. His older brother, Adrian “Buddy” Short III, is a stagehand, his sister, Debbie, was a stagehand, and his son, Joseph “Joey” Short, is a stagehand. The union was his family’s business, and Tommy’s father ruled the local from 1965 until his death in 1987. A pugnacious, cigar chomping Edward G. Robinson look-alike who carried a .22 pistol in his pocket and kept a sawed-off shotgun in his desk drawer, Adrian Short Jr. ruled with an iron fist and a fat expense account. He ruled through the hiring hall.

Cleveland was a tough town in the 1970s, when Tommy was coming up in the union. In 1976, the city was dubbed “the bombing capital of America” because 37 bombs exploded in the Cleveland area that year, the result of a brutal turf war between two rival mob factions—the Licavoli Mafia family and an Irish gang led by a charismatic psychopath named Danny Greene. The weapon of choice for both sides was the remote-control car bomb. Since the time of Prohibition, these factions were associated with organized labor. Cleveland’s labor unions were also split into two camps. The powerful Teamsters Union aligned with the Licavoli gang, and the Stagehands local teamed up with Greene’s Irish mob.

The war was triggered in 1975 by the sudden death of John Scalish, the longtime head of the Cleveland Mafia, who had forged alliances with the city’s other underworld camps. Scalish was succeeded by his underboss, James Licavoli. Danny Greene was aligned with a mobster named John Nardi, the secretary-treasurer of Cleveland’s Teamsters Local 410, and neither Greene nor Nardi accepted Licavoli as the new boss. The “Greene-Nardi faction,” as it was known, went on to kill more than a dozen of Licavoli’s soldiers—and numerous other honest and dishonest citizens as well. Greene and Nardi, in turn, were both killed by car bombs in 1977.

The wave of bombings led to one of the largest criminal investigations in American history. The federal Department of Justice convened an Organized Crime and Racketeering Strike Force headed by special attorney John Sopko, which won convictions of many top Cleveland gangsters and conducted a separate investigation of the Shorts and Stagehands Local 27.

Junior Short’s main tie to Cleveland’s Irish mob was Daniel Patrick Greene, one of the most colorful characters ever to come out of Ohio. He dressed in green, drove green cars, wrote with green ink and, between bombings, lectured his followers on Irish history. He considered himself a modern-day Robin Hood, stealing from Italian Mafiosi and giving to his gang of Irish hoods. Greene was left partially deaf when a car bomb he was

planting in 1968 blew up prematurely; before he was finally killed, he had become famous for close brushes with death.

Junior and Danny Greene were great pals who spent many nights together at the Blue Fox, a now-defunct stagehands' hangout on the west side of Cleveland where Junior held court, and where Tommy and his older brother, Buddy, could often be found. Buddy, in fact, once gave Tommy a whipping—and a black eye—in the bar's parking lot after Tommy had mouthed off to him once too often. Greene's henchmen Kevin McTaggart and Keith Ritson also frequented the spot. Junior and Danny Greene also spoke frequently on the phone. According to Junior's daughter, when Greene called her father at home, he used the code name "Mr. Patrick" to identify himself.

Another ally of Junior's was Greene's nephew, Kevin McTaggart. A drug dealer and a killer in Greene's war on the Licavoli crime family, McTaggart worked as a stagehand at the Cleveland Convention Center and as the spotlight man at the Roxy Theater, a local burlesque house. Junior Short got him both jobs. Court documents from Junior's 1983 embezzlement trial show that Junior once traveled with McTaggart to Minneapolis on union business, and that he was fond of mutilating and dismembering his murder victims in the back of his van, which he'd dubbed "The Meatwagon."

After McTaggart shot and killed a gambler named Billy Bostic in 1980, Greene's henchman Graewe chopped off Bostic's hands and head. Graewe, who laughed when he plopped Bostic's head and hands into a bucket, told a police informant: "I learned one thing here. You can't chop a man's head off from the back of the neck. What you have to do is flip him over, cut his throat and then chop through.."

Junior introduced his son to this company of killers. "Tommy knew Kevin through his father," a union source says. More generally, a 1980 Justice Department memo asserted, "Thomas Short is closely associated with the younger, more irresponsible and violent members of the unions, as well as Kevin McTaggart, one of Greene's ex-lieutenants." Certainly, Tommy was never accused of killing anyone, but from his early days in the union, he displayed a volatile temper and a recklessness that stunned and frightened many of those who knew him. His first altercation to make the local papers came three years after he joined the union.

On December 23, 1971, while on assignment as a lighting technician for WKYC, the NBC affiliate in Cleveland, Tommy got into a loud argument with a reporter from WEWS Channel 5, a nonunion local TV station, and disrupted a Christmastime press conference where the wives of Vietnam POWs were being interviewed. Although Tommy apologized, his station suspended him for two days for "unprofessional conduct." In protest, his father ordered a "sickout" by the 13 other Local 209 members employed at the station.

Tommy got into another fight with a WEWS reporter on the night of April 7. This one turned violent and resulted in his arrest. Tommy had been drinking at a local bar that night when he decided to stop by the Roxy Theater to visit some friends who were walking a Local 27 picket line. WEWS reporter Jay Bacchus and a camera crew arrived

at the theater at about 9 p. m. to film a report about the theater, and crossed the picket line to go inside. On their way back out, words were exchanged.

Tommy, a stocky, 5 foot-11 inch 190-pounder, called Bacchus a “whore” and then proceeded to beat him up. “Without any provocation,” Bacchus’ attorney said in a subsequent lawsuit, “Short seized Bacchus ripping his shirt, and began to shake him while continuing his offensive remarks. Short pushed Bacchus down, then pushed him against an automobile parked on East Ninth Street. Short then began to pound Bacchus violently with his fists while pushing him against the car, Bacchus was afraid and unable to defend himself because of the number of Short’s companions.” One of those companions eventually stepped in and pulled Short away. Still cursing, Tommy lumbered down the street to the Town Pump Lounge for a few more drinks. That’s where the police found him when they arrested him for public intoxication. Bacchus, who suffered a cut lip and had a filling knocked loose, sued for \$123,000, and three years later the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas ordered Short to pay \$300 in compensatory damages and \$500 in punitive damages.

Tommy maintained throughout the proceeding that he had punched the reporter in self-defense.

Tommy’s drinking problem has gotten him into other jams. On the night of May 17, 1992 he was arrested in a Cleveland suburb for driving under the influence of alcohol. He refused to take a breathalyzer test and was carted off to jail. He pleaded no contest, and was put on probation for six months, was fined \$350 and had his driver’s license suspended for 90 days.

Don Jonke, a former member of Local 27’s executive board and now the administrator of the local’s pension plan, once complained to a friend that more of the union’s business was being conducted in bars than in the local’s offices. “There’s people in these bars who know more about our business than we do,” Jonke said in a telephone conversation taped 12 years ago by John Dement, a dissident Local 27 board member. “Tommy Short’s as guilty as anyone else of putting our business on the streets in saloons, and I’m getting tired of it. At one time, the people at Seagram’s Bar and Casey’s Lounge and Pat Joyce’s knew more about what was going on in our fuckin’ business than I did.”

Junior and Tommy’s association with Irish crime figures eventually led to the mob’s introduction into their union. It was a connection that quickly drew the attention of the U.S. Justice Department. According to a 1980 DOJ memo, “(Junior) Short’s close association with remnants of the once powerful Danny Greene faction is apparent from his arranging that ex-Danny Greene lieutenants, Kevin McTaggart and Keith Ritson, be admitted to Local 27.

McTaggart is (Junior) Short’s bodyguard and enforcer.” (Reliable union sources say that Ritson never worked as a stagehand, and as far as they know, was not a member of the local.) Kevin McTaggart, who had worked on and off for several years as a stagehands’ apprentice, was sworn in as a full fledged member of Stagehands Local 27 on December

9, 1978. Union records show that Tommy Short, the local's president, presided over McTaggart's induction ceremonies, which were held at the local's old offices in the Marion Building in downtown Cleveland.

Six other apprentices became members that same day. One of those men, Chuck Fleming, stood next to McTaggart when they were sworn into the union.

Another inductee that day was Jimmy Tucker. Fleming, a burly former tackle at the University of Toledo, recalls an incident that occurred not long after they'd joined the union. "I was working at the Cleveland Convention Center when McTaggart came in at about 2 a.m. The crew was taking down opera scenery and setting up for the next day's performance. McTaggart walked up to Jimmy Tucker, who was bent over pounding nails, and McTaggart kicked him in the head. He kicked the shit out of him. Then he pulled out a gun." Removing a 9mm Model 39 Smith & Wesson semiautomatic from a gym bag he was carrying, McTaggart took aim at Tucker, who lay sprawled on the ground at his feet. "I'll kill you, you motherfucker," he screamed. McTaggart, who believed that Tucker had told the police about his drug dealing activities, wanted to kill his brother stagehand right then and there, but Fleming and another stagehand intervened. "We grabbed him and I said, 'Look, you can't be killing people at work.' He turned and put the gun to my chest and said, 'Let me go.' Then I put a knife to his throat, and he said, 'You are fuckin' crazy.'" McTaggart calmed down, put the gun back in the gym bag and, according to Fleming, "promised that he wouldn't do nothing to Tucker, at least not at work."

Word got out that McTaggart had threatened to kill Tucker, and had beaten him up on the job. The Local 27 executive board convened a disciplinary hearing and slapped McTaggart on the wrist, fining him \$500. "Tucker was scared of being killed," Fleming recalls. "That's the kind of stuff we had to put up with." McTaggart was also afraid. Fleming recalls that McTaggart was so afraid of being blown up by a car bomb that "He used to pay guys \$20 to start his car."

Tommy Short shared McTaggart's fear of car bombs. For laughs once, Tommy's fellow stagehands at Severance Hall, where he worked for the Cleveland Symphony, told him that somebody was messing around with his car in the employee parking lot. Tommy was so afraid of being assassinated, the story goes, that he ran out and looked under his car to see if someone had planted a bomb there.

After Danny Greene was killed by a car bomb in 1977, McTaggart and the survivors of Greene's army called a truce and merged with Greene's former enemy, the Licavoli crime family. That alliance, however, would prove to be both sides' final undoing. In 1982, special attorney Sopko's federal task force brought indictments against the surviving leaders of both crime groups. McTaggart and two of Greene's former henchmen, Hans and Fritz Graewe, were indicted along with Angelo "Big Ange" Lonardo, the underboss of the Licavoli crime family, and Joe Gallo, a captain in the Cleveland Mafia, charged with taking part in a criminal enterprise that was responsible for six murders, widespread drug distribution, wire fraud, gambling and racketeering. McTaggart, who was convicted of the racketeering and drug charges in 1983, is currently

serving a 214-year sentence at the federal penitentiary in Allenwood, Pennsylvania. Hans Graewe was sentenced to 194 years, Lonardo to 103 years and Gallo to 138 years.

Justice Department allegations that Junior Short used Greene and members of his gang as enforcers are supported by a 1983 telephone conversation between John Dement, a longtime union dissident, and Don Jonke, a Short loyalist who is now the head of Local 27's pension plan. Jonke, who did not know that Dement was taping their conversation, told Dement that in 1977 he'd considered running for the local's executive board against Tommy's older brother, Buddy, but backed off after Junior Short threatened him. Junior, Jonke said, "told me that I should drop out, or back off, or Danny Greene would back me off."

In the end, Jonke did back off, deciding not to run against Buddy Short, who was elected to Local 27's executive board. Dement, whose brother-in-law, Mike Frato, had been shot to death by Greene in 1971, died of a heart attack last year. Jonke, however, maintains today that he misunderstood Junior's message. "At the time," he said in a recent interview, "I misconstrued the whole goddamn thing. I made an incorrect assumption. It was something I didn't understand at the time." In any event, Jonke said, "That's water over the dam. Whatever wounds there may have been between me and the Short family are ironed out. I have nothing but pride and admiration for Tommy Short. He wasn't involved in any of that. Tom Short's the future of the International."

Jonke, however, was not the only one who complained about these bullying tactics. "If you weren't on Junior's side, he'd tell you that he would beat you up or have you killed," says Chuck Fleming, the Local 27 dissident who was sworn into the union the same day as McTaggart. "Having Kevin McTaggart coming around, and having guys threatening you if you vote the wrong way, it gets to you." Fleming says, "McTaggart would come to people and say, 'If you're not on Junior's side, I'm going to hurt you.' And Junior would say, 'If you fuck with me, I'll have you killed.' I heard him say that." For years, dissidents say, loyalty to the Short family has been enforced through the hiring hall: those who were loyal got work, while those who weren't, didn't.

Numerous members and former members, including Tommy Short's own sister, have also complained about these abuses. Debbie Short, who had a major falling-out with Tommy and Dale after their father died, says: "They have people who come around and put fear in you. They intimidate you. If they need a certain person to do certain jobs, they have them." Tommy, she says, is "...ruthless. He's a dictator. He goes after people. He went after me. I never got any work. They intimidated people who talked to me. My dad was a fighter. Tommy was not. He was hated by everyone in the local."

Tommy rose to power on his father's coattails. Born on September 13, 1948, Tommy Short joined the local and its sister union, Studio Mechanics Local 209, on January 9, 1968, after spending less than a year at the unaccredited Rio Grande College in southern Ohio. After serving a brief apprenticeship, he went to work as a television lighting technician, a plum he was given by Junior. By 1973 he was elected to the local's

executive board, running on his father's slate. Five years later, the local's executive board installed Tommy as president.

The former president, Ed Moore, resigned after six years in office on December 8, 1977, allowing Tommy to assume the post without facing election. "Junior Short wanted his own people in there," says Moore's son, Richard. "He wanted his kids in there. I was very disenchanted with the way they treated my father." Richard, a former member of the local who quit the union 13 years ago, says he himself once considered running for the local's executive board, but decided not to because "They were going to spread rumors and lies about me in the local. My father told me this." Ed Moore, a stagehand for 50 years, died in 1988.

Tommy served as president of Local 27 from 1978 until February of 1993, when he was appointed general secretary-treasurer of IATSE—the international union's chief financial officer--and moved to New York. During his 14 years as president of Local 27, he was challenged for re-election only once, in 1982, when he narrowly defeated Bobby Acton. Numerous past and present members of the local say that they believe the 1982 election was "rigged," although no one can prove it, and no one ever filed a complaint with the Department of Labor. "Election is just a word," says one member of the local, who asked not to be identified. "There weren't really any elections. Everything was prearranged."

In a taped message sent to all the local's members, Acton, whom Tommy defeated, charged, "A continual pattern of harassment and abuse of process has existed in this union for many years." Acton made that allegation in 1988 while in a legal battle with the local. Acton continued, "Over the years, it's been the policy of this administration to create villains of everyone who opposes or questions their views and policies. Their style is to attack the individual in order to divert attention from their lackluster performance in office, which is laden with inefficiency, waste and failure." Acton, reached at his home in Marco Island, Florida, declined to be interviewed for this story. The members voted on December 4, 1982. When the ballots were counted, Short won the election by a dozen votes.

Three weeks before IATSE's 1980 convention in Hollywood, Florida, Tommy Short's attorney notified a federal judge in Ohio that Tommy would be leaving the state to attend the convention. Such notification was required any time Tommy traveled outside the Northern District of Ohio, because Tommy, who was free on a \$10,000 bond, was under indictment for embezzling from his union. Tommy and his father, Junior Short, had been indicted by a federal grand jury a few months earlier—on March 26, 1980. Also indicted was Earl Riedel, a Local 27 official who was accused of aiding and abetting Junior Short in his conspiracy to embezzle union funds.

The Shorts' indictments made the Cleveland newspapers, and were common knowledge four months later at the 1980 IATSE convention, but nobody seemed to mind: there is no mention of the indictments anywhere in the voluminous official minutes of the 1980 convention, where Junior Short was re-elected third vice president of IATSE. He ran unopposed, and Tommy seconded his nomination.

The government's primary focus was Junior Short, who was charged with one count of conspiracy to embezzle union funds and 24 counts of embezzling union funds. He was accused of stealing more than \$32,000 from the unions by various schemes. Part of the \$32,000 that Junior Short allegedly embezzled went for lavish family vacations. Tommy Short, meanwhile, was charged with four counts of embezzling union funds; a paltry \$1,988.50. Tommy was accused of "double dipping—of charging Local 27 and the international union for the same expenses—during the IATSE's 1976 convention in Minneapolis and at its 1978 convention in Hollywood, Florida.

The money was peanuts, but the money wasn't the point. As one prosecutor told jurors after Junior's trial, the government's real objective was to smash "the Irish Mafia." The indictments, after all, had grown out of the government's lengthy investigation of the bombings and murders that had visited Cleveland during the Licavoli-Greene organized-crime war. That inquiry, in turn, led to allegations of "embezzlements and payoffs involving the IATSE Local 27 and 209 and the Cleveland Convention Center," according to a Justice Department memorandum, which also alleged that Junior Short "has received personal payments from local employers solely to ensure labor peace. In that capacity, he has also forced potential employers to utilize a labor-contracting service that he helped create and has a monetary interest in. He also is involved in a scheme of billing employers for phantom union members and then pocketing the proceeds."

Junior, however, was never indicted on any of these charges. The government's case against Tommy was "a companion" of the case against his father. As one Justice Department official noted in a memo, the case against Tommy "has always been considered a backup case for the other [Junior] Short indictment. By that I mean that if the [Junior Short] case is successful at trial, it is highly likely that the son would then plead guilty." Fortunately for Tommy, it never came to that. Junior's 1983 trial—which was the second-biggest scandal in the I.A.'s history—saw some of the I.A.'s top brass come in from New York to testify at the federal courthouse in downtown Cleveland, including IATSE president Walter Diehl, IATSE secretary-treasurer James Riley and future IATSE president Al DiTolla. They all testified on Junior's behalf, sticking to the party line that all his expenses had been approved by the local's executive board. The trial lasted five weeks, but on August 15, 1983, after several days of deliberation, the jury was hung: it acquitted Junior on seven counts, but could not reach a verdict on 14 others.

According to three of the four jurors interviewed for this story, the jury was hung 10-2 for conviction. The jury foreman maintains that the jury was hung 11-1 for conviction. Either way, it was a narrow escape for Junior, albeit short-lived. For Tommy, the hung jury was a lucky break: had Junior been found guilty, the government would have gone after Tommy with everything it had. After Junior's hung jury, a plea bargain was struck. On November 26, 1984, Junior agreed to plead guilty to a lesser charge—filing a false and fraudulent income-tax return for the year 1978 -- and the government agreed to drop the remaining counts against him. On that same day, the prosecutors requested—and were granted—a dismissal of the indictment against Tommy. Court records show that prosecutor Charles French told U.S. District Court Judge William Thomas on that day that dismissing the charges against Tommy was an "unrelated matter" and that "This is not contemplated by [Junior's] plea agreement."

Another prosecutor in the case, however, later told the judge that Junior's plea bargain had been the "result of intense and prolonged discussions."

That being the case, it is difficult to imagine that Junior Short, patriarch that he was, would have agreed to plead guilty and go to jail without knowing the fate of his son. Indeed, it was critical to Junior that his son go free. "My dad was innocent," insists Debbie Short. "My dad took that count because he didn't have the money to fight it," she says. "The only thing I heard my dad say was that they were trying to get to my dad by indicting Tommy. My dad didn't want to see Tommy go to prison." Junior's attorney, Robert Rotatori, maintains even today that Junior was innocent and that there was no deal for Junior to take the fall for Tommy. "I don't think there was any linkage at all," he says. "It was just part of resolving the entire case." Efforts to reach Tommy for comment on his case, and on this story, were unsuccessful. Dale Short, reached by telephone at his law office in Cleveland, declined to comment and said Tommy would not agree to be interviewed either.

Shortly after Christmas 1984, Junior began serving a four-and-a-half month stint at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago. The tax charge, however, was a non-barring offense, meaning that he would not have to give up had been ruined by the scandal. "That investigation destroyed my father," his daughter said.

Junior Short died on September 30, 1987, only 10 months before the I.A.'s 1988 convention, where he planned to seek another term as the international union's second vice president. He died broke, his finances exhausted after years of battling the government on charges that he'd embezzled from the union. Probate records show that his only holdings were \$2,946 in common stock. His car and his home in BayVillage had been put in his wife's name to protect them from the government. His only other asset was a severance claim against Stagehands Local 27, payable to him on his retirement or, in the event of his death, to his widow, Anne. The claim amounted to \$95,713.

After Junior's death, his youngest son, Dale, was appointed by the local's executive board to replace him as business agent of Local 27. Dale and Tommy, the local's longtime president, who co-signed the local's financial reports, then saw to it that their father's severance pay was paid in full to their mother, Junior's widow. This large payout, however, caught the attention of the Cleveland office of the Department of Labor, which launched an investigation into the local's finances. The DOL investigation found that "No monies were set aside by the union to finance the severance pay," and that among the "other deficiencies" contained in the local's financial records was the "failure to report the former business agent's severance pay as a liability." The DOL report, however, disclosed no evidence of any misappropriation of funds, and after determining that Local 27's membership had approved Junior's \$96,000 severance package, allowed it to be paid to his widow. The DOL report made no mention of the slush fund that Tommy's sister says her brothers discussed at Don's River City Cafe. Junior died a broken man, but the dismissal of the indictment saved Tommy's career. Ten years after the government dropped its charges against him, Tommy was appointed

international President of IATSE. But the road to the Presidency would not be an easy one.

Tommy had been a delegate to each of the IATSE's biennial conventions—where the union elects its international officers—since 1976, but didn't make a run for office until 1986, when he ran a losing campaign to become one of IATSE's delegates to the AFL-CIO's conventions. He finished a distant third to two entrenched incumbents. He learned a valuable lesson from the defeat, though. He learned that it takes something special to defeat an incumbent member of the union's "official family." Convention records show that IATSE incumbents almost never lose an election, and that, with few exceptions, IATSE international officers leave office only when they die or when they retire. Either way, such vacancies allow the general executive board to hand-pick a replacement, who then becomes an almost unbeatable incumbent at the next convention.

Tommy came up with a clever strategy for the 1988 convention; he would target a vice presidency reserved for the so-called "special departments," which represent a loose confederation of ticket takers, telephone-order clerks, janitors and parking-lot attendants. The plan was rooted in a provision of the union's constitution that requires one of the 11 international vice presidencies to be reserved for representatives of three distinct groups of local unions: the Hollywood film and TV unions, the Canadian locals, and the "special department" locals. The other eight presidencies are open to all the local unions, although they are usually won by representatives from the stagehands and projectionists locals, whose delegates to the conventions far outnumber any others.

The constitutional technicality left Tommy Short in an enviable position. Besides Local 27, his family controlled two other IATSE locals in Cleveland: Studio Mechanics Local 209 and Stage & Picture Operators Local B-27, one of the so-called "special department" locals, which represents janitors and parking-lot attendants at several convention halls and sports venues in Cleveland. At the 1988 convention in Reno, Tommy would run for the vice presidency reserved for the special-department locals, which are also known as the "B" locals, as in Local B-27. It was a calculated move, but it was perfectly legal. Aside from his post at Local 27, Tommy was the founding secretary-treasurer of Local B-27 -- a job he was appointed to by his father on January 1, 1977 -- and in 1981 became the "B" local's business agent. This made him eligible to run against 11th vice president Alex Parizer, the longtime "special departments" vice president.

The only flaw in the plan was its transparency, for Tommy had always been—and remains—much more closely associated with Stagehands' Local 27 than with Local B-27, and to some, the strategy didn't seem fair. Tommy demonstrated his strong ties to the stagehands by representing Local 27 as one of its two delegates at six consecutive I.A. conventions. Then, in 1988, he showed up in Reno as a delegate from Local B-27. Alex Parizer, Tommy's target, didn't have a chance. Parizer's base of support was the tiny "B" locals scattered around the country which all together sent only 91 delegates to the 1988 convention. Tommy, however, had a much broader base—the union's many stagehands locals which had sent 183 delegates to the 1988 convention. "The convention board said it was legal," Parizer said in a recent interview. "He didn't do anything wrong; He figured I was the weak guy to run against."

There were, of course, other factors in the election. Tommy had run a very strong campaign, complete with a fancy and expensive “hospitality suite,” where delegates were wined and dined. And in a father-and-son union like IATSE, he also had the sympathy and the support of the many friends of his late father, the powerful vice president who had suffered a heart attack and died only 10 months earlier. And he also had the support of his mother—Junior’s widow—who was flown in to the convention for the sympathy vote. Tommy won in a landslide, defeating Parizer by a vote of 677 to 290.

Tommy’s career was on the rise; no longer just a leading labor figure in Cleveland, he was now moving into the big leagues, succeeding his father as vice president of the international union representing more than 70,000 members. But his growing power didn’t quench the rage that marked his early years. Tommy had married Anne Gall on November 14, 1970. They’d been high school sweethearts; she the daughter of a prominent Cleveland physician, he the son of a local labor official with ties to the mob. After 20 years of marriage, however, Anne wanted a divorce. Tommy was a violent drunk, and she was afraid of him. She could no longer take his abuse, or tolerate his abuse of their three children. So on May 11, 1990, she filed for divorce. The next day, Tommy went berserk. On May 12, 1990, the day of his twin daughters’ Catholic confirmation, Tommy got into a fight with his 16-year-old son, Joseph “Joey” Short, and went after the boy with a baseball bat after putting a lit cigarette out on his son’s head. A police report on the incident, filed by police officer M. A. Spaetzel, noted that Joey said that the fight began when Tommy “asked to talk to him about his pending divorce from Joseph’s mother.” Joseph stated his father blamed him for the divorce. Joseph walked away to go up to his room while his father kept taunting him and calling him a ‘wimp.’ Joseph returned downstairs to tell him to shut up, whereupon his father burned Joseph’s forehead with his lit cigarette. According to the police report Joseph then “pushed his father down to the floor and held him there. Thomas called for his daughters to call the police. Joseph then got off his father and went up to his room. Joseph stated his father had obtained a baseball bat out of the garage and was going up to [Joseph’s] room with it when the police arrived.”

The incident terrified Tommy’s 14-year-old twin daughters, Tammy and Tracy, who had just received their confirmation that morning. During the fight, Tracy called her confirmation sponsors Martin and Patricia Yurick, who in a sworn affidavit said that they’d received a phone call from Tracy while the beating was going on. “She was crying and very upset,” they said. “Her father was drunk in the home and had been yelling at and beating up her 16-year old brother, Joey, who had just locked himself in his bedroom. Then she began screaming nearly hysterically for us to come over. She screamed that her father had gone down and got a baseball bat, and was walking past her room headed toward Joey’s bedroom door.”

Three police officers responded to the call, only to find that the fight was over. When they interviewed Tommy they detected “a strong odor of alcoholic beverage” on his breath. “His speech was slurred and his conversation rambled,” their report said. They also reported seeing “two black burn marks” and a 2-inch scratch on Joseph’s forehead.

Sergeant C.E. Holliday interviewed Tommy, who said, in the words of Holliday's report, that he and his son "had been having a verbal argument, but said Joseph struck him for no apparent reason. When asked about the burn on Joseph's forehead. Thomas denied doing it intentionally, saying it must have happened inadvertently during their struggle. He did say the part about the baseball bat was true, but gave no explanation as to what he had planned on doing with it. Thomas Short appeared to be highly intoxicated." Police made no arrests in connection with the incident.

Debbie Short says that Tommy and Joey have since made up and are now "really good friends." Joey recently worked as a stagehand at the Allen Theater in Cleveland.

A few days after filing for divorce, Anne petitioned the Cuyahoga County Court in Ohio for a protective order against her husband. The order was granted later the same day. In her affidavit, Anne said that Tommy "has engaged in domestic violence" and "has recklessly caused bodily injury" to her and their three children, who were placed "in fear of imminent serious physical and emotional harm... by threat of force." Tommy, she declared, often drank to excess and continually verbally abused, threatened and harassed her and the children. Tommy, she said, "has a chronic alcohol problem" that "runs in cycles where he will go on binges for three to five days at a time." She said that she had joined a support group for co-dependents of alcoholic spouses, but that Tommy "refuses to acknowledge that he is an alcoholic and refuses to seek any help." In the past, she said in her affidavit, Tommy frequently assaulted her and threatened her. Tommy, she said, threatened to throw her out a window and physically shoved her around the house.

By 1993 Tommy was estranged from his mother, his sister and the mother of his children. But his personal problems never diminished his ambition. Tommy made his next move five years after his election as vice president. The I.A.'s general executive board, on which Tommy sat, decided that it was time for James Riley, the union's long-time secretary-treasurer and chief financial officer, to retire. Riley, like Short, hailed from Cleveland, where he'd been head of the projectionists local. He'd been a friend of Short's father for many years. Junior, in fact, had helped Riley get the job. Now Tommy wanted it, and he won on February 4, 1993, in a split decision of the executive board, narrowly defeating a rival vice president, John Nolan. All the while, Tommy kept his eye on the union's top spot. "When Tommy was going for Riley's job," his sister says, "he kept saying that he is going to be the next international president." Winning the union's No. 2 job "would never satisfy Tommy," his sister said. "He wanted to be president."

Tommy's turn came in December of 1994. Al DiTolla had brain cancer, and his condition turned critical, opening the door for Tommy to move up, once again without benefit of an election. But he had one more hurdle to clear. John Petrafesa—DiTolla's East Coast assistant—would also make a bid for the presidency. Petrafesa had secured the backing of at least two IATSE vice presidents, but fell short of the six V.P. votes he would need to take over the reins of the union. When his coup failed, Petrafesa decided it was time to quit. He now deals with Short from management's side of the bargaining table, having recently joined Walt Disney Theatrical Productions as a labor-relations executive in New York. Petrafesa failed to return numerous calls for comment on this story.

On December 16, 1994, the union's general executive board met in special session to formally choose DiTolla's successor. Tommy was elected unanimously. DiTolla died four days later. DiTolla's widow, Kathleen, says that Tommy Short "was extraordinary to Al and he was extraordinary to me," Tommy has impressed favorably during his brief tenure as president. "I think he's been doing a good job," says John Ryan, a stagehand and, for 22 years, a vice president of the international. "He runs a good meeting." Ryan says Short's strong start, and his status as an incumbent, make him a sure bet for election to the top post at the IATSE convention in July. Ryan observes, "Usually, the incumbent president has a pretty good advantage."

Most labor unions are not corrupt—they're not run by gangsters, they don't threaten and intimidate their members, and they don't shake down employers. Today, even the Teamsters are relatively clean. In the entertainment industry, which is one of the most unionized industries in America, only one major union has ever been taken over by the mob—IATSE. It happened 60 years ago, and one IATSE leader after another has been trying to live down the stigma ever since.

Founded 102 years ago as a union for stagehands who worked the major cities' music halls, burlesque houses and legitimate theaters, IATSE expanded during the era of silent movies to represent the behind-the-scenes workers in the emerging film industry: movie-theater projectionists at first, and then, over the years, it grew to include the entire range of film artisans and craftsmen. Today, it represents some of the most highly skilled film and TV workers in the world.

But at the height of the Great Depression, IATSE took a dramatic detour when it was swallowed up by Al Capone's Chicago mob—specialists themselves in the art of extortion and labor racketeering. It happened at the union's 1934 convention in Louisville. The old president, William C. Elliott, was told that it would be better for him and his family if he didn't seek re-election. Elliott stepped down at the convention, and the mob's backers nominated George Browne, whom Elliott had defeated only two years earlier at IATSE's convention in Columbus, Ohio. This time, however, with Elliott out of the way, Browne would run unopposed. He was elected international president without a dissenting vote. Browne, the hard-drinking boss of Chicago's Stagehands Local 2, had been introduced to the mob by his friend Willie Bioff, a convicted pimp who had helped Browne organize a soup kitchen for his hard-pressed members.

Once he was in office, Browne took his orders directly from the mob—reluctantly at first, but after he came home one day to find a stick of dynamite nailed to his front door, he began to drink more heavily, and did exactly what he was told. On the mob's orders, he appointed Bioff to be his assistant in Hollywood, and together they would go on to extort more than \$1 million from the major studios, promising labor peace in return for the cash. Browne and Bioff, in turn, would kick back half their take to Frank Nitti who was running the Chicago outfit while Al Capone was in jail for evading income taxes.

A massive state and federal investigation would eventually produce indictments against Browne, Bioff, Nitti and a number of other top Chicago mobsters, including Johnny Roselli, Paul “The Waiter” Ricca, Nick Circilla, Louis Campagna, Phil D’Andrea and Charles “Cherry Nose” Gioe, all of whom, with one exception, were convicted in 1943 on racketeering charges and sent to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. The only exception was Frank Nitti, who committed suicide the day after he was indicted in what came to be known simply as “the movie scandal”—the biggest scandal ever to hit Hollywood. Bioff, who had turned state’s witness and testified against the mob during the trials, was killed by a car bomb in 1955. For the next 50 years, succeeding IATSE presidents—Dick Walsh, Walter Diehl and Al DiTolla—would try to live down that stigma. Now it’s Tommy Short’s turn.