



Carmen Policy grew up in a tough town, the kind of town the late Los Angeles Times sportswriter, Jim Murray, might have said was a place that got you drunk before deciding if it wanted to invite you home to Sunday dinner or just kick your ass for the hell of it. Carmen's grandfather was the man at the loading dock immortalized in films of other tough towns, the guy who pointed a finger each morning at the lucky men who were going to work that day. The family fortune, slim as it was, came from running a restaurant/tavern and a small store.

The Youngstown, Ohio of Carmen Policy's youth did not lack for nicknames. It was called Steel Town and Crime Town, or if those don't conjure up enough of an image, you would recognize it as Murder Town, Little Chicago, or the Steel City.

Carmen succeeded in the rough legal circles of Youngstown. People in trouble went to him for help. He stayed busy. His legal career, however, is a footnote to the work he did for the San Francisco 49ers during their glory days of the eighties and nineties.

California Conversations first met Carmen in one of those comfortable San Francisco restaurants where the windows open onto the street and people walking by nod their hellos.

We were told by his friends that Carmen was charming. He is. He treats everyone beautifully. He dutifully gave us the daunting billion-dollar math of starting a team from scratch in the NFL. There was a slight grin when we jokingly asked him if he checked the Castro-like pulse of Al Davis every morning to see when the Oakland Raiders would be on the block.

Carmen got wealthy standing before juries. He is a lawyer who made twelve strangers believe him. He is even more persuasive when the audience is smaller. He looks better than he should for a man his age. His eyes are blue/green. He is calm, quick to smile, engaging, and tells stories about famous people without sounding like a gossip or a name-dropper. He is a bit shorter than average, a muscular, well-built guy who is probably thinner now than he was a decade ago.

California Conversations met up with Carmen again a week later. We interviewed him in his Nob Hill apartment. The spacious home, like him, is orderly, spotless, a sense of money made and well managed. There is a view overlooking the neighborhood where Joe DiMaggio married for the first time and, in reachable distance, the Golden Gate Bridge.

Carmen greeted us like old friends. He insisted on getting us something to drink. He didn't sit down until he was sure we were at ease. His manners are old fashioned, nothing cloying, rather complimentary, although there is a sense you are being put in a place where he is comfortable.



CARMEN AND EDDIE WITH STEVE YOUNG; THE POLICYS AND JERRY RICE; EDDIE DEBARTOLO; JOE MONTANA AND JERRY RICE; A PROGRAM FOR ONE OF THE 49ERS REUNIONS; CARMEN IN AN AD FOR WESTIN HOTELS

California Conversations:**What are your first memories of growing up in Youngstown?**

Carmen Policy: The concept of neighborhoods, heart, hard-working people from different parts of the world, people who pursued the American dream. Some of them felt they were experiencing it. But none of the people felt it was a delusion, or a lie, or a fraud.

CC: Steel town?

CP: Steel town, aluminum. There were machine shops and other types of processes to build the huge pieces for the mills and machines running industrial America.

CC: Mostly middle-class—no real rich, no real poor?

CP: There were some upper class, but the vast majority of people were the working middle class. I would say the wealthy people were respected. They were educated. In some cases, there was the feeling perhaps that their snobbery may have gone a little too far and become ethnic prejudice.

CC: Mostly ethnic neighborhoods?

CP: Mostly ethnic neighborhoods. I grew up in a neighborhood that was predominantly Italian, African American and Slavic/Croatian/Serbian/Hungarian.

CC: You lost your parents early?

CP: I lost my mom when I was nine. My dad passed away when I was 15.

CC: You were raised by your grandmother and grandfather?

CP: Grandmother. My grandfather was killed in a robbery. He put money away and bought a restaurant and tavern in the area of the steel mills. He knew when the railroads paid and the steel mills paid. He would cash the workers' checks. It was good for the workers, because people didn't put money in the bank necessarily. There were no credit cards. They would need the cash to shop for groceries and so forth. He had a little deal. If your check was \$100.13, he kept the 13 cents. Some thugs in the area figured this out. He came back from the bank. They grabbed the bag. They had a gun. He wouldn't let go of the bag. (*Carmen makes the sound of a gun*). You think to yourself now, how dumb was that? But, when you understand the culture, you understand the man, how hard he worked for everything. This is like taking a piece of his soul or

a limb from his body. He was not going to let them have it...they killed him right there in front of the restaurant.

CC: Tell me about your folks.

CP: My mom and dad put some money together and bought a small drug store. No prescriptions. I used to go there after school, do my homework, and help with some of the stocking. They worked from nine in the morning and closed at eleven at night. My mom always made herself mayonnaise and tomato sandwiches and drank Coca-Cola. I was late for school one morning. When I got up there were people in the house. She'd had a heart attack at the age of 42.

CC: Your dad was out of the picture by then?

CP: No. He just never was able to handle her death. They were very, very close. My mom was a hard-working woman. She was a fun person at the store. She was the one who taught catechism at the parish. She was the one who was in charge of Sunday school. She was a very A-type personality. My dad played violin. He read all of the Papal encyclicals printed in English up to that point. He was a reticent kind of guy.

CC: Any brothers and sisters?

CP: I had a brother five years older. He passed away in 1990. He was named James after my grandfather. I was named after my uncle who was missing in action during World War II. We belonged to a church called Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. My mother would make this Novena, you know, send my brother home, and I'm going to name this child Carmen if it's a boy and Carmel if it's a girl. (*laughs*) That's a schmaltzy story. They named me after him. Then they found him. He was released from a German prisoner of war camp by the Russians.

CC: Your household initially spoke Italian?

CP: My grandmother would always try to get me to speak Italian. I fought it. I thought, hey, that's not cool. I'm an American. Sometimes you see the kids come over from Europe, and they'll put them in classrooms, and they can't speak English. I would agree to say prayers at night in Italian.

CC: Did you go to Catholic schools?

CP: I went to St. Joseph's Grade School and Ursuline High School taught by the Ursuline nuns. In those

days, a lay teacher was a true rarity. The nuns were in total control. It wasn't a matter of what happened, it's what did Sister say happened. I have happy memories of school. You'd get in a fight, but those things were rare, even in the neighborhood in which we lived. Depending on the time of the year it was—you're on the playground picking teams and playing baseball or you're playing football. There's something going on all the time. Most people didn't have TV.

CC: Organized sports?

CP: We'd get 12,000 to 14,000 people at our football games. Playing football was probably the most intense desire I had at the time. I went out for the team. I was on the meatball squad. When the offense was scrimmaging, they threw me in on defense. When the defense was scrimmaging, they threw me in on offense. So, I'll never forget this as long as I live; the coach came up to me and he said, "Carmen, I've got good news for you. You're going to receive an award at the sports banquet. You're going to have the highest scholastic average on the team." I said, "I'm embarrassed to receive that. Couldn't I play in some varsity games between now and then?" He said, "I really think you'd be great on the debate team." *(laughs)* Reality hit.

CC: You went to state college?

CP: Youngstown State College. I walked to school. I lived with my grandmother in a one bath, two-bedroom flat. Total square footage would be about 700 square feet. There was a porch, and everybody sitting on the steps in front—a postage stamp yard.

CC: The relationship with your grandmother, was it special or was it a young man being responsible?

CP: She was probably my life preserver in what could have been a tragic situation. I mean, without her, and keep in mind she's a woman who came over here as a teenager from Italy...her name was Michaelina, I called her Mickey, and there was no disrespect in that...she stepped in for me. She didn't give it a second thought; she realized my daughter's dead, my grandson's father is not well and taking care of Carmen is something I want to do.

CC: Did she live a long life?

CP: Yes, she lived until ninety.

CC: So she saw your successes?

CP: She did. *(laughs)* She got a kick out of some of the things, especially when I was on TV.

CC: Your brother James. Were the two of you close?

CP: We got closer as we got older. I think he, like my father, never got over my mother's death. At the time she died he was a freshman at a very fine prep school in the Cleveland area. My mother felt education was everything. When I think about the money they made and the sacrifice they had to engage in to put James in that school, I mean, I am stunned. But, that was my mother's goal, to get James this education and get him to a good college and have him keep moving up the ladder...and then after her death they couldn't keep it going anymore. I think he lost his compass.

CC: Was he successful ultimately?

CP: No. No. He was a very likeable guy, had a lot of friends, but just never put his life together.

CC: You went to Georgetown Law School?

CP: A federal judge tried recommending me at Harvard. They didn't even think twice. I got the impression I would get turned down at Georgetown also. A very, very nice man who had his own CPA firm and taught at Youngstown State part-time, called the president of Georgetown. He said, "Carmen doesn't have much going for him as far as people or connections. Can you help him?"

Carmen tells a vivid story about a trio of men who stepped forward to help him get into law school. He remembers their names clearly and what each of them did to make it possible for him to enter Georgetown. Unexpectedly, Carmen begins to get emotional as he recalls the meetings. He leaves the room for several minutes. It is an odd moment seeing him with his guard down. He returns, his composure regained and begins where he left off.

...I don't know why they went out on limb for me. They said this has to be one of those decisions you make that's based on the fact you're doing a nice thing for someone, and you're going to take a chance it will pay off. It was one of the pivotal moments in my life. Those three years at Georgetown changed me significantly.

CC: Did you learn from that episode the importance of connections?

CP: Growing up in Youngstown, you always knew that connections can get you a summer job, or maybe help you take care of a traffic ticket...before buying the restaurant my grandfather was the foreman pointing out who's going to work that day. But I have never been so immediately affected by someone who knew someone and by simply asking them to do something it benefited me.

CC: Was Georgetown a strange new world?

CP: It was a stunning law school. I saw how important Georgetown was to me from a personal development standpoint, because I'm going to school with kids who'd been to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Cal. They had mothers and fathers who went to school. Some were in the Kennedy administration, federal judges, business people who belonged to the finest clubs. I'd never been on an airplane.

CC: Did you feel like the kid on the outside?

CP: I felt like they were different. I had a lot of catching up to do.

CC: The American tale of this kid from Youngstown thinking I'm going to beat these guys?

CP: No, I really didn't see myself in competition with them. I saw myself as really in competition with myself. I didn't resent who they were and what they had because basically that's what I wanted. So I'd be resenting my dream if I resented them. I used the good things I saw as an inspiration to improve myself. I was elected to the student bar. I was head of the guest lecturer/guest speaker committee. I made good friends at Georgetown.

Carmen returns to Youngstown. He works first as a prosecutor to get trial experience and after a couple of years goes into private practice.

CC: Friends say Carmen Policy is the most charming guy I've ever met. And people who don't like you say the same thing. Those who love you say it's part of your personality; those who don't say you're slick.

CP: When I meet you, I start off liking you, no matter where you're from, what you look like, what you do, what your background is, what's your whatever. It's kind of like the ball's in your court now. I'll try to overlook the bad, unless the bad becomes

too overwhelming. Then, what I do is, rather than develop rancor or become too upset, I find a switch that I can flick so it's no longer creating a negative or a positive reaction. It's like a nothing. I think maybe part of that is a defense mechanism I developed as a kid. You know, losing your mom and not really having the infrastructure around you at a time when most families were two parent families.

CC: In Youngstown in the seventies there was a quote, "If you're in trouble and you can afford it, you go to Carmen Policy?"

CP: Yes.

CC: You take on some rough clients. Is it offensive to say Carmen Policy was a mob lawyer?

CP: I find it offensive because it sounds like I'm representing an organization. I would represent individuals. I think there was an element of professionalism that I always tried to maintain that even law enforcement, even the FBI saw as being the differentiating factor that took me out of the so-called mouthpiece for the mob and put me into a status of being counsel for an individual.

CC: You represented some mean guys.

CP: Yes.

CC: Were you ever afraid of your clients?

CP: No. I handled myself the same way as their doctor would be involved with them. We didn't go to dinner. We didn't travel together. I don't think I was invited to their birthday parties. Don't misunderstand. We'd see each other in public circles because in Youngstown a lot of these people I represented were sought after on the social scene. So, you'd be mixing and so forth. But, I think if you were to believe the FBI reports and their so-called informants, you would understand there were two competing factions. I represented what would be portrayed as the top person in each of those factions—at the same time and at different times.

CC: You had one of the most notorious murder cases in all of Ohio.

CP: Danny Green. Crazy Irishman. This is a movie—this story about Danny Green. He'd go jogging with two automatics. He was in competition with some of the rougher guys in Cleveland for a variety of turf and finally they blew him up when he came out of the dentist's office.

CC: Did you get the guy off from the Danny Green thing?

CP: He wasn't put to death.

CC: You're still a young man at this point.

CP: Yes. I argued a case before the U.S. Supreme Court that I would not have had the opportunity to argue if not for the individual I represented being charged with involvement in a major gambling ring. It was a wiretap case. There I am, thirty-something standing up in front of those...

CC: The Berger Court?

CP: Yes, the Berger Court. I'll never forget it. I thought Justice Renquist was a Nazi because I'm starting my argument and he says, "Well, Counsel, how do you correlate your argument on constitutional grounds with footnote 15 of US vs. Katz?" I just so happened to have US vs. Katz with me and I had highlighted footnote 15, so I got lucky. But, where do you go for that experience? How do you get in the court, first of all? I wanted to be in court, and I wanted to be in front of juries. I wanted tough cases; I wanted to make money. What am I going to do, defend insurance companies? You see, at the same time I also did real estate development work, corporate work, domestic relations work, bodily injury work. I would try to be an expert on anything that came through the door that could pay. I hate to put it that way, but that was what was happening.

CC: Were you getting rich?

CP: I was making more money than I ever thought I'd make.

CC: You were living in a home you'd dreamed about when you were growing up?

CP: Yes. We had a \$50,000 home on a golf course street in one of the nice suburbs of Youngstown. \$50,000 was a lot of money for a house back then.

CC: Is this a happy time in your life?

CP: Very happy. I'm married. The kids are coming.

CC: Still going to church?

CP: No, well I'm going to church because of the kids. I'm busy and I go on holidays and so forth.

CC: Is Catholicism a part of your life now?

CP: I'm not a religious guy. I don't think I ever was. God, family, school, you know, you did it. It was a

responsibility more than a belief. I think religious experience when you're young is a great governor and it's a great molder.

CC: The first marriage ended in divorce?

CP: Yes, after twenty-five years. She's a wonderful person, and she is a remarkable mother.

CC: You married a second time?

CP: Right. When you have children and you find someone you love very much and want to share your life, your greatest obstacle is somehow, some way, hoping they form a relationship with your children. I can tell you that had I wished for a result in terms of the relationship my wife has with my kids, it would not have matched what has actually transpired. I'm a very lucky man.

Policy, the successful lawyer, was told he needed to meet another young man from Youngstown.

CC: Is it fair to say that Eddie DeBartolo is one of the most important figures in your life?

CP: No question about it. Meeting Eddie and the relationship that developed transformed what I was, where I was going, and what I would become.

CC: What was your first impression?

CP: I liked him a lot. Sometime after I first met him, I'm representing this contractor, a big construction company, he was a Lebanese fellow, great guy, big guy, big heart, you know. He was a sub-contractor for the DeBartolo Corporation. He'd done work for them around the country and he says DeBartolo's not paying me. He claims I didn't put the sewer in right. I said how much is it? He said \$250,000. So I said let's put a lien on the mall. He said are you crazy? Put a lien on one of Mr. DeBartolo's jobs. I said how else are you going to get your money? I mean, it's a quarter of a million dollars. He said, if we do it, he won't give me any work. I said he's not going to give you any work anyway, unless you're willing to write off the \$250, and he's going to think if you're willing to write off the \$250 that means he was right about the bad job you did. So, I put a lien on it. I guess Mr. D went through the roof. I found out later that he said, "This punk puts a lien on my mall? I want to know who he is. Get him up here." And then later I learned Eddie had said, "He's a pretty good guy. Why don't you let me handle it?" Eddie calls and asks me to come up to discuss this.

**“I was ecstatic.
Lawsuits are fun,
but this is a
whole different
platform.”**



So, I did. We're in the conference room. Eddie is at the table. He's got his head of construction who stares at you like he's eating you for lunch. He's got his CFO, he's got an engineer, he's got their in-house lawyer. There was one other person taking notes. I was by myself. Eddie said why don't you just tell us what this whole thing is all about. So, I went into it. I did my homework. I said here's what we did, here's where you're wrong, here's what our people are saying, here's this, this, this. And finally, it's been about an hour, and Eddie says why don't you go to the coffee shop and I'll be right down. It took about twenty-five minutes. Eddie comes in and says if you don't mind going back in there, I think we can get this worked out. I walked in, everybody's sullen-faced. I said, gentlemen, do you have something you want to discuss? They shoved a release of lien and a check in front of me. \$250,000. I said this is for the whole amount. The construction guy says, "What do you want, interest?" I signed it. That Friday Eddie and I went to dinner and it started. It's been a phenomenal, phenomenal ride.

CC: You became his personal lawyer?

CP: I was his personal lawyer. As a result of that, I started doing work for Mr. D as well and the DeBartolo Corporation.

CC: Did you become exclusive to them?

CP: No, I always wanted my own business.

CC: The hit on Eddie is that he was the spoiled kid whose dad gave him everything.

CP: (*Carmen shakes his head.*) Eddie has a certain energy that causes you to think this guy could be a lot of fun to be around. And you also have the feeling that for all the right reasons, personality, style, money, incredible joy for life, influence, electricity, stuff's going to happen around him. If you're with him, and things are going the way they should be going, and if you control it, it's going to be good stuff.

CC: The criticisms of him are unfair?

CP: Yes. He's a very good person and intrinsically he's extremely positive and wanting to do good. It doesn't always turn out the way you'd hope.

CC: Would he have been successful without his father?

CP: There's part of me that wonders about that monstrous shadow his father cast, if he would have been better off utilizing his talents and his personality and going his own way. In the early days, my observation was his biggest problem was to not be his father. He wasn't one of those moronic kids who come out of amazingly wealthy families that

do screwy things. Guys liked him. He didn't roll with the country club group. He ran with contractors. He ran with gritty, tough people. Eddie is a gritty, tough guy.

CC: Is he his father's son?

CP: I think he's a nicer person than his father, but you have to understand what his father went through. His father lost his dad; his mom was pregnant with him when her husband died. He got his engineering degree. He was in World War II, in Okinawa, and he's building bridges over there. He comes back, and he couldn't find himself in a frame of mind capable of enjoying life the way Eddie enjoyed life. He just couldn't. The fun gene didn't permeate his body. And he worked so hard, he resented vacations.

CC: He was self-made.

CP: Totally, totally self-made. When you talk about self-made, that's the profile.

CC: What did you call him?

CP: Mr. D.

CC: Did anybody call him anything but Mr. D?

CP: Some of his close friends would call him EJ, Ed, EJ usually. Very few.

CC: Were Eddie and his father close?

CP: There was a great deal of love, but it was love that couldn't handle the magnetic and sometimes counter-magnetic forces that went on between the two of them. The old man wanted to make the company bigger than it was, make sure they were number one in the United States and maybe in the world. Eddie didn't really want to be the head honcho of a huge real estate development company. He wanted to enjoy life, and he wanted to be his own self. I really believe it was that dynamic, more than Eddie's love for sport, that pushed him to push his father to ultimately buy the San Francisco 49^{ers}.

CC: So, who bought the 49^{ers}?

CP: His father helped arrange the financing and so forth, but Eddie DeBartolo, Jr. bought the 49^{ers} in 1977 for approximately \$17 million.

CC: Were you in on the deal?

CP: No. I'm in a restaurant in Youngstown when I hear about it. Mr. D and Eddie come in. Mr. D is excited about how his jet performed—Eddie says, "I bought

a football team." I said I didn't know the Cleveland Browns were for sale, thinking that was the only team Eddie would consider buying.

CC: Were you surprised Eddie was in a position to buy a football team?

CP: Eddie was successful.

CC: He was the heir apparent.

CP: Without question, the heir apparent, but he was a damn good businessman, especially when the business was people. The truth of the matter is, and I'm not sure I've ever phrased it like this before, the old man was bricks and mortar. Eddie was people.

CC: What was your reaction to Eddie buying the 49^{ers}?

CP: I was stunned. I thought why was Eddie buying a football team halfway across the world. I knew he wasn't leaving Youngstown because that's where home is, that's where family is, and Eddie's not one of those guys who picks up and moves easily. I'm not talking about traveling. I'm talking about pulling up roots.

CC: How did San Francisco fans react to him?

CP: Eddie took horrible abuse in the press and in the community. I'm not saying it wasn't deserved and today he'll tell you it was probably deserved. A lot of it was Youngstown, Ohio, buying the San Francisco 49^{ers}. And, initially, Eddie didn't look like he had the characteristics of a successful owner.

CC: When did you first become aware there was a spot for you with the 49^{ers}?

CP: In December of 1978, after Eddie had two horrible seasons he invited me to fly to Washington, D.C. to watch the Redskins' game. I felt he was signaling to me to get involved with him and where he was going with this team.

CC: And were you receptive?

CP: I was ecstatic. Lawsuits are fun, but this is a whole different platform.

CC: When does he finally say Carmen I want you on board?

CP: He told me he was thinking of hiring Stanford's Bill Walsh as his head coach. In January of '79 we're at a New Year's Eve party, a black tie party, and Walsh is down 22-0 at the half of the Bluebonnet Bowl. Everybody's nudging Eddie because Mr. D was told by

people who were icons in the NFL that Bill Walsh was not head coach material. In the second half Walsh turns things around. He wins the game 25–22. Eddie says alright, keep your schedule free, second week of January you're going out there with me.

CC: Not working for the 49ers yet?

CP: No. I'm not even getting paid for this. I'm keeping him company.

CC: But having a great time.

CP: It was exhilarating.

CC: How does Eddie tell his dad about hiring Walsh?

CP: Eddie took the advice of Edward Bennett Williams (*owner of the Washington Redskins and inside power broker*) and said to his father, "I'm taking the heat so I'm going to make the decisions. I want you to keep your nose out of the team's operations from this point forward."

CC: How did Sr. react?

CP: Mr. D calls me to his office. He'd always want me under the radar screen—he didn't want Eddie to know, so, that meant 5:30 in the morning. He says, "Eddie's making a mistake with Walsh. I can't talk him out of it, but I'm going to rely on you to negoti-

ate the right kind of deal with Walsh so when we fire him, it's not going to cost us too much."

CC: Did you enjoy this intrigue?

CP: I said Mr. D. why can't you talk to Eddie about this. He said you know I can't talk to my son.

CC: Did you find in DeBartolo, Sr. and DeBartolo, Jr. what you missed as a boy?

CP: Yes. I felt Eddie was as close as a brother, and while I disagreed with so much of what the old man would do and say at times, I had a strong sense of respect and admiration. I don't think I loved Mr. D. I liked him, but I didn't love him.

CC: Why didn't you love him?

CP: When you love Eddie, you love a person. With Mr. D, you're respecting the monument.

CC: Who's in the room when Bill Walsh is hired?

CP: Eddie and I are in his apartment on Nob Hill. Bill Walsh comes in the room, and it's the three of us sitting on a couch. I don't think we even had a drink at that point. We started talking, and Walsh was magnificent—his presence, what he said, how he said it. It's as though he downloaded from Eddie's heart and brain everything that related to the 49ers of the future and played it back.



BILL WALSH; CARMEN AND BILL; CARMEN AND GAIL POLICY; THE POLICYS AND DEBARTOLOS



THE SUPERBOWL RINGS; DWIGHT CLARK (COURTESY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS); THE VINEYARD; JOE MONTANA (COURTESY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS); GEORGE SEIFERT

CC: Now, that becomes a ticklish point later, doesn't it, because Walsh would suggest all of the 49ers' successes were because of him. Is that true?

CP: It's not true.

CC: No? Is it true that Walsh would say that?

CP: Yes. Unfortunately. Bill is a genius, and Bill is probably the singularly most important extrinsic element that resulted in the 49ers' success. And I say extrinsic because ultimately it doesn't happen without Eddie. Eddie had the vision. Eddie fought the fight to hire a college coach. Eddie knew what he wanted. No one else was offering Bill Walsh a head-coaching job anywhere, certainly not in the NFL.

CC: Did you like Walsh?

CP: I felt comfortable with someone like Walsh because I felt in order to turn the 49ers around we're going to need more than an X and O guy.

CC: Did he know when you went to see him that night that you were hiring him?

CP: It was the finalization. He had to come up through the service entrance, because the press staked out the apartment.

CC: What did you pay him?

CP: Mr. D wanted me to pay him \$40,000 a year.

CC: What was the going rate for an NFL coach?

CP: *(laughs)* \$110,000–\$125,000. I’ll tell you the story. Eddie is crazy about him. Truth is, I’m crazy about him at this point, too. Still, I’m trying to stay away from all financials. I said, okay, Bill, let’s have a glass of champagne and agree that I deal with your lawyer starting tomorrow. He says, “I don’t have a lawyer. Can’t I deal with you right here? I’m comfortable with you guys.” Eddie says, “Sure.” At that point, I’m trying to get Eddie out of the room. I’m trying to get him as far away as possible, because I see his eyes. They’re like slot machines, going around, around, around. So, Bill starts talking about what he needs, and how his wife loves living on the campus and now he’s got to get her a house in Atherton (an expensive enclave). All I’m thinking is if Mr. D hears this, what am I going to do? Walsh continues laying out the list of things he wants. It came to \$250,000 plus cars plus country club. He finally gets done and Eddie says, “Bill, you got it. That’s it. You got it.” Then everything stopped, and Eddie became very serious. He says, “Bill, I’m giving you everything you asked for. In exchange, you’ve got to give me what I’m asking for. I want a championship caliber organization.” It was very quiet. I don’t know if I’m adding this for dramatic effect or not, but I do think Bill gulped. I opened the champagne, and I’ll never forget that moment as long as I live. As we’re saying good night, Bill’s walking away and he says, “Carmen, I’ll have my lawyer call you in the morning.”

CC: Do you call Mr. D?

CP: Eddie called to say, “It’s all done. We got it done. Yeah, Carmen is right here. My dad wants to talk to you.” So Mr. D says, “How much are you paying?” I said we never got to those details. I just lied. I had to. He never found out about the details of the first contract until after the first Super Bowl.

CC: Is that what separates Eddie DeBartolo from others in business—making those who work for him feel valued?

CP: If Eddie thought you were the right person for the job, he was willing to stretch.

CC: And other owners can’t duplicate that.

CP: Too many of the owners, especially at that time, came from the bricks and mortar mentality. Mr. D couldn’t do that if his life depended on it. He just wasn’t wired that way.

CC: He would’ve offered Walsh forty and it never would have happened.

CP: Or he’d have hired him for \$60,000 or \$75,000 and would have been mad because he’s paying him \$75, and Walsh would have felt this Youngstown guy beat me up so badly that when things got tough they would have both been at each other’s throat.

CC: When is it official that you go to work for the 49ers?

CP: I did Walsh’s contract. That was my first official duty. I handled the arbitration from the previous general manager’s firing. Then Bill called Eddie and said, “Look, we’re having a couple of hold-outs, and these guys can be important to us. Would you mind having Carmen handle the negotiations? It will get done, but this way we’re still one team.” So I started handling some cantankerous negotiations on players’ contracts. By 1985, I developed a direct connection in terms of title and in terms of responsibilities with the 49ers.

CC: Did you give up your practice?

CP: No, still back and forth with Eddie. The judges were great. They knew I wouldn’t ask for continuances unless I really needed them, and they tried to work with me on my scheduling. Then in 1988, it was Bill’s last year, and I was already accepted as vice-president. Eddie wanted to make me president then, and I said, “No you should stay there.” I was vice-president, general counsel, and in charge of all league affairs and things like that. I became president in 1990. I gave up my law practice and moved here in 1991.

The San Francisco 49ers during the DeBartolo era won five Super Bowls and were arguably the most charismatic organization to ever put a team on the field. The stars were superstars, popular bankable Hall of Famers, and their names—Montana, Young, Lott, Rice and a long list of others—are a permanent part of the lore of the sport.

CC: When’s the first Super Bowl?

CP: The first Super Bowl was January of 1982. It was cold in Michigan. We won 26–21.

CC: That’s pretty quick.

CP: We were stunned. That was Bill Walsh’s doing. He was definitely the architect.

CC: Did you have input?

CP: No. I sat there. I wouldn’t dare open my mouth.

CC: Did Eddie weigh in?

CP: Eddie would weigh in. The opinions were offered respectfully.

CC: Did Eddie ever say no to Walsh?

CP: No. It was a different time. We didn't have the big pay-rolls. We were not a contender. They were kids getting drafted. Joe Montana was a third-round draft pick who took over from Guy Benjamin from Stanford.

CC: When did you know Joe was special?

CP: Eddie always felt it. He's a big romantic and a Notre Dame guy. And keep in mind, we not only had Joe, we had Dwight Clark, too. Now, you have these two dynamic guys, and I know if the coach heard this he'd roll his eyes, but I had the feeling we had some star power going...we had a little pizzazz. These two guys have personality, and then of course Ronnie Lott came on board.

CC: Where were you on the day of "the catch?" (*the 1981 game against the Dallas Cowboys when Montana throws to Clark deep in the end zone for a thrilling upset victory*)

CP: Up in the press box. You know, you're there, you're watching, and your eyes tell you what happened, but you don't allow it to compute because it's so big you almost can't believe it. Something's not real here.

CC: In the imagination of football fans, is that the moment the DeBartolo dynasty begins?

CP: Yes, and it's Joe and it's Dwight. It's Eddie's two key guys. And from then on every year we're saying we're going all the way. All of the laughing and the fun was infectious.

CC: Second Super Bowl.

CP: That was the 1984 season. We played in January of 1985 at Stanford. That team was a machine. We beat Miami 38-16. Joe had great support and the defense was relentless.

CC: Did you and Eddie have more of a role in that team?

CP: Yes. But, you have to understand, when you say role, ultimately, the decisions relating to football were made by Bill.

CC: All of them?

CP: Eddie might say I really like this kid, or I've seen this guy play, or this and that and so forth. My role

was to pay attention to the business and deal with the league.

CC: Third Super Bowl—what year?

CP: Third Super Bowl was the 1988 season, January, 1989. Joe and Jerry Rice are unstoppable, and we beat the Bengals 20-16.

CC: And this is Walsh's last Super Bowl.

CP: That's right.

CC: What was the difference with this Super Bowl?

CP: Walsh has had bad seasons. We didn't win a playoff game between the Super Bowl seasons and we see the effect it's having on him. He's been through a lot of pressure. The NFL is truly a pressure cooker.

CC: Is he nastier? More sullen?

CP: Not nastier, because I think he's having a hard time dealing with it. If anything it's almost as though he's reaching out for help in many ways. Eddie was very good with him. We came together as a team in 1988, and Bill got energized. He coached marvelously well. That was the year we went to Chicago during that horrendous storm and the Chicago Tribune said "Weather 14, 49^{ers} 0." And we won that game. Still, we knew there was going to be a change. George Seifert was going to be the head coach, and I think Bill felt out of place. You don't go from being Bill Walsh to the front office.

CC: The departure of Bill Walsh—do you remember the last night?

CP: I remember the locker room after the Super Bowl, and I saw Bill was emotionally drained. He advised us that he wanted to step down, and was going to stay with the organization in the front office. That lasted only a few months. He went with NBC.

CC: Was the relationship fractured?

CP: No. Eddie helped Bill by providing options. Bill, as bright and as driven and as right as he was, also suffered from a certain emotional vulnerability. He had a tough year in 1988. He wanted Steve Young to take over for Joe—it didn't happen.

CC: Could he have stayed if he wanted to?

CP: In the front office?

CC: No, as coach.

CP: I think all of us knew, especially Bill knew, he was not emotionally able to go through another season.

CC: Fourth Super Bowl.

CP: That was the most fun. That Super Bowl was played in January 1990 in New Orleans. Seifert did a great job coaching. Joe had another big day and we won 55–10 over the Broncos.

CC: Is Seifert given the same autonomy that Walsh had?

CP: No, because that's what George wanted. However, George ultimately did have the final say on a lot of football decisions.

CC: Did you like George?

CP: I love George. He's one of my best friends. He's one of the people that if I know he's going to be somewhere I want to be there.

CC: Are you making football decisions in 1990?

CP: I'm involved from the standpoint of what's happening in the organization. I'm not taking a position that a player can't play or can play. My position is if you get that player it will probably cost us a certain amount, and we can't afford to spend that and also have the next player we'll need.

CC: Were the 49^{ers} making money? How's the \$17 million investment working out?

CP: It's working out tremendously well in terms of appreciation. We started making money in 1990.

CC: Who gave you this ring? (His only sign of ostentation is the large Super Bowl ring Carmen wears.)

CP: Eddie gave this to me after we won the 1994 Super Bowl—we won 49–28 over the Chargers—it was the fifth one.

CC: Do you have a ring for each Super Bowl?

CP: Yes. This is the one I felt the most involved in making happen. This is the one where I get involved from a football operations standpoint, because it required a lot of negotiating to bring in free agents, and we had the salary cap in place.

There would be no more DeBartolo Super Bowls after 1994. Eddie would get caught up in a bribery scandal involving gambling interests in Louisiana that almost sent him to prison and forced him to give up control of the

team to his sister. There were rumors of estrangement between the old friends. Carmen would go to the Cleveland Browns and try recreating the magic of the 49^{ers}. It made him rich, but for a variety of reasons, the successes on the field eluded him.

CC: How are you and Eddie now?

CP: Great. He's funny. We don't see a lot of each other for reasons of geography. It's never going to be what it was, but it shouldn't be what it was. We're older, different men. I think there's a strong, mutual respect.

CC: Are you bitter that you were never given any ownership of the 49^{ers}?

CP: No. I'm not bitter.

CC: Did you deserve it?

CP: It was promised to me.

CC: Who promised it?

CP: Eddie.

CC: Why didn't he give it to you?

CP: He was ready to. As a matter of fact, it was positioned for me to get a piece and to run the team for five years. By that time Eddie would get himself straightened around... (pause)... however, new people were involved and the situation became very murky. It was too late because too much had happened. Then the opportunity came in Cleveland, and it was too hard for me to move back. It was too late.

CC: Last question. Is there a moment when you realized the magic with the 49^{ers} was over?

CP: It was in the locker room after the last Super Bowl and instead of the wild laughter and fun from the early days, I heard players talking about the kind of money they were going to be making now that free agency had arrived. The innocence of the 49^{ers} was gone.

CC: Thanks, Carmen.

Carmen Policy and his wife are building a home in the wine country. The kid from the meatball squad who grew up in a two-bedroom flat with the tiny yard is using the money he invested from his football earnings to live near the open expanse of his own winery. His beloved mother was right that education and hard work would someday mean living the good life.