

LIFE

Appreciation: A Jersey Girl reflects on Tony Soprano

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- James Gandolfini died in Rome at 51
- Iconic mobster Tony Soprano ended his HBO run in 2007
- New Jersey has lost one of its own

CANNES, France — I'm a Jersey Girl who happens to be in France right now, reflecting on the news that James Gandolfini just died while on vacation in Rome.

And although I'm in France, my first thought was of my friends and family in New Jersey. I wondered what their reaction would be, since it's like one of our own has died.

I admittedly don't know much about Gandolfini. But like many others, I think I know Tony Soprano pretty well.

The iconic mobster ended his HBO run in 2007, but after spending so much time with him, he's become embedded in our lives. It's like a distant relative you haven't seen in years, but remain cognizant of his or her existence.

There are equally important deaths every day that often go unnoticed. Members of the military. Children, wives, fathers.

But the death of Jersey native Gandolfini, and with it, Tony Soprano, means that a meaningful-yet-flawed member of our clan is gone.

"Feels like a family member passed," "rest in peace," and "I'm so sad about the loss," said my friends on Facebook. They shared remembrances about the TV show and Tony Soprano's character. One classmate from my Wayne, N.J., high school changed her profile picture to Gandolfini, the way that other Facebook users do when a loved one dies.

Although I lived in New York City, I attended *The Sopranos* viewing parties in areas such as in Hoboken. I gathered with my family downstairs in the North Jersey home where I grew up to watch new episodes.

It was grisly and excessively violent. I remember feeling squeamish with embarrassment in front of my father when the sex scenes were on.

But it brought people together for one night of the week, for one common cause: To witness Tony Soprano's compelling, complicated life — and to dissect it afterward.



Fans looked forward to a ritualistic Sunday night viewing, the way those of my Italian culture look forward to a Sunday family meal of pasta. (Something I'm very familiar with, as well.)

There are few TV shows — and few characters — that bring out that kind of dedication.

And while the storylines had ramped-up drama, many of us could relate to Tony Soprano's struggles in managing work and family life.

Although his lifestyle and profession was something that most of us only witnessed on Mob-themed TV shows and movies, we could understand his struggles and small triumphs with family, friends, colleagues — as well as his own psychological troubles.

In an incredibly small way, I sometimes get to witness the power that Tony Soprano had by the characters around him knowing, and even fearing, his name.

My significant other is a man from New Jersey named Vito. He is a well-educated and well-spoken professional who runs an engineering firm.

But his New Jersey accent and an Italian Mob-sounding name spurs people into action.

Early on in dating, I called my superintendent many times about a broken bathroom faucet, to no avail. Three weeks in, Vito called and said, "This is Laura's boyfriend Vito. I expect that faucet to be fixed by the end of the day."

It was.

You don't say no to a guy named Tony Soprano either.