I took my Mom to see Frank Sinatra and had to drag her out of the Hollywood Casino around one in the morning. She was 72 in 1993.

Frank almost hit on her but my instructions from the Casino staff was not to bother the legend or even look at him for more than a few seconds. My assignment was just to follow around Frank for the evening.

This would be my last Sinatra, Sr. concert.

Aug. 22, 1993--

There's something special about swinging in the shadow of Frank Sinatra. The Chairman's opening-night appearance Thursday at the Paramount Arts Centre in Aurora afforded a unique opportunity to wander in a legend's trail.

Frank's World was delightfully approachable during the three nights he performed in Aurora, Aurora, that Hollywood Casino town. Aurora does not have a Pump Room. The hipster memories of Jilly Rizzo are miles away. Everyone's a stranger in the night.

Frank stayed incognito at an Oak Brook hotel, forgoing his traditional digs at the fancy Ambassador East in Chicago. Frank's World even considered pitching stakes at the 16-room Wheaton Inn bed and breakfast in tranquil Wheaton. He canceled on a week's notice. Innkeeper Linda Matzen was bummed.

That's life.

"His entourage kept growing smaller, so they found someplace else," Matzen said. "They first contacted us three weeks ago. They wanted to know if we could prepare our country breakfast in the afternoon, since he sleeps through breakfast." Frank's World also liked the fact that the Wheaton Inn has its own bar and liquor license.

But koo-koo witchcraft intervened, and Frank changed his mind. Matzen, who has also hosted former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and ex-pitcher Dave Dravecky, can only dream of what might have been. "I'm still honored he even thought of us," Matzen said.

Once lodging was secured, Frank's performance requirements had to be addressed. His backstage spread consisted of Hershey Kisses, Hershey Bars and Tootsie Rolls. A casino source said Frank's World had requested a special entry be built into the 62-year-old Paramount; instead, the theater paved a walkway through the graveled back alley.

On opening night, Frank flew into downtown Aurora via helicopter from Oak Brook, landing in a field near the police station. A limo picked him up for the short ride to

the Paramount.

Frank got his first standing ovation from the sold-out audience before singing a song. He greeted his fans with the news that he would do "nothing new because no one writes anything anymore." This was a recurring theme throughout Frank's set. "There are no young songwriters anymore," he said later. "Even the guys that wrote the junk before all quit. They got the bread and went home." Huh?

That's just Frank being Sinatra, and that's good enough for me.

Frank's performance was full of metaphorical moments. Before Frank tackled Paul Anka's "My Way," the bandleader walked through the darkness near the brass section to fetch a pitcher of water. He returned to place the pitcher on the piano, carefully avoiding the spotlight that was on Frank. The bandleader poured the water into a glass. Without ever facing the audience, he turned his back and began conducting the orchestra, seemingly at ease in the obscurity of the shadows.

The bandleader was Frank Sinatra Jr.

On opening night, Frank Sr. struggled between temporary brilliance and disconcerting moments that even wounded his own soul. At one point, he was gliding through "I've Got You Under My Skin" in the breathy runs that are vintage Sinatra. Minutes later, he almost bailed on "My Way," complaining at the outset that "I can't see (the onstage TelePrompTer), I can't hear." You found yourself pulling for Frank. Imagine that.

Frank wrapped up his gig with "My Kind of Town (Chicago Is)" and slowly walked off the stage. Now, with Frank being 77 years old and staying in a quiet suburb, you'd think he might hit the hay a little early. But Frank partied down.

Frank's World wandered across the street from the Paramount to the Cafe Harlow restaurant in the Hollywood Casino. Frank took off his black bow tie and removed his black tuxedo coat. He kicked back for a late dinner.

"He ordered thin sliced veal, onion rings and French Fries," said Michael Foster, the captain who served Frank. "That was it. For drinks, he wanted Jack (Daniels) and water, ice on the side. After dinner he wanted espresso, Sambuca and cheesecake. He was funny. He drew us a picture and said it was worth 500 bucks for whoever wanted it. I couldn't tell what it was, though."

Ah, Frank, that abstract expressionist.

Frank Jr. was missing from the 10-person entourage. "He was downstairs earlier," Foster said. "He ate in the buffet line. He had a quick snack, then went over to the show."

As it neared midnight, the casino security staff began to clear a path for Frank's exit, coming right by my table. My brush with Frank was near. There was a dessert cart nearby, and Frank made a joke about stealing a couple of the truffles. I laughed heartily and began to say hello.

Frank ignored me and smiled at my mom, my companion in Frank's World. She smiled back. What if this continued? What would I tell Dad?

Frank apparently wasn't ready to go home, and neither was Mom. So we all adjourned to the casino's Director's Lounge to hear Frank D'Rone, a great Chicago saloon singer. I'm sort of glad Frank Jr. wasn't around, because frankly, that's too many Franks in one night.

Frank was seated directly in front of D'Rone, who eloquently delivered Sinatra songs like "I've Got the World on a String" and George and Ira Gershwin's "Change Partners." D'Rone tried to egg Frank onstage by saying, "If you feel like it, you're welcome." At one point Frank stood up, turned around, twirled a finger in the air and shouted to no one in particular, "I'm gonna get drunk first!" I started to get the feeling I was in for a long night.

We hung until the wee, small hours of the morning - well, at least until 1 o'clock - and Frank never sang with Frank. But there's no room for disappointment in Frank's World.

You sing, you swing, you take no prisoners. The Sinatra legend can be celebrated in many ways, but on the summer night Frank rolled through Aurora, he made the most of a make-believe world.