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First Author's Prologue

Darrell Steffensmeier

I do know I am not going to make it. [Doc] gave it to me plain, very Goddamn plain: "Sam, there ain't time for that. Get your house in order, with your grandchildren, with Wanda. I says, "How long?" He tells me, "Give or take a little, six weeks, three months. Maybe sooner." That hit home like a ton of bricks fell on my nuts.

—Sam Goodman

Sam Goodman—long-time thief, fence, and quasi-legitimate businessman—died following a four month bout with lung cancer. Sam's criminal career spanned fifty years, beginning in his midteens and ending with his death when Sam was in his midsixties. I had known Sam for roughly twenty years and had written about him in *The Fence: In the Shadow of Two Worlds* (1986). *The Fence* described Sam's criminal career as a burglar, his eventual drift into fencing, and the circumstances that led to his incarceration for receiving stolen property in the 1970s.

Confessions of a Dying Thief offers an updated and greatly expanded case study of Sam Goodman based on continuous contact with him for many years, on multiple interviews with his network associates in crime and business, and on a series of interviews with him shortly before he died. I stayed in regular contact with Sam from the time he was incarcerated in the 1970s up until he died in the 1990s. Toward the end, the contact became more intense, as I visited him frequently during his four month bout with cancer. I also interviewed Sam at length on a Friday-Sunday weekend, five days before he slipped into a coma and eleven days before he died.

A few weeks after Sam's death, I gave Jeffery Ulmer a partial transcript of the deathbed interviews and asked for his reactions. Jeff was a graduate student working with me during the time Sam was alive and sometimes visited Penn. State. Jeff had met Sam, heard him speak to criminology classes, and