

wait to have him over to my place. Sound crazy? Hide in plain sight. The way I figured it, if he knew me, and we got along, and he knew which apartment was mine, I figured he wouldn't rob me by accident. Unless I really pissed him off, that is.

Late one night, while I was working as a busboy at the Unicoi State Park Restaurant in Georgia, my boss, Cathy, came and got me, and told me I had a call from my mom back in Chicago. My heart stopped. I knew it could be nothing short of an emergency. Why? My mom never called me. Concerned, my friend Curtis headed up to the office with me. On the phone, my mother was nervous and asked me if I was sitting. "I am now," I said. It took her a while to get it out, but eventually she got it out that J.J. had called her looking for me. My friend George, J.J.'s brother, who had lived with Mom, me and Caesar for almost two years, had been found dead of a cocaine overdose.

I called J.J. immediately. He still had tears in his voice as he told me how they found him.

Wilson Avenue was one of the worst streets in Chicago. It constantly smelled of piss and feces. Homeless people, street hustlers, drug users, drug dealers, gang-bangers, prostitutes and the mentally insane all filled its streets like a stirred up nest of hornets. And circulating amongst these angry, dying people were more of the same, wearing blue uniforms and carrying badges and guns, and billy clubs, and mace.

And among all these, the detritus of humanity, was our little Georgie. Smart, dumb, good, bad, funny, angry, thief, lying dead. He was found lying face-down in the gutter with the trash that the trash had thrown out. Lower than the low. Our George.

I was crying when I gave J.J. my love and prayers and hung up. Curt was silent as I briefly told him what had happened. Looking up in his eyes with mine blurred and burning, I asked him, "Why do we do this to ourselves?" He could only shake his head as he stared at the gold traces in the maroon patterned carpet.

The last I heard, he was doing a seven-year stretch for robbery.