

PROLOGUE

It was the summer of 1984, and nighttime had fallen over the town of Lawrence, Massachusetts. It was a clear cool evening and the streets were dry, so driving from the north side of town to the south side wasn't a problem. It was nothing like during the winter months. I was with my two best friends, Jimmy Mustapha and Freddy Cristaldi. We decided to jump in Freddy's Mercury Cougar and check out a party that we'd been told about. We were the kind of kids that were always looking for a good time. If we could smoke a little dope, drink some beers, and hopefully find some girls to play with, well, that was a good enough reason to throw on our jackets and head out for the evening.

When we arrived, we noticed that there weren't many cars parked in front of the two-story house. Our first thought was that this party could be pretty lame. But we could see that there was definitely *something* going on through the second floor windows and decided it was worth investigating.

Getting out of the car, Freddy popped the trunk open and called me and Jimmy over to show us something. There next to the spare tire was a sawed-off shotgun that Freddy

was “babysitting” for his sister’s boyfriend. He pulled it out and handed it over to me. I remember feeling excited when I held it. My dad had started me hunting at a very young age so I’d always had a passion for guns. But after a few moments, Freddy insisted that since we were on a main road we should put it away before any cops drove by. Reluctantly, I handed it back. Freddy locked it back into the trunk and we made our way upstairs.

Once we got inside, two words were enough to describe this party—sausage festival! There were *maybe* two girls out of the twenty some odd people that were there. Way too much testosterone for us in most cases. Still, being underage and all, it was nevertheless a place to catch a buzz.

We schmoozed for awhile, drinking and huddling up in the corner to gossip about the muscle-headed idiots that laced the room trying to out-do each other’s egos. But we weren’t tight with any of these people, and after a couple hours of boredom, we’d had more than enough. On our way out, I realized that I had forgotten my jacket. I’d told Jimmy and Freddy to go downstairs and get the car and I would catch up with them in a second.

I headed back into the party, nudged my way through the room and grabbed my jacket off of the couch. On my way back to the door, me and this other kid unintentionally slammed into each other. Our beers went crashing to the floor and we both just looked at each other wondering who should apologize first. Then he peered at me with this unfocused look in his eyes and mumbled some smart-ass remark. Next thing I know, push comes to shove. We hit the beer-soaked floor and started going punch for punch.

At the same time, I begin to feel people kicking me in the ribs and in the back of the head. I thought at first that

it might have been people from the party just trying to break us up and being rough. But it only took a few more boots to the back of the head before it clicked that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I began thinking, “Shit! These fuckers are all his friends. This is *not* good. I gotta get the fuck out of here.” It was just my luck, though, that the only two people that I knew could help me out of this mess had already gone downstairs to get the car. Finally, the kid who was throwing this party made his way over to us and broke up the fight, giving me the chance to get to my feet and out of the house.

As I walked across the front yard, I could see Jimmy and Freddy waiting for me in the car. I could tell they had no clue what had been going on by the way they were banging their heads and playing air drums to the tunes that they were cranking on the stereo. When I finally got close enough to catch Freddy’s eye, he was able to see that something was wrong by the way I was huffing and puffing. My shirt was ripped, my face was red from getting punched and kicked and I was cussing up a storm!

They jumped out of the car and approached me.

“What the fuck happened to you?” they said, confused.

“Those motherfuckers just jumped me upstairs! This dude slammed into me with a beer and blah, blah, blah.”

I started spitting out the whole story. As I babbled away and worked Jimmy and Freddy up into an ass-kicking mood, I saw Jimmy look over my shoulder and across the yard. I turned around and saw the same guy that I had just fought come stumbling out of the house with four or five of his buddies behind him. He was walking right towards me with his eyes locked onto mine. All I thought to myself was, “Here we go!”

Freddy and Jimmy immediately began heading in their direction to see if they could calm the posse down. I walked right behind them waiting to see if this shit was going to explode again (of course, feeling a lot more confident about it now that my bro's were by my side). It looked like something out of "The Warriors"; both parties heading towards each other with leather jackets on, ready to rumble.

Just as everyone started yelling at each other about what happened, I saw this dude pull out one of those huge-ass Rambo knives from his jacket. And with his eyes still locked on to mine, he broke away from the rest of the bunch and started heading in my direction.

Of course no one else saw this because they were all too busy arguing and trying to calm each other down. But I saw it clear as day. I began thinking, "Fuck this! I am *not* getting stabbed with that thing." I turned my ass around and ran back to Freddy's car, snatched the keys from the ignition, popped the trunk open, and pulled out the shotgun that he had stored away earlier. My adrenaline was so high that if I were a horse, I could have won the Kentucky derby that night.

I didn't hesitate for a second. I walked right back at this dude, who at this point was being held back by some of his own friends as they tried talking him out of using the knife. Well, that is, at least up until they saw me with a sawed-off shotgun in my hands. At that point they let him go and everyone seemed to have taken a step back. Could you blame them? It didn't seem to bother Rambo, though. He kept on coming right at me with this insane look on his face. I remember thinking, "Wow! Either this dude is really wasted, or he's really crazy. He has no idea that I'm holding a shotgun in my hands." He was on a mission. He had red in his eyes, and no matter what, he was going to stab me. Showtime!

As he got within feet of me, he raised the knife above his head in a stabbing position, only seconds away from plunging it into me. I pulled the shotgun up, pumped it once to load the chamber and pointed it directly into his face. I remember feeling nothing for this person at that point. My insides were filled with fear, kicking my survival instincts into full-force. And I knew as I braced my finger firmly on the trigger, if I hesitated for a second it could cost me my life.

But how did it come to this? How did my life get to this point? At the age of 16, I was about to throw away my future and risk spending the rest of my life in prison over a bad night and some spilled beer. Maybe I should just start from the beginning...

