

BROTHERHOOD OF CORRUPTION

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A Cop Breaks the Silence
on Police Abuse, Brutality,
and Racial Profiling

Juan Antonio Juarez



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A TASTE OF AUTHORITY

“HEY, MOTHERFUCKER! Open the goddamn door before I kick it in!” Steve bellowed, bringing the ropelike vein in his neck to life as his face turned crimson. “I’m gonna give you ’bout two seconds.”

The pounding hard-core punk music rattled Steve and shook the door as we stood on the front porch of 13— North Greenview Avenue for five minutes ringing the bell. We’d been called to a noise disturbance; the complainant was a neighbor. It was clear that this was a bona fide incident and should be settled with a simple radio code of 4 (noise disturbance)—either Paul (peace restored) or Frank (some other police action taken). At least that’s what I’d learned at the academy.

“Hey!” yelled Steve. “Open this motherfuckin’ door!”

This is what other cops loved about Steve; he didn’t take shit from anyone. He was a cop’s cop—hardworking and diligent with a penchant for aggressiveness. My father had met him when they worked the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) Public Housing North detail in the 1980s. Over the years they kept in touch. When I got out of the police academy, my father pulled some strings to get me assigned to the 14th District with Steve as field training officer (FTO). He was a Caucasian veteran of three decades. In his midfifties and short, he nonetheless had a vice-grip hand-shake and a jawline that perfectly matched his sharp military haircut. I was to pull on his coattails for the next sixty days.

Hundreds of cops had learned from him, and many adopted his police mentality. “If you wanna be a good cop,” my father told me, “you gotta

have a great FTO.” I considered myself lucky and was excited to have such a respected elder showing me the ropes.

Steve brought his knee up to his chest and thrust his foot into the door just as it began to open. The force of his foot meeting the door sent the person inside flying back about ten feet, landing on his ass.

“Hey, stupid! I’m a cop!” Steve straddled the chest of this scrawny white kid as soon as the door was open. “You do what I say, when I say! Understand!” The kid, dazed and trying to recover from the impact of the door, had a gash on his forehead. There was blood streaming down the bridge of his nose as he looked up at Steve. I remained standing at the threshold, frozen by the sudden and bloody violence, but the mixture of Steve’s power and authority sent a thrill down my spine.

“Can you fuckin’ hear me?” Steve demanded, grabbing a fistful of the kid’s long brown hair. “Or is the music too fuckin’ loud? Cuz it is to me!” The kid’s face was a blur as Steve yanked his hair and shook his head as if it were a toy in the jaws of a rottweiler. Meanwhile, the blood kept pouring from the kid’s forehead.

“I can hear you. I can hear you,” the kid pleaded. “Let go of my hair. C’mon man, let go of my hair.”

This kid was what Steve referred to as an “urban pioneer.” These kids had money, or at least their parents did, but chose to live in the sketchy parts of Chicago where drugs, gangs, violence, poverty, and cheap rents flourish. Steve didn’t care for these types at all. “These kids,” he had told me on the way to the call, “are friggin’ slackers. Who the fuck do they think they are? They come to live in the shit; they deserve to be treated like shit. Their parents are loaded, so they can afford to be art fucks. Escaping responsibility, if you ask me. They remind me of those friggin’ long-haired hippies. I was at the convention in ’68. I know how to handle these spineless twats.”

The surrounding neighborhood—Wicker Park, once primarily a poor, working-class Puerto Rican and Mexican neighborhood—was changing. A number of street gangs still clung to it, but gentrification was slowly sweeping them away—boarded-up brownstones with graffiti-covered exteriors were being replaced by rapidly constructed three-story single-family houses. Neighborhood families were being priced out as young professionals and “urban pioneers” staked out new territory. Times were chang-

ing, but in Steve's mind this kid, and those like him, represented the past—antiauthority, rebellious, and confrontational, just like the youth of the late 1960s and early '70s.

Steve was a stubborn bulldog of a man. Every call was calculated and solved before we arrived at the scene. He surrendered none of what he considered his personal space, and he was never one to back down or change his opinions. Once determined, he didn't bend.

"You need to turn this shit down!" Steve hollered while he sat on the kid's chest, pinning his arms to the ground. "Your fuckin' neighbor is complainin' 'bout this shit! Where you think you're at anyway?" Steve resumed pulling the kid's hair.

"Man, all you had to do was ask!" the kid shot back. "Get off me, and I'll turn it down!" Still glaring at him, Steve relented, released his hair, and got off his chest. I cautiously crossed the threshold, entered the apartment, and peered over Steve's shoulder as this sticklike kid lifted himself from the ground. Grabbing a T-shirt from the couch, he tried to slow the flow of the blood rushing from his forehead. He walked over to the receiver and lowered the volume.

"Listen! If we hafta come back here, you're gonna spend the night in jail. I'm sure the brothers would love to get their hands on a lily-white ass like yours. So don't make us come back. If you do, you'll be sorry! Understand?"

"But—"

"What don't you fuckin' understand?"

"I don't think it's against the law—"

"Oh! Now you're gonna fuckin' tell me 'bout the law!" Steve erupted. "See! That's the fuckin' problem—you're thinking!" Steve jabbed a finger into the kid's temple. "Did I ask you to think?" The kid stood silent, cemented to the spot, only flinching with each prod that punctuated Steve's demands. "Do yourself a favor and don't fuckin' think! Don't make us come back! Am I clear?"

"What about my door?" the kid asked meekly. The hinges were almost torn out.

That was enough for Steve. "You just earned yourself a ticket to jail, asshole!" He whipped out his handcuffs so fast the kid was stunned.

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“Sounds like your fuckin’ problem. Here’s some advice—don’t stand in front of flying doors.” And with that, we left, my first arrest in tow.

As we walked back to the squad car, Steve said, “Code that out, rookie.”

I didn’t know the code for that one. It wasn’t a 4—Paul or Frank—that much was sure. Wracking my brain for an appropriate response, I asked timidly, “What code do I use?”

“Tell ’em we’re coming in with one arrest!” Steve instructed. Knowing he was amped up from his exchange with the kid, I wasn’t about to ask him another question, but I still had no idea what the charge would be.

“What about medical attention for that kid?” I asked. I was concerned about following the protocol that required hospitalization for arrestees who were injured.

“Fuck ’em, damn hippie,” Steve answered. “He deserved it.”

At the station I had to ask him about the charge again once we started to fill out the paperwork. Taken aback by my naïveté, Steve gave me a look of disgust as he replied sarcastically, “Disorderly conduct. Works all the time.” Then he asked, “You learn anything back there, kid?”

I had. The power, fury, and authority he had demonstrated had enthralled me. But deep down I knew something was wrong. Yet I also knew I didn’t have the balls to say anything. The thought of beginning my police career by making waves, and the anxiety this provoked, silenced the little voice in the back of my head. I wanted to be a cop. My desire to join the brotherhood, to be accepted into the ranks, was greater than my need to tell the truth. Instead, I just nodded enthusiastically, “Yes, sir!”

This was my first day as a Chicago police officer.

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SHATTERED FAMILY

I GREW UP NEAR ASHLAND AND ADDISON on the west end of Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood during the mid-1970s. It wasn't the yuppie enclave it is today, but it wasn't a ghetto area either. Instead, it was a typical working-class neighborhood filled with tough, blue-collar families.

Arriving from Mexico in 1958, my father, Juan Manuel Juarez, already had a decent command of English. He worked his way up to production manager at a mail-order wholesale company called A. C. McClurg. They sold everything under the sun, including jewelry, books, cosmetics, and automotive tools. With his athletic figure, jet-black hair, and prominent Aztecan features, my father was an exotic foreigner who took pride in his appearance. The black-framed glasses perched upon his aquiline nose made him look scholarly, and, though he didn't get beyond the eleventh grade in Mexico, he was comfortable with his intellect. He exuded confidence.

In 1961 he met my mother, Cecelia Koenig, where he worked. She was a German American second-generation Chicagoan. He was enamored of her blue eyes, long dark hair, and white skin. And she was swept off her feet by this brown-skinned, determined, and compassionate foreigner. They married in March 1962 and immediately began having kids. My oldest sister, Noreen, was conceived before my parents were married. She was born in October 1962. Another sister, Marie, followed in January 1964. Two years later in August, I entered the world and then, before

the decade ended, my youngest sister, Lee, rounded out the family in March 1969.

My father was dedicated to his family. He strove to support us financially, and I believe he felt a great sense of accomplishment in being able to do so. He always surprised us with little trinkets—bubblegum-machine jewelry and dime-store toys—intending, I think, to demonstrate his love through these gifts. But emotionally he kept us at a distance. My father defined himself by what he did, and constant work was what he did. He was driven by the desire to prosper. He held down two jobs to support his growing family while attending English classes in his spare time, and he wasn't home very often. This placed the responsibility of child-rearing squarely on my mother's shoulders.

My mother, though a very busy homemaker, constantly fed our imaginations by reading to us. She chose whimsical titles, such as books by Dr. Seuss, adventure stories such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and a litany of other books that opened us up to new worlds. She taught us how to read and write before we entered school. She seemed content in her role as our sole nurturer; she showered us with all the love and attention that my father couldn't provide. My love of adventure began with my mother.

She enjoyed toting us around the city with her sister and her female friends who also had kids. She took us to museums, the Lincoln Park Zoo, and neighborhood fire stations. She also took us to more out-of-the-way places, such as Piper's Alley and the Billy Goat Tavern, a cool restaurant mired in the green-lighted underbelly of Lower Wacker Drive where downtown workers ate their lunches. For me, the best part of these forays wasn't where we went, but how we got there. Public transportation was our ticket to adventure. Descending into the dark, cavernous tunnels of the subway system and exiting into sunshine and the chaos of downtown made my head spin. My mother made sure to provide this stimulation in our lives.

Every summer my father would take off work for two weeks to take the family on a road trip. We'd pile into the Vista Cruiser station wagon and travel to exotic places such as the Badlands in South Dakota, the Everglades in Florida, and the Merrimac Caverns in Missouri. Together my parents did incredible things to open our eyes to the world around us.

My father had one sister, Julia, who had three kids of her own. They were all a bit older than I was; they were closer to the ages of my sisters Noreen and Marie. My mother's sister, Pam, had seven kids. The oldest one, Ronnie, was my age, and we were more than a handful at family events. The connections between our families were strengthened by four doting grandparents, and both sides of my family got along amazingly well considering they came from vastly different cultures. Holidays, birthdays, summer picnics, and occasional weekends were times of great celebration. Our extended families would join together in the festivities and the kids would eat and play until we fell down from exhaustion.

But then things started to change. My parents began to have frequent heated disagreements. I was six and had no idea what these were about, but I could feel the hostility as angry words flew around me. The temperature of my family cooled. One Saturday morning Lee and I were home with our parents while Noreen and Marie were at Bible class. My mother had prepared scrambled eggs for all of us. We sat down to eat and she must have forgotten about the tortillas she had been warming on the stove. I saw flames in the reflection of the refrigerator and so did my father. The burning smell alerted my mother and she ran into the kitchen to extinguish the flames while my father sat eating his eggs. He didn't lift a finger to help her. As soon as she put the fire out and returned to the table, my father took his plate of eggs and threw it across the table into my mother's face. Then he sprang up, slamming his chair into the wall, and charged at her.

"You stupid fool!" he yelled as he pulled her hair. She feebly defended herself with weak punches. "You could have burned down the house!" He continued beating her.

Lee and I didn't want to see our mother get the shit kicked out of her. But we were afraid for our safety, wondering if our father would turn on us after he was through with her. We got up and ran into the closet of the laundry room, praying to God that the fighting would stop.

From that day on, our happy Saturday mornings were replaced by fear and anticipation of the next incident of abuse. Hiding in the closet with Lee became as much a part of my life as my parents' fights. We wouldn't come out of the closet until we heard a door slam—a signal that my father had left the house. We'd come out to find my mom crumpled on

the couch, her tears mixed with blood. We knew we couldn't help her, but we'd try anyway by hugging her and trying to make her stop crying. "I'm OK," she'd say, sobbing into our necks as she hugged us. Then we'd all cry together.

During some of their fights, I'd try to be gallant and protect my mother by clinging to my father's leg. He would continue punching my mother while I desperately clung to him. I was useless.

Why wasn't my mother doing more to protect herself? I felt my resentment growing in two directions: toward my father for beating my mother and toward my mother for letting him. The greatest grudge, though, I saved for myself. I was ashamed of my inability to stop their constant fighting. I wondered if anyone could.

My mother's side of the family shied away, not wanting to get involved in the domestic disputes. My father's family did the same. Nobody was there to protect us from the hellish turn our lives had taken.

I remember the police coming to our house as my parents screamed at the top of their lungs at each other. All the cops did was tell my father he had to leave the house until he cooled off. That would only last a few hours. When even the cops proved ineffective, my mother found her own solution. She'd go out at night and get plastered.

My parents separated a few months after I turned seven. They took turns caring for us. One month my mother would be at the house taking care of us while my father roomed at the YMCA; the next month my father took over while my mother stayed at a friend's house. It went on like this for several months. Meanwhile, I felt like an emotional ping-pong ball. Both parents spoke poorly of each other when all I wanted them to do—all I *needed* them to do—was get over their differences so we could be a family again.

One night when my mother had charge of us, she left us alone to go out drinking. My father came over for a late-night visit. He found that we were alone, so he waited, seething, until my mother returned. She was plastered as usual. He beat her within an inch of her life. That was the end; my mother moved out permanently in 1974 before I turned eight.

I suddenly found myself living in a world that wasn't quite as accepting as I'd thought. Without my mother's gentle assurances, I began to feel the teasing by other kids regarding my ethnicity more acutely. "You're not

white! Your name is Juan. Do you need a towel? Your back is wet,” white kids taunted, while Mexican kids called me names like *pendejo* and *gringo*. I didn’t understand those words because my father had always been too busy to teach us Spanish, but I knew they weren’t complimentary. I was straddling two cultural worlds; I felt that neither world wanted or accepted me.

Nothing made sense to me. I wanted to know why my mother was severed from my life and how she could find it so easy to leave her kids. I thought the divorce was the fault of my sisters and myself and that our parents had separated because we had become too much of a burden. I felt discarded, abandoned by my mother and not worthy of her love or attention any longer. I craved answers, but no one took the time to explain what was going on in our world.

The next time I saw my mother, she had moved into a studio apartment in Uptown and was already living with another man. When she put her arms around me I could smell the alcohol on her breath. I was disgusted and disappointed. I had thought I’d be the central focus of my visit, but that wasn’t even close to the truth. I sat alone on the couch watching television while my mother and her boyfriend giggled on the bed in plain view. It made me sick. My mother tried to use humor; she danced around my questions about when she would be coming home. I could feel she was in pain; she knew she was no longer the mother with whom I had explored Chicago.

When my father learned she had been drunk and she was living with another man, my visits to her apartment abruptly stopped. I didn’t know the reasons why I saw less and less of her, but I didn’t ask any questions. Instead I began creating stories in my head; I decided that my mother’s boyfriend was forcing her to stay away from her kids. Meanwhile, my father painted a sordid image of my mom, telling disturbing stories of her as an unfit mother and speculating on her drinking habits and sexual practices. At first I didn’t believe him, but once I’d seen the change in her, I began to take them to heart. After all, who was taking care of us? Months passed between the times I saw my mother. The months slowly turned into years.

My father tried to do the best he could to raise us, but he was stretched pretty thin. He continued working two full-time jobs to pay the bills and keep us in Catholic schools. (He thought parochial schools offered a better

education.) He started one job filling candy machines at 6:00 A.M. He called us on the phone to wake us up for school. He'd finish work at 3:30 P.M. and come home to eat. Then at 5:00 P.M. he'd leave for his janitorial job at an office where he worked well into the night.

Meanwhile my oldest sister, Noreen, replaced my mother as my father's punching bag. I could no longer stand to witness his abuse. Unable to do anything about it, I made sure I was not home when he was there. And when I was home, I kept quiet and tried not to irritate him with silly questions about schoolwork. Whenever one of us brought home a test he had to sign because we failed it, he'd say, "What? Are you stupid? You'll never amount to anything!" His tongue was sharper than any knife I ever came across. When we brought home good grades, he never complimented or supported us. When it came to nurturing us or sharing his emotions, he had become even more removed.

I don't know how he managed it, but for two summers when I was ten and eleven years old, he was my baseball coach at Hamlin Park. He was a good coach, but he seemed to expect much more from me than the other players. While he would gently correct other kids' mistakes, he yelled at me in front of my teammates. I started peeing in my pants from the anxiety of getting verbally assaulted. I should have been happy to spend time with him. But I wasn't. He made a heavy sacrifice in his personal life but a warm, nurturing home life wasn't his top priority—our futures were. He was content with feeding our bodies and paying tuition, but he forgot about our hearts and minds.



By the time I was ten, he realized he needed help raising us, so we moved into a garden apartment in his sister Julia's house in early 1976. Aunt Julia became, for a little while at least, a surrogate mother. She prepared us breakfast, made sure we had lunch, and watched us after school. But she had three children of her own to care for—Angel, Maria, and Paco—and they came first. Her door was always open to us, and she did her best to help my father, but she wasn't our mother.

During the time that we were in Aunt Julia's care, Angel, who was five years my senior, started sexually abusing me. I was ten when the abuse

began. I was tall and lanky, lacking confidence and self-esteem as my father's vicious words deteriorated my spirit. Without my mother in my life and my father's immediate attention, I craved two things: acceptance and love. Angel took advantage of my needs. He was an ardent devotee of the local priests—a loyal altar boy—and he sanctified his abuse with religious icons and banter. “You’ve been chosen for this,” he assured me when I objected or questioned his actions in the attic chapel his father constructed from cardboard. I remember him telling me, “In God’s eyes, you’re special,” as the sharp bristles on his beard rubbed the insides of my thighs. I was confused, especially when he made me promise not to tell anyone. I didn’t want to reject God, so I gave in to Angel’s requests and convinced myself that there was nothing wrong with what he was doing to me.

After two years of taking care of my sisters and me in addition to her own three children, Aunt Julia slowly pulled her welcome mat out from under our feet. Our visits upstairs to eat and be with her family became rare.

My family continued to deteriorate. Noreen couldn’t take any more abuse from my father; she moved out to live with our mom. The relationship between my mother and myself was nearly nonexistent. And now my aunt Julia abandoned us as well. It felt as if each day another part of my heart dried up and blew away.

With no daily adult supervision in our lives, Marie, Lee, and I fended for ourselves. We cooked our own meals, washed our own clothes, ran around the neighborhood as long and as late as we wanted, and went to bed whenever we felt like it. I ended up finding and making a lot of trouble during this unsupervised time. I had friends who had as much free time as I did, so we found trouble together.

3

DREAMING OF AN ESCAPE

IN THE SUMMER OF MY THIRTEENTH YEAR, a number of events shaped the direction of my life in significant ways. I was an awkward, gangling kid with hair that couldn't be controlled and a lisp that wouldn't go away. I had just started wearing glasses. To put it mildly, I was a dork. But my neighborhood friends didn't give a shit about the way I looked. They knew I was up to doing anything they'd do, so we bonded tightly. We were a veritable rainbow coalition—a Mexican American, two Irish boys, a Hawaiian kid, and a Filipino. Our taste for teenage adventures, such as climbing factory rooftops and jumping from garage to garage and other harmless mischief, expanded with our ever-increasing ability to outrun the cops. My friends and I became thorough adventurers of our neighborhood, seeking out experiences that filled us with heart-pounding adrenaline. The more cunning and dangerous the activity, the greater the surge of adrenaline I experienced. I began to love the rush of doing shit and not getting caught, and so did my friends. We were adrenaline junkies.



“Hey, you little punks, you’ll stop if you know what’s good for you!” the cop behind us commanded. We had climbed up the Northwestern train tracks near Grace and Ravenswood on the Chicago’s North Side just for the hell of it. We were out exploring, but now the cops wanted us. Doing what came naturally, we ran. When we stopped and turned around, we saw the cop trying to navigate the steep, gravel-strewn embankment. “I’m gonna catch you. You’ll be sorry, you little shits,” he yelled, pumping his

fist into the air. Like hell he was. We had a good lead and knew every escape route in our neighborhood. He stood up to start running but he slipped backward and lost his balance as he slid down the gravel. We had done it again. We'd ditched the flat-footed, doughnut-eating cop. We smiled at each other and took off running as our adrenaline surged.

The times when we were caught, the cops battered our ears with profanity-laden lectures. Then they'd drive us home where we'd have to sit through the completely one-sided accounts of our "hooliganism" the cops fed our parents. I remember one time, around the Fourth of July, when I was busted for lighting firecrackers near Lincoln and Hermitage. A civilian caught me and held me until the police came and then told them that I was throwing firecrackers at his car. The police drove me home; my dad happened to be there. The cops told him the story, but then they ad-libbed and told him the civilian thought I had a gun. When I corrected them and told them it was firecrackers, they got pissed off and told my dad he should beat me until I learned some respect. My dad didn't appear to believe the cops or their stories. And he definitely didn't enjoy being told how to raise his kid. He said "yeah, yeah" to the cops. This made my dad super cool in my eyes, but it also made me realize that he had no clue whatsoever about what a troublemaker I had become. I felt I could get away with anything.

Summers were brutal. The humidity was thick and the air stagnant, and the lack of refreshing solutions sometimes forced us to venture outside our neighborhood. The only way to our summer resort—swimming in Lake Michigan—was through gang territory. All my friends knew this was a risky venture if not downright suicidal. Just to the east, near Wrigley Field, a notorious faction of the Latin Eagles called the Wilton Boys ruled with impunity. To the south, around Hamlin Park and the Lathrop Homes, the Insane Deuces and PBC (Paulina Barry Corporation) flourished. And to the north, the TJOs (Thorndale Jag Offs) and the Simon City Royals sprinkled their graffiti liberally on the walls marking their territory.

We lived in the middle of a war zone. Tom Ripley, a kid I played baseball with at Hamlin Park, had an older brother, Scott, who was two years older than we were. Scott was an all-star third baseman for Lane Tech High School, a kid whose baseball prowess was sure to get him noticed at the college level. The kids around Hamlin idolized Scott. One day, as

he sat on a friend's porch talking with some buddies, a car slowly approached and a hand, gripping a gun, took aim at the porch. Flashes erupted from the gun's barrel. Scott's baseball dreams ended as the bullet severed the nerves along his spinal cord.

Mistaken identity? Gang retaliation? It really didn't matter; the damage had been done. From that day on, I hated gangs and vowed I would do something to help society against their senseless violence.



Later that summer I witnessed the mighty force of the Chicago police for the first time—another event that helped shape the course of my life. My father dropped me off with some family friends he knew from Mexico, the Martinezes. They lived in Pilsen, a Mexican neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. They had a son named Pablo who was my age. We were going to hang out for the weekend. As luck would have it, Fiesta del Sol was taking place. Cars and people were draped in Mexican flags, mariachis strolled up and down Eighteenth Street, and the sibilant sounds of Spanish, along with the scent of grilled steak and tamales, hung in the air. Mr. Martinez's car inched westward from Halsted Street. Heavy pedestrian and automobile traffic contributed to the visible frustration of the numerous white non-Spanish-speaking police officers assigned to the area for this event. Traffic was just about deadlocked, but no one seemed to be in a hurry. Two officers pulled a driver out of his double-parked car.

"Listen amigo, move yer fuckin' car out of da intersection!" one of the police officers ordered the driver, who responded by putting his hands up in the air and saying, "Take-it-eezee, amigo. I go away. I go, OK?"

"I'm not yer fuckin' amigo!" the other officer said and shoved the Mexican backward, causing him to stumble and fall in front of our car. The officers laughed.

I was dumbfounded. "Mr. Martinez, why did they do that?" I asked Pablo's father.

"I don't know, and I'm not gonna find out," replied Mr. Martinez. He wasn't the only one remaining silent and doing nothing. Celebrants on the sidewalk continued on their way, no doubt afraid of incurring the penalty for meddling. The traffic, however, remained at a standstill as everyone's attention turned toward the cops.

The Mexican got up, brushing his hands on his pants. “What’s that for?” he asked.

“Listen, spic! Get in yer car and move dat fuckin’ piece a shit! Or else I’ll lock yer ass up, comprendo?” the cop said.

The Mexican shrugged, “Why you talk to me like that? I go. You a bad polizeman.”

At this the cops began to shove him back and forth until he resembled a pinball getting knocked around the bumpers. I was scared, but for some reason I couldn’t look away. He stumbled, tripped over his feet, and fell. As he tried to get up, one of the cops took out a small black object from his pocket and began pummeling the back of the Mexican’s head and neck.

“Motherfucker!” A flashing forehand downstroke cuffed him behind his left ear. A deft backhand followed on the upstroke. “Wetback!”

The Mexican fell to his knees as blood poured from his nose. The cop’s strikes rained down on him but his cries were lost in the sounds of the celebration. His hands, forearms, and triceps took the brunt of the blows as he tried to protect himself. It was futile. He was as defenseless as my mother was when my dad kicked her ass.

Mr. Martinez was transfixed by what he saw; Pablo urged him to get out of there. Drawn by the power of what I was seeing, I sat mesmerized, my mouth gaping. Fear gripped my stomach and nausea rose in my throat—I thought I was going to puke.

“You do what I say, when I say it!” screamed the cop, bringing his right hand over his head. Another forehand slashed through the air, immediately followed by an elbow to the back of the Mexican’s head. “You’re gonna spend the night in jail, you ignorant beaner!” The cop stood over the Mexican, who was out cold on the sidewalk in a fetal position.

Mr. Martinez awoke from his stupor, saw an opening in the traffic, and swerved around the frenzied officers. As we drove away I looked back and saw groups of open-mouthed Mexicans in cars and on the street, but no one said or did anything. The celebration continued.

That incident added to my growing confusion about cops. Was I to respect them or simply fear them? I really wasn’t certain, but the power of the police had definitely caught my attention.



Brotherhood of Corruption

As a kid I was very athletic and played baseball, basketball, and hockey, which proved a great release for my mounting aggression. The physical nature of hockey allowed me to unleash my anger at opposing teams, and I led the league in both penalty minutes and fighting. My love of sports and athleticism earned me the right to tag along with my older cousin, Paco, who was three years my senior. I thought I was cool because I hung out with the older crowd. But because of my skinny frame and slight lisp, I became an easy target for his friends' violent behavior. I wanted to be accepted, but all they did was tease me and beat me up. Both my ineffectiveness and their bullying pissed me off, but, fearing rejection, I accepted their ridicule and their violence toward me and continued to hang out with them.

My father earned a GED in the winter of 1979, when I was in eighth grade. This was further proof to us that an education was important. He also introduced my sisters and me to the girlfriend he had been keeping a secret. Her name was Dale. She was a nurse at Grant Hospital. Meeting her wasn't such a shock to us because we had been receiving Christmas cards stuffed with checks from her for the last two years. She was a bit of a mystery, but I didn't care what my father was doing with his personal life, so I never asked questions about her. I was just happy to get the cash.

My mom had had three boyfriends since my parents separated. To my knowledge, Dale was my dad's first romance. She was considerably younger than my father, loved to cook and bake, had a gentle demeanor, and was willing to play a part in our lives. Accepting her was difficult for me at first because I didn't know if she wanted to replace my mom or just be with my dad. Dale kept her own apartment; she never slept at ours. She made my dad happy, and that was good. After a while I guardedly allowed her into my life.



In 1980, as I was graduating from grammar school, my father entered the police academy. One year had passed since he had earned his GED. When I asked him why he wanted to be a cop, he explained that it was a great profession in terms of financial and job security and had great perks, especially health insurance and a retirement plan. When my father became

a cop, Paco's friends suddenly stopped teasing me. They feared having to deal with him. I didn't get any more shit from anyone. This tiny badge of metal bought me instant respect, and it wasn't even mine. I wanted power and respect; I decided I wanted to be a cop just like my dad.

Two years later, in 1982, Dad married Dale and they bought a house near Central Park and Montrose. Since meeting Dale, he'd mellowed quite a bit. He seemed happy now. Though they got into screaming matches on occasion, it took only one incident for him to learn that Dale wasn't going to tolerate being slapped around. On the one occasion when he hit her, she called the cops, got him in deep shit with his job, and then promptly left the house for more than a week. They reconciled before she came home. He never hit her again.

My desire to join the police force grew stronger when my cousin Paco joined in 1986. Then Dale became a cop in 1987. I wanted a badge even more when I learned about the world of privilege that came with it. Paco told me about how chicks love a man in uniform, how he could clear a corner of gangbangers just by getting out of his squad, and how he was able to get into nightclubs for free. Meanwhile, my parents told me stories of catching criminals and throwing them in jail. The power and privilege that seemed to be woven into the fabric of a cop's uniform intrigued me more and more.

Around this time, Angel's physical interest in me began to wane, leaving me with even less self-esteem. I mentally cataloged the people who had disowned or abused me. The list was long. What was wrong with me? What was I doing wrong? Why wasn't I wanted? Accepted? Loved? I couldn't come up with any answers but I knew it was my fault.

To escape the questions battering me, I bought a twelve-speed Fuji road bike for fifty bucks from a high school buddy. I began doing epic rides—twenty-five to thirty miles—late at night. The coolness of the night air made my secret voyages that much more invigorating as my bike became my great escape machine. I'd pedal until my legs burned, my lungs ached, and my head was ready to burst from the blood coursing through my body. The surge of adrenaline I experienced as I rode, testing my physical limits, helped me work through the issues of my life and gave me room to construct a better future.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

I GRADUATED FROM AN ALL-MALE high school at the bottom of my class, number 450 out of 454 students, and scored a 17 on my ACT exam, slightly below the national average. Because my grades were poor, I had to petition Northeastern University in Chicago to get accepted. They put me on a strict academic contract requiring me to maintain a 2.0 average or better. It would be a challenge—my GPA in high school had been .65—but they were giving me a clean slate and I was determined to make the most of the opportunity. Plus, there were girls at Northeastern; I wanted to excel so that I could remain there.

I thought perhaps my brains would impress girls, as my looks sure didn't. I began taking my prerequisites with dreams of transferring to DePaul University, which I considered the best college in Chicago. I did well in my classes and studied extremely hard, metamorphosing into a dean's list student during the first quarter and loving the college atmosphere. Soon my classmates became my friends. We'd meet in the student activity center between classes to shoot the shit or make weekend plans. My circle of friends was getting larger and I was having fun. It was at Northeastern where I got the best advice of my life to that point, from a sexy Puerto Rican girl who saw my hazel eyes underneath my dorky, cumbersome glasses. She told me, "Get contacts."

I did get contacts and suddenly the world of women came into focus. I had no idea how to flirt, but when girls looked at me, I returned their gazes. Soon I'd find myself wanting to conquer them and have them when

and *only* when I wanted them. I was especially drawn to women of color—Mexicans, blacks, and Puerto Ricans and their wondrously curvaceous bodies—but I still lacked self-confidence. I saw how my friend Cito had tons of girls hanging on him, so I asked him his secret. “Lies,” he replied. “Tell them lies.”

My life had been filled with pain and sorrow, but I saw that sad topics weren't going to get me anywhere with girls. I buried the old Juan deep inside and started to create a new identity for myself. My self-esteem was still pretty poor, but I learned that telling white lies made me feel better, which changed my self-perception. “Yeah, I got great plans for my future,” I'd hear myself say. “I want to be a lawyer and then maybe, someday, the mayor of this city. You know the Latino race is taking over, don't you?” They'd agree and stare deep into my eyes. My ambition drew them to me, so I kept up the charade. “Yeah, I can dance. Yeah, I can get a car. Yeah, I can love you better than your man.” Soon there was nothing I couldn't do—or at least nothing I'd admit I couldn't do. I seldom brought up my family because I was ashamed of where I came from. I made sure to steer the conversation toward my plans. I soon began believing every word that came out of my mouth, and so did just about every girl I came in contact with. Women seemed to adore my self-confidence.

I started dating like there was no tomorrow. I lost my virginity and found that I loved the sexual release that women gave me. Besides, it was much more fulfilling to brag about the number of women I conquered than hang my head in shame knowing that I'd spent a lot of my past getting sucked off by a guy.

My self-esteem was growing by leaps and bounds, but so were my conning ways. I cheated on all of my girlfriends and never got caught. I lured women into my web by stretching the truth and telling white lies. Then, for the knockout punch, I'd tell them sob stories about my sexual abuse and then lie further by saying my mother was dead. Then after I got the sex I wanted, I'd drop them without a word, without remorse. I simply walked away.

My self-esteem had a strange but altogether welcome effect on my academics. As I was telling woman about my great plans and passions for my future, I was manifesting that success in school. I wanted a big brain to

impress women and visualized myself being smart because that was the new identity I was creating for myself. I began to ace classes such as earth science, chemistry, criminal justice, and psychology.

I was amazing myself. When people began telling me I could be a model, I basked in their compliments. I'd certainly never heard anything like that before. I noticed the physical changes from all my late-night bike rides—my long body was now lean and sinuous, and my angular jaw and cheekbones had become more defined. I was proud of my metamorphosis.



The summer after my first year in college, my father met a high-powered attorney while on duty. The attorney phoned the police because his house had been burglarized. My father used his connection with the lawyer to get me a job at the Circuit Court of Cook County. I was assigned to traffic court as a file clerk, retrieving driving records for judges, lawyers, court clerks, and the general public. Three months after I started, I was promoted to work in the courtrooms.

My duties put me directly in the public view. I was the clerk who called the court docket, kept order in the court, and worked closely with lawyers, and at times beautiful women, to ensure their cases were called first. I was always willing to do favors for women because I never knew where it might lead—perhaps to a conversation, then a lunch or a dinner date, and maybe a conquest. But my main desire was to get to know the legal system. My inflated dreams of becoming a lawyer did not seem so far out of reach now that school was going well for me and my confidence was growing. Getting my foot in the door of the legal profession was that easy. All my dreams were being realized.

Then I met Ana.

In between court calls I liked to wander the halls, checking out the scenery. One day I spotted a Mexican girl, around five-foot-six with long, dark, curly hair, a beautiful olive complexion, and teardrop-shaped brown eyes. She had an incredibly fit and shapely form. She was standing in the cashier's line waiting to pay a ticket. I confidently strode over to her, smiled, and then nonchalantly inquired, "What are you waiting for?"

She looked at me with a quizzical glance before turning her head and kept silent.

"I'm sorry," I began. "My name is Juan. I work here and if there's anything I can help you with, I'd like to." The people ahead of her and behind her made various faces of confusion as if saying, "Hey, I'm in line, too. Can you help me?" I ignored them all as the girl told me she was there to pay some parking tickets for her boss. She showed me the tickets and I looked at them officiously. When I finished inspecting them, I said, "Follow me."

I walked back into the courtroom, told her to wait a minute, and then went to see the judge in his chambers. I told him the tickets belonged to a friend. He instructed me to put them on the docket and told me he'd dismiss them. I bounced out of the chambers and approached the girl. She was even more beautiful standing alone in the courtroom.

"I did you a pretty big favor," I began earnestly, "but before I tell you what I did for you, you have to tell me your name."

"It's Ana. Ana Nuñez," she replied. I was mesmerized as I watched her lips form every sound. "What did you do for me?" she asked coyly. Her brown eyes penetrated my heart.

"Oh, your tickets are dismissed and you can go," I said. "Hey . . . Ana. Where are you going right now?" It was 10 A.M. and the next court call didn't start for another thirty minutes, so I hoped I'd be able to talk to her for a while.

I ended up walking Ana back to work in the warm September sunshine. As we walked and talked, I noticed that her dark, brown eyes turned a light shade of caramel in the sun and that her springy curls bounced with her every step. We talked all the way to the health club where she worked. When I got back to the courtroom, a co-worker chided me and predicted that I was going to marry Ana. I brushed it off as nonsense. "We haven't even gone out yet."

"Don't matter," she said. "It's in both of y'all's eyes."



My first date with Ana was at O'Famé, an Italian eatery on Webster Avenue near Halsted Street. It was a cute little café that had paper

tablecloths and crayons to draw on them with. We colored while we learned more about each other. Ana attended St. Xavier College on the far Southwest Side. She wanted to become an accountant. I shared my dreams of becoming a lawyer with her. We were deep in conversation when the waiter came by and asked if we wanted something to drink.

“I’d like a bottle of wine, red wine,” she said. Looking at me she asked, “Is that all right?”

“Sure,” I replied as the waiter walked away. In fact, her request made me wince. I had some cash, but I didn’t know if I had enough to cover the libation. I decided not to worry about it and just kept up the conversation.

We found out that both of us enjoyed working out, biking, running, participating in team sports, and dancing. Now I knew how she maintained her knockout figure. We also discussed our families and found that we shared similarities in that area—we both came from broken homes. She lived with her mother, two sisters, and a brother. When I told her I lived with my father, I had an instant flash that she could provide me with the female love and affection I had so sorely missed growing up. I then visualized that I could offer her the male support and strength she had missed out on.

Before the bill came, we had made plans to go to the Art Institute, a Joffrey Ballet performance, and a play. I was excited about the prospect of seeing her again, and she was obviously interested in seeing what I was about.

Shortly after our first month together, I joined Ana’s health club so we could be with each other even more. I couldn’t get enough of her. The sex we shared was intense and profound, making me feel things I had never felt before. Each time we made love, we’d stare into each others’ eyes and I’d whisper, “I’m gonna love you for the rest of my life.” These feelings were new to me.

Another thing that kept me interested in Ana was her desire to seek higher education. Most of the women I had met to that point weren’t seriously interested in school, but Ana and I shared the same drives and passions. Both of us wanted to do better in life than our parents had done. Her mother, Rosita, was a laborer, and, at sixty-three, she continued to work hard to support her family. Ever since Ana started working at fif-

teen, she always surrendered her paychecks to her mother to help with the bills. Her father had owned a bar on Archer Avenue and abruptly left the family without a word when Ana was seven. She hadn't had any contact with her father for several years and considered him dead. When I listened to her story, I felt like I was listening to excerpts of my own life. Though our pasts were sad, they provided the motivation behind our desires to succeed.

About the same time I met Ana, I transferred to DePaul University, the school of my dreams. It was the fall of 1987 and I felt nothing could stop me. Even though I was going to be classified as a sophomore because not all my credits from Northeastern transferred, I didn't care; I was confident I would succeed in school. Ana followed my lead and transferred from St. Xavier College to Loyola University, the school of *her* dreams.

When Ana and I celebrated our one-year anniversary in 1988, it was by far the longest relationship I had ever had with a girl. Everyone in both our families thought we were destined to marry. We believed it, too. We were two Mexicans who possessed an intense desire to exceed our personal goals, and I knew that with Ana in my life, the sky was the limit.