

## **Episode 173: Buds**

Hello, this is Scott.

And no, this is not a regular new-episode Friday. Today I've got something special for you.

If there's one thing I know about you, it's that you love when people share personal stories. And I love that too!

So today, I'm giving you a preview of a podcast that I think you're gonna really enjoy. The show is called RISK.

If you've never heard of it... well, sit back and enjoy because you're in for a real treat.

The website Slate dot com called RISK! "jaw-dropping, hilarious, and just plain touching." Since 2009, RISK! is where people tell true stories they never thought they'd dare to share.

The special episode presentation you're about to hear is titled "Buds" – as in "best buds", people who are really good friends. I loved this episode so much, I've listened to it twice.

What you're gonna hear are two different stories. The first one is from Cory Byrom, and the second one is told by Chris Lundy. These two men share stories about the best and worst times with their friends from childhood.

As I was listening to this it kind of took me back to when I was a kid, and the stuff that my best friend and I would do.

Take a listen, and I hope you enjoy this episode from RISK! titled "Buds".

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### **Kevin**

Hello kids. This is RISK, the show where people tell true stories they never thought they'd dare to share. I'm Kevin Allison. This is Kenny Burrell, behind me now, and we are calling this week's episode, "Buds". These are two stories by men about best friends that they had way back when in their childhoods and how complicated that can be, sometimes, to have a good friend in your childhood. These are very tumultuous, emotional, and action-packed stories today. Out of the 560 or so episodes that we've made, I think it's only the second where it was all men. In this case, it was just that these two stories were so kind of interestingly different and yet interestingly hitting on some similar territory that the backgrounds of these two guys. And the ways that their stories echo and differ from one another, I think, is very interesting.

The first was recorded in 2015 in Denver. We thought we had lost the audio for this one. We've been doing a lot of recovering, reconstituting, remastering of old archive material. Anyway, I was thrilled to find that this story is still so great and sounds great too. This is Cory Byrom, who you can find on Twitter at cdbbyrom, with a story we call Iceberg.

### **Cory**

So I want to tell you guys about my friend, David, for a little while, if you don't mind. David and I had been sitting in his bedroom for a couple of hours with the blinds closed when his parents got home and told us about the several inches of snow that had fallen outside. We were at that age where sitting around in one of our bedrooms, listening to punk rock and watching horror movies was about as exciting as a Friday night could get. David fashioned himself after the classic British punk rockers. His hair was always in spikes or a mohawk, and it was rarely its natural color. He wore a denim jacket with safety pins all over it and a huge portrait of Johnny Rotten on the back that he had drawn. He was an excellent artist. While we sat around doing nothing, he would draw album covers for made-up bands that he imagined himself to be a part of while I dicked around on the guitar and that sort of thing.

Snow in suburban Atlanta was a pretty rare treat. So as soon as we found out that it had in fact snowed, we got on a couple of extra layers of clothes and then headed out just to kind of explore. There wasn't really anything to do in the snow but just be out in it because it was so rare, it felt kind of magical and it was nighttime. Street lights cast kind of an orange glow all over the pristine blankets of white snow that were over everything.

We met up with another kid who lived near him who was just as bored with life as we were, and we just kind of goofed off. We were throwing snowballs, doing whatever. Oh, we rescued a bird. I mean, that's something you do in the snow, right? The other guy - who I didn't really know that well - he saw the bird and it was kind of hobbling around and he started to go for it. For some reason, I thought he was going to hurt it, so I'm like nudging David, "Holy shit, we're about to fight because this guy's about to hurt a bird. I don't even know why I thought that he was a nice enough guy, but he didn't. He grabbed the bird and stuck it in the pocket of his hoodie. Then, we walked back to his house and he set it up in the garage with a box and a heater. I think he took care of it for a couple of weeks and then it flew off. I don't know how that has nothing to do with the rest of the story. I just like to tell people we saved a bird.

So after we dropped off the bird, David and I headed back out into the cold alone. Pretty soon, we found ourselves at the apartment complex pool. Given our haircuts and our ages, you would have thought that David and I would have been out to really cause some trouble but we were sort of shrouded in a cocoon of innocence that it's hard to even imagine existed. We didn't drink or do any drugs. We didn't even smoke cigarettes. We would occasionally talk about, "Hey, we should buy some pot from this guy" or "So-and-so is getting some acid. We should get some." But nothing would ever really materialize. We wore X's on our hands to have a sort of a punk rock straight-edge identity, but the truth is we were just straight-edge by way of extreme laziness.

We were standing there looking through the fence at this frigid water and the snow falling on it. It's really pretty or whatever. Then we climbed the fence and then we made snowballs and dipped them down in the cold water until they were just hunks of ice and then pelting each other with them. Normally, that's the kind of thing I would have been really whiny about because I was and remain an incredible pussy but, with all those extra clothes on, you couldn't even really feel it. So as long as we didn't hit each other in the face, it was no big deal.

I don't know whose idea it was to start building the iceberg, but we were suddenly very serious about it. It was a two-man operation. So one of us would be crouched down at the side of the pool holding this big hunk of icy snow that we had placed there, and the other one would be gathering up snow to pack on it and around it to make it bigger and taller. Building this iceberg was really sort of emblematic of the years that David and I spent together because these were

sort of our formative teenage years and we had no car, we had no job, I was 15 at the time of the iceberg and David was 17. So we just kind of wasted time in the way that only dumb teenagers can, usually late at night, usually without our parents knowing what we were up to.

Once, we snuck out of his house late at night and we were going to go roll toilet paper, roll this kid-down-the-street's house. But we can only get two rolls of toilet paper from David's house or else his parents would notice the toilet paper was gone and then they would see the house that had been toilet-papered and know that we snuck out. So we just rolled the shit out of one bush. That was pointless. Four kids cleaning up the bush the next day. I don't know.

Another time, we snuck out of his house and walked a couple of streets over to meet up with some girls at one of their houses. Only David took us to the wrong house. So we knocked on the window and then hid behind a car for half an hour while some guy in his underwear with a shotgun tried to find the little shits that scared his wife in the middle of the night. Not one of our smarter moments.

David always had something going on with some girl. We were always walking to see some girl that he had a thing going on with. Even though he was this grubby punk rocker, he was just about the most charming son of a bitch you'd ever meet and he could say and do things and get away with stuff that most people couldn't, that I certainly couldn't.

Once, he came into our ninth-grade math class and announced to the whole class, "Yeah, I decided yesterday I'm just not going to take showers anymore. I just don't even give a shit if I'm dirty." And all the girls giggled and made "Fuck me" eyes at him, and I'm sitting there all jealous. I couldn't do that. That doesn't make any sense. He convinced that same class that I had monkey feet. He's like, "Yeah, Cory, take off your shoes. Show everybody your monkey feet. Whenever nobody's around, he picks stuff up with them. He can use a knife and a fork. It's crazy." If anybody here has monkey feet, it's not a big deal. I mean, it would be kind of cool, to be honest, but when you're, like, 14, you don't want people thinking you got monkey feet when you don't have monkey feet. I don't have monkey feet for the record, but they believed him because that's just how it went with us.

We had a friend who lived with his grandparents and his grandmother was this, like, surly, irritable woman who cursed like a sailor and wouldn't take shit from anybody, and we were all kind of terrified of her, but David plopped down on sitting next to her and he said, "Can you hear my voice?" When she barked back, "Yes," he kind of lovingly laid his head on her shoulder and said, "Do you like it?" And she busted out laughing and it broke the ice with her. We actually all grew to really love her and realize she wasn't nearly as frightening as she seemed once we kind of got beneath the surface. But that was the kind of sense of humor that David had. He didn't mind putting himself in harm's way for a laugh or pushing people's buttons. He loved making jokes at my expense, much like the monkey feet.

Once, in one of the bathrooms in our high school, he drew on the wall, a huge, gigantic penis, 13 inches long and four inches wide. Again, he was a great artist. This wasn't, like, just some scrawled outline. There were, like, veins and hairs. I mean, it was a masterpiece, frankly. Then, above it, he wrote, "Cory Byrom has a huge dick." Of course, he didn't tell me that he had done this. So I just go in the bathroom one day and I'm like, "God damn it." He could have at least snuck into the girl's bathroom if he was going to start spreading this rumor about me, right? So he was a very charming guy. A lot of our time wasted involved trying to play music together.

I played the guitar. We'd wrangle up a couple of the guys and try to start a band. Sometimes, he would play bass but he had a really unparalleled lack of rhythm. Other times, he would try to sing and his timing was no better there. So these sessions would usually end with us not speaking for a few days because I would get so irritated with his lack of focus and he would be so annoyed by my constant bitching about his lack of focus. So for the years that went by and all the times we tried to start bands together, we managed to write one song and it was called "My sister got plowed by Hitler." It was pretty sophisticated.

Anyway, at least, with the iceberg, we had a physical representation of our time wasting. Once we were done building it, we could step back and look at this huge thing we had made in the pool and be proud of our accomplishments. So you can imagine my frustration when I went to go to the bathroom and came back to see the thing floating off in the pool unfinished, and I told him, like, five times, "Just sit here and hold it. Don't do anything. Don't try to add any snow. Just sit here and hold it. I'm just going around the corner. I'll be right back." I have no doubt that my insistence on him sitting there and holding it is exactly why he didn't sit there and hold it because that's just the kind of guy he was. But no, the iceberg had floated off and it was a done deal.

Over the next year or so, we started to drift apart as we both got into bands that took up a lot of our time - bands not with each other because that was not going to work. Even though our bands shared the bill a lot of times and we even shared a band member for a long time, we just didn't see each other as much. He dropped out of high school and, unfortunately, even after our earlier attempts at being straight edge, he started getting into drugs. As he got more and more into drugs, his resentment towards me started to build partly because I was still very vocal against all of that kind of stuff.

His band started getting pretty popular and I think he saw that as kind of a middle finger to me as well, going back to our earlier days of trying to start a band and all of my constant criticism of him. This all sort of came to a head when he began publicly mocking me and talking shit about me pretty much every chance he got. He would make fun of me from stage. He wrote song lyrics that made fun of me. He was generally just an asshole. There was no event that caused it. It was just something that started kind of building and happened over time. If anyone asked him, "What's your problem with Cory?" He would just be like, "Man, fuck that guy. He thinks he's so much better than everybody else because he doesn't drink or do drugs. And now he's all high and mighty." And I mean, the truth is I can't necessarily argue with his reasoning. I mean, looking back on it now, I think I was probably as much of an asshole as he was. I just wasn't quite as public about it. This went on for, I don't know, a few years - maybe 18 months. It's slowly built.

The thing is we still had tons of friends in common, so it was really awkward because we tried our best to avoid each other but we would often be sort of thrust into the same space. He was still the fun-loving, crazy, hilarious guy that I'd always known. He just wasn't that way around me. For example, we had a friend in town visiting who was supposed to be staying over at David's house. That friend came bursting into the Little Caesars where I worked and he was like, "Hey, I need somewhere to stay tonight. David got arrested." So I had these conflicting emotions. My first thought was like, "Oh Jesus, what has he done now? Was it drugs or theft or violence or whatever?" And then my second thought was, "Good, that dick." Because I kind of figured whatever he had done, he had brought it on himself anyway, so he's getting what he deserved. But no, it wasn't any of those more serious things.

He got arrested for streaking the Fayette County high school football game. Let me paint a little scene for you. It's kind of misting out. It's not really raining, just kind of drizzly. There are four teenage boys in a car taking their clothes off in the parking lot next to the high school football game. This is what the police officer found and he knocked on the window and David wrote it down as being the most cool-headed and charming of the bunch. The officer said, "What are you guys doing in here?" He said, "Oh, our clothes just got wet from the rain a little bit. So we just got in here to dry off and get on some dry clothes." So this police officer did what I think any one of us would do when confronted with four teenage boys taking their clothes off in the car in a high school parking lot, and he said, "Okay," and walked off because he's like, "They do not pay me enough to deal with this shit. So whatever these kids are doing, they can fucking do it."

Sure enough, just before halftime, David and these three other guys hop the fence of one end zone and they go tearing off down through the football field, butt naked. The crowd's going crazy. The cops come in from the other side and are coming up behind them. As they get to the other end zone, the fence on the other side, our school's head janitor, this big redneck guy is leaning up against the fence, and he casually tosses out some advice that David could have probably followed from then on. "You better move your ass, the cops are right behind you." Sure enough, the cops caught him and the others and they were arrested for streaking the high school football game.

These moments of hilarious shenanigans aside, his drug use was starting to lead him to some pretty dark places. This culminated in a few Gigi Allen style performances with his band involving nudity, beer bottles, oral sex, and whatever else, and it was starting to get him a reputation of being kind of fucked up. Meanwhile, he thought I was a square, I thought he was becoming a junkie, and neither of us was wrong.

On the night of my 18th birthday, I went out to go to a party at a friend's house and there was a Papa John's box sitting on my car. David was a delivery driver for Papa John's, so I was a little scared to open it because I thought he might have shat in it or something, which would be kind of funny, I guess, even though it was being a dick, but he didn't shit in it, thankfully. When I opened it up, there was one of his band's T-shirts inside and a message scrawled on the box that said, "I'm sorry, big hairy fatty." Big hairy fatty was the term of endearment, if you can believe it. So it was the best gift I got that year.

I went to the party and David was there and we hugged and exchanged, "I love you," and he apologized. I said, "David, What happened? What caused all this?" He said he didn't even know. The thing is it didn't really even matter because I had my friend back. But over the next couple of months, when we hung out more and tried to go back to the way things used to be, it was never quite the same. Too much time had passed. Our inside jokes weren't funny anymore. Our interests had shifted. He was still heavily into drugs. I was still heavily not. But we were at least on friendly terms and all that tension and awkwardness between the two of us and our group of friends kind of released because we were getting along and it was good. It wasn't the same as it was before but it was good.

That following year, our lives took a sort of different direction as I went off to college and he moved up to Athens, Georgia to focus on becoming a tattoo artist. We didn't see each other quite as much, but we were on good terms for the next two years. Just before I turned 21, I was up in Athens with a band. We were recording a record. The first night we were there, we got a phone call that David had overdosed on heroin. He was in the hospital.

We went to visit him and the gulf between us seemed bigger than ever. He was cracking jokes. He didn't remember anything that had happened. We'd hoped it would be like a wake-up call to him but he remembered getting off of work and then waking up in the hospital. The part that he had missed - at least part of that - was his roommate coming home to an empty house, but a locked bathroom. He pounded on the door and there was no response. He walked around and looked in through the outside window and found David lying on the floor unconscious, so he called 911 and kicked the door in, but all of that was gone for David, and the events leading up to it were gone. He knew nothing of any of this. When he first woke up, he wanted to know who had kicked his ass. He thought he must've been, like, assaulted after he got off work. So we hoped that it would be a wake-up call to him, but nothing really changed after that because, to him, it was just like, I don't know, a side trip that didn't really affect him.

Over the next couple of years, he bounced around a lot between Athens, Georgia, and Savannah and Atlanta and New York, and even Fayetteville, Georgia, where we grew up and where his parents still lived and I would run into him every now and then. We'd see each other at parties and that sort of thing and he would always say he was clean, but you could tell he wasn't. Once, my wife and I had gotten a new puppy and we took it to this party with us. David was there and he played with the puppy all night. Then, I saw him again a couple of weeks later and he said, "Hey, I heard you got a new dog, man. I'd love to see it." Everything was just becoming a blur to him.

As the years went on, we had less and less contact. People would ask about him or I would ask people about him and the stories would always start with, "Well, I'd heard he was clean, but—" and they never really ended anywhere good after that.

In 2006, my first son was born. That night, I was feeling pretty emotional and nostalgic. I found David on MySpace and we had not had any contact in years at this point. I sent him a message telling him my news and he wrote back two sentences. "That's wild. What'd y'all name it?" And he never wrote again.

After that, the day after Christmas of 2009, my wife and I were sitting around watching TV and she was chatting with a friend whose husband was a fireman in our town. The friend told her they had just heard over the police scanner that there had been an attempted robbery at the Walgreens with shots fired and that the suspect had a blue mohawk and was covered in tattoos. Our hearts sank. David had a friend drop him off at the Walgreens and he went inside and pulled out a gun and told everyone to get out. He headed straight for the pharmacy. Was rummaging through the drugs and he was trying to get the narcotics safe open when the cops got there. He tried to close the gate but he couldn't get it to close. So he pointed his gun at the cops and one of them shot him twice. They hit him in the abdomen and luckily he did not die. As they were dragging him out, cuffing him, and putting him in the ambulance, he was reportedly yelling, "You were supposed to kill me."

David is now on year 6 of a 20-year prison sentence and we've written back and forth a few times to try to patch things up. We've both done our fair share of apologizing. As you can tell from the telling of this story, for most of David's story, I was just more of a bystander. I was a witness to his humor, his charm, and his talent, but also his pain, his overwhelming need for acceptance, and his ultimately devastating addiction. In all those years when we weren't in as close contact, I could have tried to help him get clean. I could have fought with him or begged him or staged interventions - maybe other people did in my absence - but, ultimately, I didn't do

any of that. I didn't really try to help him. So in the end, he just floated out of my life. Not unlike an iceberg in an apartment complex pool in the winter of 1993. Thank you for listening.

### **The Clash**

♪ Darling, you got to let me know ♪  
♪ Should I stay, or should I go? ♪  
♪ If you say that you are mine ♪  
♪ I'll be here till the end of time ♪  
♪ So you got to let me know ♪  
♪ Should I stay, or should I go? ♪

♪ It's always tease, tease, tease ♪  
♪ You're happy when I'm on my knees ♪  
♪ One day it's fine, and next it's black ♪  
♪ So if you want me off your back ♪  
♪ Well, come on and let me know ♪  
♪ Should I stay, or should I go? ♪

### **Kevin**

This is RISK! This is the Clash behind me now and we just heard from Cory Byrom. Now listen, there's a documentary that was made about Cory's friend, David's band. It's on YouTube. The film is called, "Stopper: The Rise and Fall of the Bastard Squad." So if you want to check that out, it's on YouTube.

Let's get to our final story today. This is quite a trip. This story comes to us from Chris Lundy, who is the host of the First Person Arts Story Slam. Oh my gosh, we love First Person Arts in Philadelphia and we're so thrilled that they introduced us to Chris Lundy. You can find Chris on Twitter at LundyWorld.

This is also extraordinary in that all of the music in this story was composed by our audio editor, John Lasala. So let us go off on this journey. Now, here is Chris Lundy. With a story we call "413."

### **Chris**

So growing up, my big sister loved dating gangsters - like thugs and roughnecks. The rougher, the better. That was her style. The one guy she was most head over heels for was a guy named Duran. My sister and him were inseparable. You would not see one without seeing the other. Everybody knew that Duran was dating my sister and my sister was dating Duran. They were, like, this notorious couple.

Duran was as gangster as it got. I didn't know what he did or how he did it, but everybody was afraid of Duran and Duran wasn't scared of anybody. He wasn't the biggest guy in the world. I consider him, like, lanky. When he was smiling, I mean, he had the kindest face in the world but, when he was angry, that same area would turn down and become this extremely intimidating scowl. So it was, like, two extreme opposites - same face, two completely different ends of the spectrum. He kind of walked to the beat of his own drum. He had his own set of rules, his own code. Even though he was on the outskirts of the rules and kind of had that bad boy thing going

on, because he lived by this code, he seemed like a standup guy, an honorable guy, a trustworthy kind of dude. He had a lot of bass in his voice and he knew how to use it.

I remember one time, I was with Duran and he saw these 4 guys out in front of an apartment building. For no reason at all, he yelled to them, "Het, what the fuck are y'all looking at?" Not one of them said anything. I was floored by this. If I had seen these four guys, I would have been scared or just wanted to mind my business, but Duran unprovokedly initiated a beef with these four guys confidently and they didn't say a thing to him. That was just more evidence that Duran was a motherfucking gangster. Everybody was scared of him. He had the neighborhood on lock.

I was growing up in a tough neighborhood but I wasn't a tough kid. I was in middle school. I loved comic books. I collected pennies. I was that kid. I was a penny collector and I would lay them out in rows in my bedroom all by myself in the order from oldest to newest. My favorite ones were the old ones. The ones that were old as shit, on the back, they didn't even have the Lincoln Memorial yet. It just said one cent on the back. Those were my all-stars. I love those.

My neighborhood was right on the border of Southeast DC and Southeast DC was notorious for being the roughest part of a rough city. So by being on the Maryland border there, it was like, you can make a left and go toward a Creek where there were trees and nice flowers, or you can make a right where if you weren't wearing a bulletproof vest, you might as well just go ahead and plan your funeral. There was, like, this dichotomy going on and it shared a zip code, but the worlds were so different. I had friends on both sides of that line.

I was raised by a single mom, a Haitian immigrant, and she was tough. She ran a tough ship in the house but I don't think she knew much about the neighborhood or what was going on outside of our doors. There were fights all the time for no reason, for stupid reasons. There were bullies all over the place and people would tease you about anything. If you have old shoes, you're getting teased. We called it joning, right? So if someone were talking about your hair, they would be joning on you. People joned all the time. Fights were unprovoked. You could get jumped for no reason or worse.

Guys were getting shot for gritting their teeth on each other. Gritting— what that is it's when you kind of look a person up and down in a sizing them up kind of way, and that was just considered a sign of disrespect. This sign of disrespect oftentimes led to somebody actually getting shot, actually getting killed. The worst part about it was this was normal to us. This was like a cultural norm. Everybody knew somebody who got killed. Everybody had a friend who died and we just accepted it as a way of life.

It was a scary little world that we lived in but, just naturally, I gravitated toward the good kid way of things like following rules. I remember nothing made me happier than bringing home my report card to my mother and showing her how well I had done. That would make my day. Getting her approval meant everything to me. So that's the path I walked. That's where I was, but I was always aware of just how bad shit was around the neighborhood, but Duran protected me from all of this just based on his reputation alone. If you fucked with me, then you might have to fuck with Duran, and nobody wanted to fuck with Duran.

He wasn't stingy with his street knowledge either. He would school me up. He would give me lessons and tell me things like, for example, "If some bullies are messing with you, you pick out the biggest one and you hit them with whatever you could find - a brick, a stick, whatever you



could find. You hit them with that and you'll probably lose. You'll lose that fight, but he'll never mess with you again. And everyone who's smaller than him, they're definitely not gonna fuck with you because now you're seen as the crazy kid that'll hit somebody with a brick." And it was true.

He taught me these types of things while he would cut my hair and that was kind of like his hidden talent. He was the best barber I've ever seen - like sharp lines, nice fades. It was an art form for him. He would really take his time. We would set up the bathroom, he'd sit me on the toilet. The toilet was the barber seat. He would line up his clippers and he would just shape me up. While he was doing that, we'd be talking. He was like a comedian. He'd asked me about girls and told me jokes. We talked about school. I mean, Duran taught me everything from how to shoot a gun to how to kiss a girl. If my mother knew what he was teaching me while he was giving me those haircuts, she would have kicked him out right then and there and told me and my sister to stay far away from Duran.

But he knew where we were, he knew the neighborhood that I was in and the type of shit that I would be subject to, so he was teaching me and preparing me for any situation that I might come across because of where we lived. He knew that I needed it. He knew I needed the help. Again, single mom— there wasn't a dad around. Older sister— I didn't have an older brother. He kind of stepped in as that male figure to teach me how to navigate the hood. It just boosted my confidence and it gave me this sense of security when Duran was around. Bottom line, I worship the ground he walked on.

When he asked me to take a walk with him one night, I jumped at the chance. I was in. As we're walking one night, a car pulls up, and it's Saquon. Saquon is another guy from the neighborhood, older than me but maybe a couple of years younger than Duran. Saquon was a little badass, not like Duran though. Duran was a badass that you took seriously. Saquon was more of a mischievous little guy. He didn't really go to school or maybe he dropped out too - I'm not quite sure. No one really took Saquon too seriously. No one feared Saquon but if you dared Saquon to do something, Saquon would probably do it. That was his reputation.

He comes up and he goes, "Hey, yo, this is UUV." Now, I didn't know what the hell a UUV was, but for the record, a UUV means Unauthorized Usage of a Vehicle, AKA a stolen car. I assumed it was the model of a car like the Nissan UUV or something like that. I had no clue. I was just a little naive little kid. Duran motioned for us to get in, so we got in and I was thinking, "All right, I'm hanging with the boys. What are we about to get into?" We headed to a construction site where they were building these townhomes and Saquon was driving like a complete wild man. He's doing donuts. He's spinning out, jumping little ramps, and shit like that. Then, Duran takes the wheel and he's even crazier than Saquon. He's doing all kinds of stuff, driving fast. Then, out of nowhere, Duran goes, "Hey, yo, let Youngin drive." That was me. I was Youngin. So I get in the driver's seat and this is my first time ever driving. I'd never sat behind a wheel before.

I'm driving the car and we spot this porta-potty, and they say, "Yo, run that shit over." Literally, they were saying, "Let's play bowling. Let's go bowling using the car as a bowling ball and the porta-potty as the bowling pin." Now I'm thinking to myself, "This is insane. First of all, I've never even driven a car to begin with. And my first time out, I'm going to go bowling with porta-potties. I'm not understand what's going on. First of all, Saquon must have excellent insurance on this UUV of his." I was kind of shocked at myself that, "Yes, I was excited, but I wasn't that nervous." I think that I started to assimilate to being one of the bad boys. If Duran was saying that hitting

this porta-potty was okay and Saquon was giving me the thumbs up, then this was the way to go.

So I lined the car up and I hit the gas and I'm going to this porta-potty and I'm thinking to myself, "Are you sure? Are you sure? Are you serious? Are you really about to do this?" Boom, crunch, crash into the porta-potty. It goes flying. There's piss everywhere. Shit everywhere. I went flying through this porta potty and it was exhilarating. It felt like I was waiting for some type of award after the world's greatest porta-potty killer - that's how I felt after hitting that. It felt like I had graduated from this little innocent naive kid to this rookie bad boy. That's what it felt like. I mean, I'm looking at the porta-potty destroyed. I'm looking around. We're in this construction site, driving this car. It just felt like we could do anything we wanted to do at that time. It was exhilarating. Like, this kid- I never really did anything wrong and, for the first time, I felt like I was in a bad boys club. I was behind the velvet rope and I finally got to see what goes on behind there and I loved it. I love every second of it. So I'm still on this high.

Saquon takes the wheel. I'm in the back seat and we're going back to our neighborhood for Saquon to drop us off. On our way out, we see five cop cars on their way in and I see Duran stiffen up and Saquon get really quiet. As the cops pass us one at a time, I turn and I see they all start to make U-turns in a single file. I take another peek at Saquon and Duran and they're even more stiff, even more quiet, and I see something that I had never seen in my life and I never thought I would see. I saw fear on Duran's face. I turned back around and I saw the cops, the lights flash on, the sirens blaring now, they hit the gas, sped up, and now they're pretty much right up on our bumper. I'm scared shitless. I look in the rear view and I see Saquon's face and he looks confused. He looks unsure. He doesn't know what to do. So I yelled to him, "Stop the car. It's the cops." It was common sense to me. When you see police, if they tell you to stop, you stop. End of story. But Duran had other ideas.

Duran said, "No, go. I got warrants. GO!" I'm thinking to myself, "What do you mean 'Go'? If cops say 'Stop', you stop." Duran said, "Go." Saquon obliged by mashing down on the gas. I'm thinking, "What the hell is going on?" In my little naive mind, I thought we were just playing, we were all taking turns driving Saquon's car, messing around and now we're being pursued by police and we're actually talking about running away. It blew my mind and I couldn't wrap my little head around it. What are your warrants for? What could Duran have possibly done? I panicked and Saquon obliged Duran's request by putting the pedal to the motherfucking metal and gunning it.

That fast, we were in an all-out high-speed police chase and I'm seeing that we're headed full speed toward an intersection and there's no lights. There was a stop sign but there was no light. So the cars are coming east to west, west to east - they're flying - but we're going north to south and we're not slowing down. If anything, we were picking up more speed. I'm bracing. I'm thinking, "Damn, this is the way I'm going to die - in the backseat of a UUV." We go straight through the intersection. I don't know what the odds are but we went through untouched, unscathed right through. Now the cops, of course, are going to be more careful through an intersection. So, they stopped to make sure they weren't causing any accidents. At those speeds, an accident would have been fatal - no doubt - so them being more careful and stopping created separation. It gave us a little bit of breathing room.

So by the time we got to our neighborhood, there was a moment of peace. Saquon brought the car to a roll. It was just slow enough for him to jump out. So Saquon jumped out and then Duran jumped out. I tried to jump out but my door was locked and wouldn't budge - fucking child safety

locks. Because the car was still in motion, the rear doors couldn't be opened from the inside, so I was trapped. I was petrified. I looked back and I saw that the cops had made their way through the intersection. My stomach dropped. I remember my face feeling tingly just from fear, from shock, from panic. I was yanking on the door. I even slid over to the other side and tried to yank that door open too. Neither side would open and the car was still moving. It's still rolling.

I'm wondering, "Am I about to crash into something?" So I got danger in front of me. I turn around, I see the cops, I got danger in the back of me and I'm fucking trapped. I'm thinking, "How am I going to tell my mother what's going to happen to me? Am I going to jail for the rest of my life?" Like, my body couldn't handle the amount of shock that it was receiving. It was overloaded. I couldn't physically process what my mind was sending to my body. It was overloaded. I don't know what's going on.

Out of nowhere, my door flings open. I looked and it was Duran. I couldn't believe my eyes. I know how fast Duran is and I know that he had enough time to be gone - I mean vanish into the night - but he stopped and he came back to let me out. I didn't even understand how he knew that I was still stuck in the car when they had both jumped out and sprinted away. He must've checked back or looked back for me. I don't know. I'm having all of these thoughts, "How is he here? He had a clean getaway. He could have been gone, but he came back, circled back, and opened up my door." I don't know. I was frozen with shock. Then he snapped me out of it by saying, "Run."

He took off. I jumped out of the car. I'm running behind him. I was trying to follow his path, but he was too fast. This guy was a streaker. He was gone and I'm trying to follow where he's running to in the direction that he's running but I can't keep up. I actually saw, at this point, there were cops all over the place and I heard one yell "Freeze!" with their guns drawn, but Duran threw both of his arms up and kept running full speed. So he's got both his arms up in the air, sprinting full speed, and still getting away. They couldn't catch him. I'm telling you, this guy was a track star.

In all of this commotion, I noticed that nobody was after me. No one was chasing me. So I took this opportunity. I had the bright idea to take my jacket off, throw it into the bushes, and just start walking casually, blending into the neighborhood like I was a bystander who just happened to be outside. So I'm walking calmly, minding my own business, and then I hear that sound, the clanging, the clink clang of police batons, keys, handcuffs, and pepper spray - that sound that cops make when they're sprinting. I hear it. I'm thinking, "All right, just stay calm. Just chill out." It's getting louder - the clanging, the clinking, the clanging. I'm like, "All right, commit to the role, Chris. Keep your cool. Keep your cool." Boom. Two cops brought me down and they started pounding me - I mean, beating the shit out of me. One was kneeling me in the back. The other was grabbing my hands to put behind my arms. I guess I wasn't moving fast enough because they were punching me in the spine. I was yelling out that I was a kid in hopes that they would lighten up a little bit. I knew that if they were determined to rough me up, that's what was going to happen but at least scale it back a little bit to the middle schoolers version of whatever you're going to do here.

So I was beaten up and they threw these cuffs on me extremely tight - I'm talking like fingertips losing circulation - and they threw me in the back seat. It was confusing to me because I was raised to be a good boy and to do the right things. If the police tell you to do something, you do it, you comply but the way that I was being roughed up— man, it was really giving me some doubts on that whole philosophy, that whole concept there. So I'm sitting in the back seat and

the cops are sort of heckling me. I remember the canine unit guy came and he let his German shepherd in the backseat with me, barking ferociously all in my face. I thought I was going to be mauled to death in the backseat there, so I'm petrified. I'm wondering what happened with Duran, and what happened with Saquan. I'm seeing more and more cops, more and more patrol cars. It looked like this just huge scene had completely gotten out of hand because all you saw was red and blue lights everywhere.

So I was sitting there, handcuffed, waiting, thinking, and it started to dawn on me that it might not have been Saquan's car. I was a completely naive little kid. So the cops took me down to the precinct, fingerprint, mugshot, jail, cell, the whole thing, and they're pressuring me to give up the names of the guys who got away and I tell them. I say, "Listen, one was Saquan, I think, and the other one, I'd never seen him before. I never saw that other guy before in my life."

A couple hours later, my mother gets me out. We walked to my mother's car and Duran was ducked down in the seat, out of sight, ducked down. As soon as he and I lock eyes, he kind of makes this motion and this look to me to just keep quiet and not say anything. It dawned on me that he must have run straight to my house and told my mother some story that got me off the hook. There was no punishment, no yelling, no reprimand. Duran had somehow cleared it all up with my mom.

The police actually pinned the stolen car on me but, because I was so young and I didn't have any priors, a fine and an apology to the vehicle's real owner was enough to kind of clear everything up and my record was later expunged. Then, some time went by and I remember Duran not being around as much. His visits were kind of few and far between. Then, we got some devastating news. Duran had been killed. We didn't know exactly what happened, but we knew that he got shot and that we knew that it happened in Washington, DC. At that time, that's all we knew. Word spread around the neighborhood. Everybody knew Duran, so him being killed just spread like wildfire. It was the talk of the town. Duran was dead. Duran was killed. I remember there was this emptiness. It felt like my big brother had gotten killed, like my protector was gone. There were just empty, dark, sad times around then.

That year, DC was the murder capital and Duran was the 413th person killed in the city. I'll never forget that number. Number 413. I later came to learn that the arrest warrant that Duran had was for murder - two separate ones, actually. He was in the life. Duran was in the life all the way. But what it did make me realize is, with everything on the line, Duran came back for me that night. He risked everything. A warrant for his arrest for two murders and he risked all of that to get me out of the backseat of that car. I don't know. That just blows my mind.

Now I took Duran's death really hard. After that loss, there was a shift in me. I started skipping school a lot. When I did go to school, my grades were bad. I wasn't into anything like sports, no activities, anything like that. I wasn't in anything. My haircuts were trash because I didn't have to run around to cut them. It was a different time.

Over time, I started to find my way out of it, started to bounce back, and made changes for the better. My grades, sports— I was captain of the football team. I joined ROTC, student government. I was the homecoming king, a pretty popular kid, and a lot of it was inspired by Duran. He did want to teach me the ways of the street so that I would be protected and taken care of. He always knew that I was different. He always knew that I didn't have to go to the left in that area and be in the life. He knew that I had what it took to be better than him and to be

better than that, and to be better than my neighborhood and what my neighborhood had to offer.

So I get a phone call, it's a police officer. As we were talking, I realized that this is the police officer who arrested me that night and took me to jail. He's being friendly. He's being nice. I'm reminiscing of just how bad he and his cop buddies were that night. But now, it sounds like a completely different guy and he's being friendly and he's checking in and he suggests that I participate in this essay contest, so I did.

The essay that I wrote was inspired by Duran. It was inspired by his passing. It was inspired by his decisions in our relationship. It was about how fucked up my neighborhood was. It was about change and about choosing to change and choosing to walk a different path, even though we were surrounded by just absolute shit. One of the things I said in the essay is that my friend's death was a sudden turnaround. I saw how he lived and I saw how things ended up. I said that I was going to learn from his mistakes.

But what was a complete shock to me was that this essay caught fire. I remember local news stations coming to my school to interview me. The Washington Post did a cover story on it and they printed it on Independence Day. High schools were bringing me in to read the essay to their student body and answer any questions that they may have had. I even had a float at a local parade. I had my own little car because of this essay. It was insane how much attention and just popping circumstances that were around this whole damn thing just because of this little essay, but they all got it wrong. All of them - the Washington Post, the local high schools - they all got it wrong because they villainized Duran.

To me, Duran was a protector, and I saw that Duran lived by a code. He had honor. He was loyal. Although he did make some bad decisions, that didn't mean that he was a bad person. I always saw him as a good person. I still do. I always had some apprehension once I saw the direction that they were pulling the essay into. I always had some apprehension about it because I knew that they were pegging it wrong and pointing out the worst of him in order to make me a turnaround story or a redemption story. But it wasn't accurate because, a lot of the ways that I went about my life and the ways that I turn things around, I learned from Duran.

I still think about Duran from time to time. I think about everything that he taught me. I think it makes me remember that, in life, shit's not black and white. There's a whole lot of gray. You can pull great things out of bad, and then there's a lot of bad and things that are supposed to be good that all was there that one night with that car. But I'll always appreciate the way that Duran came back for me, how he risked everything. Everything was on the line. I didn't know that he had an arrest warrant that would have put him away forever, but he knew. Despite that, he came back and he opened up that fucking door to let me out. They don't make them like that anymore. Duran wasn't scared of anybody.

### **Bobby McFerrin**

♪ Na-na-na-na. ♪

### **Kevin**

That is all for this week's episode, folks. This is Bobby McFerrin behind me now. We just heard from Chris Lundy. You can find him on Twitter at LundyWorld. Also, John Lasala, like I was saying, did all the music composition and the editing on his own. Of that story, John has a favorite edit of his own, an alternate edit that we're going to put up on Patreon for anyone who

might be curious to compare. It's not so unusual for an editor on the show to have a favorite version and for me to have a different favorite version. So I figure no reason we can't share the alternate version over there for anyone who is curious to hear the difference. Folks, today is the day. Take a risk.

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### **Scott**

If you want to hear more sometimes ridiculous, sometimes scary, sometimes truly beautiful intimate stories, be sure to check out RISK!

Available now on the free Audacy app and EVERYWHERE you get your podcasts.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz. Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

And finally, like the end of every episode, we're about to play this week's Listener Story. This is a 5-10 minute story, sent in by a listener. Do you have a story? Of course you do. Record it on your phone and email it to me – [Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com](mailto:Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com).

This week's story is about getting an Ambush Makeover on the TODAY Show – and you can actually see the video of this appearance on TV – you can find the link in the episode notes at [WhatWasThatLike.com/173](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/173).

Stay safe! I'll see you next week with a brand new episode.

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(Listener story)

My mother and I were in New York for a brief trip. We were there for, I think, three or four days. On our very first day, we thought we would get up early and go and hang out on the Today Show Plaza. For anyone who is listening and doesn't know what that means, the Today Show is a morning show on NBC and they have an area outside their studio they call the Plaza where, a lot of the times, they'll have the camera crew kind of pan across so you can see everybody waving and they have little segments where sometimes we'll have people say, "On a trip to New York from Bay City, Michigan" or whatever, where the people are from or if they're celebrating something.

My mom and I thought we would go and see if we could at least get on TV so people could see us waving or maybe we'd get really lucky and get to be one of the people that does a little segment that says hello to our family. So we got up early in the morning. It was late January, so it was pretty cold. We had heavy coats on and everything. We made our little sign and we were just kind of out there trying to figure out how this would work and how we could get someone's attention to be on the little segments.

All of a sudden, we saw a couple of people kind of pointing at us and someone came over and said, "Hi, who are you here with? What's going on?" And I was like, "Well, this is my mother and we're here together." One of them said, "Well, we're looking for somebody to do this little segment. We call them ambush makeovers." I immediately was so excited because I love makeover shows, or at least I did at the time - this was about eight or nine years ago now. Just

the idea of somebody giving me a makeover was just so exciting to me. My mother, bless her, does not really like to be the center of attention but was willing to do it for me. So we were like, "Yes, definitely. We want to participate."

Before they actually taped us saying anything, we had to sign some sort of liability form, I'm not sure. Then, we had to do the little reveal on camera where it looked like they picked us for the first time. We had to kind of fake the excitement a little bit because we already knew, but we made it look like they were just telling us for the first time. We were the pick for the ambush makeover.

What happened for the next three or four hours— oh my gosh. It was not at all what we were expecting. It was much more elaborate. They took us inside the studio and, seriously, for hours, we were in chairs. They were doing hair and makeup. I had never had my hair dyed before, except I think I had highlights once. This was, like, a super elaborate multi-step process. They did a really, like, crazy job on my hair and then they cut it and then they did makeup. They had us trying on different clothes. And I think the thing that surprised me the most was like, they really didn't care what we thought of the clothes at all. They were very concerned about, like, making a look that their producers would like, which is fine, but I guess I just didn't expect to not be a voice in this decision of what I was going to wear at all.

So my mom and I were in the same room while they were doing our hair and stuff, but they had a sheet hanging up so we couldn't see each other. I had no idea what she was going to wear, anything like that because they wanted it completely to be a surprise when they did the big reveal. For, I'm going to guess, about three hours, we are going through all this process of hair and makeup and clothes. Then, finally, it got to the part of the show where they were going to do the live reveal and they had us line up. They wanted me to come out first and then they were going to bring out my mom.

Another interesting, like, little tidbit is that I wear glasses. I'm very nearsighted. If I have my glasses off, things have to be probably an inch from my face to be clear. I can see colors and shapes fine without my glasses, but no detail. They didn't want me to put my glasses on, I guess, because they thought it would mask some of the makeup or whatever. They let me carry my glasses out but they wanted me to go out and turn around to see myself in the mirror and not put my glasses on. They wanted me to fake it a little bit, being able to see the details on camera, and I really tried my hardest, but when I turned around and looked in the mirror, I couldn't really see, so I tried to fake it but Hoda Kotb, who was one of the hosts who was on the stage, said, "Put your glasses on" because, clearly, I didn't fake it very well. Anyway, I turned around and my hair, I was so, like, unrecognizable to myself. It was very interesting. They put me in designer jeans that they had tailored for me, a top, and then a leather jacket. I did really love the hair color and definitely more makeup than I've ever had on in my life. I did like the makeover.

Then it was time to bring my mom out, so they had me turn my back. They didn't want me to see her right away. They brought out my mother, whose name is Joan, and I heard gasps or whatever because they show the before and after. Then, I turned around and my eyes got so wide because my mother looked so beautiful. She probably looked 5-10 years younger because of the way they had cut and highlighted her hair. Then, they had put her in the same leather jacket as me, so we kind of matched. She had different pants and top, but the same leather jacket. So I thought that was really sweet because we had told them that we share or exchange clothes sometimes. They gave us the same jacket. So it was really sweet, a really, like,

definitely once in a lifetime memory, and I really, really treasure that memory with my mother, for sure.

But we always laugh because I think the funniest part of the whole experience is, once we had done the live shoot, they let us stand on the stage long enough to take one picture. So seriously, like, one or two minutes, somebody took a picture of us with our phones, and then they were like, "Okay, do you want to wear the clothes out or change back into your clothes?" And we're like, "Oh, we'll wear it."

So they literally just directed us down the stairwell and out this door that closed and it was one of those doors that leads out to the street, and there's no handle to get back in. It's an exit only. So the door closed and it was just all of a sudden we were just back in the normal real world, and we were just like, "Did that just happen?" It was just really funny. We were in this weird space for three hours where we were doing all this stuff we'd never done before and then, all of a sudden, very abruptly, we walked down some stairs and out a door and it was back into the real world. So we loved it. It was a great experience - not always what we expected, but a great memory. Our joke now is always that we got to have an ambush makeover, probably because we were the worst-dressed people on the plaza that day.