

My earliest memory is of a gun.

I was about 5 years old when I was awoken by the sound of my parents fighting. I don't remember what they were saying or fighting about but I remember my mother screaming in almost a guttural way. Her voice was hoarse and she sounded angrier than I had ever heard her before.

"DO IT! YOU'RE A BIG SHOT?! YOU'RE SUCH A MAN RIGHT? SO FUCKING DO IT! DO ME A FAVOR AND DO IT!" Her voice croaked more than shouted.

I crawled out of my bed, opened my bedroom door and witnessed a scene that has stuck with me for nearly 40 years.

"DO IT!" she said. "DO ME A FAVOR AND FUCKING SHOOT ME THEN BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO LIVE LIKE THIS ANYMORE!!"

My mother was sitting on the couch and my father was standing beside her with the barrel of his gun pressed against her temple. Her face was stern and her teeth gritted as she spoke. Her green eyes were defiant. She had had enough and wasn't bluffing.

"You're fucking crazy you know that?" my father said in his thick accent. He seemed more surprised than angry as he held his .38 revolver against her head.

They had yet to notice me but I immediately burst out crying.

"Mommy?"

My mother's face changed from one of toughness and defiance to complete shock and dread. She looked at me, eyes wide open and shouted to me.

"RUN, JOHN! RUN TO GRANDMA'S!"

I burst into a run in my pajamas as fast as I could. I made it to the base of the steps of the bottom floor of our three-family house leading up to my grandparent's on the second floor and began screaming.

"Grandma! Grandma!"

By then my father was behind me, grabbing me at my waist and carrying me back into the living room. I was terrified. My grandmother opened the door at the top of the stairs and shouted down, asking what was going on. My parents told her not to worry and that everything was fine.

I don't remember anything more about that night but they must have calmed me down and my sudden appearance brought a truce for at least the moment.

That is one of my earliest memories and I think of it often.