

UNCLE RAY

Ian Catlin



IMAGE: Ann-Marie Brown

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My uncle gets out of jail next year. A year from today. Twenty-five years to the day from when he went in. He was my favorite uncle. My mother's brother. Uncle Ray, we called him. He bought me my first PlayStation.

He killed his wife. That's why he's in jail. They were getting divorced and had been separated. One day he stopped by the house to pick up some of his clothes. Found her in their old bed, fucking some guy. I think his name was Derek.

Uncle Ray wasn't a big guy, but that day he must have looked ten feet tall because Derek ran, jumped right out the window, and broke both legs when he hit the ground. After Derek jumped, Ray decided to turn his attention to my aunt. Killed her with his own two hands, choked the life out of her. Didn't try to get away. Called the police himself. Walked downstairs after my aunt was dead and dialed them. He was on the curb out front when they got there.

The courts determined it was a crime of passion, so Uncle Ray got twenty-five years with a possibility for parole, but that never came. It doesn't matter much now, seeing as he will be walking free this time next year, but still, I thought old Uncle Ray deserved parole.

I remember the day it happened. I got home from school, and my parents were sitting at the kitchen table. My mother tried to tell me first but, looking as if she couldn't decide if she had to vomit or cry, decided against it. My father was the one that told me.

"Aunt Sharon's dead," He said, "And Uncle Ray's the one who done it."

I was eight, and I cried my little heart out. Ray wasn't just *my* favorite uncle. He was *the* favorite uncle. *The Good Brother*. The one who went to college. The one who worked in New York. The one who made six figures. He didn't make enough to stay out of prison, though. Money doesn't always buy happiness

My grandmother, my mother's mother, took it the worst. Or maybe she didn't take it all if that makes sense. She would come over after Sunday service with her friend, Dolores. In their church clothes, they would talk about what Ray was like as a boy, how "that woman was bad news, to begin with," and that "what happened was the Devil".

Neither of my parents would ever chime in, except with maybe a shake of their heads. My mother couldn't talk about it without breaking up, and everybody knew how my father felt about the whole thing. He didn't believe in lying to oneself to appease some inner thoughts.

I still got to see my uncle throughout the years. My mother would pack my sister, brother, and myself into the Ford Explorer. We'd go down to the prison and talk to Ray through plexiglass in a room filled with other families and other people convicted of things like murder. We would each bring him some candy. Usually, we would just get his favorites, Reese's and a Whatchamacallit, but sometimes we would bring something different, like Skittles.

The only time I ever saw my uncle cry was the first time we went to visit him a few weeks after Sharon. My mother told him that it was okay, that he had to be strong, and that he would get out of here.

We would go a few times a year. Sometimes the family, sometimes just me and my mom. Maybe around a holiday. Maybe because I would ask to see him. My mom always let me sit in the chair and talk to him on the phone. He would smile as he asked how school was going and everybody else was getting on.

As the years went by, mom stopped going, and it was just me that would visit. I brought Trish when we married and the boys when they were each born. My mom said it was a bad idea, but I thought it would be nice for Uncle Ray to see them. You know, to see that the family is still thriving. Still, the last few times, it's just been me. That sounds sad, I know, but it has given my uncle and me a chance to get to know one another. A chance for him to open up a little. He tells me all the stories that go on. Not the stuff you see on A&E late at night. No, he tells me the real stuff. The stuff that I regret asking about. The things he's seen in there. The sounds he's heard come from other grown men.

The last time I saw him, he told me a story. This young guy, Quadire, or Quaddie for short, maybe nineteen, had been put away for the first time and got placed in my uncle's cell block. I guess he had robbed some store with his buddy's gun, and when he pulled it on the owner, the owner went for it. Bullet went right through the owner's leg. Didn't even kill the guy but put him in the hospital for a week or two. At least, that's what the kid told Ray.

Quaddie was in a gang, the Bloods, my uncle tells me. The problem with that is that my uncle's cellblock is all Crips and Kings, and even the Aryan Brotherhood was there. No bloods, though. Quaddie comes in and starts mouthing off, "his set this" and "his colors that" to anybody who would listen. Maybe he thought he would scare people off or something, I don't know. But then this guy, Bone, my uncle says that's what everybody called him, finally goes up to him. He tells the kid to "keep that mouth moving." The kid yells in his face and tells him to back off, and when his guys hear about this, Bone would have problems. Bone doesn't think much of it and just goes back to his cell.

The next day, Quaddie is taking a shower. Apparently, there's always an hour or two when you can shower alone. Still, the young guys, the "first-timers," always wait until the end of the day when everybody tries to make it before lights out. Bone watches the kid go into the showers and grabs a few of his guys. Everybody sees them when they get to the showers and knows enough to get out. My uncle is in the stall taking a deuce when it happens.

Bone's goons stand by the door as Bone walks over to Quaddie.

"Sup," Bone says.

At around five feet nine and 160 pounds, the kid is a midget compared to Bone, whose six feet six, 250-something-pound figure might remind you of the guy from Green Mile, Michael Clarke Duncan. The kid throws a bar of soap at Bone, curses a bunch, and goes for the door. He doesn't beg or grovel, though, which I guess means something in prison, but Bone doesn't seem to care about the honor or the respect of it all as he starts in on Quaddie. Bone, in his prison-issued clothes, and Quaddie, butt naked. He breaks one of the bathroom's sinks with Quaddie's teeth. He stomps Quaddie's face until his black skin turns a burgundy livery color. His eyes swell shut, and his mouth becomes an inflated cavity.

With Quaddie in a heap on the floor, Bone says, "Should've just shut ur mouth," and pulls his own prison-issued trousers down to his feet, along with his skivvies.

His big, black dick stands solid. It aims at Quaddie, whose eyes were too swollen to see what was coming. Bone puts both hands on the back of Quaddie's swollen head and brings the mushroom tip of his penis to the gummy void where Quaddie's teeth had been. Then, slowly, Bone puts the whole thing to the back of Quaddie's throat. It fills Quaddie's bloody mouth so that no sound can leave through his lips, and then Bone brings it all the way back out, and he does this, over and over again. Gughk. Gughk. Gughk.

Quaddie's body convulses. His hands become fists, and then everything goes limp. Bone moans and stops moving for a moment. He grunts, and a shimmer goes through his body.

Quaddie lands on the floor in a pile. My uncle watches through the stall as Bone pulls up his pants and motions for his guys to let him through.

A few other old-timers come in after Bone. Ray leaves the stall. There, surrounded by puddles of blood, piss, and cum, but still alive, is Quaddie. They get him some help. He survives, but he doesn't really talk much anymore. He doesn't eat much solid food, either. I mean, he has hamburgers and such but no hotdogs, though. I guess that's a bit too much, even if it's through a straw.

When my uncle does get out, I've agreed to pick him up. I wonder what we're going to talk about. I wonder if there are other things. Other people like Quaddie. Other stories.

