



After Mafia Hit A Boy Radically Changes His Identity

Darrell Fusaro (June 30, 2012)



My younger brother was a cat.



For several years following the Mafia's murder of our grandfather my younger brother thought he was Francis the cat. I mean he was a normal kid with screwed up grades when he went to school, but as soon as he got back home and inside he was on all fours and he was Francis the cat. It wasn't that big of a deal except when he would start brushing up on the front of the TV during "McMillan and Wife."

That's when our father would take the cigar from his mouth and bark, "Jesus Eric, would you move!"

Eric, I mean Francis, would stop and give our father the look an angered cat gives when scolded. Then he would raise his right paw and hiss at our dad before letting out a meow and trotting off into the kitchen to clean himself.

"That kid's lost in space." Our dad would mutter to himself and then continue to enjoy his cigar and the TV.

At one point we dragged in a refrigerator box for Francis to sleep in. Eventually my dad caved in and starting feeding my brother on the floor because Francis the cat wouldn't eat at the table.

Our mother had moved out shortly after the murder. So our grandmother, our dad's mom, would swing by to check up on us and she'd always bring food. One evening she showed up with her homemade Italian cheesecake. She made this Italian cheesecake with ricotta cheese and orange zest. It was our dad's favorite. I hated that Italian cheesecake; it wasn't really sweet. I don't think it was for kids.

It was on that evening that our grandmother walked in the back door with her homemade Italian cheesecake and caught our dad feeding "Francis" his dinner on the floor. Up until then the severity of Eric's condition hadn't been well known. To be perfectly honest, by then the three of us were used to it and didn't give it much thought. Our grandmother on the other hand flew into a hysterical panic. She set the cheesecake on the counter and began screaming the obvious to our father.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Eric is eating on the floor like an animal! Jimmy!" She pleaded, "Eric, Eric get up!"

"Ma. Ma!" Our father shouted to snap her out of it and then coolly said, "Leave him alone ma, he's fine."

"But Jimmy, he's eating on the floor like an animal." Looking at Eric with pity grandma continued, "What are you doing to my baby?"



“Ma, ma, just take it easy.” Then my father snapped. His brows came together, his eyes got mean and with clenched teeth he growled, “Where’s that fuckin’ cheesecake?!”

Our dad grabbed grandma’s homemade Italian cheesecake from the counter and while holding onto the plate with one hand he pulled open the cutlery drawer with the other. The utensils clanked against each other as he rifled through them until he withdrew a large serving spoon. He slammed the drawer shut and headed straight towards Eric, who oblivious to the commotion was still enjoying his meal.

Our father squatted down next to Eric and continued to yell at his mother, “Ma, you know what? He’s my kid ma, and if I want to feed my son my favorite Italian cheesecake on the floor...”

He dug out a portion of grandma’s homemade Italian cheesecake with the large spoon and plopped a heaping of it onto Eric’s plate shouting, “...then that’s what I am gonna do!”

Dad scooped out another heaping spoonful of the dessert onto Eric’s plate still yelling at his mother, “Just keep your beak out of it! We don’t need your help! WE’RE DOING JUST FINE ON OUR OWN!”

He ended his storm with an intense gaze aimed directly into the eyes of his mother. It was a standoff. Everyone remained perfectly still wondering who would make the next move - except for my brother who was now enjoying his desert. I could feel the tension growing more intense until my dad looked down at Eric, tenderly patted him on the head, and said, “That’s a good kitty.”

Eric was Francis the cat until the summer of 1974, when he just... Well, my dad and me were watching Nixon’s resignation live on TV. When all of a sudden Eric stripped down naked and started doing laps in the house. He was running upright. Through the living room, passing in front of the TV, then through the kitchen and back through the living room, passing in front of the TV, through the kitchen, the living room, and then just as President Richard Nixon started crying Eric stopped in his tracks directly in front of the TV. There he stood just a few inches from the screen staring at the set mesmerized by Nixon.

“You pee on that TV and I’ll break both your God damn legs.” Dad said from the couch pointing at Eric with his cigar like he did whenever he was making a serious threat.

With that Eric sped off into the kitchen, dove up onto the top of his refrigerator box, which held him up for about a split second before caving in underneath him. As he fell into the box he was laughing hysterically. That was the last we saw of Francis the cat.



Today Eric is a family man and by all appearances seems to be well adjusted. So I asked him the question that's haunted me on and off for years. "Why were you Francis the cat?"

"It seemed like a good name for a cat." He answered.

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