

This is the story of how I both helped and failed a friend. All in the space of about sixty seconds, if that. There was this guy I met in county jail while awaiting trial for the crime which I am presently incarcerated. He was "Real Irish", straight off the boat. We'll call him Mick. He was not the kind of guy I usually gravitate towards. A big weight-lifter type, into MMA and physical fitness. We did however have something in common. We both liked to drink.

As a result, we found ourselves in prison, indirectly. Or, directly, depending on your point of view. His was a financial crime, facing federal charges for fraud. Mine was a more serious violent crime, The thing was, from the outside, the reverse would seem to be the case.

His whole background lent itself to a gangsterish ambience. His looks were enough to tell one what this guy was all about. Shaved head and tattooed, he looked and sometimes acted the part of a thug. Unfortunately, the fact that he was trying to change led to the incident I'll now relate.

During our time on the block, Mick and I attended church services together. This lead to the two of us getting together and reading the Big Book. A t the prison, all of the men were locked up for most of the day. Leaving the block was unusual. Boredom and high turnover sometimes lead to conflict. Prisoners coming and going. Those of us who stayed put found each other to pass the long days anyway we could.



We ate and played cards as well. Anything to kill the long hours. If you wanted, you could get a job. Spend more time out of the cell. I chose not to do this. Mick decided he would take one of the jobs. Every night, the cleaning crew would move all of the chairs to mop up. They were heavy, and Mick would flip them over to get underneath. He was not gentle about it. Flip, SMASH! All the way down the row. One of the other guys took exception to the noise. This particular guy had many bids under his belt and as a result was very touchy about "respect". He had approached Mick and warned him about the noise and how it bothered him. However, Mick did not feel he was doing anything wrong. The chairs had to be moved. End of story.

The argument simmered for a few days until finally, they had a confrontation. I was on the phone, downstairs. The two of them were on the top tier in front of Mick's cell. I noticed them talking and went on with my conversation. They did not have my full attention, but, I was attuned to the violent ~~environment~~ environment, always on alert, keeping my head on a swivel. At one point, I noticed the guy walk away and stop to tie his sneakers while Mick went back into his cell. My back was turned from the drama about to unfold. When I looked again, Mick was staggering out of his cell with the guy on his back, locked in a chokehold. To this day, I'll never know why he turned his back on this guy. I feel like he must have lost ~~of~~ his edge by going to Mass and A.A. or something. Guess I'll never really know.



Well, he fell to his knees, unconscious on the metal grate. I quickly ended my phone call as the fight took an ugly turn. Now the guy was stomping on Mick's head. I rushed across the floor to the stairs. The distance was like crossing a basketball court. Then, up the stairs. By the time I reached the top, it was over. The guy rushed past me down the stairs as I went to where Mick lay bleeding. I knelt to see if he was alive. There was that much damage. I knew better than to move him. He was face down on the walkway as I reached to see if there was any sign of life, anything that I could do for him. He groaned and moved a little bit.

As I checked him, I realized I faced a choice, raise the alarm by pressing the call button or yelling, or just get him up and into the cell. The guy had gone out to the rec-deck, long gone. I hesitated for just a second. I looked across the way to the other staircase and upper tier. There were about forty pairs of eyes looking at me, watching to see if I would "rat" and call the C.O. Another one of the guys that I knew caught my eye and slowly shook his head ~~to~~ side-to-side. They all knew what I was thinking. But, by now the cops had figured out that something was up. I made a decision. Mick was not dead. He was no longer in danger. If the guy had come back, I would have had to fight him. But I could not bring myself to call the C.O.

My cell was on the top tier as well. The alarm to tell us to "lock-in" sounded and I stood and slowly walked back around to my own cell. Help was coming anyway. By the time I got there, Micks cell mate was helping him to sit up, doing what I should have done. I just sat on my bunk and put my head in my hands. A matter of seconds. It wouldn't have mattered if I pushed the call button or not, in the grand scheme of things. I still feel like I let my friend down.