

A collage of US one hundred dollar bills, featuring the portrait of Benjamin Franklin. The bills are scattered and overlapping, with some showing serial numbers like HC 57790115 A and HC 57790114 A. The text "A WILDERNESS STORY (EXCERPT)" is overlaid at the top.

A WILDERNESS STORY (EXCERPT)

DATE *of* BIRTH

CHRIS WESLEY

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Date of Birth takes place approximately:

* 3 years before the events of the upcoming book
Like Clutching Faith.

Date of Birth is an excerpt from the First
Episode of Season One from *The Wilderness*.

Find out more at:

<https://www.chriswesley.com>

Caesar Trejo

The stink of Jack Daniels had choked its way completely up Caesar Trejo's nostrils before he realized he was handing the gun over to his intended victim. The man he was supposed to be robbing was wearing a suit and had been carrying a bagged bottle of Jack when Caesar and his two cousins corralled him into an alleyway that ran behind two rows of homes.

This was Caesar's first armed robbery and the older of his two cousins, Junior, gave their only gun, a revolver, to Caesar as his initiation to the fold. The Suit wasn't the least bit cooperative though. When they demanded his wallet, The Suit had thrown the bottle of booze at Caesar's feet and challenged Caesar to shoot him. When Caesar looked the question of what to do to his cousins, The Suit put out his right palm and commanded that Caesar give him the gun.

It was almost in The Suit's hand when the younger cousin, Rico grabbed for the gun complaining to Junior "I told you never to give the gun

to a rookie...", but The Suit made a play for the weapon too. Rico wasn't as close, or as fast. The Suit snatched the gun with his right hand, continued forward crashing into Caesar's chest with his shoulder knocking them both to the ground, but The Suit rolled once with the momentum, putting his legs beneath him and getting back to his feet while transferring the firearm into his left hand.

Junior stood still in shock and surprise of the chain of events, but Rico followed the gun and adjusted his course to keep after it even though it was now aimed in his direction. The Suit pulled the trigger as Rico closed in on him, right arm pulled back to punch him. The volume of the shot caused Caesar to roll over off his back and jump from his prone position to his hands and knees.

Glass from the broken Jack Daniel's bottle cut into him.

By the time Caesar's eyes found him, Rico was on the ground in front of him, arms crossed over his stomach, writhing in pain and cursing under short breaths. Junior was still standing in the same place with his hands held up above his

head. The Suit had backed up a few steps to put himself out of easy reach. Caesar slowly stood avoiding sudden movements as the gun swung in his direction. He held his hands up.

"Give me your wallets. Now!" The Suit demanded. He held the gun with both hands giving the impression that he knew how to use it properly. He walked sideways to his left, so the angle of his line of fire between Caesar and Junior was smaller. He moved slowly and made sure that he maintained proper balance to get off another shot accurately. He alternated his aim between them as he did this.

Junior shook his head, mute.

Caesar told the man they had left their wallets at home.

He didn't tell the man Rico had demanded that they do that in case things went south.

"I'll find out who you are through the news then." The Suit told them with a smirk. "They love to report on shootings." Then he shot Junior in the abdomen. Caesar jumped at the sound, but remained stoic. He knew no one would come to help them quickly. In these parts of

town, the cops took 10 minutes to come after the last shot was fired. Apparently, The Suit was either aware of that too or didn't care. He wasn't in a rush to leave.

"Finally. We have some alone time, me and you." The Suit said through a crazed grin. "Pointing a gun at people like me to take what I've worked for. No one takes what I own. No one." The Suit waited a moment and when Caesar remained quiet, added "Got that?"

"Yes, sir." Caesar said.

The Suit laughed. The mania behind it gave Caesar the chills.

The Suit asked "Do you like quotes? I do. I find that in times of trouble, they can be uplifting. Almost always there's something educational about them. Do you know any quotes?"

"No, sir."

"Every man should know quotes. It indicates good breeding and that's important in this world. Well, I'll give you one then to start you off. This one is from an unknown source, but I've always liked it. Reminds me of the Old West. You ever watch movies with cowboys in them?"

"When I was a boy, sir."

"Yeeeessss. I guess you're not a boy anymore. Can't be a boy and carry a gun, right? Anyhow, in those Old West movies, I always liked that certain scene in them that this quote reminds me of. Wanna take a guess what that quote might be?"

"Get out of town and don't look back?"

"No. That would be convenient for you though, wouldn't it? The quote goes 'nice men marry dancers, real men become dancers'. Since you're a man now. How about a dance?"

The Suit lowered the gun and let off a shot near Caesar's right foot. Caesar hopped onto his left.

"Seems you got a little talent there, huh? Dancing can be real hard on the feet though. Let's see how you do with some mileage on them." The Suit said.

He fired again.

Caesar jumped up from his left foot.

Another shot.

This one tore through Caesar's left foot and he fell down with a yell and grabbed his foot.

"Nooooooooo. I had such high hopes for you." The Suit yelled joyously and did a little jig around Caesar while he lay on the ground trying to staunch the bleeding.

Caesar closed his eyes against the pain and the realization he was probably going to die in the next few minutes. He thought of his parents who had worked so hard to keep him in private schools all of his life and how proud they were when he was accepted into Stanford University.

He was on Spring Break from his Junior year and against his dad's wishes, he went to visit the two cousins he was closest to. Neither of them had the privileges growing up that Caesar had and both had spent time in juvenile hall and jail, but on some level, the three had formed an easy bond as children that continued to this day.

The Suit stopped dancing around him and stood over Caesar, looked for witnesses or any other sign that he needed to flee, then crouched down next to Caesar and told him "I want you to live long enough for me to show you how

gangsters operate. I'm going to find out where you live, who you love and I'm going to hurt them. I'm going to teach you that people like you can never take what people like me possess. Maybe you'll know how to dance by the time I'm finished." Then The Suit poked Caesar in the head with the gun for each word as he continued. "I'm the predator here, not you." Without waiting for an answer, he raised himself up and kicked Caesar in the chest with another laugh.

In spite of the explosion of pain in his chest, Caesar kept pressure on his wound with both hands clutching his foot. He felt himself get turned over as the suit went through Caesar's pockets. Caesar was glad that Rico knew better than to carry identification on themselves.

While waiting for another blow, Caesar heard the hard tap of The Suit's dress shoes against the concrete move away from him. Caesar opened up an eye and saw The Suit adjusting his clothes as he walked out of the alley onto the sidewalk until he disappeared behind a brick wall.

Caesar looked in Rico's direction. He was still now with his back turned to him. Caesar called his name, but there was no answer. Junior was laying on his back, legs splayed in an awkward angle. Caesar pushed himself up to a seated position and looked at his foot.

That's when he realized that he still didn't hear sirens yet. Maybe I can escape before the cops show up, maybe my parents won't have to know about this after all, he thought to himself. He stuffed his mouth with the front of his hoodie, biting into it, then pulled the bandanna off of the top of his head as quickly as he could. He screamed into the mouth full of fabric as he tied the bandanna around the puncture.

Then, Caesar pulled the sleeves of his hoodie down over his hands to try and not leave clear finger or palm prints in the puddle of blood spreading under and near Rico and he crawled towards him. Thankfully, he was only a few feet away. Caesar could feel Rico's blood beginning to absorb into his clothes from off of the ground.

Caesar sat next to him and pulled Rico's

bandanna off of his head, then tied it around his own bandanna already soaked with blood before reaching into Rico's pocket to pull out the car keys.

He immediately began to crawl further down the alley.

A siren had just started as he got to Rico's 1968 Chevy Camaro SS three houses down the alley. He raised himself up to his knees just behind the driver's side door. His hand was shaking so bad, it took five tries before he sunk the key into the hole and unlocked the door.

As he pulled the key out of the door, the sound of the siren was joined by another. Caesar paused long enough to get a bearing on which direction the sirens were coming from, alternating the direction of his head and calculating using the difference in sound the way Rico had taught him. The alley ran East and West. One siren seemed to be coming from the North, the other from the East. Satisfied, he swung the car door all the way open, and put the keys to the car in the front pocket of his hoodie. He put his weight on his left knee, to

bring his right leg beneath him. Using his right leg for balance and push, he managed with effort to use both hands on the steering wheel to pull himself into the vehicle, turn and sit down in the driver's seat.

Inside the car, it was harder to tell which siren was getting dangerously close, but one of them was loud enough to make Caesar worry.

He put the key into the ignition, unlocked the steering wheel as he turned the key and gnashed his teeth in pain as the 454 Big Block engine growled into life. The vibration shot through where his left heel rested on the floorboard and rattled through his wound. He picked his left foot up to minimize the shaking, but it didn't help all that much and he needed to conserve his strength if he was going to live through this. He stuffed the front of his hoodie back into his mouth to bite into again and lowered his foot back to the floorboard.

A siren went quiet. They were now close enough to be driving slower with their spotlight on. According to Rico, the Police had figured out that the people closest to shots fired

in this neighborhood didn't want to be involved, so it was usually someone a block or two away who would call in gunfire.

From there, the Police had to work off of a radius from the caller's address to find the scene of the probable crime.

The Police always went silent once they reached the perimeter of their search area, slowing down and beginning a patterned hunt. Caesar put the car in gear and punched on the gas just long and hard enough to swing the door in close for him to catch and close it all the way.

The car was facing East, away from the bodies of his cousins. He pressed on the gas until he was going 25 miles an hour and let off of it, periodically tapping it to maintain speed and pulled out of the alleyway heading South without stopping to look for traffic.

There was another car on the street Caesar turned into, but he was a block away. The lights were too low to belong to a squad car so Caesar ignored it.

As he turned East again, he heard a Police

helicopter join the search. Caesar was trying to remain calm and keep in mind everything Rico had taught him.

When he wasn't hustling, Rico spent all his time studying the way the Police moved and reacted to the neighborhood crimes. Using various members of their family, who were spread amongst 12 houses in the area, he created procedures for evading the Police.

The second siren went quiet. Both police cars were lurking in close vicinity. Rico said once they went into stealth mode, the cops stopped speeding. This was partially due to a high speed chase without sirens three years ago that resulted in an elderly lady getting killed after a cop car she didn't hear coming slammed into her as she was backing out of her driveway.

The cops would still keep their lights flashing though, so Rico warned him to look at the dark places of homes and bushes near corners where the reflection of alternating red and blue lights might reveal a cop in the cross traffic coming his way. This rule especially applied when on foot.

He turned North onto Bleeker Street and in front of him was one of the cop cars coming his way, top lights spinning, search lights scanning front yards on both sides of the car for anything suspicious. The Police always road two in a car at night. There was one cross street between them with a stop sign.

Caesar pushed a little harder on the pedal, taking the car up to 40 miles an hour trying to make sure he reached the intersection first.

Dizziness set in without warning and for a moment the world blurred, but he came around in enough time to catch the name of the cross street as he approached it. It was Lemon, the street Junior lived on with his parents. All Caesar had to do was make a right at the stop sign and it would be another 800 feet to their property line on the left hand side of the street. He reached down to the cell phone Rico kept rubber banded to the gear shift during jobs and ran his fingers along the top of the key pad, then from the top left counted down and over to find and press the 6 key.

The phone had already been set up to send

a text message to an aunt who acted as a dispatch. She received the messages on her cell, then based on the number included in the text, she would call the appropriate family member to perform a specific function. Rico's system involved 14 members of their family and close friends in the neighborhood and he chose robbery locations based on who was available during the time of the job.

Caesar counted up and over to find the 'send' button, pressed it and kept up speed. The cops had already noticed him, no doubt, but they maintained their speed of probably 10 miles an hour, not wanting to take the wrong bait and miss anything in one of the yards.

Caesar put on his turn signal and reached the stop sign first, hoping that he could make his left hand turn before either of the cops had a good look at the blood on the side of the yellow Camaro under a streetlight or their searchlight.

The cop car was two houses away from the intersection when Caesar's car made its last push forward and jerk back to indicate a full stop.

Caesar counted.

One one-thousand.

Two two-thousand.

The Police car came to a stop, the driver's side searchlight turned in Caesar's direction. Caesar hoped there was no blood on his face. He knew he looked horrible, but he also knew that any gesture that might be considered hiding his identity was grounds for the Police to pull him over. When a cop shined his searchlight on you, even a casual shielding of the bright light from your eyes was considered probable cause.

Caesar pointed his face directly at the light while keeping his eyes averted, then made an obvious indication of checking the cross traffic and pulled into the intersection cutting his wheels early to put his own headlights in the cop's eyes.

Caesar completed the shallow turn and watched in his rear view mirror as the cop car pulled in behind him, most likely running his plates.

Caesar kept the car at 25 miles per hour.

Rico said the car was registered to one of their cousins who was in Rico's system, but he was only used for diversionary purposes, so he was never arrested. This kept the plates clean.

Two gun shots sounded.

Caesar resisted the urge to step heavily on the gas and looked into his rearview mirror instead.

Another gun blast sounded.

From his rear view mirror, Caesar watched the silhouetted heads of both cops looking in different directions trying to figure out where the shots were coming from, then they made a U-Turn and headed West.

They wouldn't find the source of the shooting though. It was Junior's dad shooting his Desert Eagle into the air from his back yard after receiving the text message from 'dispatch' that Rico's phone called in a diversion.

Even in his hazed state, Caesar was amazed at the system Rico had developed and was in the process of testing for larger, more lucrative jobs.

Caesar's destination was three minutes away, but he made it there without further incident

and honked the horn as he pulled into the house's driveway.

The Street Surgeon's two teenaged boys came out of the house, one from the front door, the other from the side of the house, guns trained on the car and approached the Camaro.

The Street Surgeon had turned his home into a mini-emergency room for clients who needed gun and knife wounds treated without the paperwork and attention a hospital would bring to their activities.

It didn't matter to anyone that he made this choice after losing his medical license to malpractice.

Caesar told the two teenagers what they needed to hear and got his first response emergency medical service inside the house. Caesar had hoped The Street Surgeon would be able to save his foot, but the damage was too extensive. One of the teens dropped Caesar off at the nearest emergency room where they performed an ankle level amputation.

Caesar took a leave from college to heal and go through physical therapy.

He also stopped participating in any of the illegal activity that his family was involved in.

Actually, most of the cousins and uncles did without Rico to lead them.

To Caesar's relief, the deaths of Rico and Junior were taken hard, but no one in the family blamed Caesar. It was the nature of the business and it was The Suit that they wanted to punish.

Since Caesar had to go to the hospital, he knew that he left a trail that The Suit would be able to follow if he were determined enough, so he told his family of the threat The Suit made and they all waited, prepared for a fight that never seemed to come.

When Caesar returned to college, he did so at a less prestigious school closer to home and finished off his undergrad degree in Business. He didn't have the flair for creative analysis that Rico had, but he was close enough to understand a lot of the principles Rico had taught him and Caesar was adept at performing under pressure.

He moved up through the ranks at Hirsch

Media Corporation and moved his mom and dad out of the neighborhood he lost his foot in, to a place without a lot of crime and gang activity.

He was Ad Director for the Magazine *Impression* when he got the call on his cell from one of his uncles that one of Caesar's favorite aunts had been killed in a convenience store robbery. She wasn't one of the robbers, his uncle was quick to add. She just happened to be there, or at least that's what it had seemed until the uncle had gone through her purse to report anything stolen to the cops and found a note addressed to Caesar.

The night that turned everything sideways was 12 years ago, but Caesar could hear the voice of the person who wrote it.

It read, "Caesar. Have you learned to dance yet?"

(to be continued inside The Wilderness...)

Date of Birth continues the glimpse into The Wilderness begun with *Regret In Triptych*. The Wilderness is a transmedia storyworld looking into the charged nature of the human condition and the different ways it affects our relationships, both with ourselves and one another.

Join Caesar Trejo and other personalities from The Wilderness as they strive towards fulfillment and struggle with their respective places in life, love, career and family. Their stories will be told through my upcoming books, short stories, poetry, visual art, music releases and live shows.

For more info, visit: www.chriswesley.com

About the Author

Chris Wesley was eight years old, the first time he caught the attention of a crowd with his storytelling. Seven children stood captivated as Chris told of the time when the family's pet Doberman Pinscher became engaged in a horrendous fight with his father, ending with his dad killing the dog with a knife. It was fifteen minutes long and a lie. But then, fiction is like that.

Since that day, Chris has written music reviews and a music business column for Night Moves Magazine, acted in independent movies and plays; wrote, cast, directed, shot and edited an independent short movie, started bands and gone solo. He's generally been what some politely call "a wise guy". That means he says things, he probably should have kept to himself. He does this often. But then, smart asses are like that.

He is the creator of The Wilderness, a transmedia storyworld where he gets to write fiction, say things he shouldn't, create visual art and record music that the radio would likely poop on if given the chance. He has fun with this. But then, independents are like that.