

## **The Sit Down 1986 Excerpt One**

I gave myself a fifty-fifty chance of getting out alive.

These were, after all, outfit guys. You've got to understand, in New York they say "wiseguys," but in Chicago it's "outfit guys." Nobody but nobody in Chicago calls himself a wiseguy. It's a dead giveaway that you're from out of town. Technically it was just a "sit-down," meaning a clear-the-air/sort-things-out meeting with outfit guys I trusted – and who trusted me.

But this was a convince-or-get-killed deal, and I knew it. They did too – no matter the lie they told to guarantee I showed up: "Hey we jus wanna talk." But what were my options? Run and keep looking over my shoulder the rest of my life? Maybe my father Mario could do that. Funny that I was named after him. I'm Johnny Costello, Jr., but ever since I was sixteen or seventeen I referred to my father by his stage name. We were never close. I couldn't have called him "dad" or "father" even if he'd wanted me to. You see, my father had, let us say, "misappropriated" 250K in outfit money. That's right – outfit money. What kind of outfit guy scams other outfit guys out of a quarter-million dollars? Meet Mario Casini. He scammed the money from a mob-connected bookmaker who had pooled together some outfit guys for my father's "investment opportunity." He'd convinced the bookie that he needed the money to produce a movie about serial killer John Wayne Gacy – and everyone was going to make a bundle of cash! That worked because Gacy was all anybody talked about those days, especially in Chicago where the murders took place. A natural for a movie, right? And somehow, someway and over a long period of time, he convinced the outfit guys that Hollywood wanted him to produce it. He said they wanted "realism." Who better to give it to them than a street-smart native Chicagoan who was an outfit associate and knew everybody in town?

One of the people my father knew was Gacy's lawyer – they were friends. A relationship providing him additional credibility. Everybody was well aware that eventually someone would make some kind of a movie about this animal. You wouldn't believe how many streetwise guys fell for my father's scam. He kept telling his outfit "investors" that filming would start as soon as he'd "accumulated enough capital to begin production." That was his classic line. Sounded like he knew what he was talking about. And they'd be "co-producers."

In a word they were hooked – that is until popular [Chicago](#) [newsman John “Bulldog” Drummond](#), known for his investigative reporting on Chicago Organized Crime, unwittingly uncovered the scam. Drummond and well-known journalist Bill Kurtis exposed the story on the local news, focusing on the local businessmen my father took down and going on the assumption that my father was working with the Chicago outfit on the scam. But neither Drummond nor Kurtis realized the mob had also been victimized by my father. The mob investors knew it only too well. Beaten out of their money, scammed like some clueless “mark.” But where was my father? Who knew? Not here. Probably got the hell out of town just in time. And with him gone, so far as the outfit guys were concerned, this left just one question: “Was the kid involved?” Not a chance. Though I’m not sure I myself would have believed I had nothing to do with it. And I’m supposed to convince them of that fact. And even if I did succeed in convincing them, who was to say that they wouldn’t make an example of me so others don’t get bright ideas.

[Chicago](#) [newsman John “Bulldog” Drummond 1986 News Reel:](#)

<https://youtu.be/flRVX7hty6I>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAzAWIVNI2o&feature=youtu.be>

## **THE ROAST 2011 EXCERPT 2**

It wasn’t long after my father’s death that I came up on the half-century mark and Janell threw me a 50th birthday bash.

She’d done this kind of thing in the past. Like my fortieth birthday at the Amazon restaurant and for drinks afterward at the Barfly on Sunset. That was the first time my worlds collided on a grand scale. Bikers, mobsters and boxers coming up against actors, businessmen and other more genteel sorts. I would personally have preferred to keep these worlds separate but had no say regarding the guest-list since it had been a surprise party. I guess the highlight was when two Vagos bikers, under orders from International President Terry “The Tramp” Orrendorf, escorted me to the men’s room at Barfly and made everyone exit, including one of my corporate friends and the attendant handing out paper towels and mints, who himself was instructed to keep others out until we were done. Try pissing in comfort while two gigantic outlaw bikers stand guard on either side of your urinal.

“A bit much don’t you think guys?”

“The Tramp said to make sure you had a good time with no problems.”

I hoped that’d be the case this time around for my 50th. We had security at the door and I’d even considered a metal detector – but finally decided against it since I didn’t want to alarm my guests. Ten years on, the genteel crowd had grown in number. Not only actors and company executives but bestselling authors, high-profile lawyers, doctors and politicians as well as local news and radio personalities. A couple Playboy playmates thrown into the mix. Several high-school and college friends. But the non-genteel side of the equation – the assorted thugs and criminals – hadn’t grown any less. Despite all those who’d landed in jail or ended up dead in the intervening decade. There were some days when I’d wake up more than mildly surprised that I wasn’t among their number.

Our 100-foot long pool had temporary scaffolding in its middle supporting a dance floor painted with JOHNNY’S 50TH in big block letters. DJ Crash, who did a lot of Hugh Hefner’s parties, was stationed mid-pool behind the elevated jacuzzi and squarely above the bronze lion’s head affixed to the jacuzzi’s wall, which usually had a waterfall streaming down it but which we’d of course turned off for the event. There was enough liquid flowing that evening – plenty of booze as well as Italian food catered by my restaurateur friend Johnny Nardone, and after the feasting my wife made her way to the microphone. Okay, they have to sing Happy Birthday, let’s get that out of the way. Instead she announced that there would be a series of speakers and then introduced Scott Baio who came to the mic and beckoned me to take a seat in a chair he placed next to the microphone. Oh shit, I thought, how about that nice round of Happy Birthday! I took my seat and as expected Scott tore into me – in the nicest possible way of course – skewering me through a comic recounting of my life’s more memorable episodes. After Scott’s monologue he acted as MC by introducing one speaker after the next, DJ Crash playing personalized music for each as they approached the mic, and it turned into an hour of unmitigated ball-breaking.

Mainly because there was so much material to work with.

After this lambasting I sat back down with my drink. Earlier in the evening I had been going from table to table, greeting and joking with my guests, but now I was content to just sit back and take it all in. And in so doing I felt something missing. Something within me. Something that had long been there but was now strangely absent.

**Actor Writer: Scott Baio roast Johnny Costello**

<https://youtu.be/eT97mIdsvwU>