

Soon after this conversation, I heard that T-Bone had been arrested. He was eventually convicted of trafficking narcotics and sentenced to more than ten years in prison. His prompt transfer to an out-of-state prison fueled speculation that he was testifying against his peers to get a reduced sentence. I tried every avenue I could think of, but I had no luck reaching T-Bone. I eventually heard that he had died in prison, and he became celebrated in death for never having cooperated with the police to sell out other gang members.

For a time I thought that J.T. and I might remain close even as our worlds were growing apart. "Don't worry," I told him, "I'll be coming back all the time." But the deeper I got into my Harvard fellowship, the more time passed between my visits to Chicago, and the more time passed between visits, the more awkward J.T. and I found it to carry on our conversations. He seemed to have grown nostalgic for our early days together, even a bit clingy. I realized that he had come to rely on my presence; he liked the attention and the validation.

I, meanwhile, grew evasive and withdrawn—in large part out of guilt. Within just a few months at Harvard, I began making a name for myself in academia by talking about the inner workings of street gangs. While I hoped to contribute to the national discussion on poverty, I was not so foolish as to believe that my research would specifically benefit J.T. or the tenant families from whom I'd learned so much.

As demolition became a reality, and as J.T.'s gang continued to fall apart, so did our relationship. When I told him that I'd been offered