

# ***The Forfeited Helm:***

**Restoring Police Leadership, Rejecting Politics,  
and Reclaiming Our Streets**



John de Haas

*“Policing is not a political tool.*

*It is a public service grounded in constitutional authority,  
community trust and professional standards.*

*Yet too often, law enforcement decisions are shaped not by data  
or operational need but by political pressure, media optics or  
campaign agendas.*

*That’s not just dangerous — it’s unsustainable.”*

- Chief (ret.) Tom Weitzel

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# Prologue

*“Nobody likes to be found out . . .  
Any autobiographer, therefore, at least between the lines,  
spars with his reader and potential judge.”*

– Erik Erikson

A 911 call from a Hell’s Angel member, a group known for involvement in organized crime, provided one of the most unexpected experiences of my police career. This ‘angel’ had provoked another gang member, and his life was now in mortal danger. He demanded that the police attend immediately because he trusted the police would come and protect him. Ironically, while this hardened criminal had, through experience, learned the ethics and efficacy of the police, the general public, who had little direct contact with the police, was becoming increasingly skeptical of police integrity and performance.

In recent years, policing has faced relentless criticism, including accusations of racism, brutality, and lack of accountability, causing many people to question their continued faith in the police. To restore and maintain public trust in the police and ensure effective law enforcement, this book explores what needs to be done.

To find solutions, it is crucial to understand the current situation as shaped by the past. Therefore, before considering the future of policing, this book shares my experiences and lessons learned over a four-decade police career. What knowledge can I offer beyond TV shows like *The Rookie*, *Law & Order*, or *Will Trent*? For starters, my stories are actual firsthand accounts. They come from my times as a Vancouver Police Department recruit, rookie, veteran, union president, supervisor, and manager. They provide real-life, personal insights into the genuine challenges of policing and, therefore, help in considering the best way forward.

Initially, speaking out felt overwhelming. I spent forty years in an organization where we didn’t talk publicly about police incidents or workplace experiences. Commentary was only through official channels. Over the decades, it has been frustrating to view the media’s distortion of police actions. Having left policing behind, only to witness more misleading stories, I finally saw a door open. No longer encumbered by department restrictions, it felt important to speak out.

That moment happened while I was watching the evening news. A woman from a visible minority group was criticizing police interactions with her adult son. From her perspective, the encounter contained overt and unjustified racism. She questioned whether the officers knew the terrible impact of arresting her claimed innocent, vulnerable son. The reporter’s lead-in and closing remarks were intentionally inflammatory. Rather than calmly communicating the facts,

he portrayed the occurrence as another ‘possible’ abuse of power, injustice, or crisis of confidence in the police. This contrived drama was part of a pattern of media exaggeration and sensationalism aimed at attracting larger audiences and increasing advertising revenue. I was angry because, over many years, this trend damaged public perceptions of the police through regular allegations of incompetence and misconduct. These inaccurate portrayals fuelled damaging political reactions. But it was more than the distorted news reports that were aggravating me. In recent years, several disturbing ideas about policing appeared in the media.

One was the foolishness of those who called for ‘defunding’ the police. The idea of reducing police resources was frightening. A reduction in police presence in our troubled society would lead to dire consequences. The advocates of defunding were grossly underinformed about what the police do to keep our communities safe, had imaginary solutions to complex social problems, or were engaged in a dangerous anarchist ideology.

It was equally disturbing when the elected Vancouver School Board expelled the school liaison officers in response to vocal citizens who had issues over their own reactions when seeing a police uniform. These individuals had undoubtedly passed on their paranoia to their children. The school board yielded to, or perhaps even shared, those sentiments. The board’s lack of wisdom left me flabbergasted. What about the violence, drug dealing, and gang recruitment that occur in our schools? It demonstrated how little these trustees knew or cared about what was happening in the very schools they were mandated to govern.

Then there was the years-long turf war between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Surrey Police Service over who would police the City of Surrey. Driving the feud were politicians who pretended to care about policing and to know what was best. These elected officials had no idea what the policing challenges were or how to address them. It was astounding that the essential role of policing was even kicked around as a political football.

And for the first time, the Vancouver Police Union involved itself in politics by publicly endorsing candidates in local elections. Clearly, the union had observed the negative impacts of the incumbent mayor and council on policing in Vancouver and the ongoing chaos in Surrey. It now sought to sway the election outcome. In doing so, it compromised the integrity of police neutrality and independence, blurring the proper separation between policing and political turmoil.

Another troubling commentary was the distorted portrayal of a simple arrest of an Indigenous man and his granddaughter by two Asian Vancouver police officers. The media framed the incident as police racism and a brutal handcuffing procedure. Editorial writers produced a stream of underinformed critiques and solutions. In response, the civilian Vancouver Police Board established a new policy, as if they possessed some unique wisdom beyond that of the police themselves. Once again, I perceived policing being exploited as media sensationalism, which sparked a political reaction.

One of the strongest motivators to speak out was the province's civilian Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) making media statements about investigations into relationships between officers. The alleged events had nothing to do with police duties and were far beyond the OPCC's mandate. Their usual stance was that 'maybe' some unacceptable behaviour was involved. The complexities of private relationships or personal trauma were neither acknowledged nor given the privacy they deserved. I was especially appalled when the suicide of a thirty-year-old Asian female Vancouver police officer was thrown into the public arena as if it were cheap tabloid fodder. Her distraught family had their emotionally charged views presented as facts and alleged injustices. Of her intimate relationships over the years, two were unfairly portrayed as part of a story involving amoral, powerful, higher-ranking, White policemen exploiting her. Absolute rubbish. I knew those two officers well. In that situation, once again, the commissioner appointed a chief constable as the discipline authority, who, based on prior incidents, I believed was inclined to overlook facts and shred officers' reputations and careers as if they were disposable. By then, I was already appalled by the OPCC's ethics and actions, as well as those of its collaborators. I was furious they were continuing their game unchallenged. Adding to my anger was a great deal of guilt for supporting the creation of the OPCC, but more on that later.

Yet another reason I felt compelled to speak out was my disgust at the announcements of investigations by the Independent Investigations Office (IIO), the province's second police 'watchdog' agency, which primarily investigates possible criminal offences by the police. They also pursued the 'perhaps' storyline and looked at whatever incidents they could lay their hands on. The IIO shared several of my critiques of the OPCC: pretending to be more principled than police officers, implying the police couldn't or wouldn't objectively investigate other officers, and publicly portraying policing unfavourably before facts were known and properly considered.

And finally, there was my disdain for the regular webinars, podcasts, articles, and social media posts that contained views from polarized advocacy groups, critics, academics, and politicians about what was wrong with policing and what had to happen to it. Most of these sources had no police experience, did not understand policing, and knew little about police organizations, police culture, or change management. Similarly, the government-ordered reviews and inquiries over the years, one after another, involved some chairperson or commissioner who, after reviewing 'evidence' from witnesses, claimed to have astounding insights into policing. The media and politicians treated their recommendations as gospel. These individuals frequently became keynote speakers at events, espousing their self-proclaimed wisdom and outlining a supposed path to flawless policing. Police chiefs typically said they would consider these proposals carefully, and then rightfully ignored them as out-of-touch nonsense. Nonetheless, police leaders neither took ownership of, contributed to, nor led discussions about policing's challenges and necessary improvements.

That evening, as I sat on the sofa taking in the news, these thoughts coalesced into a critical mass. There was a sense of gravity that demanded a response. Over the next few days, I

considered what I should write about. To begin, for readers without a background in policing, I wanted to share a few stories from the front lines. I hoped to provide an unvarnished glimpse into policing through the eyes of one officer. I also hoped to show what it was like working within the police department's culture. Most importantly, I sought to capture experiences that shaped my beliefs about threats to policing's success. I have placed this content within the context of changing times, policing trends, and the unfolding of my career. With this material, I endeavoured to provide a better understanding of the issues facing policing today. That led to the closing discussion regarding what needs to be done for policing to succeed in the future.

The question arises: are there truths in my memories and judgments, or are they simply personal perceptions? Here is an answer I believe makes sense: the lens through which each of us perceives, evaluates, and feels what is happening was shaped in our early years through what we were taught and experienced. Therefore, we might live through the same event but have different memories, feel different emotions, and form different understandings of what occurred. We often build distinct personal stories of what was true in the past. The lenses through which I perceived, judged, and reacted to the police department, individuals, and events during my police career were deeply influenced by my parents. My father grew up in the Netherlands and my mother in Germany, in the relatively peaceful post-World War I period. However, Germany became politically unstable following the 1929 worldwide economic depression, which compounded the harsh effects of the Treaty of Versailles imposed at the end of the war. This turmoil paved the way for the rise of National Socialism, known as Nazism. Germany descended into darkness. Democracy vanished, freedoms were extinguished, and neighbours turned against each other. The values that had upheld human decency were shattered and replaced with barbarism. My parents' world turned into a nightmare of fear and suffering. The Nazi takeover marked a collapse of the social order and the destruction of moral principles. Ignited by the Nazis, World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. By the end, tens of millions had died, and Europe lay in ruins. In the shadow of one of history's most malevolent chapters, I grew up during the 1950s and 1960s. I was taught that there were social belief systems, or 'isms,' those collective ways of meaning-making, believing, feeling, and behaving, that profoundly affect the world, my family, and me. I became hypersensitive to others' underlying motivations and ethics, as well as to the visible and sometimes not-so-visible social currents around me. So, I can't claim that my version of what I observed and how I felt about it during my police career represents independent, objective facts about what occurred. This book is not a scholarly, empirical third-party analysis. It is my personal account of events I experienced as a sworn police officer with the Vancouver Police Department. I recall these instances as profound and memorable, and several I perceive as exposing systemic difficulties. The reader can decide what in my story is fact and what is fiction.

But my story is not just about me and the issues I saw. It is a call to consider our future together, whether policing and its values will be clear and secure enough to uphold human dignity, communal civility, and personal safety. Before we delve into those weighty issues, let's start at the beginning.

## **I. The Road to Policing**

*“We see the world, not as it is, but as we are  
—or, as we are conditioned to see it.”*

– Stephen R. Covey

# CHAPTER 1

## Drawn to make a safer world

Growing up, I initially saw the military as a means for good to prevail over evil. At eighteen and still in high school, I joined the nearest Army Reserve unit as a private. It was a Provost Corps military police unit that operated within a brigade group behind the front lines. With the anti-establishment sentiment of the 1960s and the rising mantra of ‘peace,’ being in the military seemed out of step with the times. Nevertheless, I stayed in the unit for a few years while attending university. During the summers, I worked full-time as a military policeman. Over time, I was promoted to Corporal and then to Sergeant.

In 1973, I graduated from the University of British Columbia. A few months later, in April 1974, I was recruited as a Regular Force infantry Lieutenant. I exchanged my apartment for a barracks with thirty men undertaking officer basic training. At that time, the Canadian Armed Forces faced societal disinterest and political neglect. Recruiting and retention were so poor that the military struggled to fill vacancies, let alone fulfill its many mandates. As a young person, I could not envision a future for myself in the army. After one year of service, I resigned.

Nonetheless, the core of what I have learned about leadership comes from my time in the army. The military stressed the need for forward-focused, highly sophisticated leadership. Mediocre leadership not only leads to failure on the battlefield; it also results in layers of collateral death, destruction, and suffering. In the military, leadership development was taken extremely seriously, with extensive career-long learning. Along with the formal instruction in methods and skills, there was a deep-rooted leadership culture. Respect was earned through acquiring knowledge, maintaining fitness, caring for others, and being selfless. There were also supporting customs, such as at a common meal, the senior ranks only ate after all the lower ranks had been served. Our leadership responsibilities included: understanding what was happening, setting goals, thinking strategically, refining tactics, outlining roles, building unity, defining values, developing personnel, and acting with clarity, innovation, and resolve. In the army, I learned that effective leadership is highly principled, requires great competence, is upheld by tradition, and calls for courageous action.

Having abandoned my aspirations for a military career, I eventually considered a career in policing. Several of my Army Reserve friends had joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), so I decided to apply as well. However, I was one-quarter inch below the RCMP’s height requirement. Surely, they would round up? I had a degree, military police experience, and had served as an army officer. Despite all that, they sent me an impersonal, bureaucratic letter stating I failed to meet the minimum height standard, which ended the application process.

Sometime after my rejection, the media reported that to help recruit women, the RCMP had revised the female height requirement to four inches shorter than for men. The RCMP explained that this was because women, on average, were shorter than men. I wrote up my thoughts that this standard discriminated not only against men but especially against ethnicities where people were shorter. I sent the letter to my member of parliament and to a television current affairs show. The show's serious interest surprised me. Not long after that, I received a letter from the RCMP. It appeared that my member of parliament had forwarded my correspondence to them. The RCMP had located my previous application. They stated that the following April, I might wish to reapply, as entry standards were being revised. Indeed, height requirements were removed. I reapplied and was accepted. Another change was the introduction of a first-come, first-served list. The result was that my wait time to the Depot training facility in Regina would be about a year. If I were to join policing, I wished to be in British Columbia, but at that time, RCMP members were not posted back to their home province. I also did not want to be a police officer in some small, remote Canadian community. I wanted to do what I perceived as big city policing on the front lines in my home city of Vancouver.

The city police held a special place in my heart. The British Empire and Commonwealth Games were hosted in Vancouver in 1954, when I was a child. I recall watching a bicycle race where a cyclist fell, struck a fire hydrant, and lay on the ground, injured. A tall police officer in a dark uniform approached, and everything felt safe as we waited for an ambulance. I saw these large, confident keepers of order at other events, such as the annual Pacific National Exhibition parade. The motorcycle police were especially impressive. Later, I met several city police officers who were in my Army Reserve unit. One was a motorcycle officer, and sometimes during parade evenings, he would attend for a while during his shift. The police radio on the motorcycle parked outside the Military Police guardhouse chattered constantly as the department broadcast calls and dispatched officers. Vancouver was unquestionably a big city with serious policing incidents. While on vacation, I observed the Mounties driving calmly in small, quiet communities, and so I came to view the two agencies very differently.

The challenge for me was that the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) had a higher height requirement than the RCMP's had been. Nevertheless, having been accepted by the RCMP, it was worth a try. My background seemed somewhat interesting to the VPD, at least enough for an interview. There I was, sitting nervously in a chair in front of a broad, imposing desk, being asked questions by a stern human resources staff sergeant. He didn't appear at all impressed by me. Well into the interview, he asked, "Have you ever applied to any other police department?" I replied that I had, mentioning I was on the waiting list for training at Depot with the RCMP. Frowning, the staff sergeant read my acceptance letter, then suddenly stood up and left the room. As I sat there concerned, I overheard talking and then laughter in the adjoining room. Moments later, the staff sergeant returned, accompanied by an inspector. The two bantered with me about "stealing another one from the Mounties." The interview was effectively over. In

an instant, it seemed I had become one of them. Height was never brought up. All they inquired about was when I could do the medical exam and the fitness test.

Not long after, at age twenty-eight, I started my police career. Along with a few other recruits, I was sworn in as a police officer by Chief Constable Don Winterton in his office at the Vancouver Police headquarters building. It was the summer of 1978.

## **II. The Frontline Policing Years**

*“You can’t connect the dots looking forward,  
you can only connect them looking backwards.”*

– Steve Jobs

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Recruit Constable 549 – BC Police Academy (1978–1979)**

As recruits, we spent our first week at the police department being oriented and equipped before beginning the initial three-month Block 1 training module at the BC Justice Institute Police Academy. We were a small group of middle-class men in our twenties, all but one of us White. We were full of energy, anticipation, and naivety. To the organization and the public, we were no longer individuals; we had become police officers. A multitude of perceptions, biases, and constraints immediately descended on us, the extent of which I did not at first understand. Even friends suddenly acted differently once they learned I was a police officer. It was a new form of separation. They knew me, yet they began treating me as if they no longer did.

An unusual aspect of policing in those days was that we were to be depersonalized. The first indication was that each of us was assigned a unique, though recycled, constable identification number. Mine was 549. That number was on my wallet badge, hat badge, and metal insignia, which I wore on the epaulets of my cloth tunic. It was on fabric strips sewn onto my shirts and my nylon jacket's breast pocket. I was told never to give my name to anyone demanding it on the street. I was to identify myself only as Constable 549 of the Vancouver Police Department. Furthermore, in an era of landline phones and phone books containing addresses, we were encouraged to obtain unlisted phone numbers. Gradually, I recognized I was now seen as an impersonal cog in a large criminal justice machine.

For many years, the Vancouver Police Department operated its police academy at HMCS Discovery, a federal Navy Reserve building at Coal Harbour in Stanley Park. Shortly before I was hired, the province had standardized and centralized the training of all municipal police at a provincial police academy, part of the new BC Justice Institute. A large, purpose-built campus was under construction in New Westminster. Meanwhile, the police academy was temporarily located in Vancouver's West Point Grey neighbourhood, in the vacated building complex on the expansive grounds of what was once a provincial residential school for deaf and blind children. We enjoyed the abandoned school with its yellow-tiled hallways, child-sized classrooms, and covered outside play area, now used as a parade square. This situation reflected the provincial government's efforts to improve municipal police training. The message was clear: the provincial government owned policing and was implementing necessary changes.

I didn't tell the RCMP that I was with the VPD. I believed I still had many months before going to Depot, and what if the VPD didn't work out? Then, one day at the academy, I was listening to a lecture when the class supervisor came to the door and called me into the hallway. In a serious tone, he told me I was to report immediately to the inspector at VPD Human

Resources in the VPD Headquarters building. My mind raced. What was this about? Had they finally figured out I was too short? Were they letting me go? Rattled, I drove to headquarters. It seemed the RCMP had contacted my last employer to advise that I was to go to Depot much sooner than expected, only to be informed I was now with the VPD, which they contacted VPD Human Resources to confirm.

Seated behind his desk, the inspector looked at me, paused, and then, with gravitas, as if I were guilty of some deception, asked me about my actual plans. Sheepishly, I explained that I intended to stay with the VPD, but just had not yet informed the RCMP. He mentioned that he had been a Mountie and insisted I was entirely welcome to go with them. He repeated several times “Go if you want to.” He was oddly persistent, to the point that I felt the need to persuade him that I didn’t want to go. As time passed, I wondered if he was upset that I had not cancelled the RCMP and was telling me to go. Maybe I was being pushed out of the VPD. Was I not understanding his message? Determined to stay, I persisted until, after quite a few exchanges, he stopped. “Okay,” he said, “then get back to the academy.” Feeling I had won a tough fight, I left with a huge sigh of relief and immediately wrote to the RCMP, closing that door.

Compared to the army, police training was much more relaxed. It was eight-hour days from Monday to Friday, with good food, a comfortable bed at home each night, and polite people. Some instructors tried to be authoritarian, but I quickly realized that police culture was not even para-military or quasi-military. It was pseudo-military, a facade. The harsh demands of combat shaped army culture. Policing did not involve those extreme realities. In policing, there was no sense of being entirely disposable, no need for unquestioned obedience, no deliberately imposed physical and mental fatigue to test whether decisions remained sound and leadership provided to others.

Our academy class did, however, have a corporal in charge of us with a military background. He was solidly built, clean-shaven, and wore his uniform immaculately. He soon had us functioning on the parade square in a reasonably coordinated manner. The corporal was admired and respected, becoming our trusted guide and mentor. There was invariably a problem, however, when one consumed liquor with one’s leader. Late in that first block of training, on a Friday after classes, we all went for drinks in the safety of the police personnel-only licensed bar operated by the Vancouver Police Union, curiously named the Police Athletic Club. Late in the binge, my good judgment faded away. I detected our corporal alone in a lounge chair, eyes shut. Inebriated, I went over to him, got down on my knees, and whispered in his ear. “You are nothing but a jam tart.” Many times, this had been his derisive appraisal, shouted at us raw recruits. One eye opened, looked at me, then shut again, and the night carried on. The following Monday morning, we formed up, standing at attention outside on the playground parade square, waiting for his arrival. I was pretty nervous about whether he would remember my comment. Suddenly, the building door slammed open. “Where is de Haas?” Oh, he remembered. He marched up to me and glared. All he said was, “Thirty push-ups!” “Yes, Corporal.” I dropped to the tarmac and started pumping them out. I heard him walking away, and I worried how badly

my shiny boot toes would suffer as they ground into the concrete. But that was the end of it. That is how it was done in the military. Indiscretion led to consequences, then life carried on. I knew nothing personal was involved. It was about discipline and clarity of who was in charge of whom. I remember that corporal with the utmost respect.

At the academy, during the three-month Block 1 training, we learned the basics—statute law, case law, policies, evidence collection and processing, how to take statements, procedures, techniques, paperwork, and use of force. We shot our handguns, practiced car chase skills, and role-played nearly every possible situation. We absorbed the knowledge and acquired the skills needed to respond to troubling events on Vancouver’s streets and in its homes. We gained a clear understanding that our role was to restore and maintain order. Ultimately, we had to prevail, or chaos and brutality would. Our duties would often involve gathering evidence and enforcing laws. If criminal charges were pursued, it would be Crown counsel who evaluated the evidence, deciding if it was sufficient and if the case was in the ‘public interest’ to be taken before a court. A judge would decide whether a crime had been committed and what actions to take with the offender. We also learned about our exceptional legal powers of detention, search, seizure, arrest, and use of force, which were to be used only as required to accomplish our duties. All our actions and inactions would be scrutinized to ensure they were proper. We were also cautioned that the training we received was finite, while the situations we would face daily would be dynamic and rarely fit neatly into the scripted training scenarios. Therefore, we would be expected to apply critical thinking, principled judgments, experiential learning, adaptability, and discretion. By the completion of that first round of training, the complexity and accountability of the police profession seemed deeply serious and profoundly daunting.

After the Block 1 training, we moved on to the second of five phases, three months of on-the-road training. It was my first exposure to actual police work. In this Block 2 period, we worked with field trainers to gain hands-on experience that would provide context for the subsequent academy materials. There I was, in a real police car, with its blue-and-white paint job, two red-and-blue rotating lights on a roof rack, and a police radio. It was the real thing, circa 1978. The operational uniform of the day included navy-blue pants, a short Eisenhower-style tunic, and black Oxford shoes. We also wore a navy-blue clip-on tie - so no one could choke us, and a peaked hat. We were indoctrinated that on the streets and at calls, hats and ties were to be worn at all times, without question. There was a fervent belief that department discipline, public confidence in the police, and social order would all fall apart if officers didn’t wear their hats or ties. Back then, we also wore a wide black leather duty belt with a holster on the side. It held a .38 revolver loaded with six bullets. To keep the gun hidden from the public, the holster had a large flap that covered most of the weapon. On the opposite left side of the belt was a set of handcuffs in a leather case, with a small pouch built onto the case above them, holding six additional bullets, all in a row. Reloading a revolver under stress was difficult enough, but pulling the extra rounds out of that tight pouch was almost impossible. Each patrol car, whether it had one or two officers, was assigned one portable radio, and so, sometimes a radio pouch was

attached to the belt. Back then, that was all we had. We were primarily expected to rely on our authority and presence. If those didn't work, we were to use physical force as necessary.

I spent six weeks downtown with my first field trainer. A memorable moment was meeting Superman. One Halloween weekend evening, my trainer and I were in the entertainment zone. He had parked the police cruiser by the curb outside a nightclub we were visiting for a liquor-license compliance check. The sidewalks were crowded with club-goers. As I stepped out of the passenger door, a male in a Superman costume jogged down the sidewalk toward us. When he saw the police car, he stopped a few yards away and, standing tall, placed his hands on his hips. In an earnest voice, he asked me, "Everything alright tonight, officer?" I replied, "Yes, everything is in order, Superman!" Pleased, he stated, "Excellent! Keep up the good work!" and thrust his right arm forward as if to fly off, then continued jogging away down the sidewalk. It was great to know we were not alone - we had a superhero with us that evening.

I spent another six weeks in the southeast part of the city with a second trainer, a ten-year veteran of the VPD. She had a confident, seasoned demeanour. As we handled one call after another, I learned a lot from her. Then one evening, I asked her a tactical question. She replied that she didn't know the answer, as women had only been operationally deployed for about two years. Before that, women were only used for female escorts and other inside duties. I had assumed that women had been on the frontline for decades. Though the department had female police officers since 1912, it took the women's liberation movement to open operational policing to them. However, they remained easily recognizable from their male counterparts as they wore a slightly different uniform. They had the choice of wearing pants, skirts, or culottes, and they were issued large working purses, along with an odd bowl-shaped hat, to be worn at all times, of course.

During the field training period, I learned how the department was structured. It was housed primarily in two police buildings. One was located in the oldest part of Vancouver, a large four-story headquarters at 312 Main Street, which had opened in 1953. In the late 1970s, an annex to the east at 236 East Cordova Street was added and connected to the main building via a broad skywalk two stories above the laneway. The building complex housed Patrol North, comprising District 1 for the northwest sector of the city and District 2 for the northeast sector. It also contained most specialized investigation units, the Traffic Division, and almost all support and administrative components. Abutting the main building to the south at 324 Main Street was the six-story police city jail. Across Cordova Street to the north, at 222 Main Street, stood the Vancouver Provincial Courthouse, which opened in 1974 with several court floors, Sheriff Service cells, and offices for Crown Counsel and justices of the peace. A police substation at 620 West 45th Avenue, behind Oakridge Mall, opened in 1961. It housed Patrol South, consisting of District 3 for the southeast sector of the city and District 4 for the southwest sector, as well as a small detective component for general follow-up investigations. There were other structures around the city, such as a dog squad building, a police boat office, horse stables, a seized-vehicle lot, and anti-organized-crime offices.

For dispatch and communication with deployed police units, each of the four districts had its own dedicated radio channel. A fifth channel was available for urgent conversations or protracted critical incidents. The large, windowless communications center was located deep within the police headquarters building at 312 Main Street. Civilian call takers handled the phone lines, and civilian dispatchers were assigned to each channel. Priority incidents were monitored by the Chief Dispatcher, a Sergeant who could intervene on any radio channel and issue critical commands if required. An additional administrative police supervisor oversaw the communications center. Officers were assigned car areas, which they were expected to patrol to prevent crime, and where they were assigned calls. The radio airwaves were busy not only with patrol units but also with a wide variety of specialized support units, such as traffic-enforcement motorcycles, dog squad units, forensic units, marine craft, and agency-partnership cars.

The Patrol Division worked an 8-hour, 5-day workweek with 2 days off. Three rotation sets of shift hours - day, afternoon, and night - ensured 24-hour service coverage. Patrol officers worked 4-week blocks on one of these shifts before cycling to the next shift hours. I soon found the four weeks of nights exhausting for my body, mind, and social life.

I soon understood that I was in an organization that had developed organically since its founding just ninety-two years earlier, in 1886, when Vancouver was a small town of 500 residents. Historical events shaped the department. John Stewart was the first and sole police officer. A month later, when three more officers were hired, he became the Chief Constable. Over the following years, as the police department grew rapidly, a hierarchy formed. When I joined, there were about one thousand police officers and several hundred civilian support staff. Hundreds of Constables were on the front lines, and well over a hundred Detectives were conducting follow-up investigations. A cadre of supervisors spanned three levels: Corporal, Sergeant, and Staff Sergeant. Since 1918, all these lower ranks had been members of the Vancouver Police Union (VPU), one of the first police unions on the continent. At the management level were the 'white-shirts' of over twenty Inspectors reporting to five Superintendents. These two management tiers also had their own collective bargaining unit, named the Vancouver Police Officers Association (VPOA). At the top were two Deputy Chief Constables, above whom was the Chief Constable. These three senior officers were employed directly by the civilian Vancouver Police Board to whom they reported. The police board, which by law acted as employer and governing body, was a curious entity. I learned that the city's mayor was automatically the chairperson of this small group of provincial government-appointed citizens who lacked knowledge of policing, organizational matters, or governance. Nonetheless, the board was tasked with overseeing policies, procedures, and budgets. While this oversight was designed to distance the police from political interference, the provincial government, through its Police Services Division under the Attorney-General, maintained control over training standards, uniforms, firearms, and accountability processes. However, it only exerted authority over the dozen or so independent municipal police departments.

Since 1950, the RCMP had been contracted to provide police services to numerous municipalities throughout the province and to rural areas as a provincial police agency. Under their contract with the province, as a national police force, they were exempt from provincial dictates and remained entirely under federal control. I soon realized that the police service delivery model was complicated, wrought by disparate political decisions over many decades. It didn't take long to see that, as a result, policing in the Lower Mainland and throughout the province was fragmented and not configured for success. In Vancouver, we were directed not to think beyond the city's boundaries, not for Richmond across the Fraser River to the south, Burnaby beyond Boundary Road to the east, or West Vancouver and North Vancouver over Burrard Inlet to the north. Yet, many criminals and crime enterprises operated regionally without regard for municipal borders. At the time, the talk was about obvious and imminent regionalization. As it was, regionalization remained, and remains, just talk.

What quickly became clear to me was that a training program for police leadership had never been developed. By the time I arrived, policing across the province focused on developing skilled police officers, but little on creating supervisors and managers, let alone leaders. Required training beyond constable was almost nonexistent. I found this quite puzzling, as it was the opposite of what I observed in the army, where higher ranks meant more training. The senior police levels seemed confined to being administrators, maintaining operations as they had come to be. I rarely saw police managers, never spoke with them, and was never approached by them. They appeared to be a mysterious group, entirely disconnected from the police work I was doing. Only one was ever visible, the on-duty operations commander, but only on rare occasions.

After field training, I returned to the academy to complete the three-month Block 3 training curriculum. One noteworthy glitch was seeded at the academy back then. Near the end of training, a lawyer came in to speak to the recruits. He shut the door dramatically, as this was to be a direct and confidential chat, purportedly for our benefit. He was tall, well-dressed, confident, charismatic, humorous, and knowledgeable. Most importantly, he knew the current realities of the policing environment. He warned us that we would be under incredible scrutiny, at times driven by unprincipled agendas and politics. He cautioned us to be careful when responding to any inquiry about our work, as our words would be recorded and could be used in multiple processes, including the Police Act, civil suits, criminal proceedings, coroner's inquests, and public inquiries, not to mention the media. His advice was to be guarded and vigilant. If the performance of our duties were questioned, the mantra was to 'act surprised, show concern, say nothing, and seek counsel.' If compelled to respond, the recommended words were "I can't recall." It indicated we weren't denying or agreeing to anything, and one might recall events at a later time. He joked, "What does 'I can't recall' mean anyway?" Everyone laughed. Now, from such a credible source, we had tactics to stay safe out there. This approach became part of the culture. Many years later, it proved problematic when events led to a widespread perception of a 'blue wall of silence' against accountability, which I will discuss later.

By the end of my Block 3 training module, I had a picture of a police department that lacked engaged leadership and had no vision of the future; yet every hour of every day, it was doing a solid job of responding to every call for help from Vancouver's citizens, which was more than good enough for me. And I was new to policing, so who was I to question how things were? I was feeling good and looking forward to working on the frontline in the city.



The all-male graduating classes 10 & 11, BC Police Academy, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 1979. I am in the front row, fifth from the left, wearing the era's police officer mustache.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Rookie Officer – Patrol District 4 (1979–1980)**

The post-academy years were a time of learning police craftsmanship. My first assignment was to District 4, the city's southwest patrol district. It encompassed the neighbourhoods of Arbutus, Fairview, Kerrisdale, Kitsilano, Marpole, Oakridge, Shaughnessy, South Cambie, West Point Grey, and Dunbar-Southlands, as well as the Musqueam Indian Band reservation. Overall, the residents were middle and upper-middle-class. That part of the city had mile after mile of nice homes on spacious lots, well-kept lawns, and clean cars. There were areas with older walk-up, three-level apartment buildings, all well-maintained and well-managed. The district had business corridors with restaurants, shops, and services. Throughout, there was an air of honest work, prosperity, order, and tranquillity. It was a nice place to live.

Not long after my field training period, the Patrol Division adopted a trending policing model called Team Policing. Each of the four districts was further subdivided into several geographic areas, roughly encompassing one or two established neighbourhoods. A large, designated patrol team was assigned to each area, providing 24/7 patrolling and call response. It was as if the city had been divided into neighbouring villages, each with its own small police force. The model looked fabulous on paper. In reality, as always, depending on a call's nature and priority, dispatchers sent whoever was available.

I became a member of Team 41, whose geographic area covered the north-east corner of the district, from 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the south to the waters of False Creek on the north, and Burrard Street in the west to Cambie Street a mile east. It was the Fairview neighbourhood, and it was anything but neighbourly. The residents were spread out across a vast urban expanse, along with hundreds of businesses and restaurants in several shopping zones, the province's largest hospital complex, and a large public market by the water's edge. Geographically, it lay in the center of the city, separated from the downtown core to the north by three bridges. Day and night, traffic flowed through in all directions along several of the city's major arteries. Most residents were polite, respectful, and upholders of the status quo. The police were usually called only when a serious situation arose or a recent crime was discovered. Being in a patrol car and responding to calls was still new to me. I was finally doing something that felt real, from taking reports to making arrests, quelling disturbances, and resolving a variety of conflicts. But honestly, most of the work in that part of the city was taking reports of overnight commercial break-ins and sorting out fender benders.

It soon became clear that there were two somewhat incongruent worlds within the VPD. First, there were the front-end service providers who faced the realities and dangers on the street.

I soon experienced the strong bond among frontline officers. I realized that the only people I could rely on to come to my aid if needed were other police officers. Only they understood the threats, knew what to do, had the courage, and would take immediate action. It felt as if we were truly the thin blue line between a safe society and one of fear and disorder. The second domain consisted of the administrative staff, detached from police work and with its own organizational culture. This was where most of the higher ranks were during the day, in the secure world inside the buildings, from Monday to Friday. Frontline officers often saw them as trying to appear busy, plotting for the next promotion, creating a sense of personal importance, or at least trying to justify their healthy paychecks. Each of those motives generated administrative demands that flowed down the ranks and could be exasperating to deal with. I learned that when I left the police parking lot and radioed that I was in service, the bureaucracy's gyrations remained behind. The intermittent clash of these two mindsets explained three unusual phrases I frequently heard and initially found confusing: "Don't draw heat," "Cover your ass," and "Make me look good." This self-focused attitude within the VPD contradicted the public image of serving and protecting the community. It was also worlds away from the language used throughout the military—to serve, to be selfless, and to be a team player.

It wasn't all camaraderie and elation on the frontline. My first day on patrol, I was assigned a regular partner. He was a tall, heavyset senior officer who had been working alone. "Jesus," he said after the parade, as he and I walked to the cruiser, "I told the sergeant I didn't want a partner." Though I was surprised, I didn't take his words personally. His demeanour reflected his attitude. His uniform was fine; we had regular laundry service paid for by the employer. But his relaxed composure wasn't close to even quasi-military. Walking fast was out, and if there was a wall to lean on, it didn't go to waste. With him, I quickly learned offbeat things, such as being cautious when taking a free coffee in a nightclub during a liquor-license compliance check. How did that coffee get a shot of liquor in it? My partner didn't seem in the least surprised. After six months of working together, I asked my team sergeant if my development might benefit from a change in partners.

My next partner was younger and more enthusiastic about police work, but he was a character other officers weren't rushing to partner with, either. He often displayed abrasive social skills, being dismissive with radio dispatchers and officious with citizens. Not wanting to be seen as a complainer, I persevered for another six months before asking my team's second-in-command, a corporal, the same question about my development. From his response, I figured out that the supervisors felt that the junior-most members should work with less popular peers. Maybe they had a wry sense of humour because my third partner turned out to be a classmate. Both of us inexperienced, we fumbled around as best as we could.

Were there stressful incidents? Many. But I learned to endure most things. Yet, some haunted me, such as the 'man with a knife' call, which my second partner and I were dispatched to one mid-afternoon on a warm, dry fall day. The location was near the enormous Vancouver General Hospital complex in an area of predominantly older three-level apartment buildings. The

call seemed strange for the time of day and location. As we drove onto the block, we saw a young boy throwing a pocket knife at the ground, trying to make it stick blade-first. We told him to stop, as his behaviour was alarming the caller. Then we notified dispatch and drove away. A few moments later, the dispatcher radioed back, "Are you sure?" The caller was still on the line and said two men were involved, one with a knife. He was sparring with another, who had a jacket wrapped around his arm to protect himself. They were between buildings now, somewhere on that block. Though it still seemed unlikely to us, we drove back into the block, parked, disarmed the communications staff, then wandered down the sidewalk, leaving our new, cumbersome thirty-six-inch wooden batons in the car.

Near the end of the block, between two old walk-ups, there they were. I moved closer while my partner began broadcasting on the radio. When the male with the jacket around his arm saw us, he hustled past me and was gone. I was now nearest to the man wielding a Sicilian Chef boning knife. It had a long, sharp, narrow blade for removing meat from the bone. He had my full and undivided attention. I was about ten meters away when I recognized his distinctively deranged stare. My training sprang to mind. It felt good knowing what to do, at least in theory. For me, this was a first-time application, and I strongly hoped it would work. Distract him, get his mind engaged, connect with him, and above all, keep myself safe. I kept enough distance so I could draw and fire my revolver if he attacked me. I still believed it would protect me, but that is another story for later. Maintaining a calm, slow, inquisitive, friendly demeanour, I engaged him. "Hey, what's up? I'm John. What's your name? How are you doing? What's going on?" I saw him trying to process my questions. Time passed. In my peripheral vision, I noticed police units in the lane. Then, I became concerned when I spotted a lone police officer some distance behind the man, moving along the bushes separating the two apartment buildings. He was trying to move stealthily and held a long board. When he was quite near, he accidentally made a loud noise. The man with the knife turned and looked at him, then slowly turned back to me. Our frail bond was broken. His face expressionless, he stared at me, raised the knife high and across his chest, then made a deep, hard slash through the far side of his neck, slicing through his carotid artery and jugular vein. A moment later, he fell back onto the grass, his arms outstretched as if crucified, knife still clutched in his hand, gazing straight up. I approached him, stepped on his knife hand, so I couldn't be stabbed, then looked into his eyes and paused. Such a situation hadn't been covered in the academy's first-aid training. My only thought was that if the cut was clean, I should try to push the pieces back together and apply firm pressure. I put one hand under his armpit below the slash and the other on the opposite side of his head and squeezed hard. I held him like that for a long time, even as my arms began to shake from exhaustion. When the ambulance crew arrived, an attendant replaced my hands with his. That is how the person went to the emergency ward. He survived, and only when my partner and I visited the hospital a couple of days later did we learn that he, in fact, was a not-so-petite she. In the big picture, she had lost just a little blood. The doctor told us that air being drawn into her brain would have killed her first. All she remembered were 'voices.' But many times, I relived my acute bewilderment at watching someone who, while looking directly at me, attempted to kill themselves. It was the

first of many instances where the despair and death of the frontline viscerally penetrated my psyche.

One dark and rainy night, substantial police resources were required to manage traffic after a horrendous car accident on Cornwall Avenue, a busy main street fed by traffic from downtown off the Burrard Street Bridge. A young male driver was speeding on Point Grey Road, a parallel street that swings up to a stop sign at Cornwall. Not even slowing down, he ignored the sign, broadsiding a vehicle. The driver and his young male passenger were not wearing seatbelts. At the moment of impact, they were thrown forward from their seats, their heads smashing into the windshield, and their necks breaking, killing them both. The windshield looked like something from a futuristic vehicle, with two large, half-circular protrusions that hadn't quite shattered from the force. The firefighters had the grim task of removing the lifeless bodies from the wreckage. I remember the gloomy, dreary weather matching the tragedy of their deaths - so young and senseless.

On another occasion, during the afternoon rush hour, with clear visibility and dry streets, a pedestrian decided to run across Burrard Street, a busy six-lane street, mid-block. She almost made it. A vehicle travelling at full speed down the curb lane on the far side struck her. Undoubtedly, visibility was a problem in the heavy traffic. She was propelled down the street, where she impacted the asphalt headfirst. It looked as if a portion of her head was embedded in the street. In truth, it had been ground off by the pavement, a long band of blood led back to where her head first contacted the street. The image was grisly and surreal. As a team, there was a body to deal with, a scene to protect, traffic flow to manage, an investigation to do, people and agencies to notify, legal processes to follow, and procedures to complete. With so many essential tasks to be done, there was no time for emotions.

In those days, the idea that a thief, especially a car thief, would get away with stealing things was unthinkable. So, we received thorough training in pursuit driving at the academy. We practiced with a small fleet of police academy cars on the old, decommissioned runways at the Ladner airport south of Vancouver. We learned how to properly use the brake and gas pedals, to feel the car's sensations relating to the physics we had been taught in class, and to speak on the radio while the siren blared. It was neat stuff. One night at work, I was driving when my second partner ran the license plate of the car ahead of us, a Pontiac GTO, a sporty machine with a big engine. It came back as stolen. When I activated the overhead lights, the driver accelerated, and the chase began. The academy training proved effective. The driver couldn't shake us as he turned down side streets and alleys, sped up on long straightaways, and then again barrelled down more laneways and side streets. Eventually, smoke came from his brakes as they overheated and burned. It wouldn't be long; he would either lose his ability to brake and crash, or he would pull over. Fortunately, he pulled over. The problem was, I was high on adrenaline. I didn't recall this being covered in training either. So, as the driver pulled to the curb, contrary to policy, I aimed the police car to impact the GTO just ahead of the front tire to pin it. In that split second before impact, my senior partner realized what I was doing. "No!" he screamed. But it

was too late. Though the dent was minor, apparently some witnesses observed the GTO attempting to drive away again and, in doing so, impacting the police car. That wasn't how I remember it, but it might have been true. We all remember events differently.

Sometimes providence seemed to take care of people. Late one evening, my classmate partner and I were eastbound on Broadway, a main east-west artery, in heavy traffic. The street was six lanes wide: two curb parking lanes and two travel lanes east and two west. We came up to cars stopped at a red light at Main Street, a major north-south cross street. Several cars ahead, we observed a male step off the sidewalk, walk through cars parked in the curb lane, and enter the passenger side of a vehicle in traffic. The light turned green, and cars started moving. The car he entered made an awkward lane change into the center lane, then hastily turned left onto Main Street. Perhaps the driver had a few drinks? We pulled the vehicle over. The young female driver was fine. She said she had just been startled by the man who unexpectedly got into her car and asked for a ride downtown. She also seemed charmed by this new acquaintance. He appeared slightly intoxicated, and we took him out of the car for a chat. He was a few years older than the driver, good-looking, sharply dressed in slacks, a white shirt, and a brown leather vest. He said he needed a ride and took the opportunity to jump into the car with the attractive female driver. When his record check came back, it showed he was on parole for rape, with multiple convictions. He was also in breach of a court order, so we arrested him. Admittedly, my partner and I did not communicate well about controlling the male. I wanted him seated on the ground, but my partner preferred him standing. While doing our tasks, we alternated with him several times, leading to him being told harshly to stand up or sit down. The female driver became angry at what she saw as abusive treatment toward her new friend. When we explained his criminal record and parole status, she fell into shocked silence, realizing the danger she had been in and how fortunate she actually was that evening.

Though more calls for the police occurred during evening and night shifts, particularly on weekends, we could never predict what might happen. During a quiet day shift, the all-districts radio alert was activated. The broadcast reported a major incident in progress. The chief dispatcher announced that an emotionally distraught man armed with a long rifle had abducted his ex-girlfriend and taken her to Little Mountain Park in central Vancouver. His intentions and location within the park were unknown. The park sprawled over many acres, with vast picnic spaces, forested areas, buildings, tennis courts, and an old sunken quarry. By then, I had become familiar with how large multi-unit response calls were managed. If a situation was routine and relatively small, like a bank robbery, the response was pretty straightforward. But the larger the incident was, the more disorganized the response tended to be. The department didn't seem skilled at rapidly ramping up command-and-control systems. This call immediately took in nearly every available on-duty unit in the district and more. Several supervisors spoke on the radio, making it hard to determine who was responsible for what. The operations commander was making decisions, but they were all relayed second-hand through various supervisors. As the response to the call was swelling, my classmate partner and I were coming in-service from the

Oakridge police substation, and we decided to stay away from the incident unless otherwise instructed. We were one of only two police units in the district that remained available, and over the following hours, we handled other urgent priorities as they arose. We kept monitoring the Little Mountain call on one of our radios, which had shifted over to a dedicated radio channel. The couple was located sitting on a grassy slope. Finally, after what felt like hours, they got up and wandered down a wooded trail. There, they encountered an officer with a rifle. I recall the officer shooting the male suspect before he could harm anyone. The suspect was transported to the hospital and survived. Personally, I was relieved we weren't caught up for hours in the police response.

One evening, I was working alone and was dispatched to an in-progress domestic violence call. The male was known to be skilled in a martial art. Upon arriving, despite management's strict rules about wearing hats and ties, I decided not to wear my hat because, if there were an altercation, it would be a distraction. Additionally, if it were damaged, I would need to complete extensive paperwork to get a replacement. When I reached the house, I learned the man had left. I broadcast this to inform units that were on the way so they could cancel. After finishing with the caller, as I walked back to my cruiser, I noticed an unmarked police car stopped in front of the house, and the driver signalled me to come over. Approaching the car, I recognized the rank on the officer's epaulets - he was the operations commander. Expecting a question or comment about the call, I was taken aback to hear that something else was more important. He demanded, "Where is your hat?" I explained my tactical reasons for not wearing it on that occasion, but he wasn't buying it. Instead, he gave me a lecture about how crucial it was to wear my hat. Otherwise, the police service would surely fall apart. My reply? "Yes, sir. Of course, sir."

Another thing I learned in those early years was not to bring work home. In my excitement over my new experiences, I would relay stories to my first wife, who would invariably become upset and then critical, unable to relate to the events or my perceptions, feelings, and reactions to them. It wasn't long before I stopped sharing my work experiences with her. Most police officers found they could best decompress by sharing what they had gone through with other officers over a few drinks. Conveniently, the union operated a bar for members in their building, two blocks from police headquarters, the Police Athletic Club, which I mentioned earlier. However, the recounting of incidents needed to reflect the work culture and avoid any indication of distress or fear. Proper psychological support was still in the future.

Besides difficult experiences, research also showed that police officers' mental health was just as affected, if not more so, by the organizational environment. During my time in the district, work conditions improved. The union negotiated a 4-day, 10-hour shift model for patrol officers with 3 days off, which was much better for their bodies, minds, and social lives. Newly created bulletproof vests to wear under the uniform shirt were also issued. They were bulky and hot, but it was reassuring knowing one's torso was protected against handgun bullets and knives.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Jailer (1980–1981)**

After one and a half years in District 4, I was transferred to work at the jail. Most officers spent some time there early in their careers. It was an essential learning period for understanding legal processes and department policies. For some minor offences, such as shoplifting, recent changes in the law enabled police to release arrested persons at the scene by serving a court attendance document called an Appearance Notice. Otherwise, all arrested persons were transported to jail in purpose-built wagons. The drivers were mostly volunteer senior police officers who preferred not to write reports, or else the junior-most members on shift were assigned. Back then, the Vancouver Jail was old and worn. It looked more like a movie set than a functioning facility, but it was still very much in use. The interior featured dull institutional-green cement cinder-block walls, easy-to-mop cement floors, and caged light fixtures. There was an abundance of steel: solid steel-sheet cell doors and numerous cells with steel-bar walls. Nothing about the place was warm or welcoming. The staff were not particularly friendly either. It was a pretty cool place to work.

Police officers rotated through various job positions. During a shift, one could be the searcher, booker, fifth-floor jailer, or assistant jailer responsible for mugshots and fingerprints. The complex records jailer role was typically handled by one of the two permanent jail staff members on each shift. Working in the jail had its challenges. A lot of distraught and damaged people came there—drunk, angry, rebellious, antisocial, violent, psychopathic, drug addicted, and broken. Working in the jail required learning to manage people verbally, gain compliance through a professional demeanour, and, when all else failed, handle them physically. Violence was common in the jail. Back then, there was greater public tolerance for police use of force when responding to aggressive or resistant offenders. No one was shocked when police were assertive with prisoners. Wasn't that a part of their job? Rarely was a physical altercation initiated by a prisoner or an officer considered a matter for review by any external process or court.

The prisoner population increased throughout the evening and into the night. Some were soon released with conditions by the justice of the peace who came over from the courthouse across the street. Otherwise, every prisoner remaining in police custody was legally required to be brought before a judge within twenty-four hours of arrest. In the mornings, sheriffs would attend and take these prisoners to the courts. If a judge kept a pre-trial prisoner incarcerated longer, they would become a provincial prisoner and be transferred to a provincial detention center. By late afternoon, only a few individuals remained in police custody, usually recent arrests with reports for Crown prosecutors still being prepared. Often, people would be held for

Canada Immigration for several days under a care agreement. These individuals, who stayed longer, were housed and fed better than the prisoners arrested for criminal acts. When the court staff went home and evening came, the cells filled up again. That was the daily rhythm of the Vancouver City Police Jail.

Arrested individuals were brought in from the narrow back lane behind the jail. There were times when several prisoner transport wagons would block the laneway. The drivers would unload their prisoners and walk them in handcuffs into a rarely used single-vehicle sallyport. At the far end was an elevator operated by a civilian. The elevator operators were an interesting bunch. They refused to do anything but operate the elevator. Most of them neither talked, assisted, nor even looked around. If there was a citizen complaint, internal investigators knew that asking the elevator operators anything was a waste of time. They saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing, and remembered nothing. The elevator went up to the third floor of the jail, where a pre-booking holding cell, a booking counter, a records management area, prisoner possessions bins, a fingerprint room, and a sergeant's office were located. There were only two video cameras back then, one in the sallyport and one at the booking counter. After booking, the women went to the fourth floor, where a medical nurse and a custodial nurse were located. Detentions under the Mental Health Act, for those who posed a danger to themselves or others, went to the emergency department psychiatric rooms at Vancouver General or St. Paul's Hospitals. However, if a criminally arrested person, male or female, displayed mild mental health issues, they would be held in a special cell near the fourth-floor medical office where the nurses could monitor them. Otherwise, after booking, men went to the fifth-floor cell complex, staffed by two male police officers. This floor had a large number of cells, configured from group to individual. Doors throughout the jail were opened with large keys carried by the jailers. If there were a fire, there was no way to evacuate the facility quickly.

Individuals found intoxicated in public places and unable to care for themselves were also taken to jail to sober up, usually for a minimum of four hours. On the fifth floor, there were two large drunk tanks directly across from the elevator. They had no furniture, just a warm cement floor. They could each hold about thirty people, so on busy nights, many drunks would be sobering up there. In the far corner of each tank was an open wall-mounted urinal for those able to reach it. The entire area was thoroughly hosed down each morning. The long-term alcoholics weren't the healthiest. Even though a nurse was on duty at all times and regularly checked all prisoners, occasionally, a chronic drunk was found lying dead in the tank. This was the impetus for the later construction of a sobering facility operated by provincial health services for non-violent intoxicated persons. Although the jail was sparse, for many impoverished people, it was drier, warmer, and safer than the streets.

There was also a second jail elevator on the front, Main Street side. Police officers at the Public Information Counter on the ground floor of the adjacent police building screened individuals wishing to visit prisoners in the jail. Once approved and given a pass, visitors would take the front jail elevator to the third floor, where they would enter a room isolated from the

main jail. There were hard seats in front of a row of thick glass panes and a telephone receiver on the wall by each seat. Prisoners would be brought into the room and seated on the other side of the glass. The two people could speak with each other by using the phone system. It looked like something out of a 1930s movie.

Events in the jail were often raw. One day, a very young man arrived. He was short, frail, and had an unhealthy, wasted appearance. Having been arrested frequently, he was well-known to the jail staff. They were aware he had a horrible childhood and that he was deeply addicted to drugs. After his latest arrest, he was first escorted by two officers to the hospital for medical attention. While being attended to by the doctor, he jumped off the examination table, pulled the firearm from the unsuspecting officer who was closest to him, pushed the barrel into the officer's stomach, and pulled the trigger repeatedly. The officer's partner scrambled over and subdued the would-be shooter. Experience and adherence to policy sometimes really paid off. The officer's gun had been unloaded per escort protocol. The prisoner was pulling the trigger of an empty gun; nonetheless, he was charged with attempted murder. While working on the fifth floor that day, I placed him alone in an open steel-bar cell where he could be observed. Sometime later, I was escorting another prisoner who was in custody over a minor matter. As we approached the open cell, hanging by his neck from a strip of torn blanket was the would-be police killer. Out of sheer terror, as if he had just found himself in a horror movie, the prisoner with me started screaming. I told him to stop yelling, go down around the corner to the end of the hall, and then wait there until someone came for him. He bolted away. I shouted back toward the office, where another officer was, to summon the jail medical staff. I unlocked the cell door, stood on the metal table, used one arm to lift the slight suspect, untied the strip of blanket from around a cell bar, and lowered him to the floor just as the nurse arrived. The ambulance crew said he would survive, but probably with severe brain damage. Not so. In the months afterward, he seemed just as active and dysfunctional as ever.

Sometimes it was difficult to tell the good guys from the bad. One evening, two detectives came to the jail. They wanted to do a lineup. You might have seen that routine in old movies. Scuzzy-looking suspects stand under bright lights against a white wall with height markings, while across from them, a large mirrored window reflects the scene, behind which unseen witnesses attempt to pick out the culprit. The detectives needed a couple of jail staff who resembled the suspect to join the lineup with the handful of prisoners they had chosen, along with the accused. My sergeant volunteered me. I changed into my too-tight dark-red knit top and blue jeans, then stepped into the line. On the other side of the mirror, several witnesses identified the offender. Perhaps my feigned surly demeanour was convincing, because I was confused, proud, and worried all at once when more than one person identified me as the criminal. I questioned whether I wanted to risk participating in a lineup again.

It was during my time working at the jail that I first encountered the sometimes exploitative, divisive, and self-serving attitudes of a handful of individuals within the police department. On the street, members relied on one another for survival, but inside the police

department, it often seemed acceptable to look out only for oneself. Early one morning, a prisoner arrived on a relatively minor charge. After being booked on the third floor, he was taken to the fifth floor. That day, I was managing the cells there with another officer. The prisoner was dressed casually but neatly. His hair was a large, long pseudo-afro that extended past his shoulders. He appeared sober but was unusually verbally belligerent and confrontational. A phone for prisoners was mounted on the wall across the hall from our office. The prisoner asked if he could use it. He loudly told the person on the other end of the line, “The pigs got me!” followed by various slurs about the police. As he spoke, he stared into the office at us. After his call ended, I decided to place him in a solitary cell away from other prisoners to prevent any attitude contagion. Hours later, he was to be released by the justice of the peace. I went to his cell, where he was lying on his back on the bed. I told him to get up and come with me, as he was being released. He hurled insults, then stood up and turned away as he gathered himself. Concerned about his attitude and potential behaviour, I grabbed his clothing by the right shoulder, lifted him off balance, and walked him down the hall to the stairwell. Throughout, he cursed and tried to regain his balance so he could fight with me. At the stairs, I pushed him away. He ran down a flight, then turned and yelled some more obscenities before going to the booking desk on the third floor, where he was released.

A week later, a detective from the internal investigation unit visited the jail to speak with me. He was young, well-groomed, and clean-shaven. Wearing a plain sports jacket and tie, he appeared keen and diligent, conducting himself as if he were a business representative. He seemed trustworthy, but I sensed he was out to get something for his own benefit and was trying to create a false sense of camaraderie. He told me he was investigating a serious assault in the jail, I was the suspect, and he wanted my statement. New to this, but guided by what I was taught at the academy—act surprised, show concern, say nothing, and seek counsel—I first went to the union. The union president agreed to be my agent. We drafted my statement, describing the events as I have explained. Even so, a few weeks later, I was notified there would be a disciplinary hearing on the matter. An adjudicating superintendent and a prosecuting inspector had been assigned. What had transpired in the meantime to bring the complaint to this stage?

Soon after, I found myself at the hearing. The physical evidence was presented; some hair was allegedly pulled out, and there was a bruise. I acknowledged that I may have grabbed some of that coif when I took hold of him. As for the bruise, I had no idea. Then my agent asked the investigator whether he had discussed the case with Crown counsel regarding a criminal assault charge. At that moment, I noticed the investigator’s leg jittering under the table. “Yes, I have,” he said. “Well, what was the result?” He replied that Crown counsel would not approve a criminal charge, as the matter was simply two different accounts of the same event. My agent then asked the detective what he did next. Since Crown counsel was not supportive, he took the complainant over to the justice of the peace to lay a private citizen’s information in an attempt to start criminal proceedings. After the justice accepted it, nothing occurred. I know, because I spoke to that justice later during one of his frequent trips to the jail to release prisoners. He told me he had

taken the citizen's report to placate the detective, but then placed 'no process' on the form to quash it. When the superintendent heard that Crown Counsel and the justice of the peace had not advanced the case, he looked both surprised and displeased. "Well, what are we doing here?" he asked. At that time, the essential elements under the Police Act code of conduct regarding excessive force were the same as those for common assault under the Criminal Code. As well, the rules of evidence and standard of proof for misconduct under the Police Act were the same as those in criminal proceedings. The superintendent was not touching the matter if the legally trained authorities would not.

I asked my agent what had motivated the overzealous detective. His response was concerning to hear. The story was that the detective wanted to be noticed to help his bid for a position in the Major Crimes Unit. The message seemed to be that using colleagues and abusing processes to get ahead was acceptable at work. Such values and behaviours were not tolerated in the army. I had questions. Why did leaders in the police department allow this? Did they possibly foster it, or perhaps they didn't know any better? No wonder I so frequently heard those phrases: "Don't draw heat," "Cover your ass," and "Make me look good." The workplace paradigm of keeping a low profile and pleasing superiors now made real, practical sense to me. In that unusual environment of the police department, I appreciated the union president. He showed me that some people had the character and courage to stand up for others. Knowing there were people like him in the department made being at work okay. He became an influential role model for me.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Patrol Officer – Patrol District 3 (1980–1983)**

After working at the jail for six months, I was transferred to the southeast patrol district. It encompassed several of the city's neighbourhoods—Kensington, Cedar Cottage, Killarney, Mount Pleasant, Renfrew, Collingwood, Riley Park, Sunset, Victoria, and Fraserview. I was assigned to Team 33, responsible for the southwest part of the district, mainly the Sunset neighbourhood. This area consisted of wide stretches of detached homes and several main traffic corridors with occasional strips of shops and restaurants. The working-class residents were ethnically diverse, including a significant South Asian community. People often challenged the police, and many younger men were eager to show they were tough. Domestic disputes were frequent and often violent, most fuelled by alcohol. New officers quickly learned that bluffing would only make things worse because many residents would call us on it, and rightfully so. It was crucial to have presence, know the law, and know the options of what to do next.

After the academy, it took several years to become a competent police professional, to meld personality with duties, and to gather enough experience to make sound decisions. By then, I understood that policing was not simply black-and-white law enforcement. It was the maintenance of order globally and in countless individual situations. Thereby, the success of policing depended on what Canada's highest court had recognized as the 'inherent discretionary authority' of police officers—to do the right thing in complex circumstances. In this district, I grew professionally.

One day, my partner, a female South Asian, and I responded to a domestic dispute call. These incidents were extremely emotional because they involved our deepest attachments, those to family. Dispatch informed us that a Sikh family was involved. The yelling subsided when we separated the wife and two adult daughters from the father. As was customary, the man would only talk to me since I was male, and the women only to my female partner. To perform our policing duties, my partner and I had agreed long beforehand to adhere to this cultural mindset. The middle-aged father pleaded to speak to me privately. What he had to say was not to be heard by the women. We went to the kitchen and sat at a table. He told me of his past service in the British Army in India and said that he understood Western values and ways. But he also wanted his two adult daughters to follow their family's traditions. However, they did not want arranged marriages; they wanted to choose their own life partners. As he cried, his pain and his love for his daughters were clear. Police officers sometimes provide a safe space where citizens can break down. I was experiencing firsthand the true breadth of the policing role, often extending far beyond the formal job description and limited training.

During my time assigned to this district, a notable incident occurred a distance outside of it. Early in the morning, police intermittently pursued a motorcycle through various parts of the city. The rider drove so recklessly that police units would lose sight of the motorcycle or abandon chasing it. At one point, it passed through our district, with the same pattern of pursuit and loss of contact. My partner and I, in plainclothes and in an unmarked police car during that shift, followed the chase as it headed west across the city, then north. Several minutes later, as we entered the 100 block of East Hastings Street, the heart of Skid Row, we heard on the radio that the motorcycle was crossing a bridge into the downtown area to the west of us. It travelled down to Hastings Street and then eastward toward us. At that time, the tactic was to follow the driver in hopes he would eventually pull over. However, there was a growing apprehension that the motorcyclist, who was running red lights at incredible speeds, would soon be rocketing through parts of the city filled around the clock with inattentive, drunk or drugged pedestrians. Tragedy seemed imminent. The only instruction from supervisors was to monitor the rider's movements. In reality, there weren't any other better options available.

As the motorcycle approached, we knew the chase unit would fall further behind. My partner, who was driving, slowed and made a U-turn so we could take up the pursuit. There were no parked cars on the six-lane street. As we turned around, I saw the flicker of a motorcycle headlamp about two blocks back, where the street curved. My partner completed the turn and drove eastward. I swung my head around to look back. In an instant, I realized the motorcycle was travelling so fast that it was almost up to us. I anticipated it would swing past on either side of our car in the empty center or curb lanes. A split second later, I also realized it wasn't moving out of our lane. Before I could utter a word, I spun around and hunched down. The force of the impact thrust our vehicle forward and shattered the rear window, driving fragments of tempered glass throughout the car's interior. A few heartbeats later, as I raised myself back up, I looked through the windshield and saw the rider high in the air, face upward, with arms and legs outstretched, falling toward the pavement. He hit the front corner of our car and bounced onto the street. I jumped out of the car and ran up to him. He was lying flat on his back. His helmet, though mangled, had remained on. I couldn't detect any breathing or a heartbeat, and I assumed he was dead. The academy's first-aid training hadn't covered a scenario like this either. I knew I should start CPR, but I thought if I tried to remove his helmet or move him, I might cause more damage, perhaps even ensure his death. So, how could I safely do CPR? As I was pondering this, he gasped, began agonized breathing, and then his multiple facial lacerations started bleeding all at once. His heart had restarted, and he had come back to life. My immediate reaction was anger. My thoughts were, "You can't stay dead... You have to die right in front of me!" At least, for now, I could stop thinking about administering emergency first aid. Other police arrived, but none of them came close to the motorcyclist or me. He was my problem. Minutes later, paramedics arrived, and I was finally able to take off my bulletproof vest to remove the glass fragments that had fallen between it and my back and were cutting into me.

Many months later, when the motorcyclist was fit to appear in court, he was convicted of the dangerous operation of a motor vehicle. The Crown prosecutor felt that the defence attorney's line of questioning was aimed at a future civil suit. Indeed, it was. My partner, I, and the pursuing officer were sued for \$1 million. The lawyer for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) told us that in these cases, the plaintiff seeks a finding that some portion of their injuries is attributed to someone else, which requires the insurer to pay that amount. It was a week-long civil trial with a judge and jury. The most outlandish evidence was presented. Two young women claimed that months after the crash, they met the rider in a bar. After chatting with him, they remembered being at the accident scene that night and witnessing an unmarked police car U-turn recklessly directly in the motorcycle's path, causing the collision. Outside the courtroom, I confronted the plaintiff's lawyer about these 'witnesses.' He put on a baffled look and responded, "I just present the evidence." My confidence in the ethics of the legal profession took a serious hit. In the end, the jury found that the driver had been committing a criminal offence at the time of the impact and was therefore not entitled to any compensation. His lawyer, who would have taken a sizable share of any payout, ended up empty-handed. To me, it seemed like poetic justice.

## Biker was breaking law; suit against police rejected

By PHIL NEEDHAM

A motorcyclist who sued city police for injuries he sustained when he drove into an unmarked cruiser while fleeing police had his claim dismissed by a civil jury Friday.

Gregory Scott Harrison, now 26, was speeding eastbound in the 100 block East Hastings on April 25, 1982, about 11:30 p.m. and drawing away from a pursuing police car operating its siren and emergency lights. He collided with the rear end of an unmarked police car that had pulled into his lane of travel.

Harrison was catapulted onto the roof, then cartwheeled several

times, landing in front of the car.

Harrison said he lost the use of his left arm and suffered head injuries that cause severe headaches and loss of memory.

His lawyer, Ted Ewachniuk, claimed police were in the process of setting up a "barricade" across Hastings at Main, in violation of police pursuit policy.

Three policemen, Const. Bob Ingram, driver of the unmarked car, his partner, Const. John Dehaas, and Const. Craig Peters, who is now with Delta police and was chasing Harrison, were named as defendants in the case.

On direction from Justice Samuel Toy that there was no evidence against Dehaas or Peters, the jury dismissed the case against them before beginning deliberations on the case against Ingram.

The jury said "the accident was caused in whole or in part by the negligence" of Ingram in "failing to give adequate warning while changing lanes."

But Harrison's case failed when the jury found that he was "engaged in a criminal venture at the time of the accident, so as to disentitle him from any claim."

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I was fortunate to work with this long-term partner. He was a veteran officer, but he expressed no ambition for promotion, finding satisfaction on the frontline of patrol. Being a tall White male with a relaxed, down-home demeanour, he reminded me of Sheriff Andy Griffith of Mayberry. Just one curious feature: he was a devout born-again Christian. As we walked to our car on our first shift together, he turned to me with a concerned look. He said, “I want you to know that whatever happens out there, when I swear on the Bible, I tell the truth.” He added that if I didn’t want to work with him because of that, it was fine. He implied he would not cover up, hide, or lie about any potential misconduct. Surprised by his comments, I asked, “What do you think I do out there?” At the beginning of every shift, he brought out his Bible and placed it in the console compartment between our seats. Every arrest or good work was another “God incident.” Overall, I found it amusing. What I came to understand was that a diverse police workforce requires a clear set of overarching professional standards that prevail over any allegiances to religious, ethnic, or parochial beliefs.

At times, when my partner was off, I worked solo. Being alone sometimes led to poor judgment. Late at night, during that period of virtually no traffic, I was far south in the district by the then Blue Boy Motor Hotel on Marine Drive at Fraser Street. While chatting with a citizen at the driveway entrance, I heard a senior policewoman, also working alone that night, broadcast that she was pulling over a possibly impaired driver in the middle of the district, straight down Fraser Street near 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue. She was quite a distance away, and I listened for a unit that might assist her to come on the air. None did. A couple of minutes later, animated now, she asked for a cover unit. I listened and waited, but again, no one responded. The silence was starting to feel uncomfortable. Moments later, she broadcast again, screaming for help. Sensing she was in danger, the hair on the back of my neck bristled. I backed onto the street, accelerated down Fraser Street, and turned up the radio so I could hear broadcasts over the roar of the engine or sirens. Other units came alive on the radio, saying they were responding, but they were all far away. I saw a red traffic light ahead at 57<sup>th</sup> and went straight through it at high speed. I did the same thing at 49<sup>th</sup>—straight through, no sirens, just emergency lights. Reaching her location, I saw her on the ground and the male driver punching her. The police wagon also arrived from the opposite direction, and the officer jumped out and pulled the male away from the policewoman. Moments later, I helped handcuff the driver and place him in the wagon. Then it hit me: I could easily have killed someone running those red lights. The female officer might have been justified in shooting her attacker, but I could never justify killing an innocent person while trying to get to her. I learned a lesson that night, fortunately not the hard way, unlike others who faced similar situations with tragic outcomes, and had their stories all over the news.

During these early years of my career on the frontline, police officers across North America were being killed in the line of duty at an alarming rate. Some notable incidents involved multiple officers dying in shootouts, often against military veterans. The first major wake-up call was a shooting years earlier in 1970 in Valencia, California, when two armed suspects killed four California Highway Patrol officers. After that, more emphasis was placed on

tactical training for officers. Calibre Press, a private American company that studied these shootings, developed a two-day Street Survival training seminar for officers. They toured the continent, delivering this material. I attended two sessions, one in Auburn, Washington, and one in Portland, Oregon. They were truly eye-opening. One question asked at the seminar was about our mindsets. Would we even defend ourselves? They showed dashcam footage of officers failing to respond when they could and should have. It was sickening to watch so many officers being killed. At one session, with about 300 officers in the theatre, a presenter walked onto the stage, carrying a shotgun. He told all those American officers with handguns not to respond to what they were about to experience. Being armed off-duty was common practice across the border. Suddenly, the lights went out, and a blast from the shotgun, aimed at the audience, exploded. Then the lights returned. "How do you feel right now?" he asked. "Pretty shook up, huh? How do you think you'll respond if, out on the street, the same unexpectedly happens?" At that moment, I realized I was not mentally, emotionally, or physically prepared to react constructively. The realities of sudden, dangerous, or deadly circumstances came into focus, along with the need to establish immediate actions and habituate them so they would occur instinctively. The presenter then said, "In your workbooks, write down your department's policy on the use of deadly force." Almost everyone just sat there with a puzzled look. After a long pause, he continued, "Okay, that's not what matters. Write down what your policy is regarding when you will use deadly force. If you don't have one, you'd better come up with one because it will determine if you live or die." As instructed, I clarified my personal policy regarding the use of deadly force until it was crystal clear. When I returned to work, I applied the seminar's teachings in every situation, noting where the protective cover was, where I could move to, and what I would do if deadly violence erupted.

In the early 1980s, change was in the air. Around this time, the department piloted the Mobile Radio Data System (MRDS). Cars were equipped with a small television-style screen and a keyboard in the console area beneath the dashboard. The system allowed officers to enter license plate numbers or people's names to perform database checks of the Canadian Police Information Center (CPIC) and Criminal Name Index (CNI). This helped reduce radio chatter between officers and dispatchers and increase the number of queries. However, many of us wondered if it would actually work. Stolen cars were frequently left abandoned on the rooftop parking lot of the Blue Boy Motor Hotel at Marine Drive and Fraser Street. Hotel staff would phone in when a car had been there for several days and wasn't registered to a current guest. One night shift, when I was working alone in the early morning and the radio was quiet, I started running license plate numbers of cars on the hotel roof lot using the new MRDS. After processing quite a few, I was impressed to see a stolen vehicle alert appear on the screen. Pretty neat device. It showed that technology could radically change policing practices and that policing would benefit from embracing it in the years to come.

There was also a seismic shift in the law at that time. In 1982, Queen Elizabeth signed the Royal Proclamation, which completed the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution. With the

Constitution Act came the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It outlined rights related to arrest, detention, and charges, which didn't look much different from what we were already doing in policing and the justice system. Naturally, we apprehended people only when we had a proper legal basis, informed individuals why they were under arrest, and provided prisoners access to legal counsel. In that way, the Charter didn't seem very important. What was clearly missing, however, was any mention of citizens' duties and responsibilities. The Charter inferred that citizens weren't obliged to step up and do anything for their fellow Canadians. It expressed an entitlement mindset without contribution. The provisions seemed to imply that rights needed to be set out in overarching legislation, otherwise those in government and its services might treat citizens poorly. It reflected the 1960s to 1970s sentiment of mistrust of authorities. We had no idea how the courts would interpret the Charter in the years ahead, but we would find out.

In the district, again, I could not help but experience the department's occasionally divisive culture. One evening, a loud, out-of-control house party was disturbing the neighbourhood into the early morning hours. Attending units repeatedly told those inside the premises to tone it down, to no avail. Finally, the operations commander arrived and ordered us to shut down the party. When entry was refused, he decided to kick the front door open. The commander seemed a bit old and frail, and I felt his effort would be ineffective and embarrassing. Well, he surprised me. One solid boot, and the door flew open. I arrested the belligerent, drunk male who had been directly behind the door, yelling obscenities at us. Then I walked him down the front steps and placed him in a waiting police transport wagon without incident. A couple of weeks later, a peer asked if I was aware I was under investigation regarding that arrest. He had been interviewed, as had several others. Unaware of any investigation, I phoned the named detective at the Internal Investigation Unit and inquired whether I was under investigation. He said that I was and added, somewhat disingenuously, that he had been about to contact me, and he forthwith 'ordered' me to attend his office. I pointed out that he was not my supervisor and that following his direction could result in my dereliction of duty. If he didn't understand that, I suggested he consult the procedure manual, which clearly outlined the chain of command. He paused, his tone becoming more conciliatory, then he suggested I come if I was available.

When I arrived, he led me into a side room where he had laid out the contents of the investigation file on a table. He read the complaint that I had thrown the arrested male at the party down the stairs and used excessive force. He also reviewed some statements from others, none of which contained observations of my interactions with the complainant. Then he showed me the suspect photo lineup, which included my picture, and noted that the complainant had not identified me. At that point, without a word, I walked out of the room toward the office exit. Realizing I was leaving, the investigator ran past me and blocked the door. A roomful of detectives looked up from their desks. Confused, he asked me what I was doing. I said I was going back to work. Frowning in bewilderment, he stood there. I asked him to get out of the way. The unfolding events seemed too much for him. He thought for a long moment, then stepped

aside. Over the next while, I wondered when the penny would drop. In those days, the identity of the accused officer had to be established, and there had to be some threshold of corroborating evidence of wrongdoing. In this case, there was neither. I never heard another word about it. I knew I did not like being treated as a suspect rather than as a professional. As a professional in a fair and trusted system, I would gladly have shared what happened, what I did, and why I did it. If I had something to learn or improve on, I would have appreciated the direction. If I had unintentionally messed up, well, to err is human, too. Though I had experienced the intermittent penetrating stress of frontline police work, I also recognized that the shoddy manner in which some individuals within the department handled complaints was also a significant source of work stress.

Police work was often a silent, slow grinding down of mental stability. Stress stockpiled inside without my awareness. On duty, the instinct was to stay in control, to think clearly. There was no space for fear, doubt, confusion, timidity, or weakness on the street or in the parade room. Such traits could be fatal. It felt as if the public and my colleagues relied on me, and I needed them to know they could. I also wanted to know I could depend on my fellow officers. One evening at home, I suddenly burst into tears. It came from deep within. My wife gently asked me what was wrong. Eventually, the words came out. Over the past few weeks, I had seen far too many dead bodies. There had been such an array of corpses, from an elderly lady found lifeless in her bed in the morning to the body of the resident nobody had seen for weeks, found rotting in his bathtub. One strange thing I noticed was that I was always incredibly hungry after dealing with a call where a dead body was involved.

Sadly, death also found its way into police ranks. On the cold night of January 8, 1982, after a heavy snowfall, the streets were treacherous. A two-member patrol from my team was in the eastern part of the district when they stopped to check out an abandoned vehicle on the side of the road. As Constable Paul Sanghera stood next to the car, a pickup truck came around the corner, and the driver lost control on the icy street. The truck slammed into Paul and the abandoned vehicle. Paul died at the scene. The crash was blamed on the road conditions, and no charges were laid. Paul was a nice person—young, keen, with a promising future. He died while serving in a profession he cherished. His partner was also a great person, and it was clear how devastated he was by the tragedy. The mood at work was gloomy for quite a while, but we carried on. No matter what we were going through, the public needed us.

In the early 1980s, Pierre Elliot Trudeau was again the Canadian prime minister. Ronald Reagan was the American president, and Margaret Thatcher was the British prime minister. Reagan and Thatcher introduced a series of ‘neoliberal’ economic and social policies. Neo-liberalism focused on the essentials—the economy, jobs, and earning a decent living. It aimed to eliminate wasteful handouts, shrink government, cut safety-net services, and lower taxes. It was a throwback to an ideology of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Over time, neo-liberalism also manifested in British Columbia. I will discuss this ism in detail later, including the tsunami of public disorder it caused and the overbearing demands it placed on policing.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Traffic Enforcement Officer (1983–1986)**

With work having become routine in Patrol, I applied for assignment to the Traffic Division's enforcement motorcycles. Early on, I viewed dog masters and traffic officers as master police officers. They worked alone, and they were knowledgeable, skilled, experienced, and self-assured. My professional goal had become for me to feel proficient, safe, and productive anywhere, anytime, and in any situation. I saw this work as providing that opportunity. My application was successful, and I was transferred. On the radio, I was now call-sign 'Motorcycle 955.' When I told my mother that I was moving to the traffic enforcement motorcycles, she scowled. "Oh, you're going to be one of them!" I wondered how many times she had been pulled over for her driving. Over the years with VPD, several officers informed me that they had stopped my mother and that she had quickly and sweetly asked if they knew me. They always described her as friendly. She knew how to play her cards. Who would ticket another member's mom?

Along with a large motorcycle, the fully encompassing uniform—from riding boots to gloves to helmet—made traffic officers appear independent, focused, and authoritative. To fulfill the role, they had to be. Enforcement decisions were made without a partner's or supervisor's direction. No politics or agendas were involved, just a clear sense of mission, values, and actions. Most of the time, they worked alone, connected to the system only by a radio microphone/speaker clipped onto the shoulder epaulet of their uniform. The extensive training for operating large motorcycles and enforcing traffic laws was excellent. Eventually, I went out on the streets on my own, even if initially on a Kawasaki 1000 Police Special, the department's temporary trial away from the traditional, hefty Harley-Davidsons that the senior members preferred. The Kawasaki was a bit too top-heavy for my liking and had more gears than necessary, mostly in the slower speed range. Operating it required constant gear shifting, accompanied by the engine's high-pitched screeching. I didn't like the machine much, but, at first, even heavy rain couldn't keep me off my motorcycle. We were issued a rain jacket, which wasn't very effective at keeping water out, and a broad black vinyl apron that attached to the crash bars. It draped over the rider's lap, riding breeches, and high boots. For writing tickets in wet weather, I used a pencil, which tolerated some moisture better. I would find a nearby alcove, awning, overpass, or some other dry place to write. Eventually, the excitement wore off. On rainy days, I teamed up in a radar car and stayed dry. During my first year in Traffic, I was assigned to District 4, then District 2. After a year, I was senior enough to have some say in where I worked. I chose District 1, which included the downtown business core, the entertainment zone, and the West End. The area was a dense grid of busy major streets with

heavy traffic. I also moved over to one of the magnificent, old Harley-Davidson machines. It was much heavier than the Kawasaki, but it also had a much lower center of gravity. When stopping, I just moved my foot a short step to the road, and the motorcycle sat there solidly. It had fewer gears, and the engine had a nice, deep, reassuring rumble. It was not a top performer—it took longer to reach higher speeds—but it was rugged and cool.



PC 549 – radio callsign 955 and Harley-Davidson shop #903 – circa 1984

It wasn't always possible to adhere to the principle of uniform law enforcement. Back then, the law was amended to require seatbelt use, so we undertook enforcement to change people's habits. I recall one hot summer day, standing in the middle of Denman Street, just around the corner from Georgia Street. Many cars travelling east out of Stanley Park on Georgia Street would turn south onto Denman. A large commercial building there blocked a driver's view around the corner. When they saw a police officer, they didn't have enough time to fasten their seatbelts. It was a prime location to observe drivers not wearing seatbelts and pull them over. That morning, a vehicle came around the corner. The only occupant was a striking woman who looked to be in her mid-thirties. She was quite busty, and her shirt was mostly unbuttoned. Her seatbelt was off, the shoulder strap hanging against the driver's doorpost. As her car slowly

approached, before I could speak, she rolled down her window and started explaining why she couldn't put the seatbelt strap over her breasts - it caused too much friction against her skin, which distracted her while driving, and various solutions hadn't worked. She kept providing more details - more than I could process. Possibly for the first time in my career, I was speechless. She continued explaining, and as she drove past, she turned her head back toward me, still giving more information about the breast-seatbelt interaction. Stunned, I watched her drive away, feeling vanquished by a superior strategist. Defeated, I turned around and waited for the next car to turn the corner.

Sometimes, drivers who had been ticketed would lose their composure and rage. Usually, it was okay, as it wasn't personal. Receiving a ticket could be upsetting. They were reminded that they could go to traffic court to dispute it. Occasionally, their anger would affect how they operated their vehicle. Once, a male spun his tires as he left and threw his crumpled ticket out the window. I pulled him over again, told him to calm down, and gave him another ticket for littering. Both tickets ended up in court together. After my evidence, the justice of the peace created a new 'fact' in deciding that my serving the littering ticket was ill-motivated and then invalidated it. That experience left me considering what to do when drivers became emotional. Without drivers paying proper attention, their driving could become a serious safety hazard for pedestrians and other drivers. If there was a collision, would people point out that I had ignored the agitated state of the person I had just ticketed? I thought long and hard. The second ticket was not the solution; it only added fuel to the fire. Regardless of the reason for their anger, a police officer's public safety duty was not to allow an enraged driver to operate a vehicle. From then on, I would acknowledge the emotions involved and advise that I would hold their license and not allow them to drive until they could provide show they could operate their vehicle attentively.

One afternoon while working in the downtown area, I issued a ticket to a male driver with a female passenger. He became unusually irate. When informed that he would not be allowed to drive until he calmed down, he claimed I could not stop him from driving away. It was explained that police officers have a sworn duty to keep the streets safe for others, including from angry drivers. If he attempted to drive, he would be arrested for obstructing a police officer. I went back and sat on my motorcycle. Several minutes later, he approached and yelled at me. By attracting the attention of passersby, he might have been edging toward causing a disturbance, but at least he wasn't driving. Eventually, his female companion got out and told him to get back in the car and settle down, or they would never get on their way. The driver conceded to her demand. After a while, he returned and apologized. I thanked him for not making the situation worse, then he drove away in a much calmer state of mind. Keeping the streets safe and being fair to people could be a complex dance involving law enforcement, discretion, and interpersonal skills. When it worked, everyone benefited.

One day, while riding along Hastings Street toward the oldest part of Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside, a two-member patrol unit a few blocks ahead and to the north in Gastown

broadcast that they had just pulled over two motorcycles, but when the officers exited their police car, the motorcycles sped away. Moments later, I saw two motorcycles race southbound across Main Street and connected the dots. In those days, to transmit on the radio, I had to take one hand off the handlebars to press the lever on the microphone clipped to the epaulet on my left shoulder. But both hands were fully occupied operating my machine. I sped up to the intersection, turned left, and accelerated, spotting the motorcycles a couple of blocks ahead. Every intersection along Main Street in that area had traffic lights. The motorcycles weaved around cars that stopped at red lights and went through the intersections when they could. Their focus was solely on fleeing. Trying to close the gap without alerting them, I drove without using my emergency lights or siren. Several blocks later, they came to a red light at Terminal Avenue, a major east-west street, and cut in front of the cars waiting in the left-turn lane, only to be forced to stop until some oncoming traffic cleared. Moments after they turned, I followed. On their considerably more technologically advanced machines, they accelerated hard, widening the gap. Even as my old Harley-Davidson picked up speed, the gap continued to grow. I kept accelerating until the distance began to close. By then, my motorcycle was well beyond its safe top speed. It felt like floating, similar to that sickening pause at the highest point of a roller coaster before free fall, except the detached sensation dragged on endlessly. I knew I was no longer properly in control of my motorcycle, but I was determined to stop them.

Many blocks later, I caught up to them. One was in the lane to my left and the other in the lane to my right, both hunched over and staring straight ahead as if completely unaware of me. I knew if I activated my equipment too soon, they would accelerate away. I needed shock. I moved forward until my front tire was even with their rear tires, then activated my lights and siren. I could see by their jerked reactions and astonished backward glances that I was a complete surprise. But they did the right thing; they braked. I did too, but the brakes on my machine were pathetic, and I shot ahead of them. Gripping the front brake lever tightly and pressing hard on the rear brake pedal, I finally stopped, though I ended up much farther down the street. Police work has an element of theatre. I kicked out the stand and left my motorcycle in the middle of the viaduct, with the engine running and the lights flashing. Then I took a few steps back and hoped to give the appearance that everything I was doing was deliberate. I waved the riders toward the curb. They looked bewildered at first, but then obeyed. After checking their documents, it was evident that they did not have motorcycle driver's licenses. I radioed that I had the two motorcycles that had bolted out of Gastown and that the officers involved were welcome to attend and handle the matter. Meanwhile, I issued tickets to the riders for the offences I had observed—disobeying traffic signals, speeding, and license violations. I also called two tow trucks to remove their motorcycles. The operations commander, having heard the events on the radio, attended the scene. "Can you really just tow their motorcycles?" he asked. I thought it unusual to be asked whether a traffic officer knew what they were doing. But I explained that the riders weren't licensed to drive the motorcycles, I wasn't insured to operate them, and it was illegal under the Street and Traffic Bylaw to push or coast a vehicle on a street. Therefore, they had to be towed to allow traffic to move freely. From there, everything carried on as it should.

After a couple of years in Traffic Enforcement, I was seeking a change. Handing out violation tickets daily, month after month, was becoming monotonous. However, the World Exposition was set to arrive in Vancouver in 1986, and the city was buzzing with anticipation. This was the city's opportunity to showcase itself to the world. The old industrial and commercial area along False Creek on the downtown peninsula was being transformed into an enormous exposition site. Every detail was to be cutting-edge and flawless. The role of police motorcycles was also being integrated into the plans. Not wanting inexperienced traffic officers for the event, the commanding superintendent blocked transfers out until afterward. I was told I would be completing my full four-year assignment. The exhibition helped break the monotony of issuing the usual violation notices. A taxi company announced that, because of Expo 86, it would no longer adhere to provincial regulations which limited its services to the city of North Vancouver. They also urged all metro cab companies to ignore their mandated operating boundaries. Through their rebellious stance, Greater Vancouver would become a wide-open, unrestricted region. The governing Motor Carrier Act was complex legislation, and few police officers were familiar with it. Since those cabs were primarily poaching in my assigned district, I kept a close watch on them. Over the course of a month, I issued about a dozen tickets to drivers from that company, and the fines were substantial. Rather than penalizing individual drivers, the Motor Carrier Commission reached an agreement with the taxi company owner for a lengthy suspension of the company. That ended the revolt, and the law prevailed. That incident demonstrated to me that successfully enforcing the law depended on agencies working in unison.

People have asked me what my most stressful experiences as a police officer were. They expected stories about guns or violence. For me, the most nerve-racking work involved high-speed motorcycle escorts. It meant, regardless of the traffic control signals, through extreme assertiveness, taking control over motorists trained to obey the signals. It involved stopping in the middle of the intersection, stepping off the idling motorcycle, deciding who was to go where, and—along with shrill blasts on the whistle—waving commands. There were mere seconds for drivers to do as instructed, no matter what the traffic control device messaged. The lanes had to be cleared quickly, as, in a moment, another police motorcycle would race through the intersection toward the next, then another and another, all surging ahead to shut down traffic. Then the motorcade would pass through. Back on the motorcycle, accelerating past the motorcade, rejoining the paired escort motorcycles at the front, thinking of the route ahead and the necessary traffic control, as the lead motorcycles split away, deciding when to go, then going. The motorcycles worked together as a trained team, functioning smoothly without discussion or explicit commands. It was a collective mind. Stress was at a maximum until the route was completed. Then we could breathe again. Throughout Expo 86, we conducted many escorts. Luckily, I was then riding a brand-new Harley-Davidson—heavy and powerful.

Escorts didn't always go smoothly. During the exposition, we escorted an African monarch from the airport to Gastown, where the gentleman wanted to shop. The corporal in the

lead car had the motorcade moving rapidly. We were working hard. As we drove down Hemlock Street, nearing the Granville Bridge to downtown, I realized I needed to get past the locked-down intersections and across the bridge to the first traffic lights on the downtown side. I was travelling at high speed when I entered the bridge on-ramp, but the roadway lacked the banking needed to take the curve at speed, and I was going far too fast. My motorcycle started drifting to the right, and I realized I was going to crash into the raised sidewalk. The motorcycle's rollbar contacted the cement, with sparks flying and loud grinding noises. I did everything I could to keep the bike upright. I was sweating, not from exertion but from terror. How humiliating it would be for my bike to be wrecked and me injured. I managed to keep both wheels on the street and gradually eased away from the curb. Relieved, I slowed to a safe speed. It was another reminder to prioritize my personal safety. Officers injured on duty can't do their jobs, and they tie up even more emergency services.

Over several days during Expo 86, four of us escorted the Aga Khan, leader of the Ismaili Muslims. Tall, handsome, immaculately dressed, and with a dignified demeanour, he radiated an aura of status, sophistication, charisma, and intellect. Wherever he went, we escorted him. When he was speaking at BC Place, there was a security threat, and we were ordered to quickly move him out, overriding traffic control devices, to his secure North Shore residence. Downtown Vancouver, with its numerous intersections and dense vehicle and pedestrian traffic, made that a very challenging task. We positioned one motorcycle behind the small motorcade and another in front, with another motorcycle officer and me leapfrogging the intersections ahead as swiftly and smoothly as possible. We managed to navigate downtown Vancouver relatively efficiently. A couple of days later, when the time came to escort the Aga Khan from the residence to the airport, we were told we would first be called before him, one at a time, and presented with a gift. This was the only time in my career that the gift policy was waived; we were instructed to keep the item. It was explained that rejecting such a tribute would be considered offensive to the Aga Khan and his followers. During our brief exchange, I was surprised to find His Highness very personable and appreciative. But there was more to come. After escorting him to a small terminal at the airport, our corporal decided it would be respectful for us to line up on the tarmac as an honour guard when he left the terminal to walk to his jet. When he emerged with his wife, rather than walking directly to the plane, he approached us and individually thanked us again. I couldn't help but feel great respect for him, along with a sense of loyalty. It was a strange feeling. Here was a leader who demonstrated remarkable skill in connecting with those who served him.



With His Highness the Aga Khan – 1986

One morning, the weather and road conditions were uncertain, making us question whether riding a motorcycle would be wise. Larry Butler, another traffic officer, and I were in a radar car in District 2. As we approached Commercial Drive, we heard a priority all-channel radio broadcast about a police officer shot on Commercial Drive, just over the border in District 3, only a few blocks away. We sped there and were the first to arrive on scene. As I got out of the vehicle, several citizens pointed urgently toward the rear of an adjacent financial institution. I assumed the shooting had happened there and ran to locate the wounded officer. When I reached the back parking lot, a few anxious people pointed to the lane. Arriving there, only a couple of grim-looking individuals remained; they gestured down the lane. Puzzled, I asked one of them where the police officer who had been shot was. Looking exasperated, as if I were in a different story, he replied, “Out front!” “Then what’s down the lane?” I asked. He said, “That’s where the guy with the shotgun ran.” Suddenly, I had to shift from looking for a victim to considering whether to pursue a suspect armed with more firepower. Fortunately, Larry had seen the wounded officer on the sidewalk and was helping him. He was a canine unit officer. A hold-up of the financial institution had occurred and was first broadcast on the District 3 radio while Larry and I were monitoring other channels. The officer arrived at the location for his dog to start tracking the suspect. He had exited his vehicle but hadn’t yet removed his dog when the suspect hit him with a shotgun blast of small grain pellets. Luckily, the officer recovered from his

injuries. Still, this incident highlighted that policing often involves life-threatening situations and the paradox of needing to expect the unexpected.

For the most part, I liked working alone in the downtown core, but Larry enjoyed company and often asked to ride together. He often seemed like a pesky little brother. His looks resembled Brad Pitt. He was a few years younger, athletic, friendly, hardworking, dependable, and always open to a challenge. One summer evening, Larry and I were relishing our recently assigned brand-new Harley-Davidsons. We rode side by side along the miles of westside beaches and around the University of British Columbia. It was warm, and we wore short-sleeved, open-collar uniform shirts. A dusk breeze carried the scent of the ocean. I was riding with good company on a beautiful evening, and, best of all, I was getting well paid for it. We were living the dream. Years later, Larry died long before he should have. Although we socialized occasionally and crossed paths in different work roles, that ride remains my special memory of him.

Being equipped and trained to handle a motorcycle made everything work smoothly. However, the problem was that when separated from the bike, traffic officers weren't equipped to perform effectively as patrol officers. One afternoon during rush hour, I noticed a large Japanese motorcycle being poorly driven on a busy downtown street. The driver appeared anxious when he saw me, and I sensed that if I tried to pull him over, he would try to evade me in the heavy traffic. I followed him without activating my lights or siren until we reached a red light, where he was boxed in by cars ahead and on both sides. He looked for an escape but found none, so I dismounted and approached him. To prevent him from taking off once traffic moved again, I ordered him to get off his bike. Strangely, he couldn't find the kickstand, so he stepped off the motorcycle, letting it crash onto the street, and sprinted away. I chased him on foot while broadcasting the situation over the radio. I soon felt the difficulty of running in motorcycle riding boots, heavy clothing, a helmet, and an equipment belt carrying a gun, ammunition, a collapsed steel baton, handcuffs, and a radio. After a couple of blocks, I was getting tired. The rider turned down a laneway. When I arrived there, I saw him partway down the lane, turning left between two apartment buildings. On the other side, a patrol unit had arrived, and he ran straight into them. The radio dispatcher then updated that the motorcycle had been reported stolen. Though pleased with the outcome, I was reminded of the limitations in my equipment and practices. Success required a collective, coordinated effort. What was true that day in Downtown Vancouver was equally true for the region and province.

During my years in Traffic Enforcement, I continued to lack trust in the conduct review system and questioned the integrity of some who administered it. One day in the downtown business core, I saw two vehicles stopped at a red light. One driver was not wearing a seatbelt, while the other was driving a vehicle in poor mechanical condition. Positioning my motorcycle between them, I told one driver to pull into the bus stop ahead after the traffic light turned green and instructed the other to pull in behind the first vehicle. I issued a ticket to the first driver for the seat belt violation and sent him on his way. As I was dealing with the second driver, he

became belligerent. Nonetheless, I ticketed him for operating a defective vehicle and listed the numerous defects on the ticket for his information. Several days later, I was summoned to Internal Investigations. There, a young detective whom I had never met before gave me a stern look and stated that he was investigating me for a “hit and run”—impacting a citizen’s car with my motorcycle’s handlebars and leaving without providing the required information—and also for being abusive in issuing a traffic ticket. After this heavy ‘bad cop’ routine, he suddenly softened - his face relaxed, and he adopted a friendlier tone – ‘good cop.’ He said, “I think I can deal with the hit and run, but I want to know about the ticket.” I responded by noting that hit-and-run was a criminal offence, which I took extremely seriously, even if he didn’t. Therefore, I would be consulting counsel, and in the meantime, I had nothing to say. Over the next few weeks, I received messages to contact the investigator. I sent a note that I was still obtaining counsel. Then I just ignored him. I didn’t need counsel because by then, I knew exactly what I would do. Finally, he left a message saying that if he did not get a statement from me by the end of his last shift that week, charges would be processed based on the complainant’s uncontested statement. During my shift on Friday evening, I slid a note under the detective’s office door. It said that my handlebars had never touched the vehicle, the violation ticket was fully correct for the condition of the complainant’s car, as was the indicated fine, and that the complainant had my identity, which was on the traffic ticket. Months later, I was in the courthouse chatting with other officers when the investigator approached. In a loud voice, he seemed intent on berating me in front of my peers, saying I should have provided my statement much earlier. My reply was that if I had been treated as a professional rather than a suspect, I would have. To participate in the complaint system, officers have to buy into it, believing it is managed objectively and fairly by mature adults. Too many times, I did not perceive it as meeting those criteria.

On another occasion, I received dispatch messages to attend Internal Investigations and see a particular detective. I ignored the messages because they hadn’t come through the chain of command. One morning at parade, my sergeant handed me a note with the same message. I asked if, as my direct supervisor, he was ordering me to comply. “I guess so,” he replied, seemingly puzzled by the question. Wearing my traffic officer gear, from riding boots to helmet, I entered the roomful of detectives sitting at their desks and asked who the investigator was. When he identified himself, I approached and told him my sergeant ordered me to be there. What did he want? He first vented about the frustration of being ignored and having to use the chain of command, then read a third-party complaint. I had issued the writer’s friend, the driver, a seat belt ticket. The allegation was that I had been ‘rude’ while doing so. I could not recall any such incident. I thought for a moment, then told the detective that the complaint was not ‘prima facie’ because it lacked sufficient information about the alleged misconduct. Rude was a subjective judgment, not an objective description of conduct. Therefore, it did not require a response. He stared at the letter for several moments, then acknowledged what I had explained. I replied that he seemed reasonable and that, if there were a next time, I would speak to him directly. I realized most investigators were principled and thoughtful. What appeared to be missing was leadership to ensure training and practices consistently met those standards.

All things come full circle. Late one evening, a peer and I were operating a radar speed trap on a major thoroughfare in East Vancouver. Two cars approached at high speeds. We stepped onto the street and flagged them down. The driver of my car slowed, ignored my signals, then swerved past me and sped off. I ran to my motorcycle and pursued it, pulling the car over several blocks away. As I approached the driver's window, I recognized one of the internal investigators who I felt had treated me poorly. It was a moment of moral choice. On the one hand, I could take revenge. On the other hand, I could show professional courtesy. For me, the high road had to prevail, regardless of the opportunity. Before he could speak, I said, "All you had to do was pull over." Angry but unwilling to stoop to his level, I turned my back on him and walked away. But I did inform my supervisor immediately.

At the end of 1986, after four years in Traffic Enforcement, I was transferred back to Patrol. I was thankful to have left in good health. During my time there, one officer suffered a devastating injury in a collision when an oncoming out-of-province pickup truck driver, unfamiliar with the city's streets, made a left turn in front of him without warning. Another officer was run over by a large city street-sweeper truck coming up behind him while he sat on his motorcycle; the sweeper driver was looking down at the curb on his right rather than ahead. It sounds a bit unbelievable now, but the only thing that saved the officer from the metal brushes was the space created by the steel crash bars on the downed motorcycle. Both officers were off work for a long time. I continued my frontline police career in the Downtown Northwest District, where I had spent three of my four years in Traffic Enforcement on a motorcycle. I was back in a patrol car, and the years were rolling on.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Veteran Officer – Patrol District 1 (1986–1992)**

As mentioned, District 1 was the city's northwest sector. Besides the density of streets and traffic that befitted traffic enforcement work, it included heavily populated areas: the enormous downtown central business district; the long Granville Street entertainment corridor with movie theatres, nightclubs, shops, and restaurants; and the large residential footprint of the West End, containing hundreds of high-rise apartment buildings, supporting businesses, and Davie Village, known for its long-established gay community. My assignment was with Team 1-3, primarily responsible for the West End.

Of the tens of thousands of residents in the district, most were law-abiding, with a significant percentage being single. Among the scores of people who commuted daily from the suburbs into the downtown office towers, there was little disorder requiring police intervention. The evening crowds of liquor-consuming club-goers who gathered from across the region told another story. After Expo 86, however, the city appeared to settle into a quieter period. Life continued with the usual thefts, disturbances, drug trafficking, suicides, traffic accidents, robberies, assaults, and domestic disputes that the police were used to dealing with.

However, there was one new safety hazard at work—AIDS. I first learned about the disease while working at the jail. The growing epidemic was mainly concentrated among the gay community, which was heavily represented where I worked. Since it was fatal, avoiding exposure to bodily fluids during a call or while handling a prisoner was crucial. The key was having effective verbal skills and maintaining physical distance to minimize contact. During a violent domestic dispute call in Davie Village, when I entered the apartment, I saw blood spattered throughout the living room. One of the residents involved was intoxicated and sitting on the couch, and his roommate was in the bedroom. Instead of trying to control or handcuff anyone, it was the opposite: instructing them not to move. The ambulance crew would need to clean them up first. With baton in hand, I stayed a few feet back.

Though I initially resisted having a partner after working alone for four years as a motorcycle officer, the idea of teaming up with someone eventually grew stronger. This was somewhat because dispatchers would assign simpler tasks — break-in reports, missing persons, bounced cheques — exclusively to one-person units, leaving more volatile calls for the two-person teams. The low-priority calls made long, dull shifts. Within a few weeks, I was back to working with a partner.

I'm not sure why the police were called, but my partner and I responded to a retirement home for an elderly man who felt abandoned and depressed and didn't see the point of living any

longer. On the wall of his living room was a black-and-white photograph of himself as a sniper in the Canadian Army during World War II. It was an image of a young, handsome, vital soldier. Now he was old and alone. He told me his life now felt completely meaningless. For about half an hour, I asked questions, listened, and empathized, but he seemed locked in his despondency. Even talking about his children and grandchildren, and what role he might have in their lives and what role they might have in his, didn't help. It was a long, hard, and emotional conversation, at least for me. I said I would ask mental health services to come by; then we had to leave for the next call. Though I was still active in my own adventure, I couldn't help but take a moment to wonder how my later years might unfold.

About a year afterward, in that same multi-level residence building, my partner and I attended a call regarding the suicide of an elderly man who had also lived alone. The weather had been warm for a long time. With days having passed without the manager seeing the resident, the manager entered the suite to check on him. The manager found the resident seated in a chair in the living room in front of a large, wide-open window, a shotgun blast having blown the top of his head off. The shotgun lay beside him on the floor. Brain and bone were all over the ceiling, walls, window, and floor. The corpse was days old, rotting, with swarms of buzzing flies. It was a gruesome scene. The door had been locked from the inside, and everything appeared consistent with a suicide. I wondered what a shotgun was doing in that old-age home and how it had gotten there. It was also odd that no one had reported a gunshot or any suspicious noise. We sought to establish the time of death by determining when the shot had been fired. As a top-floor corner suite, there were no neighbours above or to one side. Those across the hall and next door did not remember hearing anything unusual. That left us with the suite directly below. I knocked on the door, and an elderly lady answered. I asked if she had heard anything loud or unusual over the past few days. She thought for a while, and then her face lit up. Yes, she had. With a curious, concerned expression, she said, "It was the oddest thing. A couple of days ago, my window was wide open when, around midday, there was a clap of thunder!" She thought for another long moment, her forehead wrinkling further. "But it was strange because there wasn't a cloud in the sky." There was the information that had been missing. I found suicides disheartening. In this case, there was a palpable sense of despair, with a man near the end of his life, alone and without any reason to go on. Afterward, I was incredibly hungry again.

District 1 also links to the city of West Vancouver on the north side of Burrard Inlet via the famous Lions Gate Bridge. The bridge's roadway enters the airspace above the inlet from a high, rocky crag in Stanley Park before soaring across to the north shore. As a child, I recall the immense American aircraft carrier, the USS Coral Sea, entering the harbour beneath that lofty bridge. That shows how high the bridge is and how deep the water lies below. One day, several Greenpeace activists used mountaineering equipment to climb the vertical steel cables hanging from massive horizontal steel cables strung between two large steel towers. The roadway is suspended from this superstructure of towers and cables. Hanging high for several days, the protesters aimed to attract media attention to their cause while traffic below continued without

interruption. In BC, and Vancouver in particular, protesting has a longstanding subculture, and the public seldom pays much attention. My partner and I were the assigned unit responsible for any investigation. The day the protesters descended, the police supervisor shut down the bridge temporarily so that officers could arrest and transport the activists to the police station. He instructed me to charge them with criminal mischief, as, in his view, they had disrupted the lawful use of the bridge by the public. However, the only evidence I had of any interruption to traffic was the supervisor shutting down the bridge. At the police station, I spoke with the protesters. They were youngish, and, having achieved their goal, were physically exhausted and cooperative. They appeared to be reasonable individuals, just blindly idealistic. I issued each of them a ticket for climbing onto the superstructure of the Lions Gate Bridge. It was one of several bridges in the province for which doing so was a provincial offence. I also advised them that, in my opinion, climbing the superstructure was the only illegal activity that they had engaged in. Then I served each of them with a court attendance document for criminal mischief and explained that this was at my supervisor's direction. In due course, Crown counsel approved the charges, and the case went to trial. Defence counsel asked why I had arrested the accused parties for mischief. I explained that I had been ordered to do so. When asked if I believed the accused had committed a crime, I replied that I did not. My supervisor would need to justify his directives, as I was merely executing his decisions. He provided evidence after I did. I learned something that day, as the judge convicted all of them.

The bridge did not always serve as a place for trying to do good; it also held deep tragedies. Early one Sunday morning, while driving across it, midspan, a highway patrol officer observed a large man in a worn suit, no tie, and wearing a construction helmet. He appeared to be inspecting the superstructure. Thinking he was an official, the officer continued driving. However, as he travelled down the causeway, he realized it was the weekend and that no such inspection would be taking place. He U-turned, and when he got back, the man had climbed over the sidewalk guardrail and was about to jump. His construction hat with a note and a rock to weigh it down lay on the sidewalk. His actions appeared well planned. The officer got out of his car and ran toward the man, shouting, "No! You don't have to do this!" The man responded, "I do," and then uttered his final words, "There is just too much pain." The officer could only watch as the jumper fell silently to the water far below. He struck the surface of the inlet with his chest, crushing his internal organs. A nearby boater saw what happened and recovered the body. Most jumpers from that bridge entered feet-first, penetrating deep into the water, and were lost in the powerful undercurrents. Most often, their bodies later washed up on a distant beach. My partner and I were assigned to investigate the sudden death. The note in the helmet informed where the man's car was parked, along with his mother's name and phone number. We visited his mother to notify her of his death. Surprisingly, she remained quite calm, telling us about his chronic mental anguish following a car accident years earlier. She knew of his constant wish to end his suffering. And so, he had. It was hard to look at that shattered body and reflect on how life was unbearable when he was alive.

The West End held so many tragedies. Early one summer morning, my partner and I were dispatched to the scene of a fall from one of the highest floors of a very tall apartment building. As we came on scene, we pulled in behind an ambulance that had just arrived. I observed a paramedic running toward the building with a medical bag in hand and followed suit. I have a clear image of that paramedic in my mind - a stocky male with straight, shoulder-length blond hair that bounced as he ran. He looked like one of the Beach Boys. He disappeared as the walkway curved between the building and an adjacent multi-level parking lot. Several moments later, he ran back toward and then past me. "Nothing I can do here!" he exclaimed and was gone. When I rounded the bend, lying on the cement, significantly flattened by the high-velocity impact and wearing only shorts and a T-shirt, was the body of a young man. One of his legs was severed at the groin and lay further down the sidewalk, his body having struck the parking lot structure first. It was a lot to take in. My partner went to the apartment and found there had been an all-night men's party. No one knew what had happened. Fortunately for our investigation, a man in a nearby apartment had been on his penthouse deck with a cup of early-morning coffee and a newspaper. He had watched the victim climb out of the window and then step onto a steel girder that encircled the building, a meter outside the window alcove. Someone had removed a security screw to allow the window to open fully. The victim sat on the beam and then, after a few moments, rolled forward and fell to his death. It wasn't a homicide, but was it a suicide, intoxication, a drugged state, an accident, or did he fall asleep? Perhaps the coroner would figure it out. We just had a gloomy incident involving the death of a young man who had barely begun his life. I knew my coping mechanism - I needed something substantial to eat.

Corpses were transported by a body removal service contracted by the province. Their task was simple—to take the body from the scene to the morgue. Body removal dealt with the worst of the corpses, including decapitated or decomposing bodies. They also transported the bodies of people who died from a known medical condition if the deceased's doctor would sign cause-of-death documents. Outside of these scenarios, a body was not deemed obviously or legally dead. It would be taken by ambulance to a hospital where a resident doctor would make an assessment and pronounce death. The coroner would then investigate further. The body removal staff were a different sort. Unquestionably, their work affected them. I found their relationship to the dead particularly eerie. I often heard them speaking to the bodies they were handling as if apologizing for how they were treating them, or perhaps hoping for some cooperation. In those days, at sudden-death calls, we were required to phone the BC Coroners Service and report what we had. This was mostly a bureaucratic step. In due course, they might take some action. Then there was government talk of tightening budgets, reducing staff levels, and constraining services. The BC Coroner's Service policy shifted, and we were told they would now attend all sudden-death incidents to do a firsthand examination of the body, scene, and circumstances. At first, it seemed like a make-work program, but passing responsibility to their expertise proved to be beneficial.

Often, weekend partying in the nightclubs would strain police resources, usually around closing time. One evening, police units were fully occupied responding to multiple drunken disturbances when a call came in about a violent fight with a large crowd gathered on Robson Street outside of Shenanigans nightclub. I was working alone, available, and close to the location. Realizing something had to be done about the violence, I advised dispatch that I was responding. Unfortunately, no cover units materialized on the radio. I entered the block, and ahead in the middle of the street, I saw a man with his back to me, throwing punches while sitting on top of another man. A large, intoxicated crowd was on the sidewalk, cheering and jeering. An idea came to mind. I drove up and stopped as close as I could behind the puncher, almost touching him with my bumper. Then, for a few seconds at full volume, I activated the siren system's air horn. The puncher's body jerked upward, no doubt thinking he was about to be run over by a semi. With their nervous systems overloaded, neither combatant had any fight left in them, and the crowd, too, became quiet. I checked that neither man needed medical attention and that the fight had been consensual. After warning them of potential charges for causing a disturbance, I told them to get off the street and behave themselves. The evening's chaos was over, and order was restored. No force was used, and no paperwork was necessary. I informed the radio that the situation was over and that I was back in service.

Back then, Vancouver was perceived to have a 'hooker' problem. Female prostitutes worked in an unofficial tiered system. Some had regular clients, while others worked discreetly out of specific clubs. 'High-track' street workers were found in particular areas of Downtown, and 'low-track' street workers were located in the Downtown Eastside. Services, costs, and risks varied accordingly. Male prostitutes mainly worked in clubs or on the streets of the West End. There were no brothels, as public policy made such facilities illegal. This stance likely stemmed from old-fashioned moral views, combined with a lack of understanding of the sex trade by politicians and the public. Nonetheless, street prostitution did have a real impact on communities. The traffic, disturbances, shouting, and confrontations were often unbearable for residents and businesses. The prostitutes were quite visible. They advertised their services effectively, dressing provocatively and showing a fair amount of leg and cleavage regardless of the weather. They would make eye contact with passing male drivers, followed by a seductive smile, until they snared a customer for fellatio, intercourse, or 'half and half,' priced at market rates, cash only.

In response to the proliferation of prostitutes on the streets and alleys of the West End, an injunction was obtained for that area in July 1984, before my assignment to the district. The trade moved to the less populated eastern part of the downtown peninsula. It also spread into other parts of the city, such as residential Mount Pleasant. As a result, it became a more widespread problem. In 1985, the federal government aimed to eliminate street prostitution by criminalizing conversations in public places about arranging sexual services. This was to appease voters who were upset that the sex trade was occurring in their neighbourhoods while side-stepping moralizing over sex for money and avoiding a deeper examination of the industry. The police department appeared to recognize that prostitution was a public policy issue that poorly designed

laws and enforcement could not resolve. Nevertheless, the department established a program where it loaned patrol officers to the Vice Squad. The task was to participate in sting operations. The goal was to have a prostitute verbally offer sex for money to an officer posing as a customer, or conversely, to have a customer do so to an officer posing as a prostitute. I participated in the program several times. During discussions with the supervisor at Vice, he told me that the initiative made no difference to the street sex trade. It was primarily intended to generate a steady stream of charges to counter accusations of inadequate enforcement by the department.

One day in court, I realized judges thought the effort was pointless, too. I was dressed casually in slacks and an open shirt, driving a rental car with a gym bag and a squash racket on the passenger seat. Mid-afternoon, my target was standing by a laneway off Seymour Street in Downtown. She didn't wear much makeup, and her clothing wasn't revealing, but her demeanour signalled she was a sex trade worker. I drove past a couple of times and returned her smile. Finally, I drove down the lane to her. She was attractive and friendly, like the girl next door, though cautiously distant. We made small talk as she examined me and the car. I said I was on my way to play squash when she caught my eye. We chatted some more, then discussed sex for money. She seemed like a nice girl from a small town, sincere and thoughtful. She wasn't working late at night when men, emboldened by liquor, hunted for sex. Continuing the nice-guy routine, I added that I didn't want to go to a run-down hotel room with someone so sweet. She hesitated, looked me over again, and said we could go to her place, which was nearby. She trusted me. I signalled the arrest team, and then I, too, was detained by the police at the end of our charade. In court, I presented my evidence, including the conversation. As such, this evidence was subject to a 'voir dire,' a trial within a trial, to determine if her words were voluntary and thereby admissible. That process lasted half a day. I thought it was a significant case because of the attention and cost involved. The judge admitted the conversation into evidence, and the accused was convicted. His minimal fine, similar to a speeding ticket, contained a message. I realized the police department was spending considerable resources on what it knew was a futile endeavour, one that also unfairly harmed sex workers and clients. The initiative was not motivated by public service but by political considerations. Many years later, when I worked with sex trade worker advocacy groups, I came to understand the serious, detrimental impacts of these government policies and their enforcement by the police.

# Woman guilty of soliciting despite claims she was tricked

By BRIAN MORTON

A 20-year-old woman was convicted Friday of soliciting an undercover police officer despite defence claims that police used "fraud, deceit and trickery" in arresting her.

In rejecting defence lawyer Tony Serka's request for a judicial stay of proceedings against Michelle McLean, Vancouver provincial court Judge Robert Lemiski said undercover police operations are essential in combatting street prostitution and that Vancouver is not like "Irma La Douce," with uniformed police clearly visible to prostitutes.

Serka argued that police



**SERKA**

entrapped McLean by using "fraud, deceit and trickery" when engaging McLean in a conversation in the 1000-block Seymour on June 26.

He said vice-squad Const. John DeHaas did not admit to being a police officer when asked by McLean and that he initiated the conversation and made the first references to money and sex.

Serka also said the vice squad was pressured into making arrests because it had a three-arrest nightly "quota."

Serka said McLean eventually began communicating with DeHaas for the purpose of prostitution, but said: "The question is how did she get to that point? They (police) created that situation themselves."

However, Crown prosecutor Alan Blair argued that it was "very clear" McLean was engaged in street prostitution.

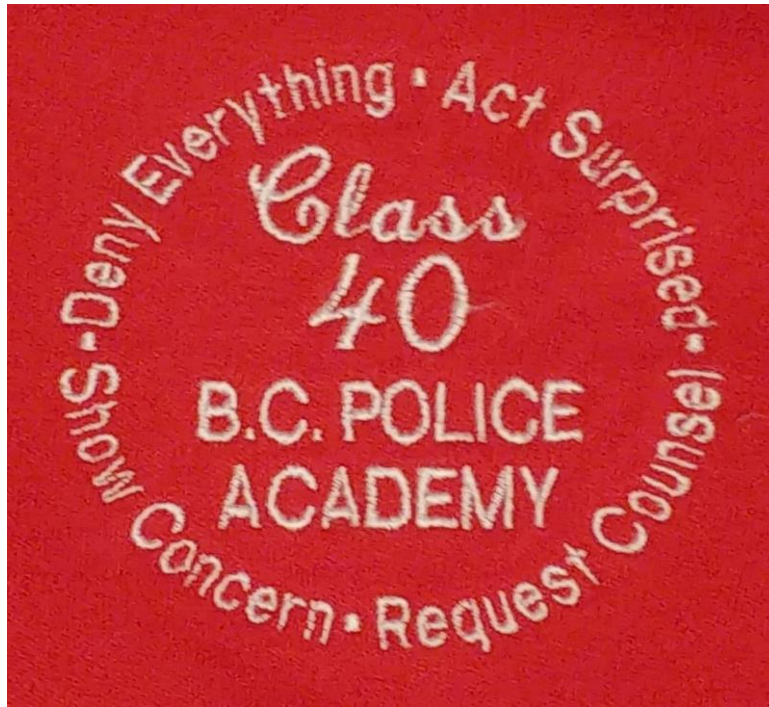
*October 17, 1987. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

Stress in police work was peculiar. In most situations, my focus was on continuously taking in information from dispatch, comparing it with past experiences to make better sense of it, and then preparing my response for when I arrived on the scene. Sometimes I overlooked routine actions. One evening, there was a dispatch about a significant violent altercation involving several males outside the Orpheum Theatre in the entertainment zone. Multiple units were responding, and I was working alone that night. I arrived on the scene and double-parked my police cruiser beside the theatre on busy Seymour Street. Leaving the vehicle's emergency lights flashing, I locked the door, slammed it shut, then ran to deal with the violence. Once several units arrived and order was restored in a few minutes, I was free to respond to other calls. I headed back to my car, and there it sat - red and blue lights spinning, engine running, and the

doors securely locked—the keys in the ignition. Fortunately, back then, we still wore our hats, and I was wearing mine. I had stored a coat hanger wire inside the top of it, bent in a circle around the rim, which I used to access cars when needed. However, I hadn't expected that one of the cars I might need to unlock would be my own. At that time, door lock pins were fairly easy to grab, as they sat just behind the window above the lock and usually had a widened top. I smoothly coat-hangered the door open and drove away, no one the wiser. Well, I was wiser, realizing the need to pay closer attention to my state of mind when under pressure.

Stress can cause tunnel vision, but fatigue can be dangerous. Rotating shifts conflict with normal circadian rhythms. When the body wants to sleep, the brain says to stay wide awake; sometimes the body wins. One early morning, working alone near the end of a long, busy night shift, the calls stopped coming in, and the radio was quiet. Feeling relaxed, I drove down a ramp toward the waterfront street that would take me back to the station. The next thing I remember was waking up to a loud thud and the police car quaking as it slammed into something. Wide awake and alarmed, I stopped the car and got out to take a look. I had struck a high curb on the cruiser's passenger side, flattening both the front and rear tires. I felt foolish, thinking I would need to call a unit to investigate the 'accident,' and I would be made fun of for a long time. Then the rational part of my brain kicked in. A flat tire wasn't an accident, and having two flat tires was just bad luck. I called for a tow truck over the radio, telling the dispatcher that the vehicle needed to go to the garage for tire repairs. No paperwork was required, and no questions were asked. However, I was reminded that, aside from managing stress, I also needed to deal with the fatigue caused by shift work.

During those years, I became a field trainer, instructing many officers in their three-month program between the academy's Blocks 1 and 3. The Block 2 field-training program shifted recruits from passive observation to full engagement, always under a trainer's close supervision. One trainee gave me one of his academy class's golf shirts with the words 'Act Surprised, Show Concern, Deny Everything, Request Counsel' emblazoned on it. It indicated that, a decade after my training, a deep mistrust of the conduct review process and those involved in it persisted in police culture. At the outset of their careers, the police academy itself still emphasized the need for officers to protect themselves and shared tactics to do so.



Near the end of my time in the district, I became a senior team member. I had passed the examination that qualified me to supervise and would act in that role when the team's sergeant or corporal was on leave. One evening, as the acting supervisor, I was requested to attend a police unit in the West End. When I arrived, several officers and a canine unit were present. They briefed me that an impaired driver refused to exit his vehicle. I asked why my presence was necessary, as removing a resistant person wasn't a complex task that required a supervisor. The officer suggested I look inside the car to understand the issue. I walked over, and there, seated upright and staring straight ahead, hands in a steely grip on the steering wheel, was the largest and beefiest man I had ever seen. He barely fit in the car. Instantly, I grasped the problem. The car had a fabric roof, so I proposed finding a gap and filling the interior with capsicum spray until he came out voluntarily. As the air in the vehicle grew more toxic, I watched his resolve to stay put, but he finally opened the door and stepped out, towering over the car and us. It was Paul Bunyan reincarnated - massive, belligerent, and drunk - disobeying all instructions. The struggle began, with several officers and a dog against this huge logger from a small town in BC. Ultimately, he was cuffed and taken to the hospital for medical attention, the dog having savaged his ankle right through his boot. The more he fought, the more the dog clamped down. The attending doctor, frustrated with the man's continued uncooperative and aggressive behaviour, finally told us to get him out of the hospital immediately. Off to jail he went. The incident reminded me that when faced with daunting obstacles, officers looked to their sergeants for creative and acceptable solutions. Skilled and experienced supervisors are vital to the success of ethical frontline policing.

Eating in restaurants instead of bringing meals was a choice I made when I was assigned to frontline operational roles. Various individual and chain restaurants offered police officers discounted meals. We would always tip generously as a token of appreciation. One day, my partner and I wanted to try a different restaurant on Denman Street. It was Vietnamese. After a wonderful meal, the middle-aged female server insisted in broken English that we didn't need to pay anything. A red flag went up. What cultural beliefs might be at play? Did she think we expected a free meal? Do police in Vietnam demand free meals? It was a new and concerning situation. The language barrier prevented us from having a proper conversation with her. We thanked her sincerely, but then left a tip that covered the entire meal. Sadly, we didn't go back there; we didn't know how to navigate the possible differences in beliefs and expectations. For us, the cost of being seen as corrupt was too high. Providing police services to a multicultural population can sometimes be complex and confusing.

Near the end of my time in District 1, there was a lot of talk about community policing. It was based on the idea that some people in a community know what is going on and who is doing it. The theorists believed that successful policing was all about getting to know citizens on a first-name basis, which would magically turn us into villagers with close, trusting relationships. It was a trending idea, so the police executive wanted the department to look progressive. Sitting at their desks during the day shift, they declared this approach would be adopted across the department. In reality, the big-city call load kept us fully occupied. Also, rotating shifts made it difficult to establish and maintain relationships, as they could only be sustained intermittently. In the end, the department created a handful of Community Police Officer (CPO) positions that mostly worked the day shift and collaborated with a small group of well-meaning but not necessarily representative or informed community members. On paper, it appeared we were practicing community policing, and both the police board and the public were placated. Was it even a valid method to address disorder in a big city? It didn't ring true. Addressing public policy seemed more important. Why were there so many mentally disturbed people causing mayhem? Because both the needed resources and authorities were lacking. Why were street prostitution and its collateral disorder present? Because brothels were illegal. Why was organized crime involving marijuana so widespread? Because it was illegal. The only obvious outcome of community policing was that officers were no longer just numbers; now, we could use our names.

In the district, I also became more involved in representing members as a Police Act agent. I performed the role within an organizational culture where, too often, reputation, bias, and ego shaped the conduct review process. One day, a corporal approached me. He was a sincere and competent member, but his personality could sometimes be seen as overly direct, if not confrontational. He didn't seem to care about getting another promotion. With superiors lacking extensive supervisory and management training, the most potent lever for controlling others in the department had become dominance over part of the complex multi-stage promotion system - it was power over rewards. When someone stopped 'playing the game,' they were often

viewed as insubordinate and unmanageable. The corporal wasn't playing anymore. He handed me a multi-page statement he had prepared for submission to an internal investigator in response to a complaint. Could I give it a read first? I read it, then asked if he wanted me to act as his agent, which he did. After tearing up the statement, I told him I'd first speak to the investigator to find what needed to be addressed. I located the investigator, who was a newly minted sergeant. I learned the investigation was prompted by a judge who was dissatisfied when three police witnesses gave conflicting evidence in court over their grounds for entering a residence. At the end of the trial, the judge, visibly annoyed, dismissed the case and sent the matter to the chief constable for his review, without clarifying his concerns. After reading the court transcript, the sergeant believed the corporal was the problem, as the defence lawyer had examined the corporal's notebook during the trial and highlighted inconsistencies between his notes and oral testimony. I asked where the sergeant expected the matter to end up. The reply was a couple of days of suspension for the corporal. I expressed that convicting and sentencing someone at the beginning of an investigation appeared inappropriate. With the corporal convinced he had done nothing wrong, if the matter carried on, there would be a hearing. I also noted that the witnesses I would need to call included the prosecutor, defence counsel, and judge. Later, I spoke with the defence and prosecution lawyers, neither of whom had an issue with what had happened in court involving the corporal. Then I contacted the judge. He was apologetic, saying he was especially angry with the prosecutor for failing to review the evidence before the trial. The judge was upset with the inconsistent testimony from witnesses, but not the discrepancy between the corporal's oral recollections and his notes. Defence counsel had brought the corporal's inconsistent accounts to light, which were considered when assessing the reliability of the evidence at trial. This experience underscored the importance of speaking to witnesses before engaging with investigators. Either way, the matter went away.

As I represented members, I appreciated that some investigators and managers did not want to appear wrong or have their authority challenged. I was confronting several sentiments in the organizational culture. I wasn't thinking about my future at that time. I was focused on the present, offended by politics, agendas, and injustices, striving for objectivity and fairness, and wanting to stand up for my peers. Later in my career, I found that several of the investigators and superiors I had challenged held grudges and would go out of their way to make my life difficult.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Emergency Response Team Officer (1983–1987)**

During my time in Traffic Enforcement and the first few months back in Patrol, I served on the Emergency Response Team (ERT) for four years. Back then, ERT was an adjunct role, and the team was not deployed full-time. After completing a preliminary course, there were several mandatory monthly training days to maintain operational readiness. When I joined ERT, it comprised two components—a large ‘containment’ group and a smaller ‘tactical’ team. New ERT members started in containment and could then be selected for tactical. For the first two years, I was a containment member, and for the last two, I was placed on the twelve-member tactical team. ERT was a peculiar thing to volunteer for because, compared to my army experiences, it seemed under-trained, under-equipped, and tactically weak. However, it struck a chord with me, and I enjoyed the few days each month at the range and training at building sites. It was enjoyable and different. The team members—all of them men back then—were also a great group.

Regular patrol units were trained and organized to handle high-risk situations and responded to most policing incidents. However, some scenarios became too dangerous for patrol members. Due to equipment, technique, or training limitations, officers could not safely approach a person or situation to gain control. While some specialized covert units were skilled at managing high-risk mobile events, patrol members needed to contain extreme incidents and keep them static. In these cases, a supervisor established a perimeter to contain the threat and protect the public by preventing entry into the area, and sometimes evacuating citizens. Under the direct command of the patrol supervisor, ERT containment members, equipped with appropriate firearms, established these perimeters around high-risk situations. Usually, the supervisor would broadcast the ‘terms of engagement’ should the suspect(s) seek to cross the perimeter. The only time patrol officers entered high-risk areas was when a suspect was harming people, requiring immediate action to save lives.

The ERT tactical team was usually assembled as a separate unit with its own leader. It was designed to enter and control high-risk areas within the contained perimeter. Typical ERT scenarios involved armed and barricaded individuals who were emotional or attempting to evade arrest, or hostage takings. When ERT became involved, the overall police response needed to shift from patrol’s immediate-action mindset to calm, precise information gathering, organizing, and action. The tactic in almost all circumstances was to wait out the suspects, as they weren’t going anywhere. Psychological studies revealed that suspects in these situations followed a predictable pattern. As the hours passed, they would lose hope of achieving their goals, expend their emotional energy, and eventually accept the inevitability of arrest. The exception to waiting

was the reasonable belief that someone would die or suffer grievous bodily harm if police did not intervene quickly. Substantial police research from the New York Police Department, conducted by Harvey Schlossberg, PhD, demonstrated the tremendous risks involved for police officers, suspects, and the public when assaults by police occurred. Therefore, such actions were considered a last resort. Similarly, the British Special Air Service (SAS) only conducted assaults in hostage situations after confirming a hostage's death. Otherwise, such violent behaviour went against normal psychological responses when the hostage and hostage-taker were together for more than about ten minutes. Our team was aware of this information, and it was incorporated into our decision-making.

The tactical team practiced two main tactics. One was a very slow, cautious search used to thoroughly check a contained high-risk area that had shown no activity for a long time and was thought to contain unknown threats. This method involved moving slowly and quietly, kneeling, crawling, using hand signals, and maintaining coordinated actions. The other tactic was a 'dynamic entry,' in which a premise was breached and secured in seconds. This approach required detailed planning, including obtaining a full layout of the premises and then assigning specific destinations, routes, and arcs of fire for each officer. The assault might involve tools such as breaching equipment and stun grenades. In all ERT tactical work, thorough preparation and clear command-and-control were essential.



A snowy winter tactical unit training day. We are in front of one of two ERT equipment vans. I am front row, center.

In my second year on the tactical team, about a year before Expo 86, the team leader position became vacant. The tactical team had always chosen its leader from among its members, regardless of rank. With the upcoming world exposition, senior management decided that a member with a formal rank should lead, and Corporal Larry Young was assigned to the role. He had been on the team years earlier, and everyone knew and respected him, so the team readily accepted him. Larry reminded me a lot of Kirk Douglas in old World War Two movies—rough and tough, with a take-charge, action-oriented personality. He even looked a lot like Douglas. Soon after, I noticed the tactical team's energy was shifting. At first, it was hard to pinpoint why. Maybe it was because several members struggled to set aside time from their regular work assignments to attend range and training days. But things got murky when a senior member was unexpectedly removed from the team. At a special team meeting, we were told that this was due to misconduct during a previous training day. I was puzzled, as I was present that day along with a few regular attendees. The story was that someone on the team reported that the senior member

had allegedly committed theft. To me, moving an old phone within an abandoned warehouse, saying it would be useful at home, and then leaving it behind did not constitute misconduct. Either way, an internal investigation had already been completed, closed, and sealed with the chief constable's approval, so long as the member was no longer on the team. I found it strange that I had not been interviewed. My focus shifted. I asked who the informant was, because knowing who was reporting and framing events was just as important to me as any alleged wrongdoing. No one said anything. Things were getting oddly secretive.

A few weeks later, an overnight training session was held at the Chilliwack Armed Forces base. The event had a strange atmosphere. Without team members being informed in advance, range staff and several other non-team personnel were in attendance, and appeared dour and serious. What was happening? I realized conversations must have occurred that team members had not been told about. After we returned from Chilliwack, it was announced that four members had been removed from the team and two others placed on probation. I was stunned. The team had already lost the member who had been pressured off, leaving only five remaining members unscathed. These included the team leader, the chief constable's son, a union representative, a member who had been with the team since its inception, and myself. My exclusion from the group of errant members baffled me, as, unlike the others who remained untouched, I lacked any obvious political capital. The fallout left the team devastated. In fact, it was hard to call us a team anymore. We had been reduced to just a group of individuals. All trust and cohesion had been destroyed. One of the probated members decided to quit. I spoke openly that I, too, planned to leave. Shortly after, the commanding superintendent called each member in for an interview. He was a tall, slender man with a long history in the department and a reputation for cleaning up problematic units. Being summoned to his office was intimidating. He knew I was planning to leave the team, but his instructions were clear: no one would be quitting. Despite what he had heard in the interviews, he stated that the removed members would be replaced and that new ones would be trained in preparation for Expo 86.

The tactical team was replenished, and training for Expo was carried out. The unit was also reorganized to include the team leader, three counter-snipers, and two four-man entry squads, one of which I led. To ensure we were ready for Expo, we spent a week with the FBI Hostage Rescue Team at Fort Lewis, Washington. It was excellent refresher training. Along with the World Exposition, the Skytrain rapid-transit line between Vancouver and New Westminster opened. We trained for potential incidents on it. Expo 86 passed without serious incident, and life seemed to return to normal—well, almost. During one training day, the few regular attendees, only about half of the team, asked me to lead some planning instead of doing any training that day. As one of the two entry squad leaders, I tried to step back, as I was only an operational leader, not an administrative one. Frustrated, they persisted until I agreed. That day, we clarified what was expected of the team, the actual conditions of our deployments, and the gaps in our training. Using the same annual training time, we suggested different content and a revised schedule for the following year. We sent our ideas to the administrative corporal assigned to

liaise with the team. Later, he called me at home and said that following a resulting discussion, the document was discarded. A little disappointed but not surprised, I took a deep breath. Having witnessed the removal of a team member and experienced the team's purge before Expo 86, I sensed our informed input was unlikely to be accepted. The situation underscored that until strong, principled leadership took hold in the organization, service delivery would be subject to in-house politics and egos.

Afterward, a series of operational deployments caused serious concern among some of us on the team because training and protocols were not followed. The first incident involved a male who had fired gunshots at two people on a busy walkway and then returned to a nearby townhouse. I was the last member to arrive on the scene, as I lived some distance away. I was told the team would immediately conduct a dynamic entry of the premises. As I suited up, I asked if someone inside the residence was in danger, as that could be the only reason for the assault. The answer was a vague 'maybe.' Under the circumstances, I felt there was no time to review what was known or the entry plan. The orders were for me to enter first, followed by my teammate, Brock Graham and then the rest of the team. I had complete faith in Brock. He was serious and disciplined. Having spent years in the army, he was highly competent, with top-level operational and weapons skills. The two of us were to storm past three rooms to the living room at the end of the hall, which we were to secure. Yet, our team protocol never allowed passing rooms that had not been cleared. After breaching the door, we entered. I was armed with a short shotgun loaded with SSG, a deadly, large-grain, multiple-pellet round, and I was wearing a heavy ballistic vest. I felt exposed and vulnerable as we ran past open doorways to the living room. A team member then discovered that the shooter had already committed suicide in a bedroom we had passed, so the safety flaws in the entry plan were moot. Later, I learned there was no information indicating that the suspect was a threat to anyone inside the premises. That had been entirely speculative. Therefore, in my assessment, our methodological slow search would have been the appropriate approach, not a dynamic entry.

Not long after that, we were called out to School Street on the east side of the city, where an inebriated Hispanic male had entered a townhouse in breach of a restraining order. He had pointed a small-calibre handgun at family members and told them to leave, but he wanted to be with his infant child, whom they were to leave behind. Once again, I was the last to arrive at the command post in a nearby hotel. The location was contained by patrol and ERT containment officers. After I suited up, I led my team on a perimeter reconnaissance. We found members in crossfire, inappropriate weapons and ammunition for the situation, and a lack of effective containment at the rear. Most deficiencies we corrected through instructions given over the radio. We then stood by at one end of the townhouse complex, where patrol and containment members were positioned. After some time, a police officer with a megaphone arrived, accompanied by a male relative of the suspect. I was told the suspect had stopped communicating with the negotiator by phone. It had been decided that I would negotiate via the megaphone through this relative, who would translate into Spanish. I was not a trained negotiator, nor did I understand

what the relative was saying in Spanish. After several broadcasts and shouted responses, it became clear the suspect was getting aggravated, and he fired a shot toward a containment member across from me, striking the wall. At that point, I ended the fruitless ‘negotiation.’ Additionally, more than once, the counter-sniper team asked for permission to shoot the suspect. I was confused about what threat justified the request, but fortunately, the operations commander denied it. Eventually, the team leader, the operations commander, and several others left the hotel command post and joined us. To reduce congestion and get closer to the suspect, I proposed repositioning my team inside the evacuated townhouse next to his location, and the proposal was approved. About an hour later, over the radio, we were informed of an arrangement the suspect had agreed to. It appeared telephone communications had been re-established. Three family members, wearing body armour, would walk to the front of the townhouse. The suspect would come out, put his gun down, and hand the child to the family members. It seemed overly optimistic and was a questionable police course of action. Much was unknown, and many things could go wrong with potentially fatal outcomes. We would lose control of the situation, and the family members could be in mortal danger. Concerned, we communicated on the radio, which was recorded, that we did not support the plan. At least that would be preserved on the record. We were told the plan was proceeding. When the family members arrived, the suspect came out, looked around, but did not put the gun down or hand over the child. Then a family member lunged forward, trying to wrestle the child away, followed by the other two family members grabbing the gun arm. Recognizing that the agreement was falling apart and a struggle had begun, tactical, containment, and patrol officers rushed toward the scene. The suspect managed to fire a few wild shots before being subdued. With the baby recovered, the gun secured, and the suspect in custody, the extended family surged onto the scene. It was chaos. The media knew to keep their distance, but unsupervised, they soon felt emboldened to move into the crowd to capture the story.

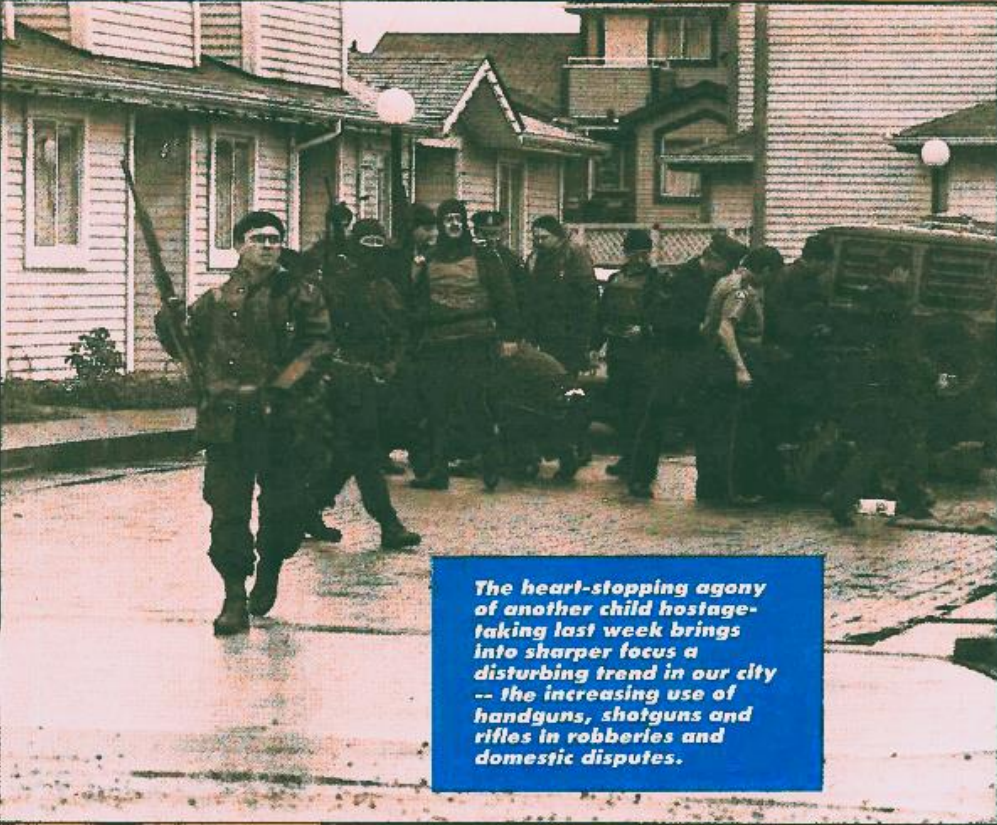
At the debriefing after the call, the operations commander was present. A team member asked him why he approved a plan that put the family members at severe risk. He responded that he did not believe they were at risk. The next question was, if that’s the case, why were they wearing bulletproof vests? Due to the team’s overall poor performance during the prolonged incident, a deep division grew among the tactical team members. One member resigned afterwards, expressing safety concerns.

Vol 1 No 6 Vancouver, January 11, 1987

# WEST SIDE WEEK

VANCOUVER'S QUALITY WEEKLY

**FEZ UP**  
*Mia Wong  
 And The  
 Dramatic  
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**The heart-stopping agony of another child hostage-taking last week brings into sharper focus a disturbing trend in our city -- the increasing use of handguns, shotguns and rifles in robberies and domestic disputes.**

## GUN CITY

**The Ugly New Trend in Our Neighbourhood - Guns**  
 BY BEV BALLANTYNE

On Dec. 20, 1986, an American veteran of the Vietnam war allegedly shot his estranged girl friend as well as two teenage girls walking home in their False Creek neighbourhood. The suspect, nicknamed Rambo by the police, was described as emotionally distraught over the deterioration of his relationship with his girl friend. Four shotguns were allegedly found in his possession.

Jan. 2, 1987 A distressed woman called police to come to the aid of her very depressed boyfriend, who was threatening suicide. He allegedly

*Continued on page 2*



**FEATHERED FOWL FLOPS**  
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**FROM OUTER SPACE**  
 PAGE 3

*West Side Week – January 11, 1987*

In response to the hostility over how the School Street call was managed, a team member arranged a meeting two weeks later. One topic discussed was whether the situation involved a barricaded intoxicated individual using his child as cover or if it was a hostage scenario. The tactics and strategies for these two cases were very different. There were no threats directed at

the child, who was, after all, the suspect's son. What kind of hostage taker would ask for diapers and milk, as he did? Regarding barricaded persons, the usual approach was to wait them out, as their psychological state generally shifted over time—especially once they sobered up. Some argued it was definitely a hostage situation, justifying shooting the suspect. As the debate became more heated and unproductive, I left.

Late one night, about three weeks after the School Street call, I was at home, sleeping soundly, when the phone rang. A fellow tactical unit member was on the line. He informed me that team leader Larry Young had been killed during an ERT operation. I was struck to my core and lay there motionless, unable to move, staring at the ceiling. I had no words to describe what I felt. The team had seemed tumultuous for so long, and now Larry was gone. February 2, 1987, was forever etched into the history of the Vancouver Police Department that night and into the minds of hundreds of its members. Even decades later, it remains difficult to talk about Larry's death. He was deeply beloved and admired by everyone who knew him, including me. His death, especially because it happened at work, made it very personal and painful. It all felt so unfair and tragic. I couldn't think about Larry's death separately, as it was intertwined with my perceptions and feelings about events within the team. It was important for me to have clarity about what happened the night he died.

Confronting a lone armed suspect within their residence did not align with the team's standard procedures. Given such an extreme threat, if the police intended to carry out a search warrant, they would avoid a dynamic entry. Instead, they might contain the premises and wait for the suspect to surrender or force them out using gas. Alternatively, more covert tactics, performed by specialist units, could be used. Everyone eventually exits their home, providing the opportunity for apprehension before entering to search. In high-risk situations like this, patience often becomes the key. On the night Larry was killed, the Drug Squad called on the tactical team because the subject was known to be armed, alert, and dangerous. Their intel was accurate, as he was lying in his home, waiting for anyone attempting to steal his drug supply. A partial tactical team assembled and entered. As they entered, the startled suspect fired his assault rifle down the hallway, killing Larry, who was in the line of fire. Brock Graham, the lead officer, acted on his ingrained army training and moved toward the shooter. Brock shot and killed the shooter, named Sheffield. It was the first tactical call in two years that I had not participated in. As the team was being assembled, either I had not been contacted or, because of the recent disagreements over the School Street incident, I had not been called at all. I will never know.

Back then, I didn't understand the trauma of Larry's death for individuals or the organization, but his tragic end affected both. Many people close to him scrambled for calmer emotions and acceptable explanations of what had happened. Clearly, people were experiencing intense emotional turmoil and guilt, both conscious and unconscious. Those who, over time, had neglected the team, played politics, or ignored red flags were forced to examine their actions. In the aftermath, there was much intuitive defending, denying, and circling the wagons. There was Larry's family to manage, the coroner's inquest to face, careers to protect, and narratives to

control. The troubling events involving the team before and after Expo 86 had to be buried. Cover-ups, falsehoods, and manipulations began. In my grief over Larry's death, I didn't fully notice, much less understand, these reactions and their motivations until much later, but there were some early signs. At the funeral, the team was divided into those who were at the call and those who were not. An interim team leader was appointed—the current liaison corporal—only to be replaced soon after by a team counter-sniper. Apparently, the executive saw him as someone reliable to guide things through the difficult times ahead. On the next scheduled training day, I was called into the office of the inspector who oversaw ERT. Unlike over a year earlier, when I was ordered to stay on the team, I was now ordered to leave. That ended my time in ERT. After I left the training day, the inspector told the team I had decided to quit, which was a lie. Afterward, I had to answer questions from team members about 'quitting.'

On one hand, after everything that had happened, it was a huge relief to be away from ERT. On the other hand, I was beginning to realize how deep the internal politics surrounding Larry's death were becoming. The department's sensitivity to the circumstances of Larry's death and the threat posed by exposing the events leading up to it persisted for years. After the inquest, I was summoned to Internal Investigations and told I was under investigation for a possible unauthorized conversation with the coroner's office. I was upset, as this was all mere speculation, a fishing expedition. I asked where the investigation originated, and was told it came from the chief constable's office. So, I went there. The chief constable's executive officer informed me that he had attended the inquest and that complex questions about team operations had been asked. He thought I might have advised the coroner's office on what to ask. I pointed out that I had not been called to the inquest, and if the coroner thought I knew something relevant, he would have subpoenaed me. Not only that, the coroner would have diligently consulted with other teams about what to ask. I received an explanation for why I was the focus of an investigation, but no apology.

Posthumously, Larry was promoted to sergeant and celebrated as a hero in a narrative in which he had tragically lost his life to the unavoidable risks of ERT police work. In one way, I wish that were the full truth. However, I saw his death as both avoidable and unnecessary. My conclusion was that no individual was to blame for Larry's death; I attributed it to the lack of a widespread, skilled leadership culture within the department. In that sense, it was truly a tragedy.

Many years later, Brock Graham, who shot the shooter during the raid, resigned from the VPD to join the Transit Police. I had finished work and was leaving the men's locker room, heading for the building exit, just as Brock entered. We hadn't spoken much since Larry's death. He mentioned it was his last day with the VPD, and I wished him well. Brock stepped away, then stopped and turned back, saying there was something he wanted to tell me about Larry's death. I took a deep breath; the politics around the death had drained me. He said, "I finally realized it was the department that killed Larry." I was stunned. I responded that I had seen things the same way for some time, but I never expected others to reach the same conclusion.

After being transferred out of Traffic Enforcement in late 1986 and removed from ERT in early 1987, I continued my patrol shifts in District 1. I was nearing a decade of policing. Frontline patrol work had become somewhat monotonous and unchallenging. I also felt disillusioned with the long-standing VPD ethos that it was acceptable to prioritize careers over peers, along with my perception of a significant leadership gap. Larry's death, along with everything that led up to it and followed, pushed my dissatisfaction beyond its limit. What made my views and judgments of the department even more negative was that I had been enrolled in a business management certificate program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Each course revealed clear shortcomings in supervision, management, administration, and leadership at the VPD. Eventually, I started contemplating what would be more fulfilling for me outside of policing. It seemed it was time to move on. But then something unusual and unexpected occurred.

### **III. The Police Union Years**

*“If you want to rebel, rebel from inside the system.  
That’s much more powerful than rebelling outside the system.”*

– Marie Lu

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Union President (1988–1996)**

Several years after I worked in the jail, the union had a new president, and I began to view it as not truly representing its members. It now appeared more as a vehicle for careerism and self-interest, sharing values similar to those tolerated in the department. With the union so closely linked to the VPD's organizational culture, how could things have been much different? I was already thinking about leaving policing, so I considered taking a position within the union. Naively, I believed I had nothing to lose and might even help bring about positive change. When the presidency became vacant just over a year after I left ERT, I campaigned against several candidates. To my great surprise and that of many others, I was elected president in the spring of 1988.

Then, Bill Vander Zalm was the province's premier. He was polarizing because his policies were pro-business and strongly anti-labour. The city's mayor was Gordon Campbell. With a background in real estate development, he was known for disliking labour. The Canadian Prime Minister was Brian Mulroney. Through NAFTA, his government further integrated the Canadian economy with that of the United States. Ronald Reagan was still the American president. He had championed neoliberalism, which regarded free-market economics as the solution to everything. It also meant fewer government-provided social supports. Neoliberalism was heading towards globalization, shifting much power to international corporations. The West's focus was on economic growth, prosperity, and wealth, at least for those who already had something. In this new economy, the disadvantaged were increasingly left to fend for themselves. In this context, I became the leader of one of Canada's major police unions. I recall my first visit to the union offices on the top floor of the six-story union-owned Harbourview building at 190 Alexander Street. It was located by the Vancouver waterfront, just two blocks north of the Main Street police station. The view of the inlet, mountains, and sky was expansive. My first leadership move was to push my desk up to the window, so that the view was directly in front of me.

In addition to serving as president of the union, I was also automatically president of Blueline Police Society, a non-profit subsidiary organization that operated a licensed premise for police officers called the Police Athletic Club, which I mentioned earlier. Additionally, I was president of Blueline Holdings Ltd., the holding company that owned the union building. I presided over the elected eight-member union board of directors, the governing body of the various legal entities. I knew nothing about running unions, societies, or companies, so I had to quickly learn how to chair board, committee, and membership meetings. I also needed to become adept at navigating the inevitable politics surrounding me in the union office, at meetings, with

the department, amongst the police unions, and from unforeseen directions. What had I done to myself? Over the years, I had tried to steer clear of the department's careerism, pettiness, and dysfunctions, but I was now deeply involved. I would learn many things the hard way, through conflicts and failures. Adding to the challenge, the role of union president remained a side job. It should have been full-time, but years of financial mismanagement made that impossible. As a result, during my eight years as president, I juggled two full-time jobs—my police assignments and my position as union president. Therefore, my story will weave between both my union and police roles.

I began as president with a department executive familiar with an obliging style of union engagement. After being elected, I was invited to the chief constable's office for a private meeting. Chief Constable Stewart was a solid establishment figure and highly regarded across the country. He was older, handsome, and dignified. His hair was short and combed back, and his manner was calm and confident, like a patriarch from a soap opera. I don't recall his asking me much about myself. Instead, I received a fatherly monologue about how serving as the union president could benefit my career by providing exposure and opportunities to prove myself. I took his words to imply that I would benefit from cooperating with and impressing the department executive. Now it seemed like I really was in a soap opera. I appreciate that he felt he was giving me good advice, but my background and hopes were different. Considering the situation, I wondered whether I could accomplish much for the union membership.

The Vancouver Police Union was not a typical collective bargaining unit engaged in a standard employer-employee relationship. As it had been since 1973 - five years before I was hired - the review of police officers' conduct was a quasi-criminal process under the provincial Police Act. The legislative writers seemed to prefer the simplicity of a single conduct review system that combined service to the public and employment matters—though they are vastly different—into a single process. The government and the public still believed that police chiefs were wise, moral, and authoritative. Therefore, as in the military, all potential disciplinary matters were handled internally by the chief constable, with an initial appeal to the citizen police board and then to the civil service BC Police Commission. These appeal bodies mostly rubber-stamped the chief constable's decisions. Was any civilian body going to challenge how the police department conducted its affairs? What would they know or care? Interestingly, the union was not a party with legal standing in these processes. As a result, virtually no union activity was involved in routine workplace disciplinary matters. This created a lack of familiarity with and knowledge of standard labour relations within the union and the police department. Except in clearly serious cases or politically motivated dealings, disciplining officers was generally avoided. Having acted as an agent, I saw that when such situations were processed, they were handled poorly. An inspector would be assigned the prosecutorial role and a superintendent the adjudicative role. The officers involved were left to speak for themselves, hire a lawyer, or have a peer 'agent' represent them. Hearing rules and fair process were often poorly understood and broken, and sometimes blatantly ignored. Subjectivity, opinion, and preconceived conclusions

often replaced objectivity. This established system was also not defensible. Why was a workplace matter, such as misusing a police vehicle or being late for work, treated as a quasi-crime? No other employment relationship had such a complicated and detailed process. And why was the union excluded from strictly employment matters? This model was primarily intended to provide ‘protections’ for complaints arising from citizen interactions with officers, because complainants and witnesses were often biased or motivated by less-than-honourable reasons. It could be argued that actions involving an officer’s public trust duties with citizens were matters of professional conduct. But, lacking a professional regulatory body, the police had no genuine system of professional accountability. The one-size-fits-all conduct review model was ill-suited to most situations. It seemed inevitable that the system would eventually falter and fail.

For the union, the submission of grievances remained to ensure management adhered to the collective agreement provisions and past practices. Since all senior managers had advanced through the ranks and knew how things were done, infringements were rare, resulting in virtually no workplace grievances. When issues arose, a phone call to the appropriate person almost always resolved them. A cadre of external labour relations experts was available to handle any matters that reached the grievance stage. The primary ongoing role of the union was to seek workplace improvements through negotiating the collective agreement every few years.

In my first term as president, the main employment challenge was police wages. I took office during a period of wage restrictions legislated by the provincial government—an effort to curb inflation by shifting the burden onto wage earners. Under the previous premier, Bill Bennett, from 1983 to 1987, there were statutory limits on wage settlements. In 1987, the year before I was elected, there was an unprecedented general strike against Bill 19, the new Vander Zalm government’s push to weaken organized labour and favour business. Bill 19, while ending direct wage caps, stated that only wage comparisons within the province were valid. The problem was that we had no comparable police agency. As for the RCMP, they were considered a federal entity. Over time, wage restrictions caused VPD police wages to fall 14 percent below those of the RCMP, which provided contracted policing for several neighbouring municipalities, and even further below police wages in other major Canadian urban centers, long considered valid benchmarks for comparison. It appeared that provincial politicians viewed the police as just another government service, expecting all government staff to deliver the performance of a brand-new Cadillac Seville, but at the cost of a ten-year-old Ford Fairlane. But the world didn’t work that way. This reality led to serious problems with officer morale, retention, and recruitment within the VPD.

Fortunately, shortly before my election, the municipal police unions had collectively hired Diane Bell, a former senior negotiator for the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). The GVRD Human Resources Division handled employer contract negotiations for most municipalities, including Vancouver, as well as the Vancouver Police Department. Diane described her departure from the GVRD as acrimonious. To our advantage, she knew how the GVRD negotiators operated. Diane was a short, stocky woman with an assertive, intimidating

demeanour. I found her not only fully informed and skilled in contract bargaining but also a brilliant strategist. Without her, the union and I would have been lost. In our first conversation, Diane accused me of having a naïve, black-and-white, police officer's understanding of the labour situation and how to handle it. She was right. Immediately, and without being asked, she lectured me on the importance of viewing the bargaining landscape as 'shifting sands.' She explained that flexibility, strategy, and timing were all crucial. I took in everything she said. Over the years, I learned so much from Diane, lessons that were never taught in any of the labour courses I had taken, nor could they have been. As chair of the bargaining committee, I soon realized that my role was to manage the union executive, the membership, the media, and the messaging, while Diane's role was to determine the next critical move.

When I took office, the collective agreement had expired the previous year, in December 1987, and renewal negotiations were in progress. Under the cloud of Bill 19's wage-comparison restrictions, our negotiations dragged on month after month. Staying within these artificial limits was no longer acceptable. Equally important, Bill 19 also removed the previous police and firefighter unions' unilateral right to invoke third-party arbitration. This right had prevented withdrawal of services as a tactic to pressure the employer. By removing the union's ability to impose arbitration, the government seemed to have given police and firefighter unions back the right to strike, if not the need to do so. However, Bill 19 also allowed the Industrial Relations Board to designate a broad range of workers as essential, including those who might threaten the economy or education system, and could rescind their right to strike. Since we could no longer invoke third-party arbitration nor withdraw services, we lacked a way to resolve our dispute. The law also stated that, in certain cases, the Industrial Relations Board could arbitrate and settle a dispute as it saw fit. Such outcomes would further harm policing. Instead of accepting the wage guidelines, we demanded a fair agreement. We were like a beach ball being pushed deeper and deeper underwater. The pressure to surface increased the deeper we were pushed. The employer's expectations were clear from the start: we would get the same as other municipal workers. They knew we had no way to pressure them, so they waited for us to give up. We began exploring ways to gain public support to put pressure on the employer, which, technically, was the police board; in reality, it was the City of Vancouver, which funded our wages through tax revenues.

While working as a frontline police officer and union president, I also continued attending developmental workshops. A particularly helpful one focused on media relations. The instructor, a media expert, explained that competition for viewers was intensifying among media outlets, as those numbers attracted advertiser dollars. It was also recognized that audiences lacked critical thinking skills and were more drawn to emotional drama than facts. As a result, television, newspaper, and radio news reporting shifted from calmly conveying information to sensationalist, attention-grabbing reporting. For the media, profit seemed to have become more important than social responsibility. The instructor described how each medium valued stories based on ACE—action, conflict, and emotion. Spectacle took precedence over details. Truth and

the impact on people mattered less. This focus on strife contributed to the rise of a victim culture, full of accused oppressors and claimed injustices. Anyone could attract media attention by portraying themselves as wronged, especially allegations against the government and its agencies, which produced media-friendly clips. The reward was a moment in the spotlight. To support our goals, the union decided to use the media by playing their game. It was a bit of a shock to department management, as the media had only been provided with a narrow, factual information flow directly from the organization.

A few months after my election, during the first week of October 1988, we held a strike vote which received 98 percent support. While mainly symbolic - a public display of frustration and discontent - the vote gained the media's attention. It was ACE—an action involving conflict, emotion, and a veiled threat of further measures: withdrawal of police services. However, there was a risk that this strong mandate for a strike might cause a panicked public reaction, justifying political interference in our dispute. Soon after, the Industrial Relations Board appointed a special mediator to address our stalled negotiations. At first, we thought this move was meant to force us into the Board's process against our will. We soon realized that only Chief Constable Stewart could shift the employer's bargaining team from its stance of long-term intransigence. We heard that he was unwilling to tolerate the department's declining morale. Perhaps the strike vote was the final straw. He reportedly insisted that the city and the GVRD move forward and find a reasonable resolution. The GVRD then turned to the Industrial Relations Board, which appointed Darwin Benson as a mediator. Additionally, because the unions in the BC Federation of Labour were boycotting the province's program and our dispute was gaining more media attention, we believed the Board aimed to become involved in our dispute and validate their role.

Benson attended a union board meeting. During his discussions with us, he stated that Ed Peck, the chair of the Industrial Relations Board, wanted to speak with me. The union directors told Benson that we had no interest in talking to Peck or in any further involvement by the Industrial Relations Board. Immediately after the meeting, Diane took me aside for a private chat. She pointed out that if the union failed to respond more reasonably, the Industrial Relations Board could impose the very restrained contract we were doing everything to avoid. The strike mandate, along with the union board's cold rejection, would lend legitimacy to their decision. This was the only instance during my presidency when I had to choose between the union board's stance and the good of the membership that had elected me. I contacted Benson and confirmed that I would have a private meeting with Peck. Early one morning, after a late patrol shift and a few hours of sleep, I met Peck at a restaurant in the Hotel Vancouver. The restaurant had a grand, old-establishment feel with booths that offered privacy. As I enjoyed my breakfast, I listened to Peck. I don't remember much about him, only that he seemed the perfect bureaucrat, dressed conservatively and with a serious demeanour. He gave a long, eloquent speech. When he finished, I acknowledged that we both knew there were downsides to an overwhelming strike vote by police officers. I suggested that the Industrial Relations Board wanted to help end our dispute, so the threat of job action would disappear, making the board seem useful. However, I

noted that, in reality, the union did not want to strike and the employer did not want to impose a lockout, as neither wanted to lose public support by reducing police services. A strike or a lockout was a fantasy. The employer knew it, the union knew it, and the government knew it, but no one was willing to admit it was all a charade. My final remark was that the union did not want the board's involvement. The public safety card instantly disappeared. Peck looked deflated, as if the big catch had slipped away.

Soon after, a bargaining meeting took place. The sands had shifted. Diane was exceptional. I remember her powerful and pivotal words to the GVRD negotiating team, stating, "So, you finally acknowledge that we need a third party to help settle this. We've been telling you that for months. But we're not going to have the deck stacked against us. We're both going to agree to a truly neutral and independent third party and process." About a week after our strike mandate, the newspaper announced that both parties were finally ready to advance discussions and agreed to Vincent Ready's involvement. He was arguably the most prominent labour mediator in the province.

# Ready for Ready

By **GLEN SCHAEFER**  
Staff Reporter

They're ready to hit the bricks, but Vancouver's finest will see if Vince Ready can prevent it.

Ready sat down with both sides this weekend in a bid to mediate the city police contract dispute.

Late last week the 993-member union voted 98 per cent in favor of a strike, but agreed to hold off as long as Ready was involved.

Both sides then said they were ready to summon Ready.

Talks broke off last month between police and the Greater Vancouver Regional District, which negotiates for the city.

Police have been without a contract since December, 1987. Other B.C. municipal forces base their contracts on Vancouver's rate.

A Vancouver police constable first class was making \$35,976 a year when the deal expired.

That's lower than what his counterpart in the RCMP, Ontario Provincial Police, Quebec Police Force and police in most major Canadian cities made last year.

Union president John DeHaas says Vancouver police want parity with other national police forces.

That, he says, would mean a wage hike of about 16 per cent.

GVRD negotiators would not confirm reports that their last offer was nine per cent over two years.

*October 9, 1988. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Province newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

Ready's work pushed many issues toward some form of agreement, but not wages; the positions were still too far apart. One day after chatting with the GVRD negotiators, Ready said to Diane and me, "The ponies just aren't there. You need to go out and do whatever you need to do." Diane had to translate that for me because I wasn't sure what Ready was saying. The meaning was that the employer was still not moving nearly enough on wages. Therefore, the union had to take action that would motivate them. We needed our wage dispute to make

headlines again. A few days after mediation broke down, on October 18, 1988, during a city council meeting, we held a rally on the steps of City Hall. Even though the chief constable published a bulletin that morning stating he did not support such an action, around 600 officers attended. After my short speech, we entered City Hall in disciplined ranks. I delivered to the mayor and councillors correspondence requesting their action on our demands. I'm sure the bosses breathed a sigh of relief, as uniform hats and ties were worn.



## HALL BESIEGED

*About 600 men and women in blue marched on Vancouver city hall last week to illustrate their frustration after six months of wage negotiations between Vancouver police and the City.*

*The Courier – October 23, 1988*

# Cops make demands

By TOM TEVLIN

Hundreds of uniformed and plainclothes police surrounded a building at West 12th Avenue and Cambie Street last week.

But rather than responding to a snap police call, the ranks of off-duty officers from Vancouver and nearby districts were at city hall to protest wage negotiations between the city and its police, which have dragged on for six months.

As council met upstairs, Vancouver Police Union Local 1 president John De Haas, read from a prepared statement to rows of officers assembled outside the building, and called the off-duty city hall meeting "unprecedented in the history of the city...and of the province."

"We're all aware that our wages are greatly below those of all of our counterparts across this country," de Haas told off-duty officers from the departments of Central Saanich, Delta, Esquimalt, Matsqui, New Westminster, Oak Bay, Port Moody, Saanich, Victoria and Ports Canada.

"Vancouver police rank number one in crime in Canada...but number 40 in wages," de Haas told the group.

After marching in tight military formation twice around the building, some of the approximately 600 officers quietly headed up three flights of stairs to the

council chambers where they were instructed by Non-Partisan Association Mayor Gordon Campbell to wait in the visitors gallery "with the rest of the public."

Spokesman de Haas, who arrived behind the rest of the group and a few minutes after Campbell called for him to address the aldermen, was then kept waiting about 15 minutes while council carried on with other matters.

Finally de Haas was allowed to deliver letters addressed to each alderman in which he advised council of the 1,000-member union's "very deep frustration and anger regarding our current contract dispute."

The letters, leaked to reporters after the meeting by an alderman, request council to instruct its bargaining officials to restore the policy of comparing Vancouver police duties and salaries to those of other Canadian cities.

"While your bargaining officials reject the principle of Canadian comparisons we know that the council believes that the principle has merit," the letter states.

"In fact, the principle was used in a timely manner by council itself to establish new council indemnities shortly after the last election."

The letter was referring to council's first regular meeting following the 1986 NPA landslide election victory, when aldermen

voted themselves a 27.3 per cent pay increase. That salary — or indemnity — increase was followed more recently with a 3.5 per cent hike retroactive to January 1987.

In de Haas' statement outside city hall he accused council of playing politics with the police negotiations, which have been going on for some six months.

"The City of Vancouver, for its own political reasons, has chosen to fight this police union over wages," de Haas said. But he added: "This is not a fair fight."

"Vancouver Police will not take strike action that withdraws police services, for to do so would make the citizens of this city the victims of this dispute."

De Haas, however, stressed: "It is not in the interests of the police, the city or the public to have our members angry or frustrated."

After police filed out of the chambers and council had recessed, Campbell told reporters he didn't find the police protest disruptive.

"They're members of the public, they're allowed to come to the city (council meetings). As well, Mr. de Haas told me he was coming...he delivered the letters and that was that," Campbell said.

"I believe the best thing for the city, (and) the best thing for the police is to sit down, mediate, and get this thing resolved," Campbell said.

Thankfully, the editorials in the newspapers the next day were supportive.

# Police deserve a better break

It's disconcerting, to say the least, to watch Vancouver's finest make a spectacle of themselves in a demonstration at city hall for higher wages. But if they're that mad, the city had better do something about it — fast.

And the police have a point. Vancouver's wages haven't kept pace with other Canadian cities, notably those on the Prairies where the most appropriate comparisons can be made.

For instance, Winnipeg's police get five per cent more than in Vancouver (which sets the pattern for increases in B.C. municipalities). In Edmonton they get 12.6 per cent more and in Calgary 12.9 per cent more.

Is it any tougher to police those cities? Can those cities afford those wages better than Vancouver? The answer in both cases is a very definite no.

Toronto police have an even wider margin — 16 per cent. And no one can say a police

officer there is that much better.

Former premier Bill Bennett's heavy-handed restraint program of 1983 has come home to roost. The compensation stabilization agency that administered it created dangerous distortions in wages by ignoring the impact in B.C. of patterns elsewhere that groups of B.C. workers had traditionally followed.

The police are now chafing at this ill-conceived restraint imposed by a government no longer around. The municipalities have been left to negotiate catch-up increases and face the flak from taxpayers. The biggest question they have to answer is whether they want to maintain cheap police forces with their hearts no longer in their jobs.

The people too have to make a choice. Bennett's restraint was very popular at the time. It won him an election. So the taxpayers have to decide whether they want more contented and committed police.

Perhaps the Vancouver uniforms went too far in invading the council chamber this week. But they have taken a responsible course in assuring the public they will not go on strike, even though they have voted 98 per cent for one.

What the municipalities should do is recognize that the demonstration is a measure of police frustration and that they are being responsible. Then give them a decent, catch-up wage increase.

*October 1988 editorial. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Province newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

The pressure we applied was effective. The employer eventually agreed to a process involving an independent third party. Vince Ready was appointed as the arbitrator. He established a three-year contract for 1988, 1989, and 1990. Each year's wage increases met the legal limits, and then he added additional 'retention and recruitment' increases. After eleven

months of negotiations with the employer, we settled. It did not restore us to the traditional national wage level we enjoyed before a decade of restraint legislation; however, by increasing our wages beyond the legislated limits, it addressed the developing crisis in policing. For now, there was quiet. From this first round of bargaining, it was clear that the provincial and municipal governments prioritized their marketplace ideologies and political ambitions above all else. Policing, public safety, and human resources issues appeared to be inconvenient matters that did not deserve their attention. I was left wondering who should raise these issues with the public—the union, management, or a professional body.

Looking back at my early years as president, there were some funny moments, though they didn't seem very amusing at the time. One involved the challenge of retaining female officers. Society recognized that having babies and caring for infants was extremely important. Yet, for new mothers, returning to full-time shift work was often too much, and many felt compelled to resign. It was devastating to their career ambitions and detrimental to the department. After consulting with female officers, we proposed that half-time job sharing be available for a reasonable period. Pursuing this at the bargaining table often felt like a war. Senior management believed that policing would fall apart, perhaps not as badly as officers failing to wear uniform hats and ties, but significantly nonetheless. Finally, probably to get the topic off the bargaining table, they agreed in principle to a program. After the contract renewal, we began further talks with the department directly about implementation. It soon became clear that only the battlefield had changed. After endless rounds that extended into 1991, the deputy chief involved, Hank Starek, seemed to relent a little. Starek was a class act - handsome in his fifties, intelligent, and dignified. He appeared as a wise, experienced, and trustworthy senior police official. He was caring and sincere, with a touch of down-home Canadiana. However, influenced by traditional values, he struggled with women being exposed to the raw realities of frontline policing and also with what needed to be done to accommodate them. He said that the job-sharing program could be implemented if limited to positions in the jail, the public information counter, or the communications center. These assignments were the least appealing to constables and were usually staffed by junior officers compelled to work there. I think Starek hoped his proposal would be rejected. I approached our first two job-share applicants and explained the offer. Surprisingly, they were quite pleased and happily accepted a shared jail position. It was inside work, didn't generate court or overtime, and followed a twelve-hour shift model that provided considerable time off. When I informed Starek, he didn't seem pleased, but the wheels were now in motion. A short while later, I attended yet another dull police board meeting. Executive members were presenting routine administrative reports that the board members likely didn't understand or care about. The meeting was wrapping up when Starek told the board, which included three women, that he had one more item to mention that might interest them. "We now have our first two female officers coming off maternity leave who will be on our new job-sharing retention program," he said with a broad smile and a sweet demeanour, as if it had all been his initiative and effort. He failed to mention his opposition to it or the union's struggles with him. I was instantly infuriated. Then he casually looked across the large

boardroom table at me, paused, and winked. I sat there in silence with a poker face, filing that event away as his playful sense of humour.

A major challenge during my early years as union president was dealing with a five-year-old criminal allegation against the police. A jail prisoner, Michael Jacobsen, claimed that an officer had assaulted him and broken his kneecap while he was in custody on September 30, 1983. Based on the investigation, Crown Counsel decided that criminal charges were not merited. Regarding any Police Act misconduct charges, based on the parallel Internal Investigation Unit file, the chief constable was also not taking action. Jacobsen appealed the chief constable's decision not to continue the disciplinary process, prompting the police board to hold a Police Act hearing to consider Jacobsen's request. After reviewing the file, these civilians, who seemed to have little understanding of the conduct review process or the consequences of their words, told Jacobsen they agreed with him that some wrongdoing had occurred. They also agreed with the chief constable's view that nothing could be done. Unwittingly, they had produced an official finding that misconduct had happened, and that no one was to be held to account. It was rather reckless to say out loud.

Jacobsen had previously filed a civil lawsuit. At one point, the police board, the chief constable, and a sergeant petitioned the court to be removed from the case. Justice Proudfoot heard the evidence necessary to decide on this request and granted it. Many considered Justice Proudfoot's later involvement in the case, which I will describe further on, to be inappropriate. In light of the police board's public statements, Jacobsen's lawyer convinced the city to settle the matter with an upfront payment to avoid the risks of a court judgment. When the media learned of the payoff, they created sensational headlines. The payment was portrayed as proof of the prior police board's earlier findings, now framed as a brutal and unjustified beating followed by a police cover-up. It all made for a fantastic story. For weeks, relentless editorial fodder fuelled public frustration and outrage. Eventually, the situation demanded a political response.

On March 19, 1986, over two years before I became union president, the government ordered an inquiry under the Police Act. They appointed the three civilian members of the BC Police Commission to serve as the inquiry panel. Their mandate was quasi-criminal—to determine exactly what had happened and by whom. It was an investigation into a specific alleged criminal offence, using the powers of an inquiry to compel witnesses to testify. This criminal focus appeared to be a new use of the inquiry process, if not a blatant political abuse of it. As a result, the officers challenged its legality, which temporarily halted the inquiry. The question of its validity reached the province's Supreme Court, where, on behalf of the tribunal, Justice Legg dismissed the officers' claim that the inquiry's mandate exceeded its lawful authority. Interestingly, Justice Legg's later repeated involvement in the case, which I will also outline below, was regarded by many as inconsistent with proper judicial practice. The matter then proceeded to the Supreme Court of Canada. Their decision of November 19, 1987, confirmed that the inquiry was legally valid but that its findings might not be admissible in

criminal court because they were obtained involuntarily. This marked a new chapter in Canadian law.

The public inquiry continued and concluded after my election, revealing nothing new. Crown counsel conducted another impartial and objective review of the evidence and still found no basis to approve any criminal charges. A second review under the Police Act Code of Professional Conduct was also carried out. After reviewing the commission's report and the evidence, Chief Constable Stewart closed that chapter for a second time.

# CHIEF HALTS COP PROBE

By **JOHN TRETHEWEY**  
Staff Reporter

Police Chief Bob Stewart has halted an investigation into four cops accused of beating a prisoner, The Province has learned.

The men, one of whom is no longer in the force, were told yesterday they won't be disciplined by the department for the 1983 incident.

Last month, a B.C. Police Commission report accused the four of lying to cover up the brutal, "cowardly" beating of Michael Jacobsen.

The 29-year-old Jacobsen suffered a broken kneecap while in the Vancouver police lockup. He later sued the city and won a \$90,000 settlement.

Jacobsen could not be reached for comment yesterday.

After the damning police commission report, Attorney General Bud Smith appointed lawyer Bryan Williams to investigate.

Williams will decide if the four men should be criminally charged

over the 1983 incident. He said his decision will "probably not be affected" by Stewart's move.

The probe halted yesterday was the department's second internal inquiry. The first inquiry also found no evidence for prosecuting the police officers.

Vancouver Police Union president John de Haas said the commission's inquiry also found no new evidence of wrongdoing.

"(It) is of tremendous relief to the police members involved," de Haas said yesterday.

De Haas blasted the police commission report for containing "inflammatory comments, biased views and accusatory innuendos."

Cpl. Brian Nixon, Const. Shayne Apostoliuk and Const. Terry O'Hara are still cops. Const. John Kirkbride quit in 1986.

Mayor Gordon Campbell appointed lawyer Richard Peck to help Stewart conduct the internal investigation.

Peck refused to comment yesterday because he didn't know why it had been halted.

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The public inquiry, however, did not quell the inferno; it fueled it further. Based on loose commentary in the report from the civilian commission of inquiry panel members, there was a reinforced public belief that a mythical ‘blue wall of silence’ existed among the officers, and that this was why no one had been held accountable. Was there even the appearance of a code of silence among the police witnesses? Well, yes. Remember, police officers were advised during academy training to use the phrase, “I can’t recall.” When too many said the same thing, it didn’t look good.

To appease the ongoing public rage, the file was sent to a lawyer outside the prosecution service in a third attempt to find possible criminal charges. It appeared he was tasked with finding a political resolution. This government-hired ‘independent’ lawyer proposed charging Corporal Brian Nixon, the jail supervisor at the time of the alleged incident. The lawyer noted that Jacobsen had identified Nixon from a photograph and claimed Nixon was the officer who assaulted him. Rice, another prisoner present at the time, had been approached by Jacobsen’s lawyer during the civil case, after which he described an assault and an assailant. However, in Rice’s account, both those aspects differed from those in Jacobsen’s. The key point was that Jacobsen had identified Nixon as present, and there were two accounts of something occurring. Credibility, reliability, consistency, believability—these were just evidentiary issues to be examined in court. By then, the lack of factual clarity was merely a political inconvenience. The challenge was public perception created by reckless remarks from the civilian police board and the civil-service police commission, which had fueled inflammatory and distorted media reports. My initial response to the suggestion of charging Nixon was that an old, trusted strategy was to be used: let the courts deal with it. In laying a charge, a judge would bear the responsibility for pointing out that there was no case. Hopefully, the manufactured public outrage would then subside. I had no idea of the lengths that would be taken behind the scenes to produce a very different outcome.

# Police question charge

The president of the 1,000-member Vancouver police union said Thursday he is suspicious about the attorney-general's decision to proceed with a charge of aggravated assault in connection with the 1983 jail-cell beating of Michael Jacobsen.

John de Haas said he wonders "why the evidence was never there before.

"This government seems to be meddling in the review process."

But Peter Ritchie, Jacobsen's lawyer, complimented Attorney-General Bud Smith, who said Wednesday he has instructed special Crown counsel Bryan Williams to proceed with the prosecution of Cpl. Brian Nixon.

"It's about time somebody got charged," Ritchie said. "The attorney-general showed considerable courage in deciding to go ahead after such a long time."

Jacobsen, 29, **JACOBSEN** suffered a broken kneecap when he was beaten in the city jail after being arrested Sept. 30, 1983 for being drunk in a public place.

He subsequently sued the city and received an out-of-court settlement in February 1986, for \$75,000 plus legal costs.



Smith said Williams' special report agreed with the conclusions of the B.C. Police Commission inquiry, released last July, that indicated police officers handling the Jacobsen case had been involved in lying and collusion.

Williams said Thursday he could not act on allegations of perjury, the giving of contradictory evidence, criminal negligence or conspiracy "on the basis that there is insufficient evidence of identification or corroboration to found a charge."

But de Haas said the repeated reviews of the case, which he said have uncovered no new evidence to proceed with charges, amount to unfair treatment of police.

"We (police) are obviously not equal before the law — it's unfair and special treatment," he said. "No civilian would go through this many reviews this many times for this many years."

He added: "If Williams would have said 'No' (to charges), would there have been another review?"

Nixon is still on active duty, de Haas said.

October 21, 1988. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

Then an inexplicable event occurred. The assigned trial judge was Justice Proudfoot. She had prior knowledge of the case from the civil evidence presented when three parties petitioned the court for their removal from the suit. At that time, I was unaware of her previous involvement. The evidence at Nixon's trial was indeed lacking. Jacobsen provided his version of events and claimed Nixon had assaulted him. Then Rice offered a different account, describing a different assailant. Evidence also suggested that Jacobsen was injured before his arrest, as someone had to help him walk before he reached the jail. Additionally, the jail doctor and nurse's medical evidence described not a beaten man but someone with a swollen knee, and they recommended he get it checked after his release. Proudfoot seemed intent on overcoming the conflicting evidence. She accepted Rice's story and the possibility that someone other than Nixon was the assailant. Then she reinterpreted Jacobsen's identification of Nixon into a fabricated narrative, placing Nixon somewhere "in the vicinity" and "at the scene" when the injury allegedly occurred. Despite accepting questionable evidence and making assumptions about what might have occurred, she decided Nixon was guilty in her narrative by not intervening to protect Jacobsen. On October 6, 1989, over seven years after Jacobsen's stay in the city jail, Proudfoot convicted Corporal Brian Nixon of being a party to an aggravated assault. Afterward, I recall Nixon's lawyer appearing bewildered. Not only were the findings bizarre, but he explained that this particular 'party to the offence' interpretation was not even recognized under Canadian law. Proudfoot's defining moment was her sentencing. Corporal Nixon was to serve an excessive nine-month jail term. Not only was this sentence unreasonable and inconsistent with principles of sentencing, but it was so extreme that it appeared absurd. It seemed like a giant, neon-lit billboard designed to satisfy politicians, influence public perceptions, and perhaps intimidate police. Nixon's lawyer assured us that everything would be resolved on appeal. He believed the politics would give way to the justice inherent in the legal system.

The appeal was equally fraudulent. In early 1991, Justice Legg of the Appeal Court wrote the court's findings. Legg was the BC Supreme Court judge who dismissed the petition that the public inquiry's quasi-criminal scope was beyond what the law allowed. Like the trial judge, he had prior knowledge not gained through the evidentiary process of criminal law. At the time, I was also unaware of his previous involvement. He straightforwardly supported the conviction and sentence. Both court outcomes were puzzling until I later discovered that both judges had prior roles in the case through earlier legal judgments well before the criminal proceedings. It was not believable that they would ignore the evidence they had heard before, which would have been inadmissible in criminal court, or their discussions over the years involving that information, invigorated by the media fest. When I found out, I inquired whether these dual roles were proper. I presented senior Crown Counsel with a similar hypothetical scenario - where a judge first rules on a civil case and later on a criminal case involving the same circumstances and people. Senior Crown assured me this would never happen because of a perceived bias, if not actual bias. When I asked if it could happen twice in a matter, counsel seemed annoyed and impatient, as if I hadn't understood the point, and firmly emphasized that such a situation would

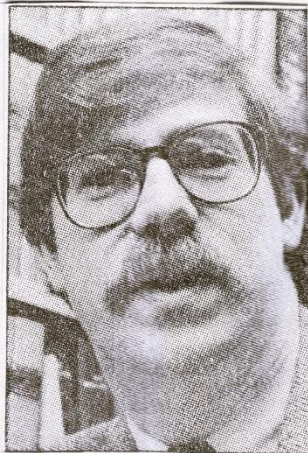
never occur. Now the outcomes made complete sense. The involvement of both judges could not have been a mere coincidence, and they must have felt that breaking conventions was acceptable. Surely the judges knew their dual roles could create perceptions of bias. Whoever assigned them knew better. The entire process wasn't about truth and justice; it was about securing a conviction and making a statement. The focus was on optics – the appearance of breaking down the supposed blue wall of silence. My frustration and confusion turned to disgust and anger. The system I was trained to respect, one that demanded integrity and high character, proved to be a sham. My trust in an objective, professional, and principled legal system was shattered. The Jacobsen case was a major betrayal of police officers by individuals with power, status, and responsibility. It resembled the scene from George Orwell's 1984, where the state gunned down a random person as an alleged perpetrator of a high-profile crime, regardless of whether it was the right person. What mattered was the image of a powerful, effective government. In our case, Corporal Brian Nixon was the random police officer in an updated version of the story, which could be titled 1991. I wrote a detailed newsletter to inform our members about the evidence and how the legal system had failed them. At defence counsel's request, to protect Nixon, who was then in the Corrections system, I did not mention the judges' previous involvement. A headline soon after suggested the trial hadn't uncovered the truth when it stated, "Truth behind assault on prisoner may never be known."

# AN INTERNAL AFFAIR

Truth behind assault on prisoner may never be known

"I think it's important for the citizens who are in custody to feel that police are subject to the law the same way they are."

— Philip Bryden



"I think everyone is aware that Nixon did not do it. He was not the assailant. . . ."

— John de Haas



By NEAL HALL  
Sun Crime Reporter

**F**OR ALMOST EIGHT years, the assault of Michael Jacobsen in the city jail has been a festering sore for the Vancouver Police Department.

The matter has dragged through various levels of protracted legal proceedings, including an internal police investigation, a police board inquiry, a B.C. Police Commission investigation, and finally the court case and subsequent appeals.

Although several officers were suspected of taking part in the assault, only one officer was left holding the proverbial bag.

Vancouver police Cpl. Brian Nixon, 43, was taken into custody this week after the B.C. Court of Appeal upheld his nine-month jail sentence for the aggravated assault of Jacobsen in the city jail Sept. 30, 1983.

Although officials refused comment, it is believed he is serving his sentence under the province's electronic-monitoring program, which requires low-risk offenders to wear an ankle bracelet that is monitored by a computer.

The program essentially keeps a person in custody in his own home during non-working hours and on weekends.

Nixon was also prohibited by court order from possessing a firearm for five years, which could spell the end of his policing career.

Still, there is a lingering feeling that the truth of who beat Jacobsen and smashed his kneecap will never be known.

The officers on duty in the jail that night — Nixon, records jailer Robert Wintrip, booking jailer Terry O'Hara, custodial jailer Shane Apostoliuk, assistant jailer John Kirkbride, and searching jailer Dean

Robinson — all denied beating the prisoner.

Kirkbride later resigned from the force and O'Hara retired.

Nixon says he saw nothing occur in the cells that night that would explain Jacobsen's serious injury. And for years, officers have suggested the prisoner fell after being released from jail.

Ultimately, however, when the matter ended up in B.C. Supreme Court before Justice Patricia Proudfoot, the court did not buy that explanation.

"There was an aggravated assault, that has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt," the judge said in her reasons when Nixon was convicted Oct. 6, 1989.

Ironically, Jacobsen was taken into custody for his own protection.

He had been an intoxicated passenger in a car stopped by police. He testified he was minding his own business but gave police a phoney last name — Hill — since he had a criminal record and didn't want to be "hassled."

But following his arrest and lockup in the jail, he was slapped by an officer when he gave the phoney name again. During a subsequent assault in a cell, his kneecap was smashed, requiring several operations. The assault left Jacobsen, who eventually received \$75,000 from the city in an out-of-court settlement, with a permanent limp.

Since Nixon was the officer in charge of the jail that night, the court found he "failed miserably" in his duty to protect the prisoner, which made him a party to the assault because evidence showed he was in the jail.

Justice Proudfoot called it a "senseless, vicious attack" and stated "the silence in this case has been deafening."

Nixon was suspended without pay after he was sentenced in November 1989 and has since been working as business manager — making about \$45,000 a year, roughly the same as his corporal's salary — at the Vancouver Police Union, which also supported him by collecting \$160,000 from officers to help offset his legal bills.

Nixon also suffered considerable stress, contributing to the breakup of his marriage.

"The universal reaction is that the members are upset," Vancouver police spokesman Const. Bob Cooper said.

"He is well-respected and well-liked."

Police Chief Bill Marshall would not comment on the matter because an internal disciplinary hearing is pending, Cooper added.

The hearing, expected to be held in April, will decide an appropriate discipline, which ranges from a reprimand to dismissal.

Philip Bryden, the president of the B.C. Civil Liberties Union, said the case was important in demonstrating that there is not one criminal standard for police and another for average citizens.

"I think it's important for the citizens who are in custody to feel that police are subject to the law the same way they are," he said.

However, John de Haas, president of the 1,100-member Vancouver police union, said members of the force are disturbed that criminal liability was placed on Nixon even though there was no evidence to show he was involved in the assault.

"What disturbs us is that there was no evidence what Brian was doing — whether he was bending over, whether he was in the washroom, whether he was looking out the window or whether he was fully and completely aware what was happening."

"We don't know, and that's what disturbs and shocks us. It's a legal precedent," de Haas said.

"Generally the view is that there should be some evidence of encouragement, rather than the absence of evidence of not protecting the prisoner... at least that he was looking in the right direction."

He added: "There's a lot of professional concern about how broad the net of criminal liability is for policemen — where does it stop? — because this one, we felt, fell outside where we thought was criminal liability for policemen."

Members of the force also feel public perceptions "generated by the media of a beating, of a coverup and of collusion" resulted in a political decision to try to charge someone with the assault, de Haas suggested.

"I don't think there is any question in policemen's eyes that at some point it was a search for someone and he (Nixon) is the guy," he said.

"I think everyone is aware that Nixon did not do it. He was not the assailant. But the concern is that if you don't commit an offence — only that you might have been in the area — then it's presumed you encouraged it. That's what we're left with, and we're really troubled by that."

*March 2, 1991. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

Upon conviction, the department suspended Nixon with pay, and on November 30, 1989, he was suspended without pay. Following an overwhelming vote of approval by the membership, the union employed him. After the failed appeal, Nixon's future was in jeopardy. For me, this troubling saga ended with my sitting down with Chief Constable Stewart. We discussed the problem of having an officer not only convicted criminally but also sentenced to jail time, not for

one or two days but for nine months. For Nixon, who was now facing a new misconduct charge stemming from a criminal conviction, the government and the public expected the chief to terminate Nixon's employment. I told Chief Stewart that the union understood the context—the insufficient evidence, the media-driven public belief there must have been an assault, the optics of a cover-up, the political need to convey that such alleged police misconduct was intolerable, the current government's need to show its authority and success in holding someone accountable, and the media waiting for the next dramatic development. By then, the rank and file were aware of all of this. But it was all smoke, mirrors, and politics. It wasn't about the truth because the evidence didn't support the findings. The original investigation was thorough, and the initial decisions were appropriate. Yet, here we were. I shared the union's position with the chief - that dismissing Nixon was unacceptable. Although he responded that the presiding officer would decide Nixon's fate, he understood that the final decision was actually his, as the Police Act required the presiding officer's decision to go to the chief constable, who then had a week to confirm or reduce the penalty. Later, under Chief Constable Marshall, Nixon kept his job, even earning a promotion before retiring as a sergeant. He was and remains a good and honourable person.

But before that outcome, there was one more political complication in the saga. When it became clear that Nixon would not be fired, the special prosecutor returned to the court for one more kick at the police. He applied to have Nixon prohibited from having a firearm for five years following the date of conviction. The evidence in the Jacobsen matter never involved firearms or had any connection to them. This move seemed an attempt to make Nixon unfit to be a police officer. However, there were enough assignments within the VPD that did not require officers to carry firearms. The rank and file were now even more disgusted by how Nixon had been treated. It felt like rubbing salt in the wound of injustice. The whole affair left me feeling drained. For the justice system to work well, it relies on the strength of character and integrity of its officials. In my view, neither quality had prevailed. But the Jacobsen matter was just an indication of what was to come. In the years ahead, I would learn much more about how police conduct review processes became politicized and, in turn, how dismally police leadership responded.

As the Jacobsen matter neared resolution, contract negotiations resumed. When the collective agreement expired at the end of 1990, Bill 19 remained in effect, continuing to limit wage comparisons within the province and to deny unilateral authority to invoke arbitration. Over this period, an economic recession and imminent new wage controls cast a shadow. As a result, bargaining started as soon as possible. With the environment becoming less favourable for negotiations, we dropped most of the union's demands and concentrated mainly on wages. With a trimmed-down agenda, the employer agreed to an expedited arbitration process. Vince Ready was brought back, and two weeks into 1991, he delivered a one-year binding settlement. Given the circumstances, what Diane called the 'shifting sands, it was a reasonable deal, especially considering the reintroduction not long afterwards of wage settlement limits, which stayed in place until the government changed later in 1991.

There was one other important outcome from the negotiations. Besides wages, we were aware that various additional factors were lowering officers' morale. The resulting increase in members leaving policing or transferring to other Canadian police departments was straining the department. Additionally, it appeared that the number of qualified job applicants had decreased. The union conducted a membership-wide survey to assess the situation. The key findings were shared with management. These issues included the lifestyle effects of the shift model, the limited mindset promoted by the pseudo-military culture, and the structural barriers to job opportunities created by the rank system. During negotiations, a joint labour-management 'Police Job Enhancement Committee' was established to explore possible solutions. After several attempts, the group realized that minor adjustments could not address the core problems. Major structural reforms were necessary in many areas. I will later outline what was achieved over the years through several joint initiatives. Even now, more work remains, which I discuss in the final part of this book.

# Policing morale problems get study

By **KIM PEMBERTON**  
Sun Crime Reporter

Morale problems in the Vancouver police department have resulted in a joint committee being established to look at ways to improve job satisfaction for senior patrol officers.

The committee will be made up of two representatives from the Vancouver Police Union, two appointed by the Vancouver Police Board and one member appointed by the city.

"There's a recognition there is burn-out and job dissatisfaction from time to time in an officer's career," union president John de Haas said Wednesday.



**de HAAS**

(the department)."

One reason for low morale is "debilitating" shifts, which require all senior patrol officers to work one week from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., followed by an afternoon shift from 5 p.m. to 3 a.m. and a night shift from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m., said de Haas.

"Our survey (of the union membership) tells us from eight years on, officers can develop problems in terms of morale. Between eight and 11 years (of service) is when members generally leave

He said other reasons are the stress of policing, and senior patrol officers — who are better educated than in the past — not feeling they have a say in their job.

"As a person gains more experience he should be allowed to take on more responsibilities. But how do you move from a para-military structure to a more broad-based approach? I don't know. But I'm hopeful through this committee we can achieve something."

Labor arbitrator Vince Ready suggested establishing the joint police enhancement review committee after the issue of low morale among patrol officers was left unresolved during recent contract negotiations.

(Ready awarded a one-year contract between the city and the union Jan. 17.)

"I find that the submissions of the union, which were acknowledged by the employer, concerning the city's ability to recruit and retain members have merit," Ready wrote in the contract mediation report.

He said the city acknowledged turnover in the department is increasing to the point that it "exacerbates the recruiting difficulties" the department is currently experiencing.

Between 1982 and 1987 the department had an average of 12 resignations annually but in 1988 the figure was 27, followed by 37 in 1989 and 24 to Aug. 31, 1990.

Ready said he believes the high turnover rate over the past three years is also a result of the current disparity in salaries between city police and the RCMP.

To lessen the gap, Ready awarded the union a salary increase of 8.6 per cent by Dec. 31. By the end of the year, a first-class constable's annual salary will be \$47,113.

However, the union will still not have caught up to RCMP salary levels because the Mounties will also have a salary increase by that time, said de Haas.

In late 1991, Chief Stewart retired. The next appointed chief constable was Bill Marshall. Among the two superintendents who applied, the rank-and-file did not see him as the clear choice. However, rumours circulated that the two superintendents had a pact: if one became chief constable, the other would be promoted to deputy chief, and they would lead the organization as a team. I had lunch separately with these two soon after the appointment. I learned from Marshall that during his interview, he had mentioned strategic planning. I assumed he had read an article about it, as the department didn't do that sort of thing, and I wasn't aware of any training he had in that area. When asked about the future composition of the senior management team, his answer was politically correct: "diversity." His competitor, who had been the union president and the agent at my hearing when I worked in the jail, told me that his response to the question about the future management team was "the best people." Apparently, that was not the best answer. In choosing Marshall, the civilian police board, which knew little about these two men and much less about the organization, policing, or leadership, made a decision that would have significant repercussions for the entire department.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Detective – South Division (1992–1993)**

In 1992, four years into my union presidency, I was promoted to detective and assigned to Patrol South. Within the Oakridge substation was the detective office, tucked away in the administrative zone that patrol officers hesitated to enter. It was a good-sized, plain room with two rows of desks on the right and two on the left, all facing away from the door. Down the middle walkway at the far end of the room was the sergeant's desk. It looked like a high school classroom. When I arrived, I noticed someone had taped a sign above the entrance that read, 'Jurassic Park', reflecting how those detectives were perceived. Some of my new colleagues seemed to have lost their enthusiasm for the job or playing the promotion game. Routine detective work was not like what you see on television—investigating exciting and complicated cases. It involved following up on files that were either too mundane for specialized investigative units or too time-consuming for patrol members. All that was needed was enough information collected by patrol officers so the file could be worked on further. For example, a patrol officer mentioned on the radio that a potential suspect in a theft case was a criminal he claimed to know well. He gave the suspect's name over the radio, showing his familiarity with the district's active criminals. "Perfect match," he said. The file was sent to the detective's office for further investigation. I spent an entire day tracking down numerous witnesses to present a photo lineup that included the suspect. No one recognized him as someone at the crime scene. I thought that the next time an officer had a hunch or just wanted to be seen as if they knew what was happening on the street, rather than waste my time, they should do the follow-up themselves. I recall only one interesting case that I was assigned: a theft from an upscale niche art store. A suspect vehicle license plate number was obtained from a witness. It was a rental car that later travelled across Canada to the East Coast. The case eventually involved the FBI as it was supposedly connected to a sophisticated international organized art theft ring. My investigation ground to a halt when the FBI inexplicably stopped communicating with me.

While conducting routine follow-up investigations, I continued to lead the union. With the expiry of our hastily arbitrated 1991 agreement, bargaining resumed. Regarding wage recovery, we had made a good start in the first years of my presidency. However, with the law unchanged and the union lacking unilateral authority to initiate arbitration, the next round of negotiations dragged on. During the 1991 provincial election campaign, Moe Sahota, then an opposition candidate, attended the BC Federation of Police Officers' annual convention. He promised that if his party were elected, legal provisions constraining our bargaining would be abolished immediately. But after the government changed, this promise was not fulfilled. In 1992, the new government repealed the wage comparison restriction but did not establish a

process for reaching an agreement. In reality, the police would still not withdraw their services or be locked out, so the employer reverted to their strategy of intransigence. With negotiations stalled again, we sought to express our frustration through the media. We took another strike vote, which resulted in 95 percent support. I was puzzled that, despite the absence of any service withdrawal during previous bargaining rounds, the opposition to strike action had increased by 3 percent. Equally surprising, after our repeat protest strike vote, the GVRD applied to the Labour Relations Board seeking to have us deemed 100 percent essential, as if this time we were really going to withdraw service. We announced that the employer and the union finally agreed on something, and that we were also understaffed, which affected our ability to address the city's public safety demands. Beyond that, the GVRD did nothing.

# Negotiators for city ask labor board to declare policing essential service

KIM PEMBERTON

Sun Crime Reporter

An application to have policing declared an essential service was made Thursday to the Labor Relations Board by negotiators for the city of Vancouver.

"We're advised by the management of the Vancouver Police Department that any strike by members of the Vancouver Police Union would pose a real threat to the safety of residents of the city of Vancouver," the Greater Vancouver regional district says in the application.

"The (GVRD) board will be seeking a 100 per cent designation of essential services."

Vancouver Police Union president John de Haas said the union has not given any strike notice, and has always maintained it would not withdraw police services.

"They're trying to suggest we would give strike notice. We've

*This application acknowledges we need to take it to the next logical step and get a third party in.*

JOHN DE HAAS, POLICE UNION

”

always been adamant we would never deny the citizens police services," he said.

"Both the union and the city finally agree on one point though, and that is police service is essential and we must never be locked out."

He said negotiations between the city and police to reach a collective agreement are at a "stalemate" with no agreement on a settlement in sight.

*February 5, 1993. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

In early 1993, as we entered our second year without a contract renewal, we started refusing to wear uniforms while on duty. This instantly became high-profile news across the media. On February 10, 1993, newspaper reporter Francis Bula wrote:

“Vancouver police had been trying to get a contract for a year and a half, and no one seemed to care. But the day they swapped their uniforms for civies, every camera crew and photographer was there. And so were reporters, to write long stories about contract issues. ‘Did we do this to attract the media? Absolutely,’ says Vancouver Police Union head John de Haas. ‘In itself, not wearing uniforms does nothing.’ . . .

Richard Kenwick, assignment editor at U.TV (says) . . . ‘The police had been having a contract dispute for a year and a half. There was no story until last week’.”

## VANCOUVER POLICE

# Officers plan to shed uniforms in dispute

MARY LYNN YOUNG  
Vancouver Sun

Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell isn't worried about public safety as city police shed their blue uniforms for blue jeans today in the latest development in a contract dispute.

The police union has told officers to wear "casual" clothes at work — but to carry their uniform jackets in the car — to protest against stalled negotiations.

For people concerned they won't be able to identify officers, members will be wearing duty belts, with guns, and a plastic police union name-tag with badge numbers. Excluded from the uniform sanctions are city police jail guards and emergency response team members.

Campbell said Thursday citizens should just "carry on as they have" and suggested people call 911 if they need a police officer, but can't find one because they aren't wearing uniforms.

If there is a problem with public safety, Campbell said he is confident Police Chief Bill Marshall can handle it.

Marshall could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Vancouver police union president Cpl. John de Haas said service will not be diminished.

"They will have all of their equipment with them," he said, adding police felt they had no other option but to go public.

The union bought a half-page ad in today's Vancouver Sun explaining its members' concerns — a lack of police cars on night shift, minimal firearms training and insufficient race relations courses. It criticizes city council's handling of public safety issues and other problems.

In October, Metro Toronto police wore baseball caps instead of uniform hats during a month-long job action against the Ontario government's use-of-force law.

Cim Nunn, an official with the Ontario solicitor-general's department, said there were no safety problems in Toronto dur-

## UNDER DISPUTE

- Vancouver police want wage parity with Metro Toronto police. Currently a first-class constable in Vancouver (someone with three years on the job) makes \$47,000. In Toronto it's \$51,000.
- Police want 12-hour shifts considered to replace the current 10-hour shift, but a shorter work week. The union says the job is too stressful as is, and that five per cent of the officers are using the force's psychological service.
- Police also want more firearms and race relations and force option training.

ing that time, but added the Vancouver situation is worse because it involves the whole uniform.

And that's what he said could create public safety problems.

"With no uniform at all, why should I listen to them?" he asked, giving the example of officers directing traffic.

But Simon Fraser University criminology professor Paul Brantingham said he doesn't think the lack of uniform will cause problems.

He said the police car is the most visible symbol for most people.

"In most parts of the city, at least for a reasonable amount of time, it won't make a difference," he said, adding the risks could increase if the job action continues.

De Haas said the labor actions will continue until police find a way to reach a settlement. Vancouver police have been without a contract since Dec. 31, 1991. The main issues include shifts, wages, benefits and training.

We also ran a full-page ad in the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper. It was titled 'Police Protest' and explained why police officers in the city were refusing to wear their uniforms. It discussed wages and their effect on recruiting, retention, and morale, along with noting that a decade earlier, provincial government interference had caused the current crisis and that city hall was exploiting the situation. Our advertisement asked concerned citizens to write or call the mayor and city councillors. We were told City Hall was flooded with calls from supporters of our wage demands. The non-uniform program had attracted the public attention we wanted. After a week, we limited it to simply refusing to wear hats and ties. Then the city just stood back again. It was time to pressure the province. On February 8, 1993, we ran another newspaper advertisement. Similar to the previous one aimed at city officials, this new ad was titled 'Police Need Your Help' and targeted the provincial Minister of Labour, Moe Sihota. However, still nothing constructive resulted. A few weeks later, ahead of the Clinton-Yeltsin summit in Vancouver from April 2 to 4, 1993, we took the high road and announced we would wear our hats and ties during the summit. Once again, we managed to generate media coverage, reminding the public of our stalled contract negotiations.

# Police put own dispute on hold for top-level talks

By John Bermingham  
Staff Reporter

Vancouver police say they'll take no job action during the summit weekend, despite 15 months without a labor contract.

"We refuse to tarnish our service to the community and our nation, despite the city's sorry unwillingness to act," union president John de Haas said yesterday.

"The city may not care about policing and community safety, but we do."

The union yesterday presented a letter to Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell — calling for binding arbitration in the dispute, currently in mediation.

Meanwhile, First Baptist Church on Burrard Street hopes U.S. President Bill Clinton will drop by for Sunday morning service.

"If he shows up, it will be the same

service as usual," said Rev Jack Farr.

But he said Clinton, a southern Baptist, would be encouraged to sing and perhaps read some scripture at the 900-seat church.

For security reasons, his handlers won't get him to the church on time.

If Clinton decides to join the congregation, it will be after the service has begun. And he'll leave before the service ends.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has been invited to attend mass at the Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church on East 43rd Avenue in Vancouver. But he has yet to say whether he'll be there.

Rev. Evan Lowig said Yeltsin may not be as devout a Christian as his late mother was and may want to join Clinton at the Baptist church.

"He clearly was raised to publicly declare his atheism," said Lowig, who added that Yeltsin has only recently started "putting in appropriate appearances" at Russian churches.

*March 30, 1993. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Province newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

The stubbornness of the GVRD negotiation team, combined with inaction by the city and provincial governments, prompted us to take further steps. Rallies had been effective years earlier, so on May 20, 1993, we organized another large demonstration, this time on the steps of the provincial legislature in Victoria on Vancouver Island. A sizable contingent of our members was bused over, and officers from the Vancouver Island municipal police departments also participated. It was a uniform event. The sight of police officers in disciplined ranks protesting wages and work conditions was not the tourist attraction the relatively new provincial government wanted. At one point, a messenger emerged from the legislature building delivering the message that the minister of labour was inviting representatives for an immediate meeting.

Diane and I went to his office. It was a brief, direct conversation. Diane pointed out that his promise to revoke Bill 19 had not been honoured. We had warned him we would respond; now we were doing so, and the public supported us. Minister Sahota had one question, given the current state of affairs: “What do you want?” Diane answered without hesitation—an independent review of the situation and our wages. Not long after, the ministry announced that Graham Leslie had been appointed as a special mediator. Among other prominent roles, Leslie had managed the GVRD labour relations department and served as a deputy minister of labour. Leslie’s report was favourable to us, and shortly after, the employer attacked him as biased and unsuitable.

# Dismissal of mediator in police pay row urged

JEFF LEE

Vancouver Sun

Vancouver city council voted Tuesday to reject special mediator Graham Leslie's report on a contract dispute between the police union and the city.

Calling Leslie "destructive to the process" of labor negotiations, Mayor Gordon Campbell said council wants Labor Minister Moe Sihota to fire the special mediator and let the city and police union proceed with binding arbitration.

The unanimous council decision, made at an in camera meeting Tuesday, came five days after the Vancouver police board wrote to Sihota calling for Leslie's removal from the labor negotiations.

Campbell said council considered Leslie's report ill-conceived because it did not take into account the employer's position and was being promoted without regard to the city's offer to agree to binding arbitration through a regular arbitrator.

"Mr. Leslie decided to do his own report regardless of what the employers felt, without having heard from the employers with regard to their position, and I think was generally destructive to the process," Campbell said.

"Council is unanimous in its agreement that we should be moving forward and doing this in an appropriate and professional way."

But John de Haas, president of the police union, said the city was asked for its position but refused to give it to Leslie. He now wants Sihota to make Leslie's recommendations binding.

"The employer would not say what they disagreed with, and in the absence of that the report should be made binding," de Haas said. "If the city chooses not to put its position forward, they cannot say they weren't given the opportunity. They have no right to dictate the process."

The city's 1,100 police officers have been without a contract since December 1991. Three months ago, Sihota unilaterally appointed Leslie, a former deputy labor minister, as a special mediator to try and break the deadlock.

But he ran into opposition from the employers, who are represented by the Greater Vancouver regional district, because he was not perceived to be an impartial third party.

Leslie went ahead with his report, and recommended a four-year contract with a series of salary increases reached by a complex formula. He also proposed shift differential increases, a clothing allowance for plainclothes officers, premium pay for statutory holiday work and paid meal breaks.

He noted in his interim report that salaries for Vancouver police officers have fallen dramatically below those of other major Canadian forces, resulting in low morale.

In a recent interview, Mark Lefleur, manager of labor relations for the GVRD, which is acting as the bargaining agent for the city and police board, said Leslie was not seen to be acceptable as a mediator.

The city and the GVRD continued their foot-dragging, as the law still favoured them. Meanwhile, Diane kept strategizing how to restore our wages to the levels we earned before the restraint years. At this stage, the wage issue had been judged by Leslie and became subordinate to process obstacles. Our appeals shifted focus from wage discussions to securing an independent and fair arbitration process. The campaign slogan became “Arbitrate the Stalemate.” What was once a legal right had now become a public plea. Our dispute could not drag on indefinitely. The union members were frustrated and angry. I was impressed by Diane’s careful analysis of the qualities we needed at that time in an arbitrator. It was a blend of reputation, principles, analytic skill, and the ability to clearly explain decisions.

At one point, Brian Foley of the BC Labour Relations Board became involved in our dispute. With his help, we reached an agreement on June 29, 1993, to have Allen Hope arbitrate. I could tell our members that we had just won a key battle. What they might not have wanted to hear was that our job action of not wearing uniform hats and ties was over. The employer seemed to think Hope would not be convinced to restore us to our historic wage patterns. They were mistaken. His decision set aside the policies that had affected our contracts and policing, and restored us to where we should have been all along. There was a sense of justice in his settlement when he agreed to our wage goal of ‘placing Vancouver on the top level among Canada’s police forces.’ The tough work of restoring wages was done.

From this years-long struggle over wages, it was clear that elected officials and bureaucrats failed to fully understand their responsibility to provide effective, essential services to the public. Even though the provincial government oversaw policing, legislators and bureaucrats saw it merely as a burdensome budget line, one that, for the most part, had been downloaded to municipalities. They did not seem to grasp or care about the negative impacts of constrained wages on key human resource issues, like recruitment, retention, and morale, and they discounted the collateral deterioration in police services, including diminished investigation quality and longer emergency response times.

Meanwhile, Chief Marshall had addressed some urgent issues. One was the lack of space for a department that had grown substantially over the years. A space study led to the sale of the Oakridge substation property and the leasing of a new seven-story office building at 2120 Cambie Street. In 1994, the Patrol Division and several specialty units relocated to this building, easing congestion at the aging police station at 312 Main Street. The department also took its first attempt at strategic planning. Once finished, information sessions were held for large groups of officers and civilian staff. It was interesting to hear about many ambitious objectives, followed by senior officers explaining why the department didn’t expect to achieve them. A memorable goal was to greatly reduce paperwork. The list of those likely to oppose this goal and their reasons stretched minutes longer than the explanation of the goal itself. The message was clear: don’t worry about the plan; we aren’t going to make any changes.

Unfortunately, relations with Chief Marshall became strained. A serious incident occurred involving the death of a male prisoner in the back of a police transport wagon on December 7, 1991. The investigation and Crown Counsel review inexplicably took eight months to complete. With the employer's full confidence, the wagon driver continued working throughout the investigation period, only for Crown Counsel to then charge him with criminal negligence. After reviewing the file, Chief Marshall believed he needed to take strong action against the member while the case moved through the criminal justice process. He placed the officer on suspension, which then would, in thirty days, change from paid to unpaid status. Normally, concerns stemming from police duties would result in the involved officer(s) being transferred to an assignment not involving the public until the evidence was presented, tested in court, and adjudicated. Before that, not all the facts had been determined. It was unconscionable to take away the officer's and his family's livelihood on unclear, months-old actions. The suspension by Chief Marshall was unacceptable. I discussed with him multiple times the need to revoke it in favour of reassignment, but he refused to reconsider. He said he had reviewed the investigation report and had deep personal concerns. A day before the upcoming union membership meeting, the union executive was on a ferry returning from Vancouver Island. Frustrated with the chief's inflexibility, they urged one last attempt. I went outside onto the ferry deck for privacy and called the chief. During our conversation, he asked, "What is the union going to do after the non-confidence vote?" I couldn't believe he was willing to be held in such contempt. I reminded him that members were very upset and warned that the morning after the membership meeting the front-page headline could be a demand for his resignation. The following day, well before the evening's union membership meeting, the chief's executive officer issued a one-page bulletin summarizing a purported review of the situation. It stated that handling of such matters was ambiguous; therefore, the member was taken off suspension and reassigned until the case was fully processed. Though the membership meeting was calmer, the union's relationship with the chief was severely damaged. Regarding the officer facing criminal charges, a preliminary inquiry concluded the evidence was insufficient to proceed to trial. Ultimately, all related Police Act charges were also withdrawn.

## VANCOUVER POLICE

# Officer involved in death reinstated

### Move de-rails talk of non-confidence in chief vote

LINDSAY KINES

Vancouver Sun

Vancouver Police Chief Bill Marshall has lifted the suspension of a patrol officer charged with criminal negligence causing the death of man in police custody.

Marshall announced the move in a bulletin Monday — one day before a regular meeting of the Vancouver Police Union.

Union president John de Haas confirmed that rank-and-file members had talked of taking a vote of non-confidence in the chief at the Tuesday night meeting.

"Feelings were running high and we had heard some rumblings of that," he said.

But De Haas said officers were relieved by the chief's decision to lift the suspension and he did not expect a non-confidence vote to proceed.

"They feel some confidence that if allegations are made against them as a result of doing their work, they'll be treated fairly."

De Haas had earlier accused Marshall of breaking an unwritten rule by suspending Const. David Hannay, 38, instead of transferring him to desk duties.

Hannay was suspended with pay Aug. 21 after being charged in connection with the death of Randall Andrews, 28.

Andrews died of asphyxiation in a police wagon Dec. 7, 1991. Police arrested Andrews on a mischief charge after a family dispute and a police statement said Andrews was subdued when he became violent.

A month after the initial suspension, Marshall ordered Hannay suspended without pay and both Hannay's lawyer and the union appealed the case to the Vancouver Police Board.

In his bulletin, Marshall said he decided to lift the suspension after reviewing 33 Police Act suspensions in B.C. police departments.

"In the vast majority of cases, officers charged criminally as a result of on-duty use of force have not been suspended and have instead been transferred to inside positions which limit their exposure to the public," he said.

Marshall ordered Hannay to

report to the bureau of support services until further notice.

The police chief said each disciplinary case will be judged on its merits.

"Allegations of excessive force will be viewed seriously by this office," he said.

De Haas said a lot of police officers took the matter personally.

"They felt they could be in Hannay's situation," he said. "Police work opens people up to allegations of misconduct while performing duties. As a result, members should be treated in a fair and reasonable manner."

*December 2, 1992. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.*

Chief Marshall eventually became involved in his own investigation. It concerned an incident from a decade earlier, in 1983, when he was the operations commander. The simple version of events is that he seems to have prevented an investigation of an officer who applied

significant force on a prisoner in the jail's sally-port. Jail staff watched the incident on the booking counter monitor of the sally-port video camera. As required by procedure, the jail sergeant recorded what happened in the jail supervisor's log. This log was how the Internal Investigation Unit and senior management learned about noteworthy incidents each morning. The incident probably would have been investigated, at least to understand what happened and how much force was used. Marshall had gone to the jail and had the sergeant's written notes 'whited out,' severing the flow of information. Why he did that, I have no idea. It was rumoured that there was renewed interest in this matter when Chief Marshall failed to keep the agreement with the other candidate for chief constable by not promoting him to deputy chief. This perceived betrayal fuelled political divisions within the department. An officer who had been at the jail during the incident years earlier and had seen Marshall neglect his duties made inquiries, which led to a formal investigation. The Internal Investigation Unit reports directly to the chief constable. But because the chief himself was under investigation, it was legally required to report on this file to the police board chairperson. When the union found out about the investigation, Chief Marshall was asked whether he had followed the Police Act by notifying the mayor, as chair of the police board. His answers were neither clear nor convincing. To make sure the law was followed, the union executive wrote to the mayor to inform him of our cooperation with the investigation. I do not know what happened after that, except that whatever thread of relationship remained between Chief Marshall and the union, it was severed.

## BRUTALITY PROBE

# Police chief can stay, mayor says

Decision counter to usual policy of reassigning officers

NEAL HALL  
and KAREN GRAM  
Vancouver Sun

Vancouver Mayor Gordon Campbell says he will not remove Bill Marshall from his post as city police chief despite an allegation of police brutality that occurred in 1983 while Marshall was the duty officer in charge.

Campbell's decision flies in the face of Marshall's own policy of reassigning police officers being investigated to prevent a crisis in public confidence in the police force.

But Campbell said he does not think there is a confidence problem in this case, which involves an allegation that a jail beating occurred in November 1983 while Marshall was the duty officer in charge.

"I don't believe there is a crisis in public confidence," Campbell said. "(Marshall) has my complete confidence."



**MARSHALL**

The matter is being handled appropriately by Crown counsel and the RCMP so nothing more is warranted, he added.

"Marshall was in no way implicated in this," Campbell pointed out.

Marshall announced Wednesday he was taking steps to eliminate any potential conflict of interest by having the police internal investigation report sent directly to regional Crown counsel Bob Wright.

Normally such reports are sent to the chief.

In the past, Marshall had asked for a police officer charged with assault to be suspended without pay to avoid a crisis in public confidence in police.

But the police union fought the measure and won — the officer was later reassigned to inside duties until the criminal matter is resolved, Vancouver police union president John de Haas said.

The union is pleased the RCMP will investigate the recent allegations, he added.

"There are so many questions now and so few answers, but obviously things are in the right hands," de Haas said. "The first thing that has to be ascertained is that an assault took place."

He added the public should have faith in the current system, which allows police to investigate themselves, although he feels the system needs to be improved.

He suggested the current public complaints commissioner should be given more power to oversee all complaints against police.

He is not in favor of a unit in B.C. similar to the Special Investigations Unit in Ontario, which was formed in 1989 to investigate serious allegations against police following charges of racism after a number of police shootings.

"It's creating more problems than it solved," he said of the investigations unit in Ontario.

Criminologist Kim Rossmo said the handling of the recent allegation indicates a high degree of professionalism, honesty and lack of corruption within the Vancouver police force.

May 7, 1993 — front page. Material republished with the express permission of the Vancouver Sun newspaper, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

Marshall remained chief, but as the investigation progressed, he was eventually suspended. The completed investigation led to an adjudicative inquiry. In 1994, Marshall left before the findings were made public. His lawyer was the brilliant Len Doust. Doust struck me as having the high character, hidden skills, and superb tactics of television persona Columbo. Like Columbo, he had an unassuming appearance and demeanour. As with Columbo, it later became clear that beneath that casual exterior, remarkable insights and brilliant strategy had been developing. Unlike Columbo, Doust was real. He seemed to anticipate what was coming for Chief Marshall. He arranged a pre-emptive retirement deal with the police board that spared them the trouble of dealing with the messy situation and, since he was not yet condemned of anything, also provided Chief Marshall with a proper payout. When the findings were revealed, they clearly faulted Chief Marshall's conduct in the incident from many years prior. A secondary effect of the outcome was a noticeable shift in the public's perception of chief constables. They were no longer viewed as revered, trusted officials but rather as fallible appointees who required careful oversight and accountability. I believe the real issue was that Marshall was not prepared by the organizational culture for the leadership demands he faced.

With Chief Marshall's unexpected suspension, Deputy Chief Constable Ray Canuel assumed the role of acting chief constable, and when Chief Marshall retired, Canuel was appointed as the new chief. To me, Chief Canuel appeared older, knowledgeable, wise, humble, and trustworthy. After a long, satisfying career, he exhibited relaxed body language and a thoughtful conversational pace. It felt as though he had nothing left to prove. I first spoke with him when I was a detective; he seemed pleased to retire as a superintendent. However, he was promoted to deputy chief to fill a leadership gap. As chief constable, I found Canuel to be an absolute gentleman—dignified, caring, and compassionate. To me, he was the quintessential departmental father figure. Overnight, Chief Canuel gained credibility and popularity in abolishing the requirement to wear hats on the front line, recognizing the inconvenience they caused. In a culture where little changed from within, this small adjustment was significant.

When the provincial government appointed three new police board members, Chief Canuel suggested they also speak with me to better understand their roles and mine as the union president. I appreciated the gesture. Over lunch, one of the new board members asked me what I considered the most important task of the police board. That was a fascinating question. I told her that the most significant thing they did was hire the chief constable, who held full administrative control and, independently of the board, commanded all public trust operations. Who the board chose defined the organization. I further explained that there was a problem of lack of training, development, or succession planning for the chief constable. Even more concerning was the fact that police board members themselves knew very little about policing, its leadership needs and required competencies, the department, its people, the selection processes, how to run an organization, or how to manage change. The reality was that chief constables were often selected based on politics, preferences, and hunches. Unsurprisingly, leadership shortcomings frequently occurred. Moreover, when necessary, the provincial

government had ignored or overridden police boards and taken actions it deemed necessary. The police board governance model was designed more for the appearance of police independence from political interference than for the success of policing. With much empathy, I wished her the best of luck in her new limited-term appointment on the police board.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Corporal – Public Information Counter and Jail (1993–1995)**

During the several months of the department's leadership turmoil and transition to Chief Canuel, in 1993, I was transferred laterally and assigned as a supervisory corporal at the department's Public Information Counter (PIC). The ground level of the 312 Main Street police building was open to the public. Beyond the two sets of large glass-panelled front doors was an expansive open area. It appeared old and worn, as if it had not been upgraded since opening forty years earlier. The space looked bleak, with a hard floor, dull walls, and mediocre illumination. It conveyed an atmosphere of an earlier British colonial bureaucratic era. The Public Information Counter was an enormous three-sided structure that dominated the floor space a short distance inside the front doors. Its broad counters created a separation between citizens and officers. Facing the front doors, within the counter area, were two large staff desks. The counter operated twenty-four hours a day and was constantly staffed by a corporal and a constable. When entering the building, to the left along the north wall and opposite the police counter, was a long traffic accident report counter manned by civilian report takers throughout the day and early evening. Further down the lobby was the public property office counter, also manned by civilian staff during business hours. Just outside the front doors was the downtrodden Downtown Eastside.

The PIC corporal's role involved handling various citizen inquiries, reports, and complaints. One never knew what would come through the front doors—distressed individuals worried about a family member they hadn't heard from in a while, complaints against police officers, or maybe a drunk, possibly violent or not. Arresting someone at the counter was common, whether it was an unruly citizen or someone turning themselves in on a warrant. In the back of my mind was the murder of Constable Tomas Agar, which occurred on September 19, 1980, when I was fairly new on the job. The intoxicated suspect had used a handgun to shoot five people in a Vancouver bar, killing three. He then drove south to Richmond and went directly to the RCMP detachment front counter to settle a deranged, imagined grievance with the police. There, he fatally shot Constable Agar. The Vancouver PIC also had safety issues, but nothing had improved after the Richmond incident. Though indoors, officers had to remain vigilant as if they were on the road.

The assignment involved additional duties at the jail. The PIC corporal would step in for the jail sergeant during the jail sergeant's absence. As the jail supervisor, there was less hands-on work with prisoners, with a greater focus on supervision and administration. The sergeant's office was near the booking counter. One evening, a guard struggled with a prisoner he had removed from handcuffs and was trying to control. I heard the commotion and went out to assist.

The prisoner was large and aggressive, seemingly convinced that fighting in the police jail made sense. That attitude probably contributed to his incarceration in the first place. Due to his extreme belligerence, I decided to place him in a small cell next to the booking area until he calmed down. It took several attempts to get him into the cell, as each time he would turn around, grab, and punch. As the evening went on, my hand began to swell and hurt. I had broken a small bone at the base of my palm during the altercation. I spent the next six weeks at home with a cast. During that time, the first Stanley Cup riot happened downtown on June 14, 1994. Feeling quite left out, I could only watch it on the news.

A major, lengthy provincial government initiative coincided with my detective and corporal assignments and the department's leadership turmoil, which led to Chief Canuel taking command. For various reasons, perhaps the very public Jacobsen saga or an audit of the Vancouver Police Department by the BC Police Commission, the provincial government ordered a public inquiry into policing in June 1992. The inquiry began under Chief Marshall. As the union president, I was notified that the appointed commissioner would be someone held in high regard by rank-and-file officers. It was Justice Wally Oppal, a senior and well-respected judge familiar to many police officers. Justice Oppal, of South Asian heritage, was tall, poised, and conveyed knowledge, maturity, and authority. When he spoke in his thoughtful, direct, concise way, I always listened attentively. He was unpretentious and easy to talk to. During his lengthy inquiry, over many breakfasts, we had frank, honest conversations regarding policing issues. He appeared to care about the public and the police, conveying a genuine desire to improve things. He viewed the justice system as needing to be healthy, ethical, and supported. Of the many topics we discussed, including leadership, organization, training, and culture, one outcome was our consensus that the predominantly in-house review of police conduct had many problems. Unfortunately, this was an occasion when I reached conclusions without completely understanding the subject. I had not learned what I should have from the Jacobsen jail saga. I had perceived that matter as a politically driven, corrupted exterior review of a police incident. It appeared the ends had been felt to justify the means. But I had filed that matter away as an exceptional one-off occurrence. I could not accept that it was the norm. I had returned my attention to my firsthand experiences with internal department politics and personalities that undermined the in-house conduct review process. I was sure the correct outsiders would be objective and fair. This led me to believe that a proper 'external' and 'civilian' oversight of public trust duties remained a better model for police accountability. The lack of third-party involvement also seemed wrong. If a sound system could be built, then perhaps cases would not end up in the political sphere as they had with the jail incident. Surely, the public and the police would accept these independent process decisions and their outcomes. I was deluding myself into thinking I understood the perceived problems of the current system and had the obvious answers.

Though workplace dynamics were occasionally troubling, I found the police department similar to medical TV series like *House*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Transplant*. In stark contrast to the

occasional in-house dysfunction and drama was a shared expectation of delivering top-quality services to the public. The thorough recruitment process included assessments of ethical considerations related to serving the public. Police training then instilled a strong public service ethic. The vetting and professional socialization of police officers were unmatched when compared to most other fields. At that time, citizen surveys on public trust consistently rated police near the top, while politicians, lawyers, civil servants, and others were significantly lower. However, ideologically motivated voices loudly pointed to the lack of a public role in the professional conduct accountability process, which police management exclusively controlled. Oppal also believed there was a growing public perception that police officers would cover for colleagues and not hold them accountable for misconduct. Oppal concluded: “There must be a strong element of civilian oversight in the public complaints process in order to safeguard the public perception that the process is legitimate.” Nonsense. The link between having a public role in the conduct review process and public confidence in the police had not been properly studied. Many years later, I researched the literature on the actual relationship—or, more correctly, the lack thereof—between the two. I will discuss this later. At that time, Oppal and I believed an external accountability model was necessary for police conduct with the public. Looking back, advocating for an external conduct review process and accommodating the idea that police might not always be transparent and honest *de facto* reduced trust in the police. The proposal would systematize and institutionalize this lack of confidence. In 1994, the Oppal report and its recommendations were published. Oppal first prudently recommended a ‘normalization’ of the workplace, involving transferring all labour-relations disciplinary matters from the Police Act back to the employer and the union under labour law. There was no logical reason to treat police differently in employment matters. He then proposed a civilian oversight agency to oversee situations involving ‘the execution of public trust duties.’ This work primarily pertains to the unique Criminal Code authorities of police vis-à-vis the public, regarding detention, arrest, search, seizure, and use of force. The government then began a protracted consideration of the recommendations.

In the meantime, discussions had begun under Chief Marshall and were later continued under Chief Canuel to improve the shift system. There were negative physical, mental, and social impacts from the month-long periods of the ten-hour shifts used by VPD. Police officers were aware of the 12-hour shift schedules used in most other police jurisdictions, usually consisting of two day-shifts and two night-shifts followed by four days off. This schedule allowed more days away from work, providing more family time and less commuting. As a result, improving members’ quality of life was becoming an increasingly important issue for the union. It was clear that the department’s shift model also had inefficiencies for management. There was often a significant misalignment of deployed officers to workload patterns. The system also had some inherent challenges. Since teams needed to police their defined geographic areas around the clock, members worked different steps of a shift ‘ladder,’ most often without working alongside their corporal or sergeant. On-duty district supervisors, regardless of which team they oversaw, provided operational supervision. This meant supervisors followed a different ladder system,

ensuring a supervisor was on duty at all times in each of the four districts. Additionally, there were mandatory training days. Periodically, one team in each district was taken off active service to attend update lessons and requalification sessions. Adjustments to other team deployments were required to cover for these absences. The deployment system was often inefficient, wasting resources. It appeared the only way to ensure staffing levels was to request funding from the city for more personnel. It was a timely opportunity to explore a new deployment scheme that could benefit both union members and the department.

During negotiations, a joint committee was established. Its mandate was to better understand workplace demands, lifestyle needs, and to identify mutually beneficial improvements to shifts. This multi-year project stood as one of the most significant collaborative achievements between the union and the department. I co-chaired this project with recently promoted Deputy Chief Constable Ken Higgins. I initially had no idea what working together with him might be like. He was tall, always had his uniform sharp, and carried himself confidently. My initial impression was of an upper-crust Englishman, arrogant and entitled, which was entirely my projection. Deputy Chief Higgins was anything but haughty. He was dedicated to understanding the issues and finding solutions. He was intelligent, open, curious, humble, and inclusive. He seemed eager to work on such a complex issue as patrol shifts. The committee learned about circadian rhythms and how work hours affect health, safety, alertness, and productivity, as well as the constraints of fixed factors, such as shift length and the need for consecutive workdays. The group was also challenged to integrate frontline deployment into the department's work processes, such as handovers of investigations to detectives. Additionally, the committee became skilled at evaluating the alignment between workload trend data and possible staff deployments. In Vancouver, a large city, significantly improving the shift model was complex, but with regular expert help from two consultants, it was achieved. The proposed new system created district teams working the same hours as their sergeants. Teams worked blocks of four 11-hour shifts followed by four days off. The system included five shift times, one fixed and four rotating, with overlapping hours in the evenings to match call load. The fixed shift began early in the day, allowing the removal of the unhealthy late-night shift. For rotating teams, after completing a block of four shifts and four days off, they would move on to the next set of hours. Training needs were met through a few additional 'time owed' shifts, since members were otherwise paid for more hours than they worked on the frontline. This system corrected many inefficiencies. It also eliminated the need for a team second-in-command corporal in each team and supported a parallel initiative to restructure the department into a less hierarchically layered organization. I will mention that project later. In 1994, the new 11-hour model was trialled for six months in District 3. Its positive results were immediately clear. It offered officers a healthier, better lifestyle while improving the matching of personnel to calls for service. On January 15, 1995, the system was adopted across the city. Its efficiency led to lower costs for taxpayers in subsequent years. I believe it remains one of the best shift models in the country for urban policing.

One day, City Manager Ken Dobell and I went out for lunch. While we ate, I thanked him for funding the upgrade of the computer programs for the shift project. It had made a tremendous difference. The \$180,000 cost had seemed significant to me. Dobell was a large man, incredibly smart, and straight to the point. In response to my thanks, a serious look appeared on his face, and then he glared at me as if I were not very bright. After a few awkward moments, he asked me a question: “What does a police officer get paid per year?” I replied, “About sixty thousand dollars.” In my head, I quickly calculated that the computer program cost as much as the wages of three constables over a year, which was a good amount of money. He then asked, “In the District 3 trial run, how many fewer officers were needed to manage the workload than under the old ten-hour shift system?” Now I was feeling clever. I knew the answer. “Twelve officers less.” He followed with, “How many fewer officers over the four districts city-wide do we need under the new eleven-hour system?” The penny dropped; the new shift system was much more cost-effective. In that moment, I understood why he was the city manager, and I wasn’t.

I learned a valuable lesson from the dynamics that contributed to the successful implementation of the 11-hour shift model. The rigid culture of policing had an unconscious resistance to change. Doing things differently seemed risky and full of uncertainties. Without a leadership mindset or well-developed change-management skills, those in higher positions often reacted by defending the status quo. It always seemed safer. Moving to the new shift system required extensive communication, engagement, time, and persistence. The new plan included several more significant improvements than the model presented to management and union members for approval. A senior manager on the committee had suggested postponing key parts so the major components could be accepted and assessed. Following the implementation, a couple of years passed. Discussing the additional improvements was met with strong opposition. The space for change had collapsed, and the opportunity to create all the lifestyle, efficiency, and cost benefits was lost. The shift model today remains pretty much as it came from the Joint Committee. There was, and I believe still is, room for meaningful improvements. It was a valuable lesson about change management within police culture. In the end, there were achievements, moments of falling short, and lessons learned.

During those same union years, in another joint union-management initiative, Deputy Chief Constable Higgins and I co-chaired a committee of in-house firearm experts. At the bargaining table, the union sought a new sidearm because the issued .38-calibre revolver was objectively unsafe for personal or public protection. The committee was formed to recommend a replacement. The Vancouver Police had experienced serious failures with the revolver. For example, in the 1960s, an armed bank robber fled in a car, followed closely by a constable. The suspect drove onto a dead-end street, where the constable then blocked the bank robber’s car. The robber exited his vehicle and began shooting at the police officer, who returned fire. The officer and the robber shot each other several times, but neither was fatally wounded, and the robber was able to escape on foot. Hours later, he was found lying in nearby bushes. The two had used similar handguns and ammunition, and both had failed to incapacitate each other. As

another example, in the 1980s, a police officer came upon a disturbance in a food line in the Downtown Eastside. As he approached, he realized a man had stabbed another and was turning to slash at him as well. At close distance, the officer fired all the rounds in his revolver into the attacker, but he continued the assault. A second officer arrived and fired more rounds into the attacker, finally stopping the onslaught. The sidearm had repeatedly demonstrated its inadequacy. Firearms need to stop threats that endanger life or cause grievous bodily harm. It was unacceptable for officers not to be assured of survival, and for so many rounds to be fired, putting innocent people nearby at severe risk. It was a hollow feeling to know that our revolvers would likely fail to protect us and others. The committee studied recent groundbreaking FBI research concerning firearm effectiveness. The group learned about the significance of hypovolemic shock and its relationship to ammunition, calibre, and penetration depth. The committee's recommended new sidearm was the .40-calibre Beretta 96D semiautomatic, which had recently been developed for police use. It would be effective against deadly threats while firing the fewest rounds, thereby reducing the risk to bystanders. To gain the support of the police board, the committee held a demonstration and information session. To secure the necessary funding, the committee took the city manager, Ken Dobell, to the range. There, he experienced firsthand the firing and loading of both the current revolver and the proposed semi-automatic handgun. By then, I had learned to respect Dobell's incredible ability to quickly grasp and assess all aspects, considerations, and costs of an initiative, and to manage funding to bring it to life. He helped facilitate the move to a better sidearm. The committee also persuaded the provincial government to amend police firearm regulations. In 1995, the .40-calibre handgun was mandated for all municipal police officers. Around this time, range personnel had strengthened training based on new data derived from police-involved shooting incidents. Distant target shooting proficiencies were changed to close-in tactical skills. Also, holsters had developed considerably, and much safer ones were issued. These changes made a tremendous positive difference to outcomes in the most dangerous situations. Over the years, these advancements have saved lives and continue to do so.

On the union's list of negotiation proposals was the development of a more objective and fair promotion system. It was time to move away from using the promotion scheme to control people or reward followers. The focus needed to be on competencies and development. The way to remove it from the bargaining table was to establish another joint union-management committee. In collaboration with management and consultants, improvements were made to various steps in the process. In 1994, the changes were implemented. However, the revisions did not last, as they could not withstand harmful forces, including the desire to maintain power over others through the promotion process, the wish to reward loyalists, the political goal to create a diverse workforce at all levels regardless of abilities or readiness, and the lack of human resources training. Various interests prevailed over principles. Therefore, there is little value in discussing the good work we did together back then. The realization I had when the system unravelled was that fixing the leadership culture would have to come before any attempt to reform the promotion system.

To conclude the wage segment of my union presidency, after Hope's settlement expired in 1994, there was one more contract renewal. The government had not yet changed the law regarding emergency services, despite being aware of Hope's detailed discussions about the process issues when a police union refused to use job action against the employer. A fair bargaining process needed to be established, culminating in arbitration. Since the government had not created such a route, to spare both parties the frustration experienced in the past years, we first negotiated a fair process. The union agreed to a step-by-step progression with a strict timeline. For some reason, it was decided to use the 'final offer' format on a one-time basis, where the arbitrator would pick either the employer's or the union's final submission. No middle compromise from a third party was to be made. There was also agreement to appoint arbitrator Ken Albertini. Diane sharpened her pencil and her insight. Ultimately, Albertini selected the union's proposal, resulting in a two-year agreement covering 1995 and 1996. We were back on top. However, there was a puzzling ending. By then, Philip Owen had replaced Gordon Campbell as mayor. Owen was a gentleman - seasoned, wise, and caring for everyone. Though he didn't understand policing, he respected the work of police officers and the department. Nonetheless, when the settlement came from Albertini, Owen criticized the outcome. It called for a public response, captured in the clipping below. Given who he was, that exchange did not damage our relationship.

# Police union takes potshot at mayor in pay-hike fight

SHERRYL YEAGER  
Vancouver Sun

Criticism by Mayor Philip Owen of the Vancouver police department's three-per-cent pay hike is illogical, demoralizing and irrational, says the president of the police union.

John de Haas said Owen's protests about the wage increase for 1,100 Vancouver Police Union members are at odds with the decision-making process the city insisted the arbitrator follow.

Owen, chair of the Vancouver police board that oversees the force, is calling for legislative changes to the way arbitrated settlements are reached. Arbitrator Ken Albertini ruled this week that police union members will receive increases of 1.5 per cent in 1995 and 1996.

"This mayor is doing exactly what the last one (provincial Liberal leader Gordon Campbell) did in the last round of negotiations. He didn't like the outcome, so he complained loud and hard about the results," said de Haas.

He noted the city agreed to arbitration, and insisted a final-offer policy be used to determine wages. Under that system, the arbitrator selects one side's offer instead of trying to find a compromise between

the positions of the two sides.

"This is exceptionally illogical behavior. It doesn't make sense to agree to a process, ask for certain conditions and then badmouth the outcome," said de Haas.

Owen said he doesn't object to final-offer bargaining, but wants legislative changes that require arbitrators



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to spend more time looking at previous and other local settlements.

"I find it alarming that in the last 25 years, only one settlement (with the police) has been by collective bargaining. It always goes to

arbitration. We should have a more exhaustive collective bargaining process," said the mayor.

He is also critical of the police union for requesting a three-per-cent pay increase that will cost taxpayers \$1 million.

"It's disappointing when you consider that some city unions showed responsibility by agreeing to a zero-per-cent increase in 1994," Owen stated, noting that the police received a

three-per-cent increase that year.

In response, de Haas shot back that other unionized city employees were granted the same 1.5-per-cent increase as the police for 1995 and 1996.

The city proposed no increase for police in 1995 and 1.5 per cent for 1996.

The pay increase keeps the Vancouver force second in Canada, behind Montreal, in wages for municipal police in a major centre.

De Haas said this scale is justified when caseloads are considered. Vancouver has the highest crime rate and violent crime rate in Canada and the highest over-all cost of living, he said.

The last round of negotiations with police lasted 22 months and ended in arbitration that resulted in wage increases of four, four and three per cent over three years to 1994.

Because policing is deemed an essential service, neither side can use a work stoppage as a bargaining tactic, and arbitration is necessary to end disputes when one side is inflexible, de Haas said.

The force is understaffed by 43 members and has been unable to respond immediately to non-priority calls because of a shortage of police cars, added de Haas.

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The provincial government took its time reforming the legislative issues it inherited. Eventually, a working group made up of management and union lawyers was assigned to find a better way forward for true emergency services. They recommended that unions and the employers of police and fire agencies be given the right to invoke arbitration to resolve deadlocks in negotiations and secure a collective agreement, without disrupting services. Finally, in 1996, the legislature passed the Fire and Police Services Collective Bargaining Act, which

included this provision. The political idealists had been set aside, and the realists had taken charge. There was no longer a need for theatrics to advance the bargaining process. Our use of public drama had been draining for everyone. Police bargaining was no longer a conflict-riddled news item.

Sometimes the union took on more than the organization could handle. As mentioned earlier, efforts by a joint committee to improve work satisfaction within the current organizational structure had failed. In the mid-1990s, a morale problem stemmed from mass hiring years earlier when the department had expanded rapidly. This demographic bulge was now in the typical career promotion zone. In the department, rank levels correlated with pay increases, more job opportunities, and professional respect. It was all one package. The unusually large number of officers competing for the same number of vacancies meant that promotion opportunities and all associated benefits would be very limited for this group. It seemed appropriate to move away from a pseudo-military hierarchy. Inspired by the flatter FBI organizational structure, police unions had lobbied the Oppal Inquiry to recommend a more professional model for policing, which Oppal supported. In 1995, following the inquiry, a collaborative union-management committee was formed, tasked to improve efficiency and effectiveness through a major organizational redesign. The aims included shorter communication channels and increased ownership of personal development and careers. The proposed plan created lateral opportunities by reducing ranks and broadening job functions, with officer-controlled wage increments within these ranks based on experience, professional development, and knowledge currency. The group eventually faced serious conflict, mainly due to overzealousness on both sides. On the surface, there seemed to be significant disagreements over several details. The main confrontational figures were Deputy Chief Constable Rick Stephens and, well, myself. I was being quite stubborn. After all, hadn't we been the first to suggest these ideas? One day, Chief Canuel called me into his office and, in a fatherly way, strongly suggested that the entire committee undergo a two-day mediation with a facilitator he trusted and respected. Knowing the ethical thing was to agree and cooperate, I politely, though begrudgingly, consented. I told our side it would be a waste of time, but I was mistaken. The facilitator disarmed everyone by having us participate in "just a fun opening exercise." It was a powerful visioning activity that showed we all shared the same view of the future. That changed the energy in the room, and by the end of the second day, only two issues remained. One was minor: what should follow-up investigators be called - detectives or detective-constables? All that mattered was that the label included the word detective. At the end of the second day of mediation, Deputy Stevens, a large, towering man, stood up from his chair on the other side of the table, and with a broad smile, firmly shook my hand hard as if we had become close friends. Afterwards, the committee spent several months working through the many side issues raised by the restructuring model. With the plan still incomplete and not yet adopted, I was nearing the end of my time as president. While Ray Canuel remained the chief constable, I received a promotion.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Sergeant – Criminal Intelligence Services British Columbia (1995–1996)**

As a new sergeant, I was first assigned to Criminal Intelligence Services British Columbia (CISBC), a multi-agency and RCMP-administered provincial strategic-level intelligence unit focused on organized crime groups. The ‘bureau’ was one of a network across Canada that supplied intelligence to the national Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada (CISC). Chief Canuel had serious concerns over the lack of output from CISBC. He instructed me to investigate what was wrong with the bureau and report back. It was eye-opening to learn about the major organized crime groups active in the province. This included biker gangs, the limited amount of ‘traditional organized crime,’ also known as the Mafia, Indo-Canadian gangs, Persians, Hispanics, the United Nations, and more. Why hadn’t frontline officers been kept fully informed about these groups and their activities long ago? Among the two sergeants there, I was ostensibly in charge of field operations, which CISBC was neither resourced for nor undertook. It was merely another label that suggested policing was doing something it was not. The other sergeant focused on maintaining the numerous computer systems used by the unit. My team consisted of career civilian analysts, along with several RCMP and VPD officers who were no longer deployable on the frontline. They gathered reports from various agencies willing to send them and entered this data into analytic computer programs. In this role, I was immersed in the province’s fractured policing structure. Not all agencies cooperated as they should, and the intelligence picture was grossly incomplete and often inaccurate. Complicating matters, the RCMP maintained its own internal provincial and national Criminal Intelligence Service units, effectively duplicating much of the work. Operational units also maintained their own intelligence capabilities, including the VPD’s tactical Criminal Intelligence Section. To me, the atmosphere at CISBC was one of my staff going through the motions of entering data, fully aware that the organized crime picture was critically incomplete and unlikely to be used. There was a sense of satisfaction that everyone had relatively low stress and secure jobs. After all, almost nothing was expected from the unit. Before being assigned there, I had never heard of it.

CISBC was housed in a bombproof and bulletproof building that contained several units, whose mandates included gathering tactical intelligence on organized crime groups in the province and executing scaled-up enforcement actions. Similar to CISBC, the work environment seemed to have low expectations for productivity. If the newspapers weren’t alarming the public and politicians, the general attitude was to take it slow. Strangely, in a building ostensibly conducting such sensitive work, which required an extremely high level of information security, there was also a civilian provincial government support unit. After a few weeks, I discovered that what I had been told about my hard drive storage folder being highly secure was false. It was

fully accessible to civilian personnel from the non-police agency. I never knew when they accessed it, but I knew they could and did. One of their staff members was helping me with an administrative matter. When I said I would print and give him a copy of the project, he replied, “Don’t worry; I’ll just grab it from your electronic files.” I quickly stopped storing organized crime data there. From early on, it was clear there were issues in that building. The challenges weren’t only a lack of participation, motivation, or information security; there was a lack of a strong leadership culture, which hindered effective efforts in the province against organized crime groups.

Pettiness thrived away from the frontline. For example, one day, my superior, an RCMP staff sergeant, was transferred to a project for several weeks, and I became the acting bureau manager. A regular meeting of the committee that oversaw the unit, composed of senior police ranks, was approaching. I prepared a draft agenda for the chairperson, an RCMP deputy commissioner, to whom I, as the bureau manager, reported. I included a proposal to clarify the role and relationship of the civilian unit in the building to the bureau. I had included this on the agenda since a building inter-agency cooperation agreement was circulating for signatures. Because I now had serious security concerns regarding the government agency's access to sensitive intelligence, I believed the CISBC governing committee should be informed of the situation and instruct me accordingly. The deputy commissioner approved and distributed the agenda. One committee member, the commander of an anti-organized crime unit in the building, after receiving the draft agenda, unexpectedly came to my office. He held a significantly higher rank as a VPD acting-superintendent. Seeming frustrated, he ordered me to remove the civilian unit matter from the agenda. He also demanded that I sign the inter-agency agreement immediately. I perceived politics influencing matters in the building rather than a focus on proper operations. Since I did not report to him, I refused and told him to present his requests to the deputy commissioner CISBC reported to. The agenda remained unchanged, and the matter was discussed. I don’t remember signing the inter-agency agreement. Later, I was reporting directly to Chief Canuel in his office, as I often did. He apologetically informed me that I was under investigation for insubordination following an allegation by the acting superintendent. I provided a detailed, multi-page report explaining the CISBC chain of command, its rationale, and how it operated in practice. However, in the end, lower-ranked individuals usually lost. I was verbally advised that in future, I should immediately call the deputy commissioner in similar situations. I had, in fact, informed the deputy commissioner shortly thereafter. But the facts didn’t matter; only a bruised ego did. Several months later, after informing the chief about the issues with the unit and the building, I requested a transfer out.

Shortly before that, I also finished my term as union president. By 1996, with another union election approaching, I felt I had achieved success on the key items of my original agenda. After years of government-imposed wage restraints, wages had returned to the national pattern. Shifts had moved to the compressed 11-hour model, which provided more days off, a healthier rotation, improved deployment-to-call load, and several other benefits for management and

union members. We had acquired a sidearm that would be more effective in protecting officers and safeguarding the public. Identified as well was a gap in income protection, resulting in the implementation of long-term disability coverage. The promotion plan saw several improvements, albeit temporary in the long run. The Police Act was under review following the Oppal Inquiry. Officers gained access to confidential psychological services as part of their benefits plan. The organizational structure was under examination for flattening. The union was properly oriented and financially solvent again. During my time as president, the union drove much-needed changes that, arguably, could or should have been initiated by senior leaders in the organization. Many times, we paused to ask ourselves if we were encroaching on management's turf. It was tempting to stay in the union. However, I sensed it was a trap of sorts. The extra pay was nice, the notoriety was interesting, and new challenges arose regularly. If it had been a full-time secondment, there would be no shift work. But my inner compass had always pointed towards being a police officer, not a labour leader. It was time to refocus on my police career. Therefore, I chose not to seek a further term as president in the 1996 elections. I thought I was done with the union, but that was not to be the case.

During the years I served as union president, there were often turbulent and stressful events occurring for the department. Personally, it was a period of deep learning driven by a continual struggle against two main forces. The first was self-interest. Too many people, both inside and outside the organization, sought what benefited them more than the common good of policing or the public. Although most people did not fit this mould, the malaise seemed to be acceptable. The second dynamic was an illusory belief within policing that the best way to get through any crisis was to stick to the status quo. Faced with external political pressures, critiques from self-interest groups, and media distortions, police leaders fell in behind the barricades. I sensed that they didn't know what else to do. Battered by self-interest and defensiveness, I felt that the only thing holding policing together was its near-monopoly on maintaining public order. Over my years as president, I also found it fascinating to learn how business relations functioned in the real world. To satisfy various stakeholders, there was showboating at the bargaining table or in front of the media, detailed conversations during side meetings, and honest one-on-one talks over coffee or a meal – all steps necessary to find a way forward. I learned that genuine influence was closely tied to the ability to secure time with someone - be it a critic, a city manager, a politician, or a chief constable - and converse as two human beings, regardless of whether we liked each other. In that way, it was the same as police work. Leaving CISBC behind as well, I happily transitioned into the role of a supervisory patrol sergeant in the city's northeast district.

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Patrol Sergeant – District 2 (1996–2001)**

To the east, District 2 bordered the neighbouring municipality of Burnaby, and in the west, it nestled against the downtown business region. It stretched from the waters of Burrard Inlet on the north to Broadway on the south, a major traffic route that roughly divided the city. By then, team policing had ended, partly due to the 11-hour shift model and, probably, because it never truly connected with communities either. Each patrol team deployed units throughout the district, with overall staff levels on the 11-hour shift model now fluctuating more closely with call-load patterns. I was assigned to lead Team 2-6. My role as a street supervisor, under the command of the city-wide operations commander, was to monitor the call load, stay aware of radio traffic, be available on air to units and dispatch, ensure officers were productive and handling calls correctly, and, most importantly, supervise multi-member responses to serious incidents. Along with some administrative and developmental duties for my team members, my main focus was on overseeing work generated by citizens calling 911 for police assistance.

This was a time of significant technological change. Sturdy, purpose-built laptop computers were installed in police cars. Calls were now dispatched simultaneously over the radio and through computers. As a supervisor, I could query calls pending dispatch, see details and priority of each, monitor what every unit in the district and city was doing, and access incident histories of premises and people. The report-writing program was also on the computer. Wherever I was, I could review and approve a unit's report by opening it on my vehicle's laptop. The computer also provided a text messaging channel between units or with dispatch. With the rapid growth and spread of the World Wide Web, everything seemed to be on the verge of complete transformation. E-mail became a key tool for efficient and timely communication. During shifts, we were now required to periodically check our messages on the secure computer terminals in police buildings. Cellular phones were evolving quickly, but it took several more years for the Internet to be integrated with them. A breakthrough in investigations was DNA. DNA evidence collected at a crime scene could be compared to a suspect's sample, conclusively confirming their presence there. It was more accurate than fingerprints. Increasingly, prosecutorial success was achieved by gathering DNA from blood, semen, saliva, or other sources. This necessitated paying close attention to DNA evidence across various crime scenes, as new samples could solve not only recent cases but also old ones. To meet the explosive demand, the processing system had to expand rapidly.

Our appearance was also changing. Across North America, there had been a gradual evolution of operational uniforms, and the department now viewed it as safe, perhaps even

necessary, to promote some level of conformity. A new appearance was adopted: shirts and pants were switched to black, the pants featured usable cargo pockets, boots replaced shoes, and jackets became much more functional. The entire outfit was designed to be practical.

Remarkably, the tie was eliminated. Equally astonishing, the world did not descend into chaos and anarchy as a result, which I had been told for years it would. We were also issued nylon web equipment belts, a dependable handgun in a secure triple-safety holster, handcuffs, a collapsible steel baton, capsicum spray, and a radio with an earpiece. Some members carried tasers, while others had bean-bag shotguns. With more force options, incidents could be handled more safely for everyone. Police procedures were slightly adjusted, with intoxicated persons now taken to a provincial health services sobering unit staffed by medical personnel. However, if they were violent, they still went to jail.

In 1997, the Supreme Court caused a stir. Applying the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the court in the Feeney case heavily restricted police search powers. The case involved a murder, where police found a bloodstained shirt in Feeney's home that linked him to the crime. However, the officers had not first obtained a warrant from a justice. The court ruled that one's home was now one's castle, and without prior judicial approval, police entry could only be justified based on a reasonable belief that someone inside was in danger of death or grievous harm, or that evidence would otherwise be destroyed. The police world was shocked. It had always been accepted as common sense that entering a home without a warrant was justified if a very serious investigation was involved or a crime was occurring. But no longer. As the Feeney decision shows, common sense and legal principles do not always align. Interestingly, in the decision, the court also upheld 'hot pursuit' as a valid exception, which allowed warrantless entry. They referenced a case in which a traffic violator was chased into his home. The court said it was acceptable for police to enter in those circumstances. A traffic offence over a murder investigation? The court also left the door open for their principle of residential sanctity to be further amended, noting that future cases could establish other circumstances that would also be exceptions.

District 2 consisted of two distinct parts. There was the district itself, and within it was the original locale where Vancouver began: the notorious Downtown Eastside (DTES). This area was in the northwest corner, backed by the nearby skyline of Downtown's corporate towers. The DTES includes the historic neighbourhoods of Gastown, Railtown, Chinatown, Japantown, Victory Square, Strathcona, and Oppenheimer. Running east-west through the centre of the DTES was Hastings Street, lined with many old and run-down single-room occupancy (SRO) residences. In a bygone era, these were hotel rooms, when sharing bathrooms on each floor was considered up to date. Most of these buildings were erected during the boom years from 1908 to 1913 to house the seasonal workers arriving in town, especially loggers from camps across the province. Given the era and tenants, understandably, many of these former hotels had beer parlours. When I grew up in Vancouver, the DTES, also called the 'skids' – originally a logging industry term, was known to be a place where down-and-out chronic alcoholics, many of whom

were war veterans, had ended up. But over the decades, conditions worsened dramatically. When I began working there, I saw firsthand that a critical mass of people couldn't take proper responsibility for their lives. These individuals included those impacted by childhood abuse, trauma, fetal alcohol syndrome, poverty, drug addiction, mental illness, colonization, racism, and other devastating circumstances. The sources of their suffering were layered and complex. Many people from across the province and country drifted into Vancouver's oldest and poorest neighbourhoods. When there was nowhere else to go, there was the DTES. There, they found cheap rooms, food lines, drug dealers, pimps, and like-minded spirits. Much of the area had fallen into a bleak, dilapidated inner-city slum of poverty, sidewalks and laneways strewn with garbage, neglected buildings, homeless people bedded in doorways, drug trafficking, open drug injection, stolen property markets, and thousands of disenfranchised souls wandering the streets day and night. The chaos persisted around the clock, 365 days a year. Its rhythm was unaffected by the time or day, only shifting temporarily on social assistance paydays - when the economic situation improved slightly, and drug transactions increased. The misery was palatable. Individuals seemed isolated and exposed, despite the crowds of people everywhere. A constant sense of danger was in the air, whether from confrontations with psychotic persons, random violence, car break-ins, or some unforeseen drama suddenly enveloping passersby. Tensions also flared continuously between the burgeoning, marginalized population and the remaining businesses and long-term residents. Traffic flowed through the DTES with windows tightly rolled up, as if passing through an apocalyptic movie scene.

An incident illustrating what the streets in the DTES were like began late one evening. I was sitting in a marked police cruiser in the 100 block of East Hastings Street. This location was the epicentre of desolation and disorder. On the car computer, I was checking the status of calls on hold and the activities of units in the district when my attention was drawn to a stocky young male emerging from the bar of a decaying hotel, mid-block across the street. He yelped as he stood in an aggressive stance on the sidewalk. With a hostile expression, he looked up and down the street, but not towards me. Then his gaze fixed on a middle-aged man waiting at a bus stop kiosk near the end of the block. I watched the bar patron closely, worried about what he might do. He moved towards the man at the bus stop, shouting insults and threats. I got out of my vehicle just in case his intentions were serious. When the man realized he was the target, he seemed to panic and started to back away. Though there was nothing funny about the unfolding situation, a chase resembling a cartoon played out around the bus stop kiosk, the hunted being pursued by the hunter. I crossed the street and stopped at one end of the kiosk just as the prey rounded the other end toward me. I waved for him to go past me. A moment later, his pursuer rounded the same corner. After receiving a burst of capsicum spray, he let out a tortured scream and dropped to the ground in agony, as if struck by a two-by-four. The bar patron was taken to jail until he settled down. I never saw his intended victim again. Often, that's what it looked like, keeping the peace in the DTES.

To get a sense of life on the streets, it was important to remove the uniform. Depending on call volume and staffing levels, occasionally our team conducted project shifts. We would all go undercover and, in a coordinated effort, target and arrest street-level drug dealers. I looked older and could blend into the environment, reducing the chance of being identified as a police officer. One dark evening, while out on the street as a cover officer, wearing dirty, worn clothes and being unshaven for a few days, my job was to loiter near the location of a drug buy by another team member. Mid-block, I melded into the surroundings, lying on the sidewalk in front of a convenience store and smoking a cigarette. A young female officer, dressed as a skateboarder, came down the street, acting as if she were looking furtively for a dealer. One materialized, and they met directly in front of me for the transaction. It must have felt unreal for the trafficker to be arrested by a skateboarder and a street person. On the one hand, this work was gratifying. On the other hand, it was clear these individual efforts made no real impact in the vastness of the Downtown Eastside, its throngs of distraught people, and the enormous drug trade. The true value was experiencing a part of that world from the vantage point of the marginalized.

Besides the chaos caused by drugged, drunk, and psychotic individuals, there was also the collateral disorder from the low-track street sex trade. In that part of the city, providing sex was mainly about attaining a survival income. Most of the prostitutes were friendly, and each had her own story. One I cannot forget was a young, frail girl, no more than twenty years old, who was usually extremely high on drugs. I called her Moon Eyes because her eyes were huge, and her gaze flitted all over. She would sway, her arms flailing, and yell at passing cars, hoping to find a client. That carried on month after month. To my surprise, one day she was sober. I drove up to her and started chatting. Clear-headed and calm, she was quite sweet. She had been in jail and forced to detox, having just returned to the street. As we talked, I asked her where she was from and what her childhood was like. Her friendliness suddenly disappeared, and she stared blankly. After a long pause, she said, "You don't want to know." Hours later, she had returned to her drug-induced, altered reality, far from her pain. I never saw that friendly side of her again.

One of the inspectors I worked under during my years in the district delegated pairs of district sergeants to various DTES communities with the mandate to address patterns of recurring complaints. Another sergeant and I were assigned the residential Oppenheimer and Strathcona neighbourhoods on the east side of the DTES. Street prostitution was prolific in the area, and residents' complaints were constant about noise and late-night disturbances. The two of us decided to use sustained enforcement to move the sex trade into the industrial zone to the northeast. We secured assistance from Vice, Traffic, and other police resources to maintain constant 24/7 pressure. As a result, the streets were more or less cleared. The area gained a peaceful quiet that it hadn't known for many years. Eventually, the additional officers had to return to their core duties, and in a few days, the prostitutes returned. I drove up to a group of them and, in frustration, asked what they did not understand about not working in that area. They said they knew we wanted them to move, but as one of them explained, they weren't safe in the

industrial area. If they shouted for help, no one would hear them. In the residential neighbourhood, people immediately called the police, who arrived promptly. I realized the situation was more complex than I had initially thought. I began to see the ineffectiveness and callousness of the enforcement approach we had used. The lesson was that we should have spoken to the women first and even involved them in finding a solution. It was becoming clear that to handle the complex issues of the DTES, participation from everyone involved, especially the marginalized, was necessary.

The safety concerns expressed by the prostitutes were genuine. During my time in the district, a pattern was noticed of women going missing, mainly low-track prostitutes. In that part of the city, it was not unusual for someone to be absent for a while, for various reasons. Usually, the person was found later, but this time, they were not. Rumours spread, including that the girls were engaging in sex on the freighters that docked there and were then taken away by the crews. I remember one prostitute telling me she was on a ship when she heard the engines start up. She said an elder crewman took her off the ship just before it left. The message to the girls was to be cautious, as something unexplained was occurring. No one had yet linked Robert Pickton to being Canada's most infamous serial killer.

Over time, it became clear to me that the dire situation in the Downtown Eastside resulted from policies imposed over the decades by various levels of government. These policies involved enforcing mainstream cultural values, moral judgments, and behavioural expectations. The public and elected officials could only see the DTES and consider solutions through beliefs shaped by their social backgrounds. As a result, governments rarely understood or empathized with the realities faced by those affected by their policies, nor did they recognize the unintended consequences. Worse still, I realized that middle-class politicians and bureaucrats in city hall, the provincial government, and the federal government not only failed to understand the struggles of the marginalized in the DTES but also appeared indifferent to them, as long as the situation remained quiet and out of the political spotlight. Years later, Wally Oppal shared similar views regarding the political responses to the DTES, inspired by his work as commissioner of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry.

As mentioned at the beginning of this book, in the 1980s and 1990s, Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal worldview and policies spread to British Columbia, influencing many policy decisions. Neoliberalism held that strong individual character and ownership of one's life were the factors determining a person's success and social advancement; conversely, their absence was seen as the cause of failure and decline. Because of this, the dogma outright rejected the behaviours and conditions of the marginalized in the DTES. These troubled individuals were seen as responsible for their hardships, and it was up to them to lift themselves out of suffering. Society's role was considered negligible. Believing everyone should fend for themselves led to constrained taxes and reduced social resources. The government froze welfare payments while costs increased. Under a disingenuous scheme to shift responsibility for the mentally disordered back to community supports, closures occurred at the provincial psychiatric

hospital, with virtually no new programs created. Assuming all individuals could make rational life decisions fostered the criminalization of poor conduct and reinforced the idea that punishment was the best way to change conduct. Often, the retributive justice system left those convicted even more broken and angry. Meanwhile, efforts to cut government costs encouraged short incarceration - quickly recycling unrehabilitated offenders back onto the streets. When public alarm about the DTES prompted government action, rather than crafting a comprehensive, multifaceted, coordinated, and evidence-based plan that involved the marginalized themselves, responses typically focused on narrow, single-issue solutions such as securing housing, increasing drug treatment beds, or even legalizing hard drugs. Simple neoliberal assumptions led to simplistic solutions that were unlikely to have a significant impact. While neoliberal principles may have benefited the capable and wealthy, they harmed and disenfranchised the less fortunate and damaged communities.

Not surprisingly, the DTES had become the city's most troubled area for crime and disorder. Criminal groups openly ran businesses involving illicit drugs and prostitution. Violent assaults often occurred alongside the drug and sex trades, and people frequently died from overdoses and contaminated drugs. To get money for drugs, addicts broke into homes, businesses, and cars and committed robberies. Despite this, a delusional belief persisted that the police would maintain law and order, especially regarding illicit drugs. America's War on Drugs had spilled into Canada in 1986 under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Even though the strategy had little effect, it continued year after year. In Vancouver, a steady stream of drug cases went to court. The judges appeared to shrug in bewilderment over what they were expected to do. In reality, we, the police, just tried to keep a lid on the craziness.

Over my five years in District 2, the police department made several efforts to stabilize the area using visible patrols. The first was doubling the two-officer walking-beat teams that each team deployed. More police did not address the underlying policies fostering disorder. A second effort was under Chief Constable Chambers, who had come from Ontario and took over when Chief Canuel retired. Chief Chambers obtained temporary funding from the city and flooded the DTES with law-enforcement personnel by reallocating resources, using off-duty officers on overtime, and convincing partner agencies to focus on the area. There was a strong show of authority for some time. His theory of change was that this law-enforcement presence would transform the status quo. Those working in the area knew that, at best, it would only push the problems elsewhere. An analysis of department data months later confirmed this: the drug trade shifted much of its activity to nearby Commercial Drive, with thefts from vehicles and other drug-related crimes moving to the nearby downtown business district and the residential West End. Once the heightened policing eased, the activities of the DTES resumed because that's where the marginalized populations lived, illicit drugs were bought and sold, free meals were available, and they just fit in.

A third effort was attempted near the end of my time in the district. It was called the Downtown Eastside Extraordinary Policing (DEEP) project. I was briefly involved in it towards

the end of my time there, and so I will explain it further below. However, experienced officers knew that all three approaches would be ineffective. Police enforcement could not solve complex, interconnected social, psychological, and behavioural issues. Police presence was ineffective in changing the behaviour of those who were deeply damaged and trying to survive. What was needed first was a shift in citizens' beliefs, understandings, and attitudes about the marginalized and their situation in the DTES.

Most of District 2 lay east of the DTES, in the neighbourhoods of Grandview-Woodland and Hastings-Sunrise, and it had a much lighter workload than the DTES. The residents were mostly law-abiding, working-class people. These areas featured a mix of European and Asian ethnicities and a concentration of Indigenous people. The Aboriginal Friendship Center was situated there, along with various other Indigenous service agencies. Almost none of the Indigenous residents were from the local First Nations; many had moved to the city from across the province and country, due to perceiving no future for themselves on their home reservations. Based on historical events, they also had little trust in the police.

Typical of policing, officers never knew what might happen on a shift. Late one relatively quiet night, there was a broadcast about several people fighting outside a small three-floor apartment block in a predominantly industrial area in the middle of the district. The information was confusing and vague, suggesting a possible child abduction attempt. I was familiar with the building. It was old but in good repair, and there were never any problems. No other police units were close. As a supervisor, I was working alone. I informed dispatch that I was responding, and within a minute, I was on scene and observed no activity in front of the building or through the glass entry door into the lobby. I informed the radio. The dispatcher updated that the melee was inside on the ground floor. I still thought the situation was unusual for the time, day, and location, but I parked and went inside. I heard a disturbance in the hallway beyond the lobby. When I arrived there, I saw a woman grappling with a man. Another tall male was nearby with two small children, neither of whom seemed especially upset. He scooped them up, one in each arm, and when he had them, he walked toward the front doors—and me. When he recognized I was a police officer, he hesitated, then, with an alarmed look, rushed past me. Although I had my capsaicum spray ready, I couldn't spray him without risking harm to the children. In those split seconds, my brain scrambled to figure out what was happening and what action to take. Before going after him, I took a few seconds to spray capsaicum on the two who were fighting. In a few moments, they would be in agony and unable to continue fighting, which would decrease the risk of being injured. Then I chased the male with the children. By then, he was running west along the sidewalk. He let one child down, a toddler, and kept going. Next decision: look after the toddler on a quiet street late at night, or pursue the man with the other child? If it was an abduction, I needed to keep after him. I continued pursuing the man as he turned right at the cross street, ran to the lane, and turned east, which would take him back behind the apartment block. As I chased him, I radioed updates to cover units, hoping they were on their way. He ran down the lane well past the back of the apartment building. A good distance ahead, I observed

him put the second child down, then turn right into a parking lot between two buildings, leading back toward the street. I lost sight of him. Next quick decision: look after the child in the lane or continue chasing the possible abductor. On my left, workers from a business were smoking near the lane. I figured they would look after the child. By the time I reached the parking lot, the male was climbing a staircase that led back up to the street. Strangely, he appeared much closer. Then he kept running west. I radioed my concern that he might be heading back to the apartment building, but he didn't; he ran past it. I followed him down to the same cross street, and this time he turned left, then down another lane and into a large parking lot. I knew the lot was surrounded by a tall chain-link fence and had no other exit. By then, cover units had arrived and secured the lot. A canine unit also arrived and began searching the compound. After a few minutes, I returned to the apartment to find out what the incident was about. Luckily, the children were there, and several police officers were interviewing residents. The first male suspect had fled. Later, I was talking with one of my officers on the sidewalk when a worker I had passed in the laneway approached us. He hesitated before asking if we were coming to recover the handgun that the man I had been chasing had placed on the tire of a truck in the parking lot he had run through. Gun? The suspect I was chasing had a gun? The tone of the whole situation changed.

Slowly, the story unfolded. Earlier in the evening, the mother of the two children was assaulted and injured by her boyfriend, who then left. She entrusted the children to a neighbour and went to the hospital. The victim chose not to report the assault to police, as social services had warned that another violent incident at home would lead to the children being taken away. However, she called her brother. Outraged by the boyfriend's violence, the brother was determined to teach him a lesson and called a friend to come along. The friend stuffed a handgun into his pocket. They went to the apartment building, ready for violence, believing the boyfriend would be there. With no one home, they started knocking on doors looking for the children. A neighbour said she had the children but asked who they were. Filled with adrenaline, the brother demanded the children; the neighbour resisted. The situation escalated from verbal to physical. Other neighbours called the police, reporting what seemed like a child abduction. As was often the case, I found myself in the middle of an event with very little information. This time, it included a serious potential threat to my safety. The man I had chased was arrested after the police dog found him. He pleaded guilty to a gun possession charge.

In policing, not only are there significant unknowns, but sometimes things are not at all what they appear to be. In the early morning hours, near the end of a busy night shift, our deployed numbers were at their scheduled low as we waited for the day shift to start. Dispatch broadcast a series of priority calls about several males in a vehicle stopping and randomly assaulting pedestrians on the sidewalk. After each assault, the suspects would jump into their car and speed away. Then, another assault would happen five to ten minutes later. The pattern appeared to be moving eastward across District 1. Soon after, residents were awakened by a serious assault inside District 2. It occurred in a laneway on the east side of the DTES and seemed likely to be part of the ongoing assault pattern. With no units available, I responded from

a distance. By the time I arrived, the ambulance had already taken the victim to the hospital. We were soon advised that he had died. In an instant, the event became a murder investigation, requiring preservation of the scene and interviews of the callers. The information about the car full of assault suspects was broadcast throughout the Greater Vancouver Region. On-call Homicide Unit detectives were contacted at home to come in and take over the case. Shift change came, and the case was handed over to the relieving street supervisor. It was later found that the murder suspects had come from a nearby after-hours party and were not connected to those in the car responsible for the string of assaults. You work with what you know in the moment.

There were times when policy didn't fit events. Even though we received training in vehicle pursuit driving skills at the police academy, police car chases had caused so many horrific accidents that new pursuit rules heavily limited them. Chases quickly became mostly a thing of the past. But not entirely. One day, an exception occurred when a unit radioed that a driver refused to pull over and was trying to evade police. The radio went 'Code 4,' meaning no routine radio transmissions were allowed, only those related to the higher-priority chase. The pursuing officer started broadcasting updates on locations, direction of travel, speed, traffic, pedestrians, traffic violations, and notable events. These recordings would later serve as a detailed chronology of the pursuit for court and other purposes. Unusually, the driver being chased would stop at every red light, look both ways, and, when the intersection was clear, drive through and speed away to the next signal. In his efforts to shake off the police, he was driving carefully and responsibly. So, the pursuit continued not as an immediate public safety threat, but as a prolonged series of deliberate traffic violations. After three jurisdictions and eighteen minutes, the officer decided to end the chase because the driver had gone onto the wrong side of the road, into oncoming traffic. At first glance, those eighteen minutes of pursuit looked unconscionable, but given the circumstances, they weren't.

There is an element in our society worth mentioning, as they seek confrontation. Late one busy evening, I was sent to the western edge of the DTES. A band was setting up on the sidewalk, and people were gathering for a party. It was, once again, the usual group of protesters who claimed wrongdoing by authority figures against supposedly oppressed groups. These repeat activists rarely belonged to the causes they protested, nor did they take constructive steps to resolve anything. They just enjoyed the thrill of anarchistic dissent. They often seemed like self-centred narcissists, stuck in childish defiance, fabricating anger and victimhood, craving recognition and validation, and feeling entitled. They were usually belligerent toward police and aimed for a heavy-handed response, so that they could claim double injustice. That evening, they planned to block traffic on Hastings Street. I had traffic officers redirect cars away from the party and then continued supervising calls from people who genuinely needed police help.

The department also persisted with its problematic in-house culture. I continued to be approached to represent members as their Police Act agent. One was a Hispanic member who received a citizen complaint. His district inspector had been an investigator for the Internal

Investigation Unit many years earlier, when I had assisted a member under investigation. This inspector expressed that all the ‘problem’ officers seemed to be under their command, a troubling perception for leadership. And now, the Hispanic member was seen as a significant problem. According to the inspector, aside from an alleged performance issue, this officer was barely understandable on the radio because of his strong accent and should not be a police officer. I asked the member to print out some previous calls he had handled to demonstrate his competence. He surprised me by providing a binder containing every call since he was hired several years earlier. The material was divided into calls he had handled alone or with a partner, those with ride-alongs he was responsible for, and a few thin pages of calls involving complaints or concerns. At a later meeting, the binder was presented to the inspector. I conveyed my full confidence that an independent labour arbitrator, reviewing this material, would find the officer capable and without any concerns about job suitability. Seemingly annoyed, the inspector ignored me and looked directly at the officer, stating that this was now simply about what was best for him. What did he want? I thought pushing his agent aside was a dirty trick and worried the member might speak poorly of himself. But no, he took a slow, deep breath, thought for several moments, and then, with a strong Hispanic accent but understandable, said, “Well, Inspector, I wasn’t a problem before I came to your district. I wish to go back to my previous district.” And so, it happened. He successfully continued his career as a fine police officer.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Returning as a Union Director (1997–2001)**

When I started in District 2 as a sergeant, several union directors encouraged me to rejoin the union executive, at least as a director. In 1997, one year after stepping down from the presidency, I was elected to the board. I served two terms, or four years, until 2001, all the while remaining a sergeant in District 2.

In the union, I continued to witness the succession of chief constables. Chief Constable Canuel retired in 1997. When he died several months into retirement, he was honoured for the widespread respect and admiration he had earned. His funeral service was held at Holy Rosary Cathedral in downtown Vancouver, filling the nave. Hoping to end longstanding divisions and factional loyalties, the police board decided to hire his replacement from outside the organization. They chose Bruce Chambers, the police chief from Thunder Bay, Ontario. He held multiple university degrees. I found him to be a quiet, distant person who spoke little and smiled politely. He seemed happy to have been chosen to lead one of the nation's largest municipal police forces, but also conveyed a sense of feeling overwhelmed. Unfortunately, he was. I have already shared the story of his failed effort to tackle the entrenched crime and disorder of the DTES through a period of intense law enforcement. For a city as complex as Vancouver, it was vital to understand its communities, build positive relationships with key external stakeholders, and develop a deep understanding of the policing challenges. Equally important was establishing many trusting relationships within the organization. Sadly, he started without any of these, nor did he work to develop them. He also seemed convinced that there were camps within the department that threatened him, making him feel the need to stay on guard.

After Chambers became the chief constable, several police officers were under investigation regarding serious allegations of assault during the arrest of a citizen outside the Roxy nightclub in the entertainment district. Chief Chambers decided there was enough preliminary information to suspend the officers involved. However, the practice was not to jump to conclusions when a complaint involved actions taken in the execution of police duties. If there were significant concerns, the standard procedure was to transfer the officers to roles that kept them away from direct public contact until all the facts were known and properly reviewed. First, there would be a criminal process, followed by the professional discipline process. Otherwise, immediate suspension would be a sanction without due process and could result in no income after thirty days. When senior ranks told Chambers that, under the circumstances, suspending the officers was unfair, corrosive to morale, and outside the norm, he remained unmoved. At a union executive meeting, we decided to visit the chief immediately. We met him in his office at his large meeting table and reviewed how such matters were expected to be handled. Chief

Chambers was shown a binder containing correspondence regarding Chief Marshall's handling of the wagon driver years prior, a story recounted earlier in this book. It contained all relevant details, including the union's next steps and Chief Marshall's loss of face. Now knowing what was coming, Chief Chambers wisely withdrew. The officers were taken off suspension and assigned inside roles until the matter was fully resolved. Only one of them was sanctioned by the court, and it was for a minor aspect of the incident. In the end, the officers continued with their careers.

Chief Chambers also experimented with ways to improve service delivery. He decentralized various city-wide units by splitting them into smaller ones, each assigned to one of the four patrol districts. The setup appeared as four smaller police departments. It looked good on paper, but many of the new micro-units lost their effectiveness and efficiency. Chief Chambers also played with the staffing numbers. One day, during a police board meeting, he explained how, under his leadership, there were more frontline officers than ever before. I listened carefully and took notes because some parts of his explanation didn't add up. The next day, arriving at work early, I thought he might be in his office before the usual morning meetings and available for a chat. I knew he was approachable, and when I called, he invited me up. During our meeting, I explained that his figures were confusing. I asked whether he had included the recruit class still at the academy in the operational numbers. Yes, he had. Had he included his planned increase in micro-squad numbers in the budget request to the city? Yes. Were the ones on light-duty or other assignments included in the patrol figures? Yes. At that point, I understood his presentation. It should have been more clearly explained to the board. The actual number of officers on the streets remained the same.

Chief Chambers had a three-year contract with a one-year renewal trigger. Before that date, the police board gathered performance feedback from various stakeholders, including the union executive. We were not positive in our evaluation. Once the commentary was collected, the police board informed him that they would not renew his contract. This vote of no confidence led to an early parting of the ways. After he left, an audit of the organizational chart found that the number of city-funded or 'authorized' positions was lower than indicated on the chart he had presented to the police board. Additionally, the dismembered support units were reassembled.

Out of necessity, Chief Chambers' replacement came quickly from within. It was mainly a time to maintain peace and manage affairs, with the hope that greater cohesion and unity of purpose might develop. In 1999, Deputy Chief Constable Terry Blythe served as acting chief. Blythe was approachable, unpretentious, and friendly. He quickly put people at ease and made it seem as if they had known each other for a long time. At least, that was how I felt around him. There was a sense of trust, and you could be frank with him. Blythe looked young and often dressed in 'business casual,' preferring a collarless pullover under his suit jacket rather than a white shirt and tie. Around this time, the union executive hosted a joint social dinner with the Vancouver Police Board. Near the end of the evening, business discussions began. Mayor Philip Owen asked what should be done about filling the unexpectedly vacant chief constable position.

The main question for the police board was whether to promote internally or hold another open competition. It was clear that the civilian board members were seeking answers. In fairness, I knew they didn't have much knowledge about policing or the department, so they didn't fully understand what was needed. The union executive had earlier decided not to get heavily involved in such decisions, as another poor chief could shift blame onto the union itself. After the acting union president shared general principles to consider and qualities to look for, a moment of silence followed. Then, a loud voice boomed from across the other end of the table: "de Haas, you've been around a long time. What do you think?" The question came from a long-serving police board member. I didn't like being in the spotlight, but I suggested they stick with Acting Chief Blythe, who had also been part of the previous competition. I doubt it made much difference, but Blythe did become the chief constable. I suspect the board's main goal was to keep the department together. Nonetheless, Chief Blythe achieved more.

The joint department-union restructuring initiative I described earlier had stalled under Chief Chambers and was not pursued further by the union presidents after me. In a conversation with a deputy chief I knew well, I asked what should be done to advance the restructuring initiative. On his own, he revived the project. A new joint committee finalized the plan, and on October 2, 1999, a staff sergeant and I presented it at a special meeting of the police board. To open the presentation, we led a visioning exercise. It was a trick learned from the mediator who had used it in earlier restructuring discussions when Ray Canuel was the chief constable. The "fun, five-minute warm-up exercise" took the police board members much longer. Guided by three questions, they became absorbed in describing their broad vision of the department's future. Anticipating their visualization, we provided them with the plan to achieve it. At the end of the presentation, a surreal moment occurred. With the joint committee present, Mayor Owen noted that the board usually did not approve proposals immediately following a presentation, but asked whether members might consider doing so. Several board members supported the mayor's suggestion. The police board then unanimously voted to endorse the plan. Ken Dobell, the city manager, also supported it. He said we were doing 'better city government,' while other city departments were merely talking about it, and he committed financial support.

**From:** Tang, Wai Ting on behalf of Chief Constable  
**Sent:** October 6, 1999 2:43 PM  
**To:** All VPD Staff  
**Subject:** Special Board Meeting

This is a short note to advise you of the outcome of the special Police Board meeting that was held on Saturday October 2, 1999 to specifically discuss the Restructuring Proposal for the Vancouver Police Department. All Board members with the exception of one who could not be there and all the SMT along with the Restructuring Committee attended the meeting with representation from the VPOA, and VPU. A thorough presentation was made by Deputy Gary Greer, Staff Sergeant Bob Pounder and Sergeant John deHass with the aid of a Restructuring Presentation Workbook.

The presentation was supported by all that were present as it was made to the Board. The Board asked many questions for clarification but it was clear that they were very supportive. At the end of the presentation the Board was asked to take the material and the information they had obtained, review it and give us their opinion. The Chair of the Board, Mayor Owen said he felt that the Board could deal with it immediately and received that assurance from the other Board members present. A unanimous vote was reached to endorse the restructuring proposal presented.

Effective immediately we will begin the process to restructure the Department to reflect no rank of Staff Sergeant or Corporal and that the Inspector strength of the organization will move from 20 to 31. There are many things that must be accomplished before this will be completed. The first order of business is to finalize the competition process for Inspector. It is hoped that this will occur in the next few weeks and that information on the selection process will be distributed to those affected as soon as possible. An implementation committee will be struck to deal with any issues that arise due to restructuring. As this implementation progresses members will be consulted and encouraged to provide input.

It is anticipated that the overall competition for officer positions will not be concluded until sometime in the early New Year, but the preparation will commence immediately.

I am very pleased with the endorsement by the Police Board for our organization to move forward. This is very encouraging and promising for our future development.

Your support and patience is appreciated.

Terry E. Blythe

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Chief Constable Blythe's e-mail to all VPD staff – October 6, 1999

Over the two years following the plan's approval, a scheme to gradually remove the three ranks of detective/corporal, staff sergeant, and superintendent was implemented, along with the

establishment of a merit-based pay increment system within the remaining ranks of constable, sergeant, and inspector. The chief and deputy chief constables remained unchanged. However, the committee's presentation emphasized the need for a paradigm shift and the creation of a new supportive culture. Collaborative and cooperative attitudes and skills would need to be fostered throughout the organization. This effort began with a consultant who designed and trialled supervisor and management training programs. I participated in both and found them to be excellent starting points. Supervisor training took hold, effectively conveying essential knowledge and skills regarding street tactics and administrative duties. Management training, however, never progressed beyond the pilot stage, and the additional training programs required over the long term were never developed. The manager responsible for creating these was not held accountable. This reflected a common practice: making grand promises, taking minimal action, reporting progress, and knowing that, over time, expectations would fade. The supportive culture did not materialize. Additionally, further on, I will provide an update on the regression of the entire plan.

The government took about four years to process and implement the Oppal recommendations. In 1998, it passed laws reflecting Oppal's ideas on reviewing professional conduct and established the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC). I still held onto an idealistic belief in a perfect system – one with individuals who were non-political, thoroughly objective, extremely wise, and ethical. Having been heavily involved in the discussions leading up to the changes, I was invited by then-Attorney-General Ujjal Dosanjh to attend a media event at which the new legislation was introduced. It was somewhat amusing because Dosanjh pointed me out to the reporters in case they had any questions about police officer support for the model, but they all promptly ignored me. There was no ACE – action, conflict, or emotion. The OPCC, under its first commissioner, Don Morrison, appeared to be heading in a good direction. The implementation of the new law began with many unresolved questions. Given the many interpretive and administrative challenges of such a new process, he formed stakeholder consultation committees. I took part in most of these discussions. Commissioner Morrison was a good-sized man, always dressed in a plain lawyer's suit. I found him assertive at the table, sometimes a bit irritable, but I took that as his lawyerly persona.

At the same time, workplace dynamics continued. A person I had challenged when serving as a Police Act agent had since been promoted to the senior executive ranks. Concerns from a subordinate on my District 2 patrol team about an administrative matter were relayed to this executive member. Seizing the opportunity, an open-ended, extensive investigation was ordered into my administrative duties, professional conduct, and integrity. Regarding the months-long investigation, the investigator stated in his report: "It should be noted that . . . I am not aware of anybody, let alone a street NCO, ever having been placed under the microscope the way Sergeant de Haas has." Ultimately, the investigator concluded: ". . . many of these allegations . . . are slanted and appear maliciously directed toward Sergeant de Haas . . . there are far too many facts that are erroneous . . . Only 2 incidents/complaints have been proven to have

any substance . . .” Of those two, neither was deemed misconduct. On the one hand, I appreciated receiving a thorough positive assessment of my performance. During the investigation, on a survey, I was rated “by the people who work alongside John or for John” as an “above average” street supervisor. I valued that. But, on the other hand, I was angry at what I saw as an attempt to harm me. After receiving the investigation’s findings, I shared with the executive member who ordered it the multiple legal options available to me to address the negative impacts of this unwarranted, lengthy, overzealous, and ill-motivated inquiry. Instead of pursuing public resolutions, a satisfactory monetary settlement and other remedial actions were agreed upon. The department’s condition was that I would not comment about the specifics of the investigation. As a result, I have honoured that commitment and have only discussed the process and results. After obtaining a full copy of the investigation report through a Freedom of Information request, I faced a new problem. I met with my deputy chief constable and the Human Resources inspector and advised that the investigator had identified “veracity” issues with the complainant’s accounts. Police officers cannot have doubts about their truthfulness. I reminded them that the Police Act required us to share the investigator’s findings with Crown prosecutors if the complainant officer were ever summoned to testify. Failing to do so would be misconduct. I left it at that. The entire experience reinforced my view of a departmental culture that tolerated, and perhaps even accepted, poor treatment and disrespect among colleagues and subordinates. I believed this was due to an underdeveloped leadership culture.

The world itself got darker around this time. One morning, I was asleep after working a night shift when my wife, extremely agitated, woke me up. Something terrible and unbelievable had happened, and I needed to see it on TV. Still groggy, I walked to the living room. There on the screen, playing over and over, were the two hijacked planes slamming into the World Trade Center in New York. I watched in stunned silence. It was the morning of September 11, 2001. The world had flipped upside down in an instant. In the sudden new reality of fighting terrorism, talk of community policing disappeared just as fast. The public seemed okay with that. I certainly was.

I also knew that, as a District 2 frontline supervisor, I was burning out. One morning, after another night of drug addicts, violence, poverty, prostitutes, drunks, and chaos, I felt a crushing guilt for leaving all those people in the DTES without the only connection with sanity and security many of them had—contact with us, the police. A drug-addicted prostitute once told me, “You know, I like talking with you as you are the only one down here who doesn’t want to use me or abuse me.” Rationally, I knew I couldn’t change the public policies that created and sustained this nightmare. What policing the DTES left me with was a visceral sense of social injustice and my personal powerlessness. I saw stress and repressed emotions take their toll on officers who had been in the DTES for too long. To make sense of it all and protect their sanity, some believed they had the answers to problems they could barely grasp. They crafted stories explaining why people were there and how to get out. One officer expressed the view that the people there should suffer until they hit rock bottom, because then they would be motivated to

change. That was an interesting neoliberal-infused theory; however, I couldn't understand how a strategy of maximum suffering could resolve mental illness, drug addiction, child abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, poverty, or racism. I knew it was time to seek a new work assignment. As I approached the end of my assignment as a District 2 patrol sergeant, my union involvement finally also ended.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Sergeant – Downtown Eastside Extraordinary Policing Initiative (2001)**

My last days as a sergeant were awkward. Attached to the district for the previous year was an initiative called Downtown Eastside Extraordinary Policing (DEEP). I mentioned this effort earlier as one of the three policing initiatives aimed at reducing disorder in the DTES. DEEP was somewhat separate from the District 2 command structure. It was composed of an inspector, a sergeant, and, on paper, a range of available resources. In reality, those resources were managed by other commanders and agencies and were already fully occupied with their workloads. The entire DEEP organizational chart and its accompanying pitch looked ‘Chief Chamberish.’ In truth, DEEP comprised just two people—a manager and a supervisor. As it happened, the sergeant had left, creating a vacancy. The inspector asked if I would join DEEP, and I gladly accepted. I liked the inspector. He was a seasoned officer - big, direct, courageous, straightforward, and action-oriented rather than analytic. Whether or not resources were available, he was determined to address the day-to-day issues in the Downtown Eastside. I admired his enthusiasm. With his sergeant and a secretary, he held large monthly meetings with numerous community organizations and agencies. He had everyone sit on chairs arranged in a large circle for a strict one-hour session. Starting at one end, he listened closely to their safety concerns, clarified them, took notes, acted on them between meetings, and reported back at the next session. Small fires were put out, but the program was symbolic. The true victims—the powerless, poor, mentally ill, homeless, addicted, isolated, and suffering—had no voice and received no relief; only the agencies did. Within what seemed like a few days of my joining DEEP, the inspector left. He was offered favourable employment outside the department and retired quickly. Overnight, I became the acting inspector of DEEP. I guess I was all of DEEP. That charade lasted only days, as I was promoted to inspector and moved to my first assignment. I believe DEEP then vanished from the organizational chart. I stepped through the door into a completely new chapter of my police career.

## **IV. The Police Management Years**

*“A lot of lip service gets paid to being honest,  
but no one really wants to hear it unless what’s being said is the party  
line.”*

— Colin Quinn

## **CHAPTER 16**

### **Inspector – Executive Officer and in Command of the Office of the Executive Officer (2001–2003)**

In 2001, I left the union and frontline policing behind. I had fully transitioned into management, immersed in the bureaucratic culture. As one of about forty inspectors, I was now mostly confined to my office and meeting rooms in the police buildings. I couldn't just take my police cruiser and leave the department politics behind anymore. I was immersed in it. The key was not to drown.

Becoming an inspector did not require any training or development. There was no West Point, Sandhurst, or Royal Military College. The promotion process was superficial, involving several steps, but no one believed its outcomes reflected actual competence. The most assured route to promotion was to be an uncontroversial, reliable, loyal careerist. The reward was that the final years in the management ranks would significantly boost your pension for life. Aside from the four patrol districts, inspectors most often oversaw department commands with city-wide mandates or held individual management-level staff positions. Their primary expectations included performing routine administrative functions, maintaining the status quo, dealing with emergencies, and avoiding controversy. The exception to this was the operations commanders. Each inspector, whether full-time or relief, was required to serve as the operations commander for all actively deployed units. This role was radio call sign Car 10, inaccurately termed the Duty Officer. I'll share a story about this flawed title later. This commander held the full operational authority of the chief constable at all times and administrative command outside of business hours. A key duty of the operations commander was managing 'critical incidents.' Expanding on earlier points regarding field supervisors and ERT roles, the field supervisor, a sergeant, would normally handle serious calls involving multiple officers. Sometimes, other units and their supervisors would also attend, such as for a barricaded person situation - an emergency response team (ERT), or at a disaster scene - traffic enforcement officers under a traffic sergeant. The involvement of different teams required a higher command level, which led to the involvement of Car 10. As a result, the department mandated critical incident command training as the only post-promotion training requirement for all inspectors.

Throughout my career, the inadequate preparation of police officers for management and executive roles created a range of persistent problems. Edmonton Superintendent Chris Braiden highlighted the poor development of police leaders in an article titled 'Pumpkin in a Jar.' His premise was that environments shape outcomes. A square mason jar would produce a square pumpkin. Consequently, he believed that the dismal police management culture would replicate

itself. He called for fundamental reforms, often facing hostility for his views. When I was promoted to Inspector, I observed a longstanding practice that appeared to support this idea. Each week at the VPD, all sixty or so managers—inspectors, superintendents, deputy chiefs, the chief, and some civilians gathered for what was called the Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting. The chief constable chaired the session. When I inquired about the meeting’s purpose, agenda, and expectations, I was told they didn’t apply; it was a ‘round-table.’ One by one, each person shared what was on their mind. I quickly realized that the routine was mainly about stating that everything was going well under one’s command and that everyone was working hard. Thanking others for their assistance was seen as courteous, and ending with a brief, humorous remark added levity. Everyone smiled and then moved on to the next person. To outsiders, it might seem the department functioned smoothly like a well-oiled machine. There were coffee, fruit, snacks, and pastries. It was nice to socialize, but almost always, I left without learning much about the department’s actual work. The department neither identified nor addressed issues; it didn’t foster innovation or efficiencies, and it ignored participants’ training and experience. Yet, by attending, people could imagine they were in management, feel they were contributing to decision-making, and believe they were part of an important team. In reality, it was a costly exercise of little real value. In fairness, mixing civilian and police managers made it difficult to bring sensitive investigations into the discussion. Over my many years as an Inspector, the ritual never changed. But perhaps I should shut up. If one didn’t want to work hard, the lack of accountability made police management roles look ideal.

My first inspector assignment was as the executive officer to the deputy chief constable of the department’s largest component, Operations Division. The VPD had several major divisions, each with a deputy chief constable and an executive officer for support. The chief constable also had his own executive officer. My role was to assist the deputy chief of the Patrol Division as needed. In 2002, in an effort to reduce deaths in the DTES, health officials proposed a supervised Safe Injection Site for illegal drug use. During a police board meeting, managers expressed differing views and concerns about the site. Chief Constable Blythe wanted the department to present a unified stance, and I was tasked with facilitating that dialogue. About half of the inspectors attended a meeting to discuss the issue. Once it was recognized that police lacked expertise in addiction or health matters and that moralizing was inappropriate, the debate shifted to focus solely on public safety outcomes. The discussion concluded with the understanding that safety issues were unpredictable; all we could do was speculate. Consequently, the VPD should be involved in both planning and evaluation to address any safety concerns. This neutral, business-focused stance was communicated to the police board, who appeared comfortable with it.

Supporting the deputy chief constable required little other work from me. However, the position came with a section called the Office of the Executive Officer, which I thought was the most exotic department command title. It took up nearly all of my time. I was managing an orphanage of operational patrol support units that senior management couldn’t figure out how to

incorporate into the organizational chart. These units included the Dog Squad, the School Liaison Unit, the Youth Services Unit, and the Victim and Community Services Unit. Having never worked in any of these units, I wasn't leading; I was learning. I realized that the practice of rotating managers every few years also meant I would not be around to see initiatives or changes through. The implicit message seemed to be to keep everything running quietly and avoid getting involved in any changes. In other words, leave things as they are. That, it seemed, was what made my superiors content.

Women's equality gained momentum during this period. The election and appointment of women to various governance roles prompted them to question agencies' commitment to female representation. The VPD aimed to hire many more women, but many cultural and generational groups viewed policing as unsuitable for women; thus, recruiting was challenging. Nevertheless, more women gradually joined the department. Police agencies compared numbers in what seemed a competition over limited resources. At one point, the police board, which now included several women, questioned why there were many female constables and even supervisors, but a lower percentage in higher ranks. They believed there was a bias toward men for top positions and a 'glass ceiling' for women. The chief assigned a female inspector to investigate the situation. After her review, she told the board that the typical career pathway required many years as a constable and in supervisory roles before a person was seen as experienced enough for management or executive roles. Since the department had only recently started deploying women in operational roles, the percentages at management and executive levels would, in time, adjust. The organization wasn't there yet. The board's response was straightforward: that was not sufficient. These civilian outsiders prioritized appearances over considerations of proficiency. Because the senior police executive raised no objections, the department adopted an unofficial affirmative action policy that set aside questions of readiness for promotion, the impact on those who would otherwise have been promoted, officer morale, and the effects on public service. External voices, for their own reasons and ignoring the profession or service delivery, decided what was best. Over time, movement up the ranks favoured diversity in race and ethnicity. The practice of appeasing political sentiments became a fixed, accommodating stance of the executive, even though it was clear that a price is always paid when optics matter more than capability.

In 2002, Chief Constable Terry Blythe retired, and the police board again looked outside for the next chief constable. The department rank-and-file seemed tired of simmering internal factional conflicts and appeared to accept Jamie Graham, who came from the RCMP. He was John Wayne incarnate—tall, fearless, and folksy. Chief Graham would just as readily pull in behind a police unit on the street to provide cover for an officer dealing with someone as he would share stories about conversations at meetings of Canadian police chiefs. He had considerable inside knowledge of the VPD, having audited the department years earlier under Chief Marshall, when Graham held a staff role with the BC Police Commission. I was the union president, so Graham had interviewed me as part of that process. Since then, he had been in

command of the North Vancouver RCMP detachment and then of the Surrey RCMP detachment. When he was chosen as chief, I was still the executive officer to the deputy chief of operations. To me, Chief Graham seemed bright, capable, and reasonable, and things progressed under his leadership. One could see his learning curve as he came to understand the department's size and complexity. Soon after his arrival, he proposed to our small group of executive officers that sergeants also attend the weekly senior management meetings he had learned about. When asked which sergeants he had in mind, since we already had a room full of approximately sixty managers and a much larger pool of sergeants, he abandoned the idea.

At a Wednesday management team meeting, Chief Graham shared details of a BC RCMP brass Blue Sky session he had attended. Years earlier, the Abbotsford RCMP detachment had been taken over by the Matsqui Police Department, and the government had also established a new transit police service. Perhaps in response, the RCMP developed a vision to take control of the entire province. Visioning can be powerful, as it subconsciously influences goals, strategies, and initiatives. At one point, RCMP management began promoting the idea of multi-agency 'integrated' teams, ostensibly to address regional crime patterns and improve services, especially for smaller police departments. Many saw the idea as less about cooperation and more about an RCMP agenda of dominance and control, that blue-sky thing. An RCMP superintendent invited all the chief constables in Greater Vancouver to a meeting to discuss the proposal. The VPD was self-sufficient due to its size and had little interest in participating. So, Chief Graham decided not to attend. I was directed to go on his behalf, with strict instructions to listen but not engage in any discussions. During the meeting, when the municipal police chiefs asked about Chief Graham's absence, I explained he had chosen not to attend. This sent a clear message about Vancouver's stance. The RCMP's pitch was quite forceful. It was very much a "we have the resources and the power" approach. A proposed regional unit to handle serious crimes was depicted as a 'bus,' and was intended to have two staff sergeants. One municipal chief constable said he had the ideal, qualified, experienced, and available staff sergeant. Would there be room for him on the bus? The RCMP superintendent took a deep breath and said no, they already had people in mind. It was obvious that the proposed collaborative program was a sham. My view was that it was about maintaining full RCMP control and expanding their dominance. It was clear that the agenda was not about improving policing or creating greater efficiencies. It was a turf war that further divided and diminished police services across the province.

Chief Graham's tenure was timely. He provided organizational direction while demanding individual professionalism. He was the right person at the right time. He also had a good grasp of the state of Aboriginal peoples, which we in the VPD did not, and, over time, he refocused our attention on it. I will mention more about that later. Additionally, Chief Graham understood the importance of improving the department's public image and brought in experts to rebrand the VPD. One strategy involved changing the appearance of police cruisers from blue and white to black and white, with new artwork and sleek, stylish light bars. When it came to people, he did not know us well, and I can only speculate about how he decided whom to listen

to, trust, and promote close to him. He cleaned house early in his term. Of the four deputy chiefs, two accepted payouts and left. Of the remaining two, one was my superior, a decent, experienced, and capable executive. Around that time, I learned from a police board member that the situation was also not good for my deputy chief. Being loyal to him, I shared what I had learned. Later, he confirmed that Chief Graham was not interested in extending his tenure, so there was another payout. The three individuals Chief Graham promoted to fill the vacancies became indebted to him, but how could he know them beyond their brief exposure to him? These promotions would influence the organization for many years. The trio were all intelligent, and at the same time, they were products of their careers in the department. This meant they lacked leadership development, were not well mentored, and operated within a self-focused organizational ethos. There was no reference point for quality leadership. They were the pumpkins grown in their organizational jar. But, then, for the most part, aren't we all?

During my time as an executive officer, in 2001 and 2002, a mandated review of the new Police Act was initiated. This was done by a committee of legislative backbenchers elected from a variety of constituencies throughout the province. As a group, they lacked specific expertise in policing, police agencies, police culture, organizations, leadership, or change management. They were politicians operating in a political forum, providing political responses to perceived problems. Under the Canadian Constitution, the province was responsible for policing. Consequently, politicians needed to allocate proper resources and support for the evolution of policing, but not interfere as if they had deep insights, understood its challenges, or possessed solutions. The best hope might be that the committee suggests a process for subject-matter experts and leaders to advance the field. However, in its ambiguity, the committee pursued answers to issues it could never fully understand. As a representative of the Vancouver Police Officers Association, the police managers' bargaining unit, I made three submissions to this committee regarding improvements to the Police Act. I knew I was investing effort in an ultimately futile exercise.

The legislative committee provided a protected space which allowed many stories to be shared. In this safe environment, a lawyer who had worked for the OPCC claimed that Commissioner Morrison's interpersonal style was offensive and his work ethic flawed. To illustrate his point, he presented a dramatized version of the tragic death of an Aboriginal man, Frank Paul, at the hands of the VPD. Paul was a chronic alcoholic who was often picked up by police to sober up in the relative safety of the jail drunk tanks. The lawyer's overall story was that, on an icy winter night in December 1998, Paul was taken to jail but was turned away by the jail sergeant. He was then allegedly dumped and abandoned in a laneway by the wagon driver and left to die. When these claims were brought to the commissioner's attention, Morrison was described as insensitive, uncaring, and dismissive, preferring to play solitaire on his computer. There was no doubt that the portrayal of Paul's death and the commissioner's supposed reaction was to alarm the committee members. Its clear aim was to attack the commissioner. Immature antics aside, there were now public accusations of brutality, injustice, and lack of accountability.

The distorted, fabricated, and inflammatory version of the Frank Paul story appeared on a polarized Aboriginal website. Since the narrative came from an insider at the OPCC, it was accepted as true. However, it wasn't. But it was like gasoline thrown on a fire. A new outrage emerged seeking justice for Frank Paul. Does the pattern sound familiar? It was strange how people repeated themselves, as this lawyer was the same one who had prosecuted Corporal Brian Nixon in the Jacobsen affair and later sought to impose a five-year firearms prohibition against him. As the attack against Commissioner Morrison persisted, the OPCC staff criticized him for having business lunches and coffees with police officers. I had attended such meetings with him because honest and open dialogue benefits from a casual setting. The criticism of everything related to Commissioner Morrison seemed vindictive. The OPCC staff fabricated stories, a pattern that would often recur over the following years. What their behaviour before the legislative committee revealed was that some people in the OPCC were utterly unprincipled, dysfunctional, lacked character, and were ruthless. Although they claimed to be motivated by righteousness, their juvenile, self-centred political infighting exposed a deeply troubling internal culture. Reputationally wounded, Morrison moved on. Afterwards, there were several years of relative calm, with sensible and honest leadership under Dirk Rynveld.

Eventually, the legislative review of the Police Act was delegated to another civilian, lawyer Josiah Wood. I also spoke with him on behalf of the officers' association. His recommendations led to some adjustments to various details of the Police Act, but nothing significant. To me, the entire exercise seemed aimed at appeasing the usual critics of policing and authority. Regarding professional police ethics and the quality of policing services, civilian conduct review did not cause any changes. Ethics and service levels remained remarkably high on their own. Within the department, there continued to be a strange gap between what was considered acceptable conduct by police officers with the public and how poorly people often related to each other in the workplace. It was like a Broadway show, where backstage some cast members might have serious conflicts, but when the curtain rises before a live audience, the performance is expected to be stellar. A good example of this strong public service ethos occurred in the early morning hours of January 14, 2003, when six junior police officers crossed an ethical line in a vigilante incident known as the Stanley Park Six. The officers worked in the downtown entertainment district, an area rife with drug dealers. The tolerant local courts no longer provided effective rehabilitation or deterrence, allowing the drug trade to flourish. Frustrated by repeatedly dealing with the same suspects, the more senior officers decided to take matters into their own hands. Three dealers were picked up on Granville Street and taken to Stanley Park, where they were scolded and beaten for their criminal activities. Eventually, the junior-most officer, still in recruit training, reported the events to a supervisor. The officers faced criminal assault charges and later professional misconduct allegations. Chief Graham dismissed two officers and disciplined the others. Normally, if misconduct allegations arose during officers' duties, there would be support from colleagues until the facts were established through investigation and adjudication. In this case, it quickly became clear that the officers' actions were premeditated and completely outside a legitimate public trust role. There was widespread

condemnation from frontline officers. A senior constable I knew well insisted they should all be fired. It was evident that the profession was committed to the highest ethical standards in serving the public. What was troubling was the tolerance shown for questionable workplace values.

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **Inspector in Command of Youth Services Section (2003–2006)**

After two years as an executive officer, the department underwent a slight reorganization, and my next assignment was to the Youth Services Section. It included the Youth Services Unit and School Liaison Unit, and added on were the Gang Crime Unit (GCU) and a new Family Services Unit. Family Services consisted of a group of specialized inter-agency partnership cars that had previously been attached to patrol districts.

It took some time, but it became clear that the School Liaison Officer (SLO) program lacked role clarity, theoretical foundations for officers' duties, and skills development. Working with the unit's sergeant and external organizations, we ultimately provided the SLOs with an understanding of the Search Institute's 40-Asset Model. This model was based on extensive data linking security and education outcomes for youth with school and community assets. The categories of assets included team sports, a supportive school climate, a positive peer culture, and, most notably, trusting relationships between adults and youths. The model could help schools develop programs to reduce risks and promote well-being. It also provided a tangible list that officers could use to assess the risk level for individual students. The role of the SLOs expanded from providing police services to fostering community building. The officers now understood research-based strategies for creating safer schools. Using the same forty-asset framework, we collaborated on the Vancouver School-Based Alcohol and Drug Prevention Project. This was a School Board initiative aimed at developing an evidence-based program. The previous Drug Awareness and Resistance Education (DARE) curriculum, though well-intentioned, was not evidence-based, and a meta-analysis revealed that it was ineffective over the long term. To address issues arising from the SLO program, a memorandum of understanding and a joint management committee were established to oversee the program throughout the school system.

We became aware of new studies indicating that fetal alcohol syndrome (FASD) is widespread among the jail population. However, there was little awareness of FASD within the justice system. The school system already recognized FASD as a challenge to academic achievement and an obstacle to positive social behaviour. In partnership with Pacific Community Resources Society, the Vancouver FASD Table was established. This group aimed to create an integrated FASD system. One goal was to reduce the involvement of youths with FASD in the criminal justice system. Eventually, federal authorities provided funding to develop a two-day training module for frontline police officers. The first day covered FASD, and the second day addressed implications for police practices. Police members who received the training provided

very positive feedback. Later, other police agencies across the country expressed interest in FASD training. The federal government convened a meeting in Ottawa of police and government representatives to share ideas. We could offer the training package, developed collaboratively by FASD and police experts. These efforts demonstrated that inter-sectoral collaboration helps clarify the causes of antisocial and criminal behaviour, creates opportunities for evidence-based remedies, and provides resources for awareness and training. Police managers need outreach and partnership skills to understand and address complex issues.

It took months to understand the Gang Crime Unit's role, dynamics, and needs. I repeatedly pressed the sergeant for more enforcement, as little was being done. I soon learned that the focus was on intelligence gathering. He explained that with such a small unit, they had to choose between gathering intelligence and undertaking enforcement. Prosecuting gang members would shut down the pool of informants by poisoning relationships between detectives and gang members. There had even been cooperation in reducing inter-gang violence. I couldn't understand why the GCU was so small and constrained in its mandate when gang activity threatened youth in schools, spread drugs across the city, intimidated communities, and occasionally spiralled into violence, even killing innocent bystanders. But I was new to it and had only questions. I definitely wasn't in a position to give any informed direction. If intelligence gathering was the goal, it was also clear that regional sharing was terrible. I already had a good idea of the disconnected enforcement agencies and reservoirs of withheld information from my time as a sergeant in CISBC. I saw the fractured police model as a barrier to success. In hopes of increasing cooperation and information distribution, at the multi-agency Regional Operational Police Managers Committee (ROPMC), a monthly meeting for networking and discussing policing issues, I proposed forming a gang-crime intelligence-sharing group. I hoped to avoid the competition and resistance from various police empires. Key attendees supported the idea, a date was set for the first meeting, and a location was provided. Managers and analysts dealing with local gangsters showed up, along with an uninvited RCMP superintendent - the one who had previously led the chief constables' meeting on 'integrated' units. One of my colleagues had invited him. Nevertheless, we established a working group with clear terms of reference, and the RCMP provided IT support. The group was named the Regional Gang Intelligence Working Group. Over time, enforcement agencies from across the border participated, along with a few non-police agencies that dealt directly with gang members. The group could never fully replace the effectiveness of a unified regional or provincial police force, but something had to be done. Additionally, in the VPD's strategic planning exercise, I was asked to co-lead a Gang, Guns, and Violence Task Team initiative. It was mainly a collection of ambitious objectives presented in a document for the police board and public view. The department needed to appear active in response to media reports about gangs and their association with illicit drugs and violence. Since the issue was regional, the department did not allocate extra resources or change its approach.

One benefit of commanding the Gang Crime Unit was having information on gangsters and their residences. One day, two detectives came into my office to confirm that I lived at the

address on file with the department. “Sir, do you know who your neighbour to the north is?” one of them asked with concern. Of course I did. Her name was Betty, a nice middle-aged Asian lady, though I had never really spoken much with her. With some hesitation, they told me that the nice lady, Betty Yan, was a well-known organized crime loan shark. More than that, she was involved in violence related to her business and, reciprocally, could be subject to violence. My neighbour? Seriously? To verify they weren’t joking, I checked with the sergeant, and he confirmed it was all true. There didn’t seem to be any imminent danger to my family, but I needed to stay aware of the situation. Luckily, Betty had no idea who I was. Eventually, she moved, and on April 16, 2009, she was gunned down in her car.

When I was in charge of the Youth Services Section, I became deeply involved in outreach and collaboration with the urban Aboriginal population. My connection began when my Youth Services Unit sergeant shared his frustrations about finding a constructive way to address the safety issues faced by Aboriginal youth. Many Aboriginal youths suffered from broken family and community ties caused by colonization. Our data showed that Aboriginal youth were over-represented as victims and offenders of crime. Some disturbing stories emerged, including sexual assaults where young girls had nowhere safe to go, and a youth who recently died in a stolen car. Many young people were imitating Aboriginal gangs like those in Winnipeg, with gang names such as the Night Crawlers, the Indian Posse, and Red Alert. At that time, Statistics Canada reported that nearly 12,000 people in Vancouver identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit – more than the total population of Aboriginal reservations in the Greater Vancouver region. The urban Aboriginal population seemed to consist of a disproportionately large number of distressed people. Many had left their bands, nations, extended families, and communities because life on the reserve was seen as worse than life on Vancouver’s Eastside. I also realized that these individuals were not a unified community but rather a diverse group of people from various nations across Canada. This meant differences in language, traditions, and tribal loyalties. Their shared experience was mainly rooted in their exposure to colonization and racism. Several reputable agencies, such as the Aboriginal Friendship Center and Native Health, supported them with their issues. I knew very little about their “true history,” as they called it. I learned about the European diseases that decimated Aboriginal populations, the forced removal of children from their families to residential schools, laws prohibiting their languages and cultures, the destruction of their economic system, the missionary campaigns to convert them to Christianity, and the persistent efforts to make Aboriginal peoples conform to mainstream Caucasian Canadian society. As I often heard, the goal was “to take the Indian out of the Indian.” It became clear that this led to the destruction of traditional ways of life, inflicted multiple traumas, and continuously eroded their sense of identity. Addressing these issues required action on many levels – tackling collective and individual suffering, dismantling systemic racism and injustice, and fostering positive relationships. Today, all of this is encompassed within the concept of ‘reconciliation.’

I also realized our policing approach, which focused on rational problem-solving, was mostly ineffective. In traditional Aboriginal cultures, relationships are valued above all else. Who are you? Where do you come from? Who is in your family? Your community? Can I trust you? Why should I listen to you? As a natural outcome of historical facts, I encountered a deeply rooted narrative and identity among Aboriginal people as powerless victims. My interactions with adults and elders in the population made it clear that there was no critical mass of effective, broadly supported leaders. During a large circle session at the Aboriginal Friendship Center, a senior, respected elder, when asked about helping at-risk youth, said, “I don’t think we as a community are ready to do that yet.” That astonished me. The situation seemed to explain why urban Aboriginal voices were rarely heard, and their serious issues went unaddressed by the government. In contrast, the established bands and nations in the region had continuity of relationships, identity, structure, language, culture, and territory. Overall, the local nations functioned well, and their leadership was identifiable. To leverage this strength, I suggested to a band leader that we needed to work together with the urban population. This was coolly rebuffed, as they were not considered part of his people; end of discussion. In time, I understood I was generalizing by race. Aboriginal peoples might have shared experiences of colonization, but they were distinct groups. The local nations had unity, organization, influence, and power; the urban and marginalized populations did not. Following advice from a young administrative assistant at an agency, I stopped pursuing collaboration with elders. Instead, I was referred to several younger individuals involved with youth-focused organizations. I reached out to them and, over time, established the Aboriginal Youth – VPD Working Group. We worked constructively together for many years. One of the younger people I worked with was Melanie Mark, who used an email address that included “warrior princess.” She was an impressive individual—intelligent, caring, principled, constructive, charming, proud of her heritage, and committed to building a better future for her children and her community. Later, she became a cabinet minister in the provincial government.



“Melanie Mark and other young First Nations leaders are working cooperatively with progressive Vancouver police officers like John de Haas (center) and Dave Dixon.”

*January 12, 2006. The Georgia Straight. Image republished with permission of Charlie Smith*

Because I engaged with the urban Aboriginal population and agencies regarding at-risk youth, the police department executive asked me to draft a proposal that would centralize and potentially expand work in the diversity policing sphere. I drafted a business plan that unified the Diversity Policing Unit, the Hate Crimes Unit, and the Aboriginal Policing Centre, along with new positions for an inspector in charge and a civilian program coordinator to oversee grant applications and administer programs. The executive implemented the plan without changes. I was due to be moved during the upcoming inspector position rotation. I should have been more cautious when I wrote that proposal because I was assigned, without being asked, to lead the newly created section.

## **CHAPTER 18**

### **Inspector in Command of Diversity and Aboriginal Policing Section (2006–2010)**

Several metrics and ‘internal and external’ strategies formed the foundation of the business plan. The unit’s initial task was to ascertain the particular groups in the city experiencing the most serious public safety issues. These were identified by examining their rates of over-representation in criminal and at-risk behaviours, victimization rates, sharing information about crimes, and perceptions of safety. These measures included data from police sources, government agencies, published studies, or research contracted to academics and conducted in compliance with their ethical standards. A key strategy was to promote collaboration between police leadership and community leaders, something funders also appeared to favour. However, with the VPD’s drive-by management approach, I doubted that any of the plan’s defined measures, strategies, goals, or activities would be sustained over the coming years.

One recurrent story among the Aboriginal population was the death of Frank Paul. As mentioned earlier, a presenter shared with the Police Act Review Committee a skewed version of the events leading to Paul’s death, figuratively machine-gunning Commissioner Morrison—not literally. Morrison was still alive after the episode, but his reputation was full of holes. This version of the Frank Paul story had become urban folklore. The public infighting of the OPCC had widened the chasm of mistrust between the VPD and urban Aboriginal peoples. Though it was wrong of the OPCC to cause this division, it was clear that policing outcomes and public order were not their primary focus or concern. To address the Frank Paul obstacle, a committee comprising police and Aboriginal partners was established. With Chief Constable Graham’s approval, they reviewed all police records that might shed light on the events of the night Frank Paul died. Unexpectedly, in response to the outrage the story sparked in Aboriginal communities, we were overshadowed by a government-ordered public inquiry into the death. The findings of our review, and more importantly, those of the public inquiry, revealed a story quite different from that presented to the Police Act Review Committee. While actions were inappropriate, it was not fair to generalize the event to the entire VPD. Nonetheless, Chief Constable Graham issued an apology to the Aboriginal population at large. Typical responses from Aboriginal representatives were that these apologies were insufficient, not made to the right individuals, or not done in the right manner. Later, when Jim Chu became chief constable, to circumvent these ongoing criticisms, he planned to travel to New Brunswick to visit the First Nation where Paul originated and apologize directly to the appropriate people in the appropriate way. It took considerable time, but I eventually understood what appeared to be happening. I advised Chief Chu that I believed the initiative out east would not resolve the issues either. It wasn’t just about

correcting a wrong, performing a specific act, or addressing a particular problem. At its core, it seemed an issue of identity. If an apology were to be accepted, many Aboriginal people might unconsciously wonder, “Who will I be if I am no longer a victim in my colonization story?” The idea of ending this chapter threatened the worldview that many Canadian Aboriginal peoples relied on to understand their place in society and how they needed to survive. We never went to New Brunswick. The concept of a long-term, multi-faceted reconciliation process emerged years later.

Notwithstanding these events, we continued engaging with Aboriginal youth organizations, striving to take collective, tangible action. Our most significant effort for at-risk Aboriginal youth was developing an anti-gang program based on the 40-asset model described earlier. This program involved three instructors from a local community college, ensuring a strong, evidence-based component. The project received a substantial, multi-year grant from Crime Prevention Canada to fund a pilot program. It was Aboriginal-operated, with funds managed by the VPD. The director of the funding agency flew in from Ottawa to visit the centre we had opened. He remarked that we were the only urban project of this kind in Canada that was succeeding. However, the project faced political challenges. At one point, through the media, two professors from Simon Fraser University accused the Vancouver Police of improper dealings with vulnerable inner-city Aboriginal youth, such as having them participate in interviews without adequate safeguards. In reality, a local Aboriginal youth organization had handled these interviews - and properly. These professors later submitted a freedom-of-information request to the VPD. They received a thick binder containing all relevant documentation, after which silence followed. I contacted their university's department head and suggested he remind the two professors that academics should do their homework before making false accusations that harm people. He was apologetic and appeared frustrated with his colleagues. Ultimately, I learned that the dispute was probably more about an acrimonious relationship between these two professors and an instructor from the community college involved in our project. It seemed driven by envy rather than a genuine concern for protecting Aboriginal youth. Well into the program, destructive politics over control of funding pushed me out of the picture. Some community members wanted more control, money, power, or recognition, and I knew who they were. One day, without my knowledge, three individuals approached Chief Constable Chu. They claimed police-Aboriginal relations in Vancouver were at an all-time low, and they refused to work with me. They also wanted control over the money. I later learned that Chief Chu handed the program over to a superintendent unfamiliar with urban Aboriginal issues. Rather than being supported, my work was figuratively stabbed in the back. But then, the organizational culture tolerated viewing colleagues as expendable. The funders were shocked, and much damage was done to the department's relationship with them. They pointed out that there was a contract with the VPD, and they planned to honour it as written, expecting the VPD to do the same. I sensed they had lost interest in future initiatives with us. Over the years, constant conflicts with self-serving, dysfunctional politics became tiring. These dynamics were in the VPD, the urban Aboriginal population, community groups, outside agencies, government bodies, and oversight agencies.

When I taught Police Act agent work to other officers, I always emphasized the importance of uncovering the real issues—personal and political motives and agendas. Otherwise, clarifying facts and following processes were quite straightforward. However, on far too many occasions, I failed to recognize these hidden drivers and didn't strategize how to address them effectively. They were like deadly torpedoes beneath the water, difficult to see. I often wasn't attuned to detecting them because I believed that higher principles would prevail. Chief Chu reminded me of the sea I was swimming in.

Near the end of my time in Diversity, the city and province began preparing for the 2010 Winter Olympics. It was an exciting time. It had been a long time since Expo 86. The world would experience another mega-event in Vancouver. The financial stakes were enormous, and the construction projects would enhance the city for decades. The local Aboriginal co-host, Four-Host First Nations (FHFN), was gaining wealth and recognition from the upcoming games. I reached out to the Vancouver Olympics Organizing Committee (VANOC) for a contribution to support inner-city Aboriginal youth, but to no avail. All I received were empty words and token gestures. The marginalized population lacked power or influence, and the Olympics organizers seemed indifferent to them—as long as the disenfranchised remained quiet.

Toward the end of my time in the Aboriginal portfolio, I made one recommendation. Years earlier, the Oppal Inquiry report had paid significant attention to Vancouver's large urban Aboriginal population. Oppal recognized the impacts of colonization and their over-representation as victims and offenders in the criminal justice system. He especially highlighted the dire situation of many youths. To help address this, he proposed an Aboriginal citizen "peacekeeper" unit for Vancouver. The department did not accept that idea. However, after years of working closely with Aboriginal people and various agencies, I gained a better understanding of the urban Aboriginal challenges, the barriers to safety, and the wisdom of Oppal's concept. By then, the department had employed several Aboriginal-identified officers. I suggested establishing a dedicated police unit to conduct outreach and to collaborate with Aboriginal agencies and peoples. I recommended at least two 2-member units, each comprising a male officer and a female officer, plus a unit sergeant. This resource would serve the Musqueam band and the broader urban Aboriginal population. I believed the Aboriginal officers in the department would be willing to volunteer for time in the unit during their careers. At the time, we had one officer assigned to the Musqueam band and another to the urban population. These two could be integrated into the new unit, requiring only three new positions. The idea was not at all original. On the north shore, together, the West Vancouver municipal police and the North Vancouver RCMP already operated a similar, well-established, and larger unit for a much smaller reserve population in much less severe circumstances. Although this proposal could have benefited one of our most disadvantaged populations, I never received any response from the executive. Mind you, by then Jamie Graham had left, and Jim Chu was the chief constable.

Within the Diversity Section mandate, the biggest safety concerns were with the marginalized population in the Downtown Eastside. As mentioned earlier, I had learned as a

District 2 supervisor that there were overlapping issues where drug addiction, homelessness, racism, colonization, poverty, mental health conditions, FASD, the illegal drug trade, street prostitution, property crimes, disturbances, and other matters interconnected and influenced each other. Some aspects had cause-and-effect relationships, and all reflected the consequences of public policies shaped by past and current social norms. In short, it was complex. One issue that jeopardized personal safety was homelessness. Although District 2 had a member dedicated full-time as a liaison, this security gap was also on our radar. One day, we learned that at the large annual downtown business prayer breakfast, an American guest speaker, considered an ‘expert’ on homelessness, would speak. We also learned that Premier Gordon Campbell would attend. Sadly, the guest speaker’s comments focused more on the role of faith in saving the marginalized than on providing insightful analyses and strategies. Then the premier spoke, and that was when everything began to make sense. I interpreted his view as suggesting that the disadvantaged people of the DTES had made “choices” earlier in their lives that led to their unfortunate situation. That being the case, the appropriate response was to offer help to ease the suffering caused by those terrible decisions. I was stunned, wondering how these individuals “chose” to be abused as children, to have fetal alcohol syndrome, to be mentally ill, to be addicts, to be poor, and to have their children taken away to residential schools. The premier implied that these people could make rational life decisions, notwithstanding their traumas, dysfunctions, disabilities, or developmental issues. It was the most uninformed, naïve perception of marginalized people I had encountered in quite some time. But it explained why the government was unsure over what to do, as it didn’t understand what was happening or the reasons behind it. At that moment, I knew the DTES would remain in desolation and despondency for years to come.

Even so, we continued our work—one initiative involved collaborating with several vocal community advocacy organizations. Collectively, we planned to hold neighbourhood discussions about the street-level relationship between law enforcement and drug users. The organizing group decided it would be helpful to bring in a respected and experienced facilitator for those sessions. There was consensus to invite retired Judge Barry Stuart to a planning meeting. He attended and courteously listened to our request. I will never forget his reply: “No.” Then he paused and added words to the effect of, “These things are all the same. The police are yelled at and accused of wrongdoing and insensitivity. They defend, then everyone leaves. Nothing changes. Before you do anything, you need to have a conversation about what respectful dialogue looks like. If you have an agreement on that, you can hold your community meetings. And to have that first discussion, you don’t need me.” We did exactly as he advised. We held a World Café meeting with drug users and police officers to explore what respectful dialogue would require. A clear set of ‘rules’ emerged. Based on these, we then held the open meetings. It was interesting to see the community members who participated in the respectful dialogue exploration become the rule enforcers during subsequent discussions. I have never forgotten the importance of first establishing consensus on the rules of engagement.

During my time in Diversity, Jamie Graham's contract expired, leading to a chief constable competition. Knowing the internal candidates well, I supported Superintendent Kash Heed for the position. I lobbied police board members I knew personally. I even had lunch with a police board member, a staunch supporter of Jim Chu, to dissuade him from that stance. I knew the two candidates well. Heed was the most knowledgeable student of police literature I had ever met. He was also visionary and sought fundamental reforms. Near the completion of the competition, it seemed the mayor and most of the police board supported Heed. However, in the end, Chu was appointed. It was puzzling why Heed's support had disappeared. Several years later, over a long coffee chat, Sam Sullivan, who was the mayor and police board chair at the time of the competition, explained why. Heed's failure was not due to his own actions. Unbeknownst to him, a volunteer staffer had approached police board members with promises of personal rewards if Heed were chosen. Heed's fate was sealed when a police board discussion uncovered these questionable inducements. My internal VPD political moves during the competition undoubtedly flatlined my career. I was never moving up to the executive ranks and would remain as an inspector for fifteen years. The same staffer who appeared to cost Heed the chief constable role later contributed to his removal as solicitor-general because of further questionable activities during the provincial election. The RCMP investigation into campaign spending forced Heed out as solicitor-general. The staffer was convicted under the provincial Elections Act. Heed was cleared, but was not returned to his cabinet appointment. I suspect that the RCMP's vigour in the investigation was driven by Heed's view that regional police forces should replace them. This energetic scrutiny of politicians reoccurred when the RCMP investigated Surrey Mayor McCallum on suspicion that he falsely reported a car tire having run over his foot. As Surrey's mayor, he was replacing the RCMP detachment with a municipal force. McCallum was acquitted in court, but serious political damage occurred. The optics in both cases were that RCMP senior management was driving investigations of politicians seen as threatening to the RCMP.

Under Chief Constable Jim Chu, it seemed to me the department's focus gradually shifted. He seemed to enjoy mingling with wealthy entrepreneurs at the Police Foundation. He was attracted to flashy projects he had seen elsewhere, such as community safety officers - low-cost, lightly trained personnel who resembled police officers in police cars - or a youth cadet program, which had nothing to do with delivering policing services. Unfortunately, he also pushed back against previous progress. Recall the restructuring plan from many years earlier, which involved eliminating the three ranks of superintendent, staff sergeant and corporal. Staff sergeants had not yet been fully phased out, and two superintendents remained in the Patrol Division. Chief Chu decided it was time to review the rank structure. My perception of Chief Chu was that he already knew what he wanted, and the person assigned the review was expected to recommend it in a report. The ranks of superintendent and staff sergeant were fully reinstated. A hierarchy was appealing because, depending on the number of levels, it elevated the top. Additionally, why not follow other police departments? In police culture, conformity felt safest. Most importantly, hierarchy allowed control over personnel through power over promotion and

rewards. The communications issues, role restrictions, ego manifestations, and other disadvantages of the old hierarchy resurfaced strongly. However, no one reversed the lateral pay increments within rank levels instituted in place of vertical promotion wage increases. Not by a penny.

## **CHAPTER 19**

### **Inspector – Operations Commander (2010)**

After three years in Diversity, the conveyor belt of reassignment moved me along. The first payback from the chief constable competition politics was being assigned rotating shift work. Although I was now a senior inspector, the administration moved me to one of the four operations commander positions, which provided 24/7 command of all deployed operational police resources in the city. This included patrol and specialized response units as well as on-call resources. Initially, I wasn't thrilled at the idea of returning to shift work. However, once I adjusted to it, it felt satisfying to be on the frontline and away from the internal culture. Soon, I was glad to be back in the environment I had worked in for many years. Some things had changed since I was on the road. In response to increased weapons and shootings, more long firearms were being taken out in patrol cars. Additionally, the threat of active shooters in schools had prompted department-wide training in immediate-response drills. On the other hand, understanding the importance of proper and effective command systems had not advanced. The operations commander was still alone in a police car, without support staff, and only able to monitor two of the four patrol radio channels. Along with driving, there was the radio to operate, a cell phone to use, and a laptop to work on. The operations commander relied on civilian dispatch staff to provide critical information. It was using a small-town police system in a large, busy city. Often, I wondered where the long-overdue command room, along with its infrastructure and staff, was.

The one-person command role was called the duty officer. This title likely came from the military. In the infantry, when a battalion was in garrison, rather than deployed in the field, a junior officer was designated as the point of contact to avoid disturbing the senior ranks after hours. In the headquarters building, there was a room with a bed and phone where the duty officer was available until normal business hours restored direct contact. This setup probably started in the VPD when Vancouver was a small town. Over time, the police duty officer role transformed into an active on-duty operations commander. The duty officer now represented the highest point in the active provision of police services, leading to two separate and independent command structures within the department. One was the administrative chain, ascending through the ranks to the chief constable, that closed down at night, on weekends, and on holidays. The other chain of command was for the deployed operational police resources, which operated 24/7. It ascended the ranks, bypassing the administrative staff sergeant rank, with an inspector titled the Duty Officer at the top. Although these two structures symbolically converged in the chief constable, the chief's role had long been removed from on-the-street activities. A provision in the procedure manual granted the duty officer full independent command authority over operations.

The idea of renaming the duty officer to ‘operations commander’ faced resistance and would likely stay so until an external authority mandated the change or other police departments adopted it.

I remember a memorable incident during my time as operations commander. Recall those protesters I mentioned when I worked in District 2 as a street supervisor? That group of anti-social activists moved from issue to issue, seldom genuinely invested in the matters at hand. They were well known to the police planning unit for hijacking legitimate protests. However, their behaviour was becoming increasingly dangerous. Well past midnight one evening, I was told that activists were gathering in a park to protest improvements being done by the Parks Board. They had placed tires on the road next to the park and set them on fire. This act of chaos happened while police resources were busy serving the public. A peaceful end to the protest required gathering enough officers, involving overtime costs for the taxpayer. These same serial protesters presented themselves as anti-Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics activists. One of their slogans was “Not on Stolen Lands,” referring to the unceded lands of the local Indigenous nations. That stance persisted until the Four-Host First Nations CEO and the chief of the Squamish Band slammed the protestors for speaking on their behalf. The Aboriginal nations were co-hosts and fully supported the games on their traditional territories. Once again, the protest culture appeared uninformed and childish.

This was my last full-time frontline work. Within a year, I was reassigned to the organization’s administrative side. In the years ahead, I only took on a few Car 10 relief shifts. As the 2010 Olympic Games arrived and the city went into a frenzy, I settled into an inside staff job.

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **Inspector – Designated Discipline Authority (2011–2012)**

Around this time, further amendments to the Police Act removed the finalization of a complaint investigation from investigators, requiring it to be completed by the chief constable or their designate, who could be an inspector or someone of higher rank. In Vancouver, this meant creating a new full-time inspector position. The Act now mandated that upon submission of the investigation report, the discipline authority (DA) must independently review the evidence, consider the relevant law, establish the facts, determine whether a breach of the Code of Professional Conduct occurred, and, if appropriate, propose sanctions. A document outlining all of these elements was required from the DA. The civilian complaint commissioner then reviewed these decisions.

A deputy chief constable asked me to accept the new role, recognizing my background on the subject. Although I enjoyed operational command and being back on the street, I took the position. A lawyer with extensive legal expertise on policing matters and knowledgeable of the various duties and responsibilities involved in this type of adjudicative process provided essential training. In my office on the fourth floor at 2120 Cambie Street, with a panoramic view of Downtown and the North Shore mountains, I processed around 120 files over the following year and a half. Most complaints were unfounded. Many allegations of wrongdoing by officers seemed to stem from anger at being subjected to authority. Others appeared motivated by the belief that complaining about law enforcement might give some negotiating leverage to drop charges, or at least create the perception that the charges were without merit and the accused a victim. Some individuals were simply unhinged, anti-government, or grossly immature. I'm sure that dealing with this range of complainants and their allegations was a thankless job for the OPCC. Commissioner Don Morrison once told me how out of place he felt at a North American conference of civilian police oversight agencies when many discussed systemic corruptions, infiltration by organized crime, and racism. At a Police Act legislative review committee (2001–2002), where I provided input, a key issue emerged. The question raised by a committee member and then passionately discussed by the group was, "How can we get police officers to apologize more readily?" The conversation acknowledged that in B.C., serious police misconduct was comparatively rare. Rarely did an officer behave so badly that significant censure was required. More typically, a minor transgression would require training, education, or an advisement. Most of my DA work involved explaining to the complainant, the officer involved, and the complaint commissioner why no misconduct had occurred. With the province retaining highly professional police services, I am certain it has been challenging over the years for police complaint commissioners and the OPCC to gain public recognition and appear relevant.

As I mentioned, the first commissioner, Don Morrison, worked collaboratively to ensure that interpretations and procedures reflected the spirit of the new concepts. It was a significant task. However, he hired several staff members who had not been involved in developing the legislation and who held different ideas, and they succeeded in ousting him. As noted earlier, there was nothing too sensational, as Dirk Ryneveld then diligently carried on. Over the years, I also drifted away from the subject. When I became the discipline authority, Stan Lowe was the commissioner. He was Asian, with black combed-back hair, and he always wore a dark suit. I found Lowe to be all business. I don't think I ever saw him smile sincerely. However, unlike Morrison, he would not acknowledge his shortcoming of being underinformed about policing. I saw him as a constant critic, convinced he had all the answers. Even more troubling was my impression that he lacked empathy. He did not seem to be the right person for the job. Soon, I realized that under Lowe, the interpretation and application of the Act had strayed far from its original ideals and intentions. At the start of my assignment, the sergeants conducting police conduct investigations complained to me about constant interference from the OPCC. They described critiques and directives from analysts who were deficient in investigative practices, lacked understanding of police realities, acted on agendas, didn't know their legislated role, or chose not to stay within it. It appeared so easy for OPCC staff, sitting at their desks in Victoria, to judge how police officers should have conducted themselves. Alongside this, I knew that the OPCC lacked the necessary understanding not only of policing but also of police organizations, police culture, and change management. I was meant to carry out the discipline authority role from an objective, detached, and independent standpoint, applying my in-depth knowledge and experience of policing. Yet I anticipated that I, too, would be influenced by the views and demands of the OPCC and the commissioner. It was only a matter of time before that office, directly or indirectly, tried to influence the outcomes of cases assigned to me for adjudication - and they did.

One situation involved a male officer with a South-Asian cultural background. He had alarmed a woman from another service agency with his advances while they were having coffee together. With cultural elements at play and two professionals involved, I felt that dialogue between them was essential for each to learn from the other and move past the incident. This situation also had nothing to do with the delivery of police services. I secured departmental funding for a restorative justice expert with a doctorate to assist. The officer was open to the process, and it was decided that the restorative justice expert should contact the female first. Since the complainant had been reluctant to bring the matter forward and only did so under peer pressure, I was optimistic about her participation. However, then the OPCC caught wind of the plan. An OPCC staff member, under the guise of seeking to clarify file information, called the female. The OPCC advised me that, by the end of the conversation, the female no longer wished to participate in the restorative process. That forced me to sanction and transfer the officer. The outcome failed to help the two involved learn anything. I saw the OPCC actions as meddling, narrow-minded, and self-serving—certainly not serving the public, policing, or people. What did they get out of it? Another statistic.

One of the most egregious instances of OPCC behaviour led to a significant shift in my view of the OPCC. It is useful to examine the following story, which is on the public record, in some detail. Headline-grabbing stories don't get much better than the accusation of a murder being concealed by a police constable for ten years. Well before I received the final investigation report, I was inappropriately told that a "dirty" officer was involved. When I finally received the completed investigation report, as required by the Police Act, I studied it and the evidence thoroughly. The investigator's storyline was compelling. It was like a TV detective episode, with the story unfolding - but incomplete and confusing. I expected the final dramatic moments to reveal some crucial information that would clarify everything, but nothing significant appeared on the last pages of the report. The evidence didn't connect the events to a murder. The information laid out a tragic accidental death, not a fiction created to entertain. To any trained police officer or lawyer, a homicide was not evident, and there was no evidence of any cover-up.

The matter involved an Oak Bay Police Department sudden-death file, which had been closed many years earlier. The circumstances involved an adult son staying overnight on the main floor of his mother's house. Also sleeping that night in the basement was the deceased's sister. Upstairs was a male friend of the sister, and in another room was the mother. The evidence suggested that late in the rainy evening, the son put on his boots and went onto the porch to smoke a cigarette. It appears he may have slipped or even had an alcoholic seizure, and while falling headfirst down the stairs, he struck his head against a railing post. The mother woke up from the sound of the impact and came downstairs to find her son sitting on the sofa, holding his head. Being a retired nurse, she recognized the signs of her son becoming unresponsive and called an ambulance. He was taken to the hospital, where, after lingering in a coma for more than a day, he died. As required by law, the attending doctor called the police. The police investigated and concluded the death was accidental. The coroner reviewed the file, found no indications of other injuries, and expressed no concerns. Many years later, a friend of the deceased told police in Alberta that he believed something more might have been involved that night. A police sergeant in quiet, small Oak Bay began a new, lengthy investigation. The Coroner Service maintained its original opinion that the single head injury causing death was consistent with a fall and that there was no indication that a weapon was used. Then the police purchased an independent forensic medical opinion, which summarized that the head injury involved a broad surface. It seems that wishful thinking led some to believe that a homicide had occurred that night. As a result, creative collateral theories emerged that the deceased's family had misled the sudden-death investigation and concealed the truth for years. An electronic surveillance authorization was obtained, and as eavesdropping took place, the family was prompted to talk about the death. The wiretaps yielded no new information and failed to support the conspiracy theory. That should have ended the investigation, but it didn't. Unfortunately, it kept on going. One proposition was that the daughter's male friend, who was in the house that night, had, for unknown reasons, killed the deceased. The climax of the investigation was a protracted interview with the proposed suspect's cousin by a forensic interview team. That cousin was Constable Stephen Todd of the Vancouver Police Department, and it was imagined that he, too, had

covered up the murder. The interview followed the unlawful arrests of the deceased's mother, sister and the 'suspect.' The interviewers seemed eager to let the constable know arrests had been made. At a later public hearing, Police Act adjudicator Wally Oppal stated that at the time of the arrests: "It is important to note that there was no evidence to implicate any of the three of any crimes." The hearing also revealed irregularities and abuses in the interview, including "Threats, inducements, and coercion" used against the officer during the lengthy interrogation. He was falsely told he faced criminal charges of obstructing justice and breach of trust, which were "ready to go against him." The constable was repeatedly lied to, all the while trusting that among police officers, there was "honesty and truthfulness when dealing with one another." Believing the investigators and influenced by "many suggestions," he ultimately sought to satisfy their insistence that his cousin must have told him about killing the deceased. He provided a story he thought they wanted to hear. It was later determined that at the time, he was "emotionally broken." His statement was made under duress and driven by a desire to leave the interrogation and reunite with his family. Compared to what was already known, his story was seriously flawed. Claiming the deceased was intoxicated that night was wrong, as the toxicology report showed no alcohol present. The suggestion of a physical fight on the main floor was unsupported by evidence. The idea that a weapon was used during the supposed altercation to strike the deceased on the head was hard to believe: he later said it was a hockey stick, but no one in the house played hockey. Additionally, it was false to say police had been called to the house that night, as the emergency room doctor had called them hours later. The Oak Bay investigator present during the interview did not question these inconsistencies. Immediately after his unlawful detention, the constable called the union president to explain the fabrications he had made and why. Based on his statement, he was criminally charged and suspended from work. When Crown Counsel received his recantation, the charges were dropped. However, oddly, the Police Act investigation continued.

After carefully reviewing the Police Act investigation report multiple times, I called a senior OPCC analyst familiar with the case. He appeared quite alarmed at my assessment of the evidence. I got the impression the file was too big a story to let go of. Instead of immediately making a ruling, I rejected the investigation and directed the investigator to review his analysis because it lacked a proper evidentiary basis. I also asked him how he could conclude that a homicide had been covered up. His answer was, "I'm only doing what I'm told to." That was a very troubling comment. Who could be directing him, and for what reason? I also instructed him to follow up on a few specific issues. One was to go back to the Oak Bay investigator of the imagined homicide and ask what evidence remained after the officer's interview statement was recanted. The investigator revealed that the officer's account was the only evidence supporting his homicide theory. That was no surprise. I also updated my superintendent on the situation. He wanted the case to move forward and be someone else's problem. Realizing my superior was not going to address the issues I brought to his attention and feeling troubled over the matter, I called a deputy chief constable. I told him that the earlier portrayal of the case was inaccurate, and I believed there were false arrests and improper conduct in the VPD's Professional Standards

Section's assistance with Oak Bay. He suggested I make further inquiries, and the disturbing situation continued without interference. My rejection of the investigation seemed to be too much for Lowe. He took the matter out of my hands and sent it to a trusted discipline authority who might give traction to the unsubstantiated theories. Nevertheless, I found it hard to believe that Chief Constable Dave Jones of the New Westminster Police Department upheld misconduct and dismissed the officer. Based on my review of the evidence, I wondered how or why Jones could have reached such conclusions. At the subsequent public hearing mentioned earlier, I was relieved when adjudicator Wally Oppal determined that, on a balance of probabilities, there was no homicide and nothing covered up. Then he reinstated the officer. I suspected that the OPCC had sought and obtained a profile from what had always been a nonexistent case. Instead of being handled objectively, the constable was subjected to an appalling exploitation that caused tremendous pain and hardship for many years - affecting him, his family, peers, and friends. Not to mention the unjustified negative publicity policing received. The conduct review process had shamefully disregarded ethical boundaries. Regarding the OPCC, I came to view it as either grossly biased against policing, incompetent, or ethically corrupt. Something was seriously wrong in that office.

Eventually, I saw the Oak Bay matter as part of a larger pattern. At first, I was troubled by files where I found the OPCC seeking from me what I considered unreasonable findings and/or excessive sanctions. I also noticed unnecessary process decisions based on the information, relationships, or circumstances involved. I formed the impression that evidence was often interpreted strangely or ignored, reasonableness was set aside, and the system was manipulated or interfered with to achieve certain desired outcomes. When I asked the OPCC about specific questionable aspects, the usual defensive response was that the matter involved complexity or unique factors I wasn't privy to. These things were secretive, mysterious, and not part of a transparent process. I became troubled when I realized that the same people were involved in what I judged were dubious cases. When these names kept appearing, I believed the commissioner sometimes appointed individuals who had the willingness, biases, or self-interest to achieve the outcomes he sought. Based on who was involved, the outcomes became quite predictable. I inferred that the OPCC, instead of focusing on and achieving its delegated goals, had developed a life of its own. Lowe did not seem to favour a principled approach that would help complainants, improve officer performance, maintain public confidence in the police, and support officer morale. What seemed to matter was media coverage that created the narrative of ongoing police transgressions, and that the OPCC and the commissioner, at considerable public expense, were involved in important work that ought to attract the attention of the government and public. The OPCC regularly promoted itself by advertising its investigations into 'possible' misconduct by officers. As with the Oak Bay matter, they seemed to fabricate issues and present them as dramatic and significant. The OPCC's constant implicit message was that police agencies were untrustworthy and incapable of handling police misconduct. Under Lowe, the OPCC's approach was not focused on resolving conflicts but on building a record of condemned police officers.

But it didn't end there. Another troubling aspect of what Lowe did was to interpret the Act to bring potentially high-profile employment matters under his office's authority. Recall that the Oppal Inquiry explicitly recommended "normalizing" the workplace by structuring it the same as any other employer-employee relationship. The Police Act was not intended to address workplace matters or issues between the employer and staff. Instead, all employment-related issues were to be managed under labour law. A separate conduct review system was considered appropriate only for 'public trust duties' that involved the special police powers outlined in the Criminal Code of Canada. These powers are primarily concerned with detention, arrest, search, seizure of property, and use of force. The wording in the Police Act attempted to reflect this framework. However, the shift of employment matters to a traditional employer-employee relationship never truly occurred. Police unions and police managers had not taken steps to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. They remained unfamiliar with labour relations and did not object when the OPCC under Lowe applied its process to ever more employment issues. In fact, they even fed these issues to the commissioner. There seemed to be no limits to what the OPCC claimed authority over. It gained a monopoly on all potential disciplinary matters, arguing that the public had an 'interest' in workplace discipline. Of course, that is not the same as 'public interest.' Being interested in an event does not mean one has a legitimate stake. But Lowe unilaterally defined what the law should be, reshaping the police accountability structure to suit his agenda. It appeared to me that Lowe's focus on workplace issues served several of his goals and ambitions. When there was sparse public service conduct to look into, there were always labour matters. Some could even be framed within current social movements, the latest isms – whether about race, religion, harassment, sexual orientation, Indigenous rights, power differentials, entitlement, civility, flirting, or anything likely to attract media sensationalism. The politicization of conduct review had fully taken hold. When I started my career, these dynamics were mainly internal. Now, they mostly lie outside the department. The drivers shifted from departmental personalities and careerism to the OPCC's desires. Abuse of process and injustice had been transplanted - and worsened.

Civilian conduct review was supposed to improve policing; instead, it went off the rails. It was as if a group of citizens was reviewing hospital protocols and surgeries performed by doctors. I now saw a compromised 'professional' conduct review process that had deteriorated into a practice where truth and procedural fairness were clearly ignored. This broken system not only failed in its goal to help policing succeed but also, in many ways, weakened it. My view was that the OPCC's constant accusation model, along with its manipulated findings, eroded public trust in the police rather than built it. The public saw policing as undisciplined and untrustworthy. It was also damaging officer morale by undermining confidence in a fair review of their conduct, both with the public and within the workplace. Under Lowe, the OPCC's public 'blame and shame' tactic was seen by officers as political, biased, and dehumanizing. It caused pain and injustice. The media, seeking sensationalism, added harm. Most concerning was the lack of leadership in policing, from both management and the union, which left officers vulnerable to OPCC influence. In many small ways, the quality of police services was negatively

affected. During times of social unrest, this explained why police often hesitated to act. They often felt safer doing nothing than risking drawing the OPCC's attention.

While I was the discipline authority, another Stanley Cup riot occurred in Vancouver on the evening of June 15, 2011. As a staff manager, I had no role, so I also missed the second Stanley Cup riot, watching it on television. The fractured and disconnected police agencies across the region made a proper police response challenging. In the twenty years since the first riot, only slight improvements had been made toward scaled-up and properly coordinated police actions during major, volatile events. The ongoing disorganization of police services was so pervasive that it had become almost unnoticed - until a crisis occurred. Once again, the owner, the provincial government, seemed indifferent. A few platitudes were offered until the media moved on to their next crisis, real or imagined. After the riot, it became clear that many young people had been swept up in the destruction and looting. Most had no criminal record, and a conviction would devastate their futures. The Vancouver Association for Restorative Justice proposed a program to divert suitable individuals from criminal court consequences. This would require genuine remorse and willingness to make amends. Additionally, many store staff and innocent victims of the riot needed to hear firsthand apologies from those involved. Although some officials were open to this idea, it was obvious that the police department appeared so unprepared for the riot that, within senior ranks, there was an almost irrational, vengeful anger. The leaders' reputations and egos appeared bruised. In my opinion, Chief Constable Chu crossed a line when he said the department would pursue the harshest penalties available. Presenting cases to Crown counsel was one thing; pursuing retribution was another. The restorative justice proposal hit a brick wall.

At this time, police leadership remained resistant to meaningful change. Senior ranks waited for the next crisis and then responded as they always had. They failed to conduct a thorough analysis of changing realities or take well-planned actions toward a vision of better service. The management culture seemed overly occupied with petty politics, career ambitions, and egos. My perception was that the enduring leadership void had not only led to multiple government inquiries and the development of external civilian conduct reviews but also threatened more interventions and a greater loss of ownership. And so, it came to pass. The pendulum of exterior civilian interference over the police still swung heavily, steadily eroding the integrity of the chain of command and professionalism. In response to critics and their amplified media voices, along with a rigid police leadership, the government decided that officers should not investigate other officers when police actions might involve criminal conduct. The idea was that any police officer could be part of that mythical blue wall of silence. The implication was that the public could not trust police to investigate incidents involving officers. I can tell you from my firsthand experience that this was not true at all. The last thing police officers tolerated was criminal behaviour within their ranks. I have too many stories that demonstrate this. However, late in 2012, the BC government established another 'watchdog,' the Independent Investigative Office (IIO), tasked with investigating serious incidents, mainly to

uncover possible criminality by police officers. It was another clear expression of no confidence in the police. These citizens were to examine matters that required considerable investigative training, experience, and resources. Once again, it was suggested that others could perform high-level police work more ethically and effectively than police agencies and personnel themselves. This was political folly. This civilian watchdog agency was a sham; it was legally designated a police agency under the Police Act. The government had to swear its members in as police officers, since they were to do police work, even though they didn't meet the same standards. Police leaders acquiesced to this new state of affairs.

Eventually, I was transferred again. I left with no love lost between Stan Lowe, the OPCC, and me. I still sought policing to succeed, but they appeared to be on an entirely different course. Feeling remorseful and foolish for my part in creating the OPCC, I gladly moved on to my next assignment.

## **CHAPTER 21**

### **Inspector in Command of Court and Detention Services Section (2012–2017)**

My next inspector assignment was to serve as the executive officer to the chief constable. My office would be near Chief Chu's on the top floor of a new police department building at the east edge of Vancouver, 3585 Graveley Street. The Vancouver Olympic Committee had used the building for the 2010 Winter Olympics. After they vacated it, the department took it over and closed down 312 Main Street, except for the annex across from the jail, which was converted into an independent structure at 265 East Cordova. I was confused when a peer said it was about time junior inspectors were no longer assigned the chief's executive officer role, and that someone with experience was. I doubted that change was happening, but it sounded good. I wondered whether this new assignment was another form of payback for my previous open opposition to Jim Chu for chief constable. Before the transfer date arrived, another so-called scandal occurred, which was much ado about nothing. It caused the chief to transfer the inspector caught up in the matter into the executive officer position. The supposed egregious events involved his sharing several reportedly risqué images with various colleagues via a workplace computer. It was something that a conversation between adults could sort out, except for the real concern that if the OPCC got their hands on this workplace matter, it would be blown out of proportion, sensationalized, scandalized, and broadcast to the world, damaging police leadership's reputation, further eroding public trust, poisoning the work environment, and destroying personal lives. The OPCC would pretend to be the white knights, cracking down on sins the police either found acceptable or were covering up. The transfer seemed a rare proactive attempt to retain control over an internal workplace issue and to present the executive in a positive light. On short notice, I was diverted to command the Court and Detention Services Section.

The section's mandate included managing the 24-hour Vancouver Police jail. Individuals arrested and held by the Vancouver Police were kept in the facility; at the time, approximately 15,000 people annually, along with prisoners from other agencies such as the Canadian Border Security Agency and the Transit Police. The section also provided station sergeants around the clock to assist operational members, ensure proper reports and documentation were submitted for charged persons, and manage urgent files. Through the Document Services Unit, the section handled court-related documents, including interim release papers, summons, subpoenas, and law enforcement officer trial notifications. Court-ordered DNA databank samples were also processed. My responsibilities included interfacing with Senior Crown counsel regarding inter-agency policy, procedures, and training matters.

The old jail where I worked as a constable and jail supervisor was replaced by a new facility, retrofitted into the provincial courthouse complex at 222 Main Street, across from the police annex. Initially, provincial corrections staff operated the jail, with a police sergeant attached, since prisoners were still in police custody and not yet a provincial responsibility. This model proved unsuccessful, and the department eventually regained full control. The staff was now entirely police department personnel, including forty full-time jail guards, a large number of part-time jail guards, and a cadre of police sergeants. They worked on four teams on a twelve-hour shift model. By the time I was in charge, this new facility already looked pretty worn. I soon realized that it wasn't just the building that was in poor condition; the protocols, procedures, training, and documentation were also lacking. Cameras were everywhere; there was a procedure manual that seemed better suited to a Corrections Services facility than to a police jail; and there was an excess of supervisors. In this multi-agency complex, it took months to understand all the processes, from daily operations to administration. Everything was confusing and overlapping. Just fixing a camera often required clarifying whether it was owned or maintained by the City of Vancouver/Vancouver Police Department, the BC Building Corporation, or the Sheriff's Service. As a result, many important issues remained unresolved. It took years to identify, untangle, and resolve problems, one by one.

In the legal environment, there had also been changes, but not to associated police practices. One example involved search protocols. I became aware anecdotally that cases were being lost in court because of illegal strip searches. It appeared that most police officers had no clear understanding of the Supreme Court of Canada's 2001 application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 'Golden' case. Regarding strip searches, the court decided they were inherently humiliating, and it defined the moment one was occurring - when an officer observed an undergarment. The court then laid out a lengthy list of requirements for strip-search procedures. It seemed as though the court was legislating rather than simply interpreting the law, but who was I to judge? Even our tactical force options training unit unknowingly continued to teach search skills that conflicted with Golden. It was a major challenge to change departmental practices to comply with the court's detailed, lengthy list of new requirements. A second legal issue that gradually came to light was that officers often and unlawfully extended the detention of arrested persons. In response to expanded Criminal Code authorities allowing police to release persons before court attendance, the department centralized these processes under dedicated Field Release Officers (FROs). If such officers were available, arresting officers were advised they could consider their assistance. However, the law applied to all police officers, not just a select few. The result was that officers frequently failed to promptly release arrested persons on promises to appear, with appropriate conditions, as required by law. Every continued detention must have an ongoing legal justification. Officers routinely sent arrested persons to the jail, assuming someone else would sort out their legal status. As well, officers seemed not to fully understand that the legal obligation to release shifted directly onto the jail sergeant once a prisoner arrived in the jail sergeant's care. The Criminal Code explicitly states this. Therefore, the jail sergeant needs all relevant information about a prisoner's status immediately, not hours

later when a report finally arrives. I had been off the street for so long that, at first, I was not fully aware of these legal changes either.

Throughout the years, the shifting ownership of the jail and the department's drive-by management model led to significant knowledge loss. To remedy this, jail staff attended parade briefings for all frontline units and provided clear updates on key legal and procedural issues related to the jail. The most notable resistance to catching up came from police executives, who I often perceived as responding with denial, obfuscation, attacks, misinformation, delay, or redirection - anything to avoid understanding complex issues and taking action. I saw this behaviour as a result of inadequate preparation for their management and executive roles. But I shouldn't limit my judgment to police leaders. Senior Crown counsel also had management issues. They were skilled lawyers but lacked the training or practices necessary for senior management. I once asked them how many cases had been lost due to improper strip searches; they had no idea. Was it a problem? Their focus was on individual cases. They didn't prioritize data collection or analysis. It reminded me of the TV series 'Suits,' where lawyers oversaw lawyers, approaching their work case-by-case through the lens of individual legal issues and tactics. Managing was somewhere in the ether. I couldn't turn to senior crown counsel to identify training gaps - we just had to wait until a high-profile incident made headlines or a judge publicly criticized us. This lack of information gathering and problem identification created an ongoing unease. We often felt like we were walking in a fog, knowing something was going to hit us, but having no idea where, when, or how.

When Chief Chu left in 2015, again, arguably, no one was properly trained, developed, or mentored for the role. High-quality training courses were available for operational command roles, including command of 911 resources, public-order incidents, major investigations, and multi-agency disaster situations. However, for organizational leadership, strategic advancement, and human resource management, nothing was required. Adam Palmer took over from Chu. He was a skilled administrator—polite, intelligent, ethical, well-spoken, and non-political, and I strongly supported him. He steadied the ship. By then, civilians had taken the helm, external forces battered about the direction of policing, and ownership of the profession was minimal.

At this point in my career, I concluded that the lack of leadership in policing had led police departments to cede much management of their personnel to outsiders who had no firsthand awareness or experience of policing, no stake in the profession, and no knowledge of police organizations and their cultures. Civilian police board governance was characterized by the politics of diversity representation, as if the right mix would resolve community-police relations and uphold public support for the police. But what did they know or care about efficiency, effectiveness, or workplace morale? The pseudo-police IIO sought work to keep themselves occupied while struggling to conduct criminal investigations properly. As for conduct review, the civilian OPCC staff kept themselves busy searching for scenarios that could be framed as inflammatory and conflictual to garner media attention and demonstrate the agency's validity. The OPCC didn't seem focused on elevating the quality of police services,

strengthening public confidence in the police, or maintaining officer morale. Around the corner was the next ism that would fuel the OPCC with multiple new opportunities to further undermine policing.

The OPCC focused on the wide range of ‘woke’ issues, a term created in 2014. It included movements like Black Lives Matter, which started in 2013; the ongoing push for diversity over skill, called diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); guilt over colonization driving endless reconciliation; and #MeToo against sexual harassment. The shared woke pseudo-academic view was based on identities of perpetrators and victims, power imbalances, and stories full of accusations and disparagements. The woke view was not about taking responsibility. It was about protesting, rebelling, and demanding one-sided solutions without checking facts or seeking common ground. It was almost the opposite of neoliberalism, where people are expected to take ownership, make choices, and improve themselves. The woke pattern on every issue was to start with a story of suffering at the hands of an oppressor. This was followed by repeated negative stereotypes, accusations, and attacks on the supposed exploitative, tyrannical group. Mainstream society was often cast as the enemy, shown as abusive, ignorant, uncaring, and possibly even inherently evil. The most hated were male Caucasians in leadership roles, accused of responsibility for all social problems worldwide. The story projected onto these men was that they lived privileged lives built on exploiting others, believing they were entitled, and were racist and sexist, with ‘colonial’ values. The media loved the drama and filled the news with woke content. It was ACE—action, conflict, and emotion. The radical, immature, victim-martyr identity and anti-establishment voices gained power and political influence. It seems the world was to be turned upside down. Then everything would be right; justice, peace, and joy would follow. But that would never happen, as this worldview would find a new group to attack. Over time, especially after Justin Trudeau was elected prime minister in 2015, governments looked into so-called “woke” issues, made statements of good intentions, and spent money on initiatives that appeared to address such claims.

The woke movement greatly influenced policing. Aiming to foster an image of inclusion, ‘visible minorities’ were quickly promoted to top roles. Although not legally mandated, it effectively became a DEI program. This disrupted the entire police reward system. The goalposts had shifted. Diversity was now rewarded. Seniority, loyalty, experience, development, and competence were less important. Promotions were often used to placate critics rather than reward merit or build an effective police service. After one round of promotions to inspector, my staff sergeant and I were puzzled by some mediocre individuals making the list. It all clicked when we checked off the diversity boxes. I am sure that many of those promoted wondered how they would be perceived within the department. The net result was a worsening leadership deficit. The civilian police board and police executive could now better promote themselves as woke-conscious. The downside was that capable, devoted, experienced, heterosexual Caucasian personnel increasingly felt excluded and marginalized. Stereotyped as the entitled old guard and privileged class, they were blamed and looked down upon. The pervasive messaging was so

strong that some of these individuals began to belittle themselves for who they were. It's called Stockholm Syndrome—internalizing a hostage-taker mindset—as they effectively had become captives of an ideology. Wokeism also created numerous opportunities for the OPCC, involving the crafting of narratives around sexism, racism, insensitivity, and abuse of power.

While I was assigned to Court and Detention Services, the OPCC grasped onto this new vision of misconduct. The chasing down of Chief Constable Elsner of the Victoria Police Department is also on the public record. Between 2016 and 2017, this white, male chief constable was allegedly involved in a consensual workplace flirtation, mainly via Twitter messaging, with a subordinate's wife. Let me highlight the main points: mutual flirtation, consensual, conducted electronically. When this inappropriate workplace issue surfaced, it was resolved with the chief constable resigning from his position, submitting a resignation letter to the Victoria Police Board. Termination of employment is the severest measure in labour law. But in the #MeToo era, this case possessed significant potential for media attention. The OPCC attempted to classify this workplace matter under the Police Act's public trust provisions. Chief Elsner challenged this in court. The chambers judge partially quashed the commissioner's investigation order. Subsequently, the OPCC pursued the case at considerable public expense to the BC Court of Appeal. In April 2018, Madam Justice Mary Newberry graciously wrote,

“The Chief Constable resigned his post in May of 2017 . . . the PCC might reconsider whether it is still necessary or in the public interest to spend public funds at this date on investigating what appears to have been an entirely consensual and short-lived flirtation via Twitter involving a Chief Constable who is no longer employed by the VPD.”

The court observed there was no complaint under the Police Act, and the allegations did not concern a police officer carrying out their duties or engaging with the public. The court further stated,

“Instead, it involved conduct of the kind that may occur in any workplace — a flirtation between two people, both married. In this instance, the ‘relationship’ was found not to have gone beyond some Twitter messages and one awkward meeting.”

The court added that pursuing the matter would harm personal and privacy interests. The court noted: “One can only imagine the effects on Officer A and B and their family of an external investigation which will take place in the public eye.” The Appeal Court's sensitivity, wisdom, and sentiment were evident. Based on my extensive experience with the Police Act and its underlying intentions, I believe it was unfortunate that the Appeal Court did not explicitly state that the circumstances did not fall within the definition of a ‘public trust’ matter and thereby were ‘ultra vires,’ or beyond the legal authority, of the Police Act's review process and the OPCC. They had a chance to clarify Oppal's recommendation to normalize the workplace. Of

note, later, in May 2026, the Appeal Court upheld the rejection of a proposed class-action lawsuit filed by female municipal police officers alleging sexual harassment and structural discrimination. The court ruled these complaints must be dealt with under workplace union grievance processes. Yet, like a pack of hyenas tearing apart a carcass, the OPCC ignored the Appeal Court's proposal for the commissioner to reconsider his actions in respect of Chief Elsner and pressed on.

Later, Lowe avoided any adjudication by a police discipline authority when civilian Carol Baird Ellan was appointed to that role. This unusual move was clearly for a specific purpose. I had never heard of Baird Ellan and assumed she was there to deliver the outcomes he wanted. The facts were presented within a #MeToo narrative where an evildoer needed to be defeated. So, I was not surprised when Baird Ellan decided 'public trust' misconduct was demonstrated. It was shocking when she then demoted the retired chief constable from the top to the very bottom of the police ranks, to constable. The OPCC held a news conference in which the commissioner, Stan Lowe himself, emphasized the severity of the penalty. Many times, I wondered what public good was served by Elsner's further humiliation and by the hurt done to his family and friends. How would this matter improve policing, officer morale, or public confidence? All I could see was that bringing down a police chief made for a striking media story. I believed the public gained nothing useful from this exercise. However, the OPCC succeeded in generating headlines and spreading their skewed, self-serving messages. Their narrative was that serious police misconduct was present at the highest levels, and that the OPCC existed, was relevant, and was active.

In 2017, while the OPCC was in a frenzy attacking Chief Constable Elsner, what else drew the OPCC's attention? As an administrative manager nearing the end of my career, I thought I was safe from the OPCC's interest. However, sometimes thoughts become disconnected from changing realities, creating a false sense of security. I had seen jail Corporal Brian Nixon convicted in criminal court based on fabricated evidence and invented law, then sentenced to nine months in jail. Contrived stories and grievances from disgruntled staff led to the ouster of Complaint Commissioner Don Morrison. Constable Stephen Todd was abused, dismissed, and disgraced without any evidence. Retired Chief Constable Frank Elsner was humiliated and demoted to constable—for a consensual and mutual workplace flirtation - not to mention many other officers whose reputations were publicly tarnished as pawns in the OPCC's agenda. Truth, sensibility, context—none of these mattered. When people were stereotyped and exploited, facts became irrelevant. Yet, strangely, I felt untouchable. Little did I realize I was about to be dragged into the OPCC's latest false narrative. Wokeism's rebranding of older white males in senior positions as society's villains, ironically, was full of ageism, racism, and sexism. As a senior white male police inspector, that meant I could be seen as outdated, irrelevant, and malicious. Even though I walked about feeling accomplished, I was an easy target for those seeking someone to attach their victim story and their sense of having suffered injustice to.



The perceived embodiment of privilege

One day, I took action to maintain the public's perception of the department as professional and disciplined. A young female guard was standing in a large atrium of a police building, chatting with her peers while members of the public gathered for an official event. She had her hands deep in her pockets and looked decidedly unprofessional. Annoyed, I approached her from behind and gently removed her hands from her pockets. As she tilted her head back to see which of her colleagues was jesting with her, I suspect she was shocked to discover it was her manager. Without thinking, I tapped her once on her right hip and said, "We do not put our hands in our pockets at these events." I felt I was guiding a young team member towards a higher standard so that the public would hold confidence in us. Then I forgot about it. Weeks later, I was called to a deputy chief constable's office, where he and another deputy chief waited for me. I was informed that the police complaint commissioner had ordered an investigation into the allegation that I had "smacked a female jail guard on the buttock with an open hand." The words projected sexual misconduct. But does it really seem believable that a police manager, in an open space with the public pouring in and many officers present, would sexually slap the buttocks of a young female guard? To me, it immediately resonated as a fabrication, just as unbelievable as Constable Todd covering up for a decade his cousin's imaginary act of murder. And what pain that case had caused for everyone involved. I learned that the female guard had not filed a complaint. Her gossiping with colleagues had reached supervisors, who felt compelled to inform their superiors, who then passed what they had heard to the commissioner, even though no conduct involving public trust was involved. It didn't matter to the OPCC that this had nothing to do with policing, not even remotely. As I mentioned earlier, by then, the OPCC made no distinction between workplace issues and service delivery. The moment I learned about the investigation, I understood the political implications. A senior white male officer and a young female guard, with insinuations of sexual impropriety, together made for a sensational headline. I knew the department, its people, and its culture, so I understood there would be no one demanding a fair, objective, and non-political review of what actually happened. I was on my own and realized I was the latest and the perfect scapegoat for the OPCC's agenda. It also seemed like payback for my past lack of cooperation with them. I was furious, mostly at myself for having lowered my guard over the past few years, believing I was safe. My bubble had burst.

The investigation report contained an interview with the female guard. In a quiet room, with her union support person present, the investigator asked her, "How would you describe that slap? Was it a tap? Was it like a forceful slap?" She replied, "A tap, I guess," and then added, "It didn't feel sexual in nature at all." She told the truth at this time, and I believe she expected that the story she had spread would be dispelled and things would be resolved. With our two versions of what occurred now matching, in my opinion, this voluntary evidence fully dismissed the specific allegation. However, the discipline authority designated by the OPCC was Chief Constable Dave Jones, the same person involved in the fabricated Oak Bay murder case I mentioned earlier. In my view, he had proven himself in the Oak Bay case to be either incompetent or completely lacking integrity. Now I saw him as a key part of the pattern of

Lowe's appointments, which influenced the outcomes Lowe desired. His involvement in my case was no coincidence. I speculated that Jones had been chosen to help Lowe secure a #MeToo conviction, regardless of what actually happened. Jones seemed to realize that the specific allegation was not proven. Similar to the alleged murder in Oak Bay, undeterred by the deficient evidence, Jones claimed that "something" had occurred and that misconduct had taken place, so he offered me a five-day suspension. Having served as a discipline authority myself, likely multiple times more often than Jones, and having often reviewed evidence to determine misconduct, I knew Jones's findings were once again completely unfounded. I requested a 'Review on the Record,' in which an adjudicator would examine the investigative file. I was confident that an impartial, qualified, and legally trained person would correct the errors. Instead, Lowe ordered a full public hearing. This made no sense to me—at first. Later, I understood why this was done. Public hearings attract news headlines. They also offer new possibilities, as they are not limited to the specific allegation under investigation. Originally, they were meant as a forum for appealing DA decisions or for publicly airing controversial incidents. But this process was poorly designed and open-ended, capable of finding any behaviour as misconduct. When Carol Baird Ellan, the same discipline authority in the Chief Elsner matter, was appointed as the adjudicator, it became clear that Lowe would not risk a reversal like the Oppal decision in the Oak Bay case. This would ensure a #MeToo conviction that could be publicly broadcast. Whether the accusation was true or not was irrelevant. The whole charade resembled George Orwell's 1984—circa 2018. I knew what the outcome would be.

As the hearing progressed, it became clear that it was not about uncovering the truth. Instead of a careful and thoughtful review of my brief finger tap, it became a sensationalized public spectacle. From my point of view, the two lawyers appointed by the commissioner—yes, two—prosecuted aggressively, aiming to find any possible wrongdoing. This included what my legal counsel called "character assassination." Based on my experience, distortions, innuendos, accusations, and name-calling were used when hard evidence was lacking. During the public hearing, the female guard decided to stand by her initial account of sexual misconduct and attempt to dismiss her interview statements. She faced the difficult task of explaining which version was truthful and which was not. It's hard to maintain a career as a police officer when you fabricate stories. At the hearing, she tried to support her original story with vague sexual innuendos about my character. However, when questioned by my lawyer about why she said during the investigation there was nothing sexual in the contact, she shifted and said the tap felt like punishment, like a "spanking." But it was too late for her to suggest that her real intention was to imply I was abusive rather than merely flirty. When asked about her statement that it was a tap, she claimed she was pressured during the interview to say that. The transcript of that interview shows no evidence of undue influence. She had now, effectively, provided a third version of the events. How can any credibility be given to such conflicting accounts of a personal experience?

In the final moments of the hearing, during one of the lawyer's submissions for the commissioner, also characterized as terrible was my forwarding to my bargaining unit, over a

year earlier, the OPCC's order-to-investigate document. I shared this because it was directly related to an improper workplace transfer imposed by the employer at the time. This communication was never a focus in the investigation nor part of any proposed allegation. Therefore, there was no opportunity to argue against this new allegation. To me, it seemed like a desperate, last-minute attempt to establish misconduct. If the 'tap' was considered innocent, then perhaps sharing the document could be seen as heinous. Baird Ellan decided that I had wrongfully struck the guard in a disciplinary manner, version number three, something that did not happen. The only evidence related to this was the guard's comment during cross-examination. In my view, Baird Ellan not only got it wrong; she did so intentionally. An experienced adjudicator could not be that inept. Then she ruled that my sharing the order to investigate with my union also constituted misconduct. Even worse, she publicly stated that my evidence, which did not fit her findings, was therefore untruthful. Baird Ellan seemed determined to convey that either one or both of the alleged events were problematic, or, if that didn't resonate, that I was bad. Feeling spent and disillusioned by this hearing - and having just passed forty years of service dedicated to the public and the Vancouver Police Department - I chose to retire immediately. Later, while the OPCC counsel called for my demotion, as had happened to Elsner, Baird Ellan, in my absence, imposed two symbolic suspensions of six weeks each. Like in Elsner, these penalties were excessive and attracted media attention. With that exclamation mark, I was happy to leave policing behind.

There were various additional outcomes. The female guard, now a police officer, faced no consequences despite providing three significantly different accounts of the same firsthand experience. From a retired judge, she and her colleagues must have learned that the foundation of policing - telling the truth - was optional. No legitimate concerns between the female member and me were ever resolved. She should have had the opportunity to share her thoughts directly with me about the way her conduct was corrected, and I would have shared my expectation that the public always sees the police as professional and therefore has confidence in them. We may both have developed an understanding from such a discourse and moved forward together, serving the public. Rather than remediate this working relationship, the OPCC destroyed it. No public benefits were derived from the OPCC's agenda. It didn't improve public confidence, officer morale, or the delivery of police services. The OPCC benefited, though. They acquired a key statistic and a public profile. I concluded that, as with Chief Elsner, Baird Ellan had delivered the OPCC's precious media headlines. Now my family, friends, and I knew directly what it felt like to be subjected to what I considered injustice. The OPCC had acted with diminished integrity, and the police department had demonstrated the opposite of leadership. During my career, I had fought for others and the principles of objectivity, fairness, and perspective. Ironically, here I was, done in by the elements I had countered. Perhaps this last chapter was just a brash reminder that there can never be complacency.

Near the end of my career, as I was contemplating retirement and my next steps, I came across a kiosk at a conference. It was from Royal Roads University. I became interested in their

two-year Master of Arts program in Conflict Analysis and Management. I applied, was accepted, and, over the next two years, completed the program. On the very day Baird Ellan announced her penalties, I also received my last marks: a proud grade average and a perfect score on my research paper. I saw this as a sign that, in the pursuit of policing's success, I still had a role to play. Reflecting on my experiences and learnings throughout my police career, it is time to have a conversation about what needs to be done to ensure that policing in the years ahead can successfully uphold law, order, and democracy.

## **V. The Road Ahead for Policing**

*“Let not anyone pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and forms no opinion... He is not a good man who, without a protest, allows wrong to be committed . . . because he will not trouble himself to use his mind on the subject.”*

— John Stuart Mill

To shed some light on the contemporary state of policing, I shared several stories from my career with the Vancouver Police Department. I described my understanding of policing in British Columbia in 1978 when I started, and where it stood forty years later. I highlighted its strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures. I offered my observations of policing struggling to succeed under the weight of its fractured agencies, underdeveloped leadership, token civilian governance bodies, and the self-serving agendas of unqualified external conduct-review agencies. I explained how policing was undermined by media sensationalism, government politics, biased interest groups, and personal ambitions. I shared how confidence in policing declined as innuendos of systemic racism, sexism, excessive use of force, incompetence, and cover-up took hold. I pointed out the characteristic police reaction of defence and denial, which were ineffective in stopping attacks. I noted that because police didn't acknowledge actual shortcomings or take ownership of issues, the government, as owner, repeatedly asked outsiders to examine policing. Exterior civilian reviews routinely involved politicians, judges, or lawyers, almost all of whom lacked police experience, understanding of policing realities, or knowledge of police organizations. Usually, these inquiries became forums for alleged grievances, emotional venting, polarized views, preconceived beliefs, and limited understandings presented as truths. The process had outsiders advising on how policing should be done. Political considerations often framed the findings and recommendations, aiming to quell public outrage, solve an obvious problem, or improve optics. Ultimately, government meddling did not halt the decline in public trust or address core issues. For policing to succeed, it must evaluate itself honestly. Based on my experience, what I've learned is that policing must be properly led by capable, visionary, adaptable, and assertive leadership; its resources rationally organized; sound governance implemented; and, most importantly, fully professionalized.

## 1. Develop effective police leadership

*“Leaders aren’t born, they are made.  
And they are made just like anything else—through hard work.”*

– Vince Lombardi

For any organization or field of endeavour, unresolved issues virtually always stem from leadership deficiencies. When I mention leadership, I do not mean administration, management, or tactical control - police have gotten good at those. I am speaking of organizational, professional and strategic leadership. This entails a deep understanding of changing realities, setting a vision for the future, and galvanizing a professional workforce. As described, many of policing’s problems originate from a lack of internal leadership. During perceived crises, such as a deteriorating community or radical protests, the silence from police leaders was often disheartening. When a calm, thoughtful, strong, reassuring presence was needed, a void was revealed. The emptiness was often filled with external commentary on what was happening and what should be done – marked by ignorance, biases, assumptions, and politics. Frequently, the passive police became the target, facing accusations of partiality or inaction, and even calls to defund the police. The lack of proper leadership training and development for senior police ranks impacted both the effectiveness and quality of services provided to the public and police members.

Over the years, in response to criticism, I observed that police officials most often paid lip service and only made the changes they felt compelled to. To placate accusations, there were often minor policy revisions, symbolic training efforts, or promises. Within the police culture, open discussions about issues were limited, and there was little meaningful dialogue with the public, nor was there a professional body for sharing experiences and ideas. Senior ranks rarely led the organization by scanning the environment, foreseeing emerging trends, setting goals, initiating reforms, engaging communities, or fostering collaborations. Leading means change, and change upsets some people. Change is antithetical to police culture, as policing is inherently designed to maintain authority and suppress threats to the status quo. Dorothy Guyot’s 1979 review of American police management was aptly titled *Bending Granite*. In the publicly funded police monopoly, merely keeping things running was often considered sufficient. From my experience, significant changes in policing – whether positive or negative – almost always stemmed from external forces: legislation, court rulings, inquiries, inquests, or media-portrayed scandals. Today, society faces unprecedented external pressures to uphold law and order, demanding proactive and innovative responses.

Policing has not recognized the need to develop strong leadership skills built on a solid ethos. The result is that policing is ill-prepared for success. How could it be otherwise? Overall, I

found police in leadership roles to be well-meaning, decent people, but when it came to leadership skills, those in higher ranks lacked understanding of what they had never experienced. Due to the absence of a well-developed, capable, and forceful leadership culture, they perpetuated the models they had been exposed to over the years. In the leadership vacuum, the chief constable's influence became excessively dominant. Chief constables held all the power, yet rarely understood how to structure an effective leadership model beneath them. With what knowledge would they have done so? Long ago, I saw police leadership as having modest, safe 'aspirations of mediocrity.' In a turbulent world, setting a low bar and resisting change seemed to be an instinctive haven from chaotic social chaos, public criticism, and political abuse.

The consequence was that governments felt compelled to step into the leadership vacuum, holding public inquiries, intervening, and trying to fix issues within and between police agencies. These intrusions destabilized the chain of command. I also wrongly believed that the answer to the leadership deficit was to bring in outsiders rather than to fix the leadership problem itself. Government intervention in policing was ultimately driven by political priorities and resulted in political solutions. Political agendas, polarized ideologies, identity politics, or questionable ethics should never guide policing. For example, an externally driven solution to policing's alleged issues of systemic racism, sexism, and insensitivity has been to focus on workforce 'diversity.' Not long ago, it was quite a spectacle to watch the federal government search for an Indigenous woman to serve as the RCMP commissioner. Those were the publicly stated essential qualifications for leading the nation's largest and most complex police force. Diversity is fine for appearances, but what about competence through proper leadership training and development? How much direct and collateral damage have external interventions caused? Outside solutions to policing's perceived problems will never succeed, as they tend to lack understanding and be biased by outside interests. Leading the profession, transforming police culture, and improving police values must predominantly come from within.

The first and most crucial step toward fostering a positive trajectory in policing is developing a strong police-specific leadership culture - one that upholds our core social values and standards of civility while continuously adapting strategies and tactics in a changing world. This is no easy task. Leaders are made, not born. The challenge lies in identifying who should initiate and lead the effort to deliver quality leadership training - covering knowledge, skills, mindset, and experiential learning, all embedded within a values system - and to influence practices and traditions. If police don't know what they don't know, and outsiders lack an accurate understanding of policing or organizational change, who should take the helm? I've outlined the problem, but I don't hold the answer. I hope for those within policing to wake up and take this responsibility. It could involve officers reading about and discussing leadership, then imagining a supportive culture. Perhaps leadership could become a regular topic at meetings and conferences to foster exploration and development. The irony is that, for effective internal leadership, the initial directive will likely need to come from outside. The provincial government, as owner, must mandate this goal and create a clear route to achieve it.

## Professionalize policing

*“Control your own destiny or someone else will.”*

– Jack Welch

Leadership connects to the next issue in policing: becoming a profession, where ownership is a key trait. We all understand that the police have a unique role in society. They are granted special legal provisions to fulfill their ‘public trust duties.’ I often felt these ‘powers’ as a burden, because neglecting to use them while doing one’s duty was rightly seen as misconduct. There must, of course, be accountability in the exercise of these legislated powers. Starting in 1829 with the creation of the London Metropolitan Police Service, modern policing adopted a semi-military organizational model. Early in my career, I sensed that the public viewed senior police ranks as military equivalents and made assumptions regarding leadership ethics, skills, and abilities. It seemed the public trusted chief constables and expected them to act decisively against misconduct. However, after the post-WW2 era of mistrust and victimhood began, it became clearer that police leaders were not the exemplary figures they were once thought to be. As a result, laws began to include outsiders in policing. Without strong, capable, and assertive police leadership, civilian interference faced little resistance. Lawmakers started to believe that civilians needed to tell the police if they understood, thought, and acted properly. They also believed that outside individuals, lacking police training or experience, were more ethical, insightful, and aware of proper conduct than trained and experienced police officers.

I have recounted instances in which the OPCC failed to provide an honest, fair, and objective review of professional police conduct. But then how could they? They knew so little about policing. They treated policing, especially professional conduct, as if officers could not possibly distinguish right from wrong in their actions. The OPCC did not interpret information from a professional standpoint, even though professional conduct was under review. Nor was it viewed from the perspective of the public, whose confidence in the police the OPCC was supposed to manage. It wasn’t even considered from police management’s point of view, whose administration and supervision of officers the OPCC was to support. The civilian OPCC’s judgment of professional policing decisions and actions was often absurd. As civilians without awareness or expertise in organizational and cultural change, they also failed to understand, investigate, or address issues within policing that required attention. This level of effort was not even on their radar, despite being implicit in their mandate. Without any stake in service delivery, they repeatedly pursued their own agenda. They often claimed to be on higher moral ground than the police, but consistently demonstrated the opposite. The very existence of a ‘watchdog’ signalled to the public that the police could not or would not uphold professional standards. This eroded, rather than bolstered, public trust. And it was simply not true. In most

cases, the OPCC's involvement lowered officer morale, hindered management, reduced service quality, and diminished public support. The civilian model of professional conduct accountability was leading policing toward failure. All of this was contrary to the government's hopes and my own vision. With the OPCC staff believing they knew best, it was as if a group of Uber drivers were tasked to critique a university professor's teaching or a university's administration. The model makes no logical sense.

Too often, the government's response to ongoing police shortcomings was to double down, increasing civilian intrusion rather than reducing it. Why? I believe no other model was visible in the public, police, or political consciousness. While in graduate school, still believing in the need for some citizen involvement, I hoped to identify which components of engagement in conduct review would boost public trust in the police. Regarding complaints, was it the filing process, vetting, investigation, adjudication, sanctioning, or simply the sense of ownership? I was astonished to learn that decades of academic literature showed no link between confidence in the police and any aspect of external review. The literature was unequivocal; civilian agencies across the continent had all failed to fulfill their mandates to maintain public confidence in the police and high officer morale. External involvement was unnecessary; it was purely ideological.

So, what would be an objective, suitably transparent and fair system for reviewing police professional conduct which would achieve the desired outcomes? The first step should be properly implementing the Oppal Inquiry's recommendation to normalize the employer-employee relationship. Police officers are not independent entities like doctors, lawyers, and many other professionals. By law, police officers must be employees of a government-designated police agency. Police agencies and unions need to learn and apply standard labour relations rules and processes. The only appropriate scope for a professional conduct review system is for the 'execution of public trust duties.' Therefore, the next step is to rescind the OPCC's interpretation that anything within a police department is automatically a 'public interest' issue. The term 'public interest' should be limited to conduct involving the public and specific police duties, such as detention, arrest, search, seizure, and use of force. It does not encompass flirting between an executive member and an employee or correcting a guard having her hands in her pockets, regardless of how captivating those may seem. Nor should it include misuse of police equipment, insubordination, improper attire, or, as the OPCC recently suggested, having a lengthy coffee break. Merely redirecting the OPCC is insufficient; for all the reasons I have outlined regarding its shortcomings, in the public interest, the agency must be abolished.

Who, then, should oversee police public trust performance? Early in my career, I believed that external oversight was essential to avoid internal department politics. What I have learned is that external does not mean outside the profession. Instead, it means outside of the police agency and its chain of command. Professional accountability requires those with knowledge, expertise, and a stake in the profession to set and enforce norms. During the Oppal Inquiry, Dr. Charles Ungerleider of the University of British Columbia advocated for a professional model. I strongly opposed it. I thought the public should take primary responsibility for any conduct review

system. But I was wrong. I don't know anything about medicine, teaching, or lawyering and shouldn't evaluate those professions, nor should outsiders assess policing. 'Professionalizing' can mean different things to different people. In 2017, Justice Michael Tullock of Ontario stated that the public deserves a professional police service, and to achieve this, the police must be treated as professionals. He stated: "Serious consideration should be given to establishing a College of Policing in Ontario as the professional body for policing." His focus was mainly on training standards and certification, which is a partial measure and falls short of full professionalization. For some, professionalizing means elevating training to an academic degree while maintaining civilian governance and accountability. Think about that. The creators of professional standards would not have a role in ensuring compliance, and those with limited knowledge and experience would judge whether standards were met. The model is illogical. Who best understands the extreme complexities, ethical dimensions, and critical outcomes of police work? Police officers, of course. A professional police body would uphold professional ethics and principles, own and establish norms, create codes of conduct, license practitioners, and, through a suitably transparent system, hold its members accountable. Regarding police agencies, it could also set policy guidelines and accredit police agencies. Throughout my career, I also noticed the lack of a genuine professional voice. Various stakeholders tried to fill this gap; perhaps a police department spokesperson, a police union representative, or those who had never performed police work—a critic, a lawyer, an advocacy group, an editorial writer, a politician, an academic, a government bureaucrat, or a police board member. None of these provided a bona fide independent professional viewpoint. In the end, the public rarely received information that helped them understand the authentic viewpoint of policing. A college would provide the legitimate and recognized voice of the police profession. Establishing a proper professional society for policing is long overdue. The provincial government is the only authority capable of creating it.

### 3. Organize the police rationally

*“What’s dangerous is not to evolve.”*

– Jeff Bezos

Over the decades of my career, despite police failings involving serial killers Clifford Olsen and Robert Pickton, organized crime networks, widespread gang violence, two Stanley Cup riots, or the looming threat of a major earthquake, there was little progress in fixing the fractured structure of police services in British Columbia. Some areas saw half-hearted measures to satisfy critics, but no meaningful reorganization took place. The system I worked in was fragmented, inefficient, and dysfunctional in delivering essential police services. The Vancouver region consisted of numerous independent and parochial municipal departments, several RCMP municipal contracts, and some specialized units under an RCMP provincial police contract. This created disparities in service levels, resources, policies, cultures, training standards, oversight, governance, and funding. Frontline cooperation among neighbouring agencies was mostly informal. At the higher level, politics, insularity, and rivalry persisted within a divided framework. Often, agencies and personnel did not collaborate well.

The province’s delegation of police responsibilities to municipalities has led to bureaucracy, waste, inconsistent services, cost disparities, division, and unhealthy ‘contract’ competition. Understandably, municipalities, police agencies, and senior police personnel all tend to prioritize their own interests over the collective good. No planner designing police services in British Columbia today would organize them as they have developed. Nor would anyone taking proper responsibility for policing maintain it any longer. Yet, divisions, politics, and inaction continue to dominate. For Greater Vancouver today, there is no regional police service, no real-time regional command center, and no detailed regional police response plan for major disasters. Clearly, there is a need to rationalize police resources.

The greatest efficiency and effectiveness would come from merging into a single provincial police service, then organizing it into regional, municipal, and rural divisions. The 2022 report from a legislative all-party committee reviewing policing made a similar suggestion. But the recognition of the need for reorganization is not new. As far back as 1978, a provincial government study on policing costs proposed creating a Vancouver regional service when one of the area’s five large RCMP municipal contracts ended. That was almost half a century ago. The 2012 Missing Women Inquiry also concluded that, for investigative reasons, there should be a regional police agency. The operational and administrative benefits of regional police services for Greater Vancouver, the Capital region, and the Okanagan have been acknowledged for decades. Yet the provincial government, which is responsible for establishing policing services,

has taken no action. If serial killers, major riots, organized crime networks, gang violence, and looming natural disasters haven't prompted the provincial government to act, what will? It isn't a matter of common sense, because even that hasn't been enough. The question remains, who will show leadership, dismantle all the empires, and establish a cohesive police organization to tackle the policing challenges that transcend municipal boundaries?

An additional question is who should oversee policing in the province. The localized civilian police board model in British Columbia has failed to provide effective governance. If anything, it has caused stagnation. In theory, police boards oversee the administration and policies of police departments, but this remains largely a fantasy. It's flattering to be chosen for a role considered necessary, even if it is mostly symbolic. Who were these appointees? I recall an Aboriginal agency youth worker, a lawyer, a businessman, a retired teacher, a human resources consultant, and others - whose backgrounds I had no idea about. Over the years, I've observed that these temporarily appointed individuals had no training or experience in policing, did not understand policing, often lacked organizational skills, and had no real ownership of policing services. They were neither informed nor equipped for their roles. They were simply appointees meant to represent the city's diverse population - a purely political consideration. Lacking credibility, they added no value. The boards had no clear vision for the future of policing in their municipality or across the province. They presented two false images: one of local civilian control and influence, and another of providing a buffer against external interference in police administrative and operational independence. From my experience, police board meetings were just symbolic administrative rituals. Police executives often provided bureaucratic reports to a group of citizens with a limited understanding of the issues. The main purpose was to create an illusion of accountability. Any matter related to service delivery was considered 'operational' and beyond the board's authority, and was not shared with them. The independence of operational decisions - the 'inherent discretionary authority' of the chief constable down the sworn ranks - is rooted in common law. Decisions involving 'public trust' are exclusively accountable under the Police Act, Code of Professional Conduct, and their processes, which fall outside police boards' mandates. Most chief constables quickly learned that simply declaring a matter 'operational' would cause the police board to drop the issue. Yet, in response to media scrutiny, civilian police boards are now developing new protocols, such as for handcuffing practices, positioning themselves as guides on frontline skills, training, and discretionary decisions.

Provincial governments are responsible for establishing police agencies and designing laws that define police duties and accountabilities. The province, for instance, has set training standards for all municipal police officers and runs the Justice Institute Police Academy. The government has decided on uniform appearance, firearms standards, and many other elements of the police service. Importantly, whenever a policing issue becomes a high-profile media-covered story, the government has bypassed the intermediary police boards and ordered an inquiry. The Jacobsen saga, the Frank Paul Inquiry, and the Oppal Commission are all clear examples. In so

doing, the government took control and revealed the fraudulent role of civilian police boards. The Police Act itself allows police agencies to appeal to the provincial government to override local government funding decisions. The province has never, and cannot, give up its responsibilities for police services. Policy and procedure development rightly involves the province, which bears final responsibility for ensuring adequate police services.

How can this on/off relationship with the government be fixed? Start by removing police boards. Like any organization, policing needs proper governance, and police agencies are administratively under the Minister of Public Safety. Isn't it best for a CEO to report directly to the owner? Similar to the RCMP and its commissioner, who report to the federal Minister of Public Safety, it makes sense to have a new provincial service, as suggested, that also reports directly to the province's public safety minister. Direct administrative oversight must recognize the independence of operations and professional accountability. Fortunately, that's already in place. Police service delivery today is probably one of the most scrutinized professions. Accountability exists through multiple layers, including the chain of command, criminal courts, civil processes, public scrutiny, and reviews under professional codes of conduct. As mentioned earlier, professional accountability should also move to a professional college or society. Updating our police services' business model has been overdue. It is the responsibility of the provincial government—the owner - to implement these changes.

# Epilogue

*“Whether we remain the ash or become the phoenix is up to us.”*

– Ming-Dao Deng

What was it like being a police officer in the real world? On a personal level, it was both challenging and deeply rewarding. There was pride in serving the public on the frontlines—rushing into violent situations, restraining offenders, protecting the innocent, and restoring order. Those are some of my fondest memories. Over the years, I felt fortunate to have worked alongside many remarkable individuals. Despite many challenges, we accomplished a great deal. Additionally, there are lasting feelings of empathy and sadness for those encountered who faced overwhelming odds—abused children, battered women, drug addicts, the mentally ill, the impoverished, and survival sex workers. A persistent sense of injustice also lingers from observing authority figures and mainstream society moralize and marginalize many people, or worse, not care. Some may have shown concern when confronted with misery or a microphone shoved in their faces, but that concern was often fleeting. Within and around policing, various disturbing dynamics also emerged. In an era of relentless social, political, and economic upheaval, policing lacked strong leadership and a clear vision for the future. The result was failure to consider adaptive strategies or develop a concrete plan for what should come next. Yet, the most troubling memories are of corrupted ethics, which frequently surfaced from outside the department and, at times, from within. These manifested as unfairness, injustice, pettiness, self-centredness, and exploitation of others. Deep feelings of betrayal also come up - feeling used and exploited for someone else’s ambitions or an agency’s agenda.

Here we are, a few years after I left the Vancouver Police Department. The world is more polarized, driven by instant social media messaging that spreads false, emotionally charged, distorted accounts of events, even outright lies. Global events are now seen as local crises that lead to protests and calls to action, despite a lack of information or critical thinking. In the middle are the police, whose role is to keep peace and order. Yet, public mistrust toward the police has grown so much that body cameras record every interaction. Why? So that civilians, who know little about policing, can review and judge every word, action, or inaction by officers. No wonder police often seem to be on the sidelines. Canada’s peaceful social order depends on an effective, engaged police service. Therefore, policing must not deteriorate further, much less fail.

*“Sometimes people don't want to hear the truth  
because they don't want their illusions destroyed.”*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

Have things changed since 2018? Some want us to believe that, of course, under their watch, everything is better. Really? Recently, a membership vote decertified the inspector's collective bargaining unit. They chose 'me' over 'we.' A 'Command Centre' was set up, but when I toured it, I was told the Operations Commander was still a 'Duty Officer' in a car or an office. The room's role appeared more about routing calls to ease the load on patrol resources. Then there is the new 'District 5.' Heralded as a progressive step for policing the Downtown Eastside, it remains a police deployment model that cannot address the underlying public policy issues. And, finally, there is the 'new' VPD Police Academy. Why fix the province's Justice Institute when one feels compelled to revert to the parochial days of old? Most of these are variations of doing the same things. Additionally, the OPCC still fabricates its workload. It reopens old cases, such as a many years-old incident where two Aboriginal citizens were handcuffed, and proposes forcing the officers to apologize; as well as reviewing the shooting death of Myles Gray more than ten years ago. Then there was their announced interest in undertaking a broad investigation of all municipal police to determine if workplace 'sexual misconduct' is widespread. These sorts of open, accusatory inquiries attract media attention, but offer the public nothing positive. In fact, as I have argued, they further harm policing.

What might be the reaction to my writing? Will current officers, and past ones, again defend – attacking, denying, asserting 'successes,' claiming changes - or will there be a display of genuine leadership through acknowledgement, curiosity, inclusion, and action? They will either provide more evidence supporting my conclusions or, hopefully, they will initiate a much-needed conversation. As for the OPCC and IIO, I expect they will defend themselves, dismiss concerns, and seek to protect their positions. I can't imagine them suddenly becoming wise, caring, and selfless.

Policing demands honest self-examination and transformation. Have I overstated some of my views? Perhaps, unconsciously. If I did it was to make a point. We need a way forward. We need to reorganize policing into a unified body that is administratively accountable to the government, fully professionalized, and led by capable, effective leaders. These steps are essential. Now, it's the provincial government's turn to act. And, if there is no leadership in the provincial government, the outlook for policing's success is bleak.



A local movie set's vision of the future