

WILD ~~ANIMALS~~ PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN

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Acknowledgements

The real, everyday people with whom I have had both the privilege and the penalty of associating throughout my life have enhanced my appreciation of the goodness and the uniqueness of every person, regardless of socio-economic position, race, education or upbringing.

I would not be able to claim the richness of experience, the breadth of understanding or the luxury of tolerance for the diversity around me if it were not for those people. They have been invaluable to me, and for that I am grateful.

This collection of anecdotes is not a recounting of incidents, but a memory of people whom I treasure.

For those that I may have harmed in my interactions with them, I sincerely apologize. For those who have enriched me, I am truly thankful.

If you recognize yourself in these stories, know that you have improved the life of this author, immensely.

Chapter 1

When I was about seven years old, I received a book titled, “Wild Animals I Have Known,” by Ernest Thompson Seton. It chronicled his interactions with several wild beasts that appeared to him to have human-like qualities, and who “adopted” him.

In addition, when I was about seven, we had a neighbour in the rural community in which I was raised who had befriended two deer in the early spring. This sweet little lady hand fed these animals for months. By October, they willingly ate from her hand. When hunting season started in November, she shot them and ate them. So much for sweet old ladies and wild animals.

One day, I observed this little woman running past our place in pursuit of one of her sons, with a .22 rifle in her hands. I remember her words vividly: “Come back, X (her son), come back. You know your father said I could shoot you.”

I later heard that her husband, in frustration with her constant complaints about the boy, had said to her, “Well, if you can’t take care of him, why don’t you just shoot him?” I doubt that it was meant literally. I also doubt that she would have shot him, but you never know, do you? That is part of the intricacy of the human being: we have more than one layer and more than one aspect to who we are and how we think.

My childhood was typical of the rural environment in which I was raised. Most of the people in our community were, if not dirt poor, then much closer to that condition than to affluence.

As I grew up and moved into the city, my environment did not change much for several years. In that time, I met a great many people from a variety of backgrounds and income levels.

In my late twenties, I worked as a “bouncer,” or security, for two of the roughest bars in our city, even though I was far from a large and muscular person. In subsequent years, I owned an investigative company that was involved in extensive corporate security issues. It is largely on these acquaintances that I draw for this collection of true anecdotes about the more edgy side of life.

You will find accounts of twenty-eight people from that array of individuals, of which fourteen were involved in murders or manslaughters – some of them involved in more than one. Three were killed by someone else, and eleven were involved in numerous violent crimes. I also chronicle a handful of police officers who crossed that line of acceptable behaviour. A couple lived significantly on the wrong side of the law.

The level of violence involved in each of these persons' lives is astonishing, and may seem appalling, but there is a constant across all but two of those individuals: an element of decency and humanity that is very rarely seen by the public.

The list of violent criminals with whom I have been associated includes those that have murdered children, raped women and young girls, shot at police officers, caved in another man's skull with a metal bar, robbed people at gunpoint, sold hard drugs, been involved in prostitution rings, and dozens of other major crimes.

I have written these stories, though, to show how, in even what most of us see as the worst of humanity, there is goodness, and that the world in which these people live and move is never as wicked as many of us assume, or the media portrays. While you, the reader, may see these people as wild animals, I see them as people, with depth, and character, along with exceptional flaws. They are, for the most part, people who do not fully understand the rules of society, or do not wish to be part of that world. Therefore, I have titled this book, ~~Wild Animals~~ People I Have Known, with apologies to Lord Thompson Seaton.

I have changed some of the names of the people involved, primarily because they do not deserve to be branded as animals by readers of these accounts. They are common people that I knew. I have changed a few of the names because they would identify others, close to them. I have left many names as they were, because many of the people in my anecdotes are people with whom I am pleased to claim a relationship, however tenuous.

Chapter 2

On Christmas Eve, 1987, two armed men burst into a home in a quiet residential area, where a man, his partner, their five-year-old and an infant child lived. According to court records, the men were members of a local biker gang, and were there to enforce a debt owed by the male in the home.

That fact, in itself, is in dispute. There has been a claim made that one of the two had a spouse who was a heavy drug user. The one biker did not approve, and had decided to compel her supplier to stop selling her drugs, by force.

The male in the home anticipated that events were not likely to work out well in his favour, so he fled to an upstairs room and escaped out the window. The two enforcers resolved the debt/drug issue their way: the woman and two children were murdered.

The outcry was deafening, and the revulsion almost universal. To kill two innocent children, and on Christmas Eve, was seen as one of the most heinous crimes imaginable. The two assassins had to be unredeemable, with no morals or values!

Both of the killers were convicted of the crimes, and sentenced to jail. One of the two died while serving his time. The second was released on mandatory parole many years later, only to be rearrested for a minor, non-violent crime later (smuggling cigarettes). No one shed a tear for the two savages that had committed this repulsive act of murder.

I first met Jon Waluk in 1980, while I was working as a bouncer for the Maryland Hotel. Jon was known as an exceptionally tough person. I heard several stories about his kick boxing skills, and tales of how he had pulverized six guys that had attempted to attack him. He was a medium sized man, with a modest beer belly, yet was not an intimidating figure.

Over a six-month period, I had numerous interactions and encounters with him. Not once did I see him start a fight, or cause a disruption that led to one. He kept his peace, and had fun. Most people in the bar expressed a liking for him.

I met Larry Fisher in the same bar, but spoke no more than a dozen sentences to him in four months. Again, he was a medium to larger sized person, bearded, blond, and in no way an imposing individual. Larry was more intense and focused than Jon, but never started a fight, and appeared to be the peacemaker when things got heated in his group of associates. The best way to describe the two was “everyday people.”

The Maryland Motor Hotel was home to an assortment of low- to middle-income regulars, from a wealth of backgrounds, but almost all labourers. Situated near the core area of Winnipeg, The Maryland represented the ethnic origins of most of the local community, with pockets of aboriginals, Portuguese, Métis, Filipinos, blacks and whites. Although, for the most part, there was no racial antagonism or conflict, each of the groups kept largely to itself. In many ways, it was pleasant to observe that, although distinct, the various ethnic factions co-existed well, in a very seedy part of town, Fights within the bar were very frequent – usually at least two per day, which I was hired to “mediate,” but in the ten months that I worked the facility, none ever originated as an act of racism.

Many of the fights had one core cause: liquid courage. That source was fed by the hotel’s primary attraction for the patrons: strippers. It is a certainty that, when you mix a few drinks, a concentration of men and a naked woman or two, you will have a recipe for primal posturing and a struggle for “supremacy.”

Yet, in spite of a continual agenda of growling, snarling and battering each other, the drinkers in the Maryland carried few of their conflicts beyond the minute or two that typically constituted a fight. However, at one time or another, easily one in five of the regulars was involved in an altercation.

In 1980, Winnipeg was home, as well, to two biker gangs – Spartans and Los Bravos – who seemed to live and even thrive on the primary objective of obliterating each other.

The Maryland was one of three watering holes for the Los Bravos. If a Spartan dared show up, my role was to make sure that he was in and out quickly, so that a turf war did not erupt on the premises and so that damage to the hotel was avoided.

The layman likely would assume that the presence of a biker gang would be an invitation to violence. However, just the opposite was true. Yes, I had been recruited from the Plaza Hotel (affectionately known as the “Zoo” because of its assortment of wild animals who called the bar “home”) to take care of the biker problem in the Maryland, but the problem was less with the bikers and more with the everyday patrons with a little too much liquid courage in them who wanted to prove their toughness by confronting a Los Bravos.

Over the course of the year that I worked the hotel, I had fewer than five fights with any member of the Bravos. I do not want to suggest that these people were “nice guys.” Hell, I would not have wanted to spend even a full day in their company, but, for the brief time that we were in contact each day, I was given only the slightest reason to dislike any of them.

Neither Jon Waluk nor Larry Fisher was a person that I disliked. In fact, both, in my experience, essentially were decent people. That statement may be difficult for you to reconcile with the knowledge that, according to the courts, they murdered two innocent children, and, likely, one innocent adult. But, indeed, I found both of these bikers to be personable, not arrogant, and, at times, more decent than many affluent, upper-crust people are!

Of the two, Jon Waluk had real character, and there was no one in the bar who objected to his company. In the hotel, at least, he was a real party animal. For many, that is the stereotype of the biker. Larry Fisher, on the other hand, was quiet, almost reserved. His gentle demeanour, in the Maryland, belied the fact that he was a striker, attempting to become a full-patch member of the Los Bravos. The two rarely “hung out” with each other, either in this bar, or in the nearby Lincoln Hotel. Jon Waluk had his own circle of associates, while Larry Fisher could often be seen with other known Los Bravos.

In most of the city’s hotels, at that time, bikers were not permitted to wear their colours while in the bar. The biker patches and emblems tended to act as a red hanky for a bull: it encouraged other patrons, full of liquid courage, to attempt to pick a fight with the Los Bravos members, and, since no biker would even think of letting one of his gang fight his own fight, tantalizing one biker meant tantalizing all of them.

I never required that any of the bikers remove their colours before drinking in the Maryland. However, none of them ever wore their vests or jackets, probably on the assumption that the Maryland had the same rules as every other beverage room in town. My rule was a lot different, though: no knives were permitted.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of the working class in Winnipeg carried buck knives in sheaths on their belt loops. To my way of thinking, I wasn’t too worried about being stabbed by a vest or jacket, but, damn, those four-inch blades would do serious damage! In addition, by banning knives, I took the weapons out of the hands of those other patrons who might think that a knife in the hand was worth two Bravos in the bush, and develop some unwarranted mettle. Everyone checked their knives at the vendor entrance, and any violations meant a one-month ban from the premises. It was the knife rule that highlighted a real strength of character in Larry Fisher.

As I have indicated, Jon Waluk was a real personality. I have also indicated that the Maryland entertainment consisted of “exotic dancers.” It was Jon Waluk’s fun loving nature, and his need to be accepted by everyone that highlighted his unique, positive characteristics.

Waluk liked to make an entrance. Whenever he entered the beverage room and there were exotic dancers on stage, he would rush to the lip of the stage, and hang on to the edge, looking up at the strippers.

The Manitoba Liquor Commission rules regarding being on stage while a stripper was performing were very specific: no one was to be on or touching the stage and no one was to make physical contact with the performers. By merely touching the stage, Jon Waluk was, I suppose, violating the rules and could have caused the bar to be penalized for allowing him to do so. I felt that this was quite harmless, and to make an issue of such a trivial matter would have caused more problems than it would have solved. I allowed him his little pleasures.

There was one dancer that Jon Waluk, and most of the bar, quite enjoyed. Gisella was in her early forties – an advanced age for a dancer. She relied on gimmicks and personality to add extra “oomph” to her shows. On occasion, she would use a bathtub as a prop. Most commonly, she used two tassels to entertain, and her “twirling” abilities received a lot of applause. She interacted well with the audience, and had become a regular performer for us. Jon, however, often chose Gisella’s shows to push the envelope of permissibility, and would run to the stage when she performed, jumping up on the dais with her. My reaction was the same, every week: I would turn off the beverage room lights and announce that the service was cut off so long as Waluk was on or near the stage.

My rationale was simple. If I were to cut off service to Waluk, nearly every patron in the bar would sneak him drinks covertly, and, without even purchasing a drop of liquor, his thirst would be quenched all night. He would be a martyr. On the other hand, if everyone but Jon was cut off, he would be the goat, and patrons might even be hostile to him.

After the first couple of nights, Waluk came up to me and asked “What are you doing, Bob? You’re killing me out there!” He saw humour in it, and was not angry about my tactic.

But the strategy always worked. It became a ritual. Jon Waluk would enter the bar when Gisella was on stage, would jump up on the platform, I would darken the beverage room and announce that everyone’s service was cut off, Jon would jump off the stage, wait for me to turn on the lights, and would slink away, pretending to hang his head. The drinkers loved it, Jon enjoyed it, and Gisella added it to her act. Everyone won, and Waluk still received the attention he craved. He hated to be disliked.

Jon and I became good casual friends. While we never socialized outside of the Maryland, he would come over to wherever I was standing, often, and we would joke around for a

minute or so. It was more like a gathering in someone's garage around a tub of beer & ice than a hotel bar, on some evenings.

But being a bouncer in that bar required that I be ready for lots of physical confrontations, and there was the ever-present risk of serious injury, because most of the regulars were no lightweight fighters. At 185 pounds and 5'11", I was a very average size, and had to use my wits daily.

Jon Waluk never liked to see his friends in danger. Maybe that was why he was a biker: he could look after people. He certainly never instigated a fight in the entire time that I knew him. He took me under his wing, even though I was the salaried enforcer, and he was a customer. For weeks after we developed our unusual one-minute-a-night friendship, Jon would come to me, if he heard that I had been in an incident, and say to me, "Bob, let me take care of things. I don't want you getting hurt." He was sincere. He actually cared, and wanted to make sure that his friends were safe.

Every time he approached me, my answer would be, "Jon, it's my job. It's what I get paid for." It reached the point where other customers were aware that Waluk wanted to protect me, and would warn would-be belligerents that Jon would deal with them if they messed with me. The situation was interesting, to say the least.

As time passed, his presence meant that I had fewer incidents with which I dealt, not because he was doing it for me, but because people who knew Jon Waluk knew that you didn't mess with him.

Although I appreciated his concern, I still had a job to do, and, while there were fewer fights, there still were at least five each week.

One day, Waluk got wind of a serious incident that had happened, where I had a little more trouble than I should have had dealing with the offender. He was angry. He rushed to where I was standing against the bar wall, and grabbed me by the shirt, lifting me completely off the ground and against the concrete wall.

"Damn it, Bob. I f__g told you that I would take care of it for you. I don't want my friends getting hurt!"

I responded from my elevated perch in his grasp, with the usual refrain. "Jon, it's my job."

That roused him further.

"Damn it, Bob, if you keep getting into fights and you get hurt, I'm going to kick the shit out of you!"

At that, I laughed, and asked him if he heard what he had just said. “You’re going to beat me if I don’t let you keep me from getting hurt?”

He paused and looked at me then burst out laughing.

“Yeah, I guess that’s pretty stupid, eh?” We both enjoyed the joke. I am convinced that Jon was not a violent person, by nature. He did need to be wanted, and maybe his biggest fault was that he actually cared. Yet, the court proved that he killed three people. Who was the real Jon Waluk?

I am inclined to think that he was a guy that loved people, loved life, and didn’t want to offend anyone. Perhaps, even, as odd as it sounds, that may be why he was at that Fort Garry residence on Christmas Eve.

Larry Fisher, on the other hand, was much more distant and aloof than Jon Waluk, but still friendly, and apparently harmless. If I had not been introduced to him, he probably would have gone unnoticed for as long as I worked at the hotel.

Biker strikers and pledges and hangers-around have a lowly existence in the biker realm. They are not even at the status of beta dog, or even the lowly cur that grovels at the feet of the alpha dog, with its throat exposed. Dues must be paid, and respect earned in that world. That was Larry Fisher’s position, but you would not know it from watching him carry himself.

Fisher smiled easily, but not overtly. He walked with authority, but not with aggression. He was, in my view, like a bull moose out of the rut – confident, but not cocky. He was intent on becoming a full patch member of the Los Bravos, but he did not earn his entry by weaselling his way in.

There was only one incident in which Larry Fisher displayed anything other than perfectly even temperament, and it occurred when a couple of the Spartans dared to trespass on the Los Bravos hotel turf.

Larry and the other Los Bravos generally preferred to drink in the hotel beverage room, rather than the lounge. Whenever the bikers were at the bar, they congregated in a group of six to ten members. The president (I’ll refer to him as “Brian”) of the club at that time was a stereotypical biker. He was bearded, had a significant beer belly, always spoke loudly and liked to intimidate. His persona was real, however, as he was one of the most dangerous, toughest people in the area. Earlier in 1979 or 1980, he had won a “tough man” contest, beating several very legitimate challengers in a style of fighting that was similar to today’s ultimate fighting, without the rules. I was fortunate in that I never had to go against him, as he almost always acted within our rules.

None of the bikers wanted to lose the privilege of drinking in this particular hotel.

At around 11:30 pm, one of the customers in the lounge snuck through the kitchen to the beverage room, to inform the Bravos that a couple of Spartans were in the lounge. The response was immediate. Every one of the eight members of the gang rushed through the kitchen back to the lounge to confront these fools. It took only seconds for me to realize what was happening, and I was only steps behind them. It was not a sufficiently quick response, though.

By the time I had arrived, the Bravos leader had one of the Spartans on the floor, while the other wisely had fled. In addition to the seven other gang members, at least a half dozen regular patrons crushed around the melee. I was unable to push my way in.

As the biker leader pummelled the unfortunate much smaller Spartan beneath him, he yelled out,

“Somebody give me a f___g knife. I’m going to stick this f___g weasel.”

We, in the hotel, had done our best to keep knives out of the drinking areas, but one of the non-bikers had smuggled a buck knife in, in his pocket. I observed the knife being passed from the fringe of the circle to one of the bikers, to the biker in the fight, and was unable to intercede.

However, Larry was in the inner circle of those bikers and, as the knife was handed to his gang head, he grabbed it from the outstretched hand and threw it across the lounge. Then he grabbed his chapter leader by the back of his jacket, lifted the three-hundred-pounder off the beaten Spartan gang member, and physically manhandled his way through the crowd, to the lounge doors that led into the hotel lobby. While Larry Fisher probably weighed no more than 250, he dragged the Bravos head man so easily that “Brian” offered no resistance.

Fisher not only dragged Brian across the lounge floor, but he actually was able to toss the man ten feet into the lobby, swearing at him as he did so.

“You’re not going to f___g mess things up in here. This is our place. You’re not going to ruin it for everyone.”

He then returned to the lounge, gathered up the smallish Spartan and tossed him unceremoniously into the lobby. This time, however, he threw the man too far, and the guy crashed into the front desk, breaking the gate off the desk. Not done yet, Fisher picked the guy up again, and threw him out the front doors. While doing so, he made his demands clear.

“Get the f___k out of here. I’m not going to save your ass again.”

Oddly, Larry then turned around, put his arm around the shoulder of Brian and walked him back into the lounge, where he bought everyone a drink, and publicly apologized for disturbing them! Before the gang left the hotel at closing, Fisher quietly returned to the front desk, and shelled out \$300 for the damage to the desk – well beyond its cost.

I saw Larry Fisher five more times after that. He never mentioned the incident, continued to be the soft spoken person with whom I had been familiar, and eventually was accepted as a full patch member of the gang, in spite of his incredible transgressions against the gang and its president!

This was the same man who was later convicted of killing three people in cold blood, over a drug debt. Before he finished serving his sentence, he died of cancer in prison. He would have been in his mid-forties. He, as I saw him, albeit in a limited capacity in a unique venue, was no cold-blooded killer. He was a man with passion, and he took risks. If the claims that he was out to avenge his wife's cocaine addiction problem were true, I can believe that he would kill to do so. He did not like to see an injustice occur. It is tragic how that attempt to rescue his wife turned out, and even more tragic if the dispute was over money.

Chapter 3

Many of the people who live close to the wrong side of the law are colourful personalities. They live life with excitement and risk as part of their diet, and that disregard for personal safety manifests itself in behaviours that many of us consider to be unusual. Their “bad boy” personas not only appeal to a large number of women, but to a large number of everyday men, as well.

As a bouncer in the Maryland, I knew little of my patrons’ home lives. They were, for my purposes, exactly as I saw them in the bar. Consequently, I knew almost nothing of what they did outside the hotel, other than what I learned from anecdotes and information passed on to me.

One of the exceptions was a fellow known in the hotel as “Dutchy.” He was one of two Dutchies that hung out in the Maryland. Dutchy’s real first name, oddly, was the same as the other Dutchy. Dutchy (Marcel), I was told, sold drugs. As far as I knew, he was not one of the bikers, but he did converse with them on many occasions. His crowd was more on the labourer/construction side of the hotel demographics. In fact, one of his frequent associates ran a landscaping business. Long before Norm and Cliff of Cheers fame were created, these two presented the same image as those later fictional creations.

Dutchy was tall, probably close to 6’2,” fairly well-muscled with little fat. He switched from wearing a goatee to clean shaven at least three times in the duration during which I knew him. He was friendly, but not in a pushy way. Indeed, he was quite quiet, and never caused a problem.

The way he looked and the way he carried himself was a far cry from our image of the sleazy drug pusher, huddling in a dark alley, or pushing pills on unsuspecting teenagers. Never once did he push, promote or display drugs in the hotel. Yet, on a daily basis, I would have to speak to one or another patron who would openly light up a joint, or pass a hit of acid.

Dutchy would come in, socialize for an hour or two, have three or four drinks, and move on. He didn’t offend anyone, and didn’t appear to have any enemies. He respected our house rules, and never so much as uttered a word of disagreement with them. Although I later learned from media reports that he was suspected of being one of the first people to push cocaine in the city, there was no such issue in the Maryland.

On only one occasion did Dutchy cross the line. One day, I was working the bar when one of our regulars came running to me.

“Bob, Dutchy and “Doug,” they’re going at it in the kitchen. They’re going to kill each other!”

Doug was Dutchy’s close friend. There was a significant mismatch in size, with Doug being no more than 5’8”, but weighing in at about 270. Dutchy topped the scales at about 235. These were two seriously sized men, but disproportionate in height.

When I arrived in the kitchen, Doug and Dutchy were locked in a pit bull hold, with each of them having their hands wrapped around the other’s throat, squeezing for all their worth. Neither could speak, and each was struggling violently to throw his opponent to the floor. There was a good deal of blood oozing from Doug’s eye and mouth.

I am convinced that either could have squashed me like a bug, had they so chosen. However, I had a job to do. I ducked down between the two, and inserted myself between the pair like an iron wedge being hammered into a block of wood. As I stood up, I used the strength of my legs to force my body between theirs, which, in turn, forced them a little bit apart. That helped to decrease the power of their death grips on each other.

I was turned toward Dutchy, but so intent were the two on killing each other that it took close to twenty seconds before Dutchy looked me in the eye. The instant he made eye contact, he dropped his grip, even though Doug still had him by the throat. Then, seconds later, Doug, too, loosed his hold on Dutchy’s throat.

Dutchy was like a puppy, so passive was he.

“I’m sorry, Bob. We just had a little disagreement.”

Doug said nothing, but turned and walked away. That was the end of their fight.

Dutchy approached me about five minutes later in the bar.

“How long am I out for?” was all he asked. He assumed that he was going to be barred from the hotel for a while, as was my practice with fighters.

“For what?” I asked. He simply smiled, grabbed my shoulder, gave it a little shake, and left.

The next day, Dutchy and Doug were in the hotel together, sharing a few drinks and a few laughs. There was no residual grudge, and no other conflict ever occurred.

But Dutchy’s story, like many in the Maryland, had its own bizarre twist.

Three years after I quit working at the Maryland, I heard a news story about a guy that had been shot by the police in the North End of the city. He was a known drug dealer, and was stopped by the cops as he transported a guy, that owed him drug money, from a booze can in Winnipeg to an unknown place where he had threatened to kill the guy.

When I followed up on the story, I found that the man who was killed was my old acquaintance, Dutchy.

The story, though, was not as simple as “cop stops kidnapper, cop kills kidnapper in self-defence.” It had its own twist, and several different versions of what had transpired.

Dutchy, from accounts that I pieced together later, had been at a booze can (a place that sold alcohol illegally) run by another of the people that I have described in this book. It was, after all, a very closed loop, with the bikers, the drug runners and the drug users all knowing each other, and being, in many ways, dependent on each other, too. Here, he ran into one of the fellows that owed drug money to him. He had been trying to collect for quite some time, without success.

One story that found its way into the media is that Dutchy was driving one of the alleged drug runners around, with a leash around his neck. That, to me, sounds like Dutchy’s way. He wasn’t the kind of guy who did things simply, without finesse. According to this version, the guy escaped at the Maryland Hotel, and Marcel DuCroix’s new passengers were two people he had met, by accident, at the Maryland.

Other reports said that Dutchy had been at a couple of the local hotels, including the Maryland, just before the shooting incident, which happened at 2:30 am. Since the bars closed earlier than that, this version seems to have some potential errors.

I was also informed that Dutchy only intended to scare the hell out of this gagged and leashed guy, since killing him would not get Dutchy his money. However, after my friend left the booze can (or the Maryland, depending on which version is true), someone phoned the police to report the abduction, and the two cops, Richard Donovan and Mike Ashley, happened upon Dutchy near Aikins Street.

When the cops pulled in behind Dutchy’s vehicle, he apparently told his victim, “It’s a good day to die,” in true Little Big Man fashion, jumped out of the vehicle and fired a shotgun blast at the cops. (Again, other reports indicated that he told the people in the car that he was going to kill the cops. What was said may be irrelevant to the conclusion of the incident).

DuCroix fired from the driver’s side of his car with his sawed off shotgun, at Richard Donovan, the cop who was driving the car.

He then proceeded to, while prone in the car, load a pistol. At that time, he was shot and killed. One cop, Donovan, suffered several pellet wounds, but was saved because he was one of the first cops in the city to be wearing the bullet-proof “Second Chance” vest. Unlike Chief Dan George in the movie, it was not a good day to die for Dutchy.

Ironically, I later met Donovan under strained circumstances. I guided his wife’s divorce through the courts against him, and earned his everlasting wrath. I rubbed additional salt in

his wounds, by marrying that woman, and defending Donovan's girlfriend against Rick in family and criminal court. I doubt that he knows, to this day, of the times that he and I came into contact during his life as a police officer.

Richard Donovan received a citation for his actions against Dutchy, and deservedly so. Dutchy received a coffin for his actions, and deservedly so, as well. But of the two, I would not hesitate to say that it would have been Dutchy that I would have counted on in any crisis.

Chapter 4

The Maryland was not the only source of killers and criminals that I have known. The Plaza, the hotel at which I began my enforcing career, had its share of unusual and dangerous characters, too.

The Plaza was known colloquially throughout the 1970s and early 1980s as “The Zoo.” It had a collection of bizarre and odd characters, but an even more dangerous collection of true human animals, with dangerous backgrounds. In the late 1980s, it formally took on the name, The Zoo,” but the quality of degenerates had dramatically degenerated by then.

I was told, in confidence by a cop, that the Plaza and one other city hotel were designated as places where they did not bust druggies. The intent was to focus those dealers into what they perceived were safe havens, observe and document them, and arrest them later, away from those hotels. It was a little like baiting a bear trap.

Throughout the year that I worked at that hotel, first as a maintenance worker and then as the bouncer, I often saw undercover cops that I knew, watching the crowds. No arrests were ever made on site, and many regulars assumed that they were safe to do whatever they wanted. That made the place particularly dangerous.

One of the most bone-chilling, heart-stopping incidents that I have ever experienced occurred when I was still working as the evening janitor, before I became the bouncer. The Plaza employed two big bruisers to enforce the rules, unlike almost every other city bar, who used only one. These two were army boys, who were permitted to work off the military base. Each weighed in at about 250, and six feet tall. They had the look of muscle, but, as I soon discovered, were far from tough.

Norm and Kerry had been friends for quite some time. They had each other’s backs in the bar, which gave them an advantage. Just like in the Wyatt Earp and Buffalo Bill sagas, good bouncers like to keep their backs to the wall. Being in the middle of a belligerent crowd is extremely dangerous, and places the bouncer at a great disadvantage. It’s tough to protect against attack from all sides! But, with the two of them working in tandem, they could stand back to back and pose a formidable wall of defence. In the Plaza, you always had to be on the defensive, even when you were on the offensive.

I cannot recall the specifics of the incident that led to my terrifying predicament. However, I had been working at the Zoo for less than a month, and had seen numerous incidents where

Norm and Kerry needed backup, even with their significant supposed strengths. I had become involved with helping them on more than one occasion.

That day, I was conversing with the person at the front desk, when both Norm and Kerry rushed past. Kerry stopped only briefly, to tell me to come with them. I did.

The two were on their way to the bar, where a fight had erupted. I followed them, and arrived in time to help break up a group of five fighters. The combatants dispersed rather readily, but one of them headed back out into the lobby. He had been the most vocal of the brawlers. All three of us followed him out to the lobby, and outside. The intent was to make sure that the guy left the premises.

The front entrance consisted of two sets of double glass doors, with a foyer about six feet deep by six feet wide in between. Each set of doors could be locked with a simple turn of a deadbolt, from the inside. In front of the double doors was a taxi and hotel rooms loading circle. Bar patrons were restricted from parking there.

But, contrary to allowed practice, an early 1970s burgundy Corvette, with Quebec licence plates, was parked in the loop. It was to this car that the fighter moved. He opened the driver's side door, and, I assumed, was preparing to get in and drive away.

I stood, with Norm and Kerry, between the two sets of doors for about thirty seconds, as the guy bent down and reached behind the driver's seat. When he stood up, he raised a hunting knife, with at least a twelve inch blade, in the air. At that exact moment, I watched 500 pounds of flesh bolt for the lobby! Before I could retreat with them, they had closed and locked the interior set of double doors, trapping me in the foyer with this apparent madman with a knife.

As he approached, I was convinced that the knife was the hugest blade that I had seen!

The guy crushed inside the foyer with me, still holding the knife at throat level. But, instead of using it on me, he waved it around for four or five minutes while he shook his other fist at Norm and Kerry, and yelled obscenities. Norm and Kerry stood there, watching, and, I believe, waiting for me to experience the sharp end of the knife.

The guy would occasionally try the inner set of doors, as if they were going to unlock, miraculously, by themselves. He shouted to the two bouncers that he needed to get in to "help" them. Help them? Help them with what? The initial fight was over long ago.

While I was "enjoying" this man's company, he informed me that he had just been paroled from prison after serving twelve years for manslaughter in Quebec, and that he was going

back to La Belle Province to “finish up the job” on another guy. Then, after sounding off for several minutes, he simply said to me. “No harm to you. You okay.”

And he left.

The police arrived about four or five minutes later, thanks to the front desk clerk and no thanks to Norm and Kerry. Later, the police informed the hotel that they had tracked down the guy, and he was re-arrested for parole violation. They didn’t specify what crime he had been paroled for.

Unlike the prior anecdotes in this collection, I have little to report on any redeeming qualities that the fellow from Quebec may have had. However, in the heat of his anger, armed with a deadly weapon and trapped in a tiny space, alone with one of the people who had interfered in his fight, this supposedly convicted killer had chosen to put away his weapon. So, I ask, was he truly as evil or incorrigible as killers are made out to be, or was he simply someone with a limited way of dealing with issues, who had a heart and a conscience that told him to refrain from harming an innocent person?

In the end, I declined to provide an incident report to the police on the knife. It would have had no benefit to the guy, to me or to the hotel. And, it was part of everyday life in that career, anyway.

Chapter 5

The Plaza Hotel may have been the breeding grounds for the mid-1970s rash of renegades and neo-criminals. The hotel's entertainment focused on hard rock, which equated to hard partying. Even on Saturday afternoons, the lounge would be packed with people listening to blues jam sessions. It was a world of drug abusers and misfits. Yet, it had few of the very violent types that frequented the Maryland. These people were there to party, first and foremost..

But there were exceptions. One was known as the "Wild Man." He had a name, but "wild man" suited his temperament perfectly. It was the Wild Man that solidified my reputation as a fighter, secured me my job as a bouncer at the Zoo, and helped lead me to my work with the Maryland Hotel. It was not his intention, and it was also quite undeserved. My reputation as a great fighter, indeed, was based on false assumptions.

The Wild Man (I'll refer to him as "Bert" on occasion. It is far enough from his real name to protect his identity) was not a large man, but his short black beard and swarthy complexion forewarned of a darkness that lurked under his sullen exterior. Bert was, by any standard, a good-looking man. He had even features, but dark eyes, a slow smile, dark hair, and even completed the image of the "bad guy" by occasionally wearing a black Stetson hat. He was only about 5'10" – slightly shorter than I was, and a couple of years older at around 29. Bert had few friends in the Plaza. Later on, when I would encounter him in the Maryland, I uncovered the handful of people who would associate with him. Even when I stumbled across him at another watering hole, the Grant, he sat alone. He appeared sullen and withdrawn at all times, rarely speaking and even more rarely smiling. It was this type of person with whom I knew, from experience, to be cautious. They tended to be explosive and unpredictable, but exceptionally intense and aggressive when they fought.

Shortly after my run-in with the guy from Quebec, I had my first confrontation with Bert. It began in much the same way as the Quebecer knife incident: Kerry and Norm passed by me on the way to the lounge, where a fight was erupting. They wanted help. I was willing. At that time, I had dropped my weight to about 175 pounds – a skinny thing, briefly.

Bert was one of three people involved in the fracas. He had an extensive history with Norm and Kerry and, in fact, had been barred from the premises. That trespass warning had never been enforced. Bert, though, was unhappy with the expulsion. He had, as I would discover, a long, but selective memory.

Bert was in the process of battling with two other patrons who, we would be told later, had deliberately provoked the Wild Man, just for the fun of it. It was their error. Unfortunately for us, Bert was no team player, or team fighter. He was more than eager to take on the two combatants, and, even though Kerry, Norm and I had arrived to break up the fight, he saw us as the enemy, as well. He didn't discriminate. The Wild Man was ready to take us all on!

Kerry and Norm always worked as a team. Consequently, they went directly to the Wild Man's two opponents, to attempt to subdue them. That would prove to be quite a bit more difficult than would have been expected, given that the patrons were known as cowards who loved to nip at the bigger dogs' heels. But, as Norm and Kerry grabbed the two fighters, Bert attacked by picking up a wheeled tub chair (the vinyl type commonly found in lounges in the 1970s) and raising it over his head in an attack on Norm, Kerry and the other two. I was caught in the middle.

According to eyewitnesses in the lounge, and according to the tales that circulated afterward, I saved the day, using my karate moves to take Bert down. That set of stories fed my reputation, but it was nothing more than a tall tale.

In fact, being caught in between Bert and the four fighters was not my idea of great strategy. And, in order for the Wild Man to attack Norm and Kerry, he had to get around or through me. I had no doubt that he would choose "through." From what I knew of Bert, he didn't have the slightest clue that "around" was a possibility in anything!

But as Bert moved toward me, I just instinctively threw up my left arm to block the chair. I missed, but caught hold of the seat of the chair. Desperation told me not to let go, so I didn't. Instead, I pulled the chair forward and down, in the direction it already was moving. I just wasn't going to be in that path, so I stepped a little to the side.

Onlookers interpreted that I had blocked Wild Man's attack, hit him in the throat, and then threw him to the ground. The reality, again, was quite different. Bert's own momentum carried him forward, and I felt that he was about to fall forward on me, so I got out of the way. As I did so, my foot caught a table leg, and I was about to stumble. To stop my fall, I reached out my right hand, and accidentally caught Bert in the throat with my arm. He fell, I fell on top (because that was a softer landing) and immediately went for his throat.

That much, at least, was intentional!

With the Wild Man down, there was no way that I was going to let him up. I'm sure he would have torn me limb from limb, so I held onto his throat until he weakened and passed out. Then I dragged him upstairs.

The onlookers saw me manhandle him, then throw him outside. In fact, I only waited until I was sure that he was still breathing, then put him in the foyer and locked the inner doors, in the same way as Norm and Kerry had done to me a week or so earlier.

Meanwhile, Norm and Kerry found that their fight had escalated into an all-out brawl, with another five or six people joining the fracas. I was too tired to re-join them, and let the fight play itself out, without my intervention.

For the next several days, the stories about my “martial arts” talent grew, until the manager approached me and asked me to work part-time as the hotel bouncer, when Norm and Kerry were on days off.

I suppose that the chronicles of my great “skills” reached Bert’s ears, because he never again returned to the Plaza. I did run into him, on occasion, at the Grant Hotel, but he acted as if he did not recognize me. It was only when I moved to the Maryland that he and I became friends, and I learned that there was far more depth and humanity to this person than anyone suspected. I will talk about that in later chapters.

Chapter 6

There are good cops, there are great cops, there are questionable cops, and there are bad cops. I have met and dealt with all types, with the good and great ones far outnumbering the bad ones.

In the mid 1970s, I instructed a hunter safety course in the rural part of the province. Through my work in that program, I worked with several of our local Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers. These cops had a stellar reputation, worldwide, for good reason: they were professional at all times. However, I could not say the same for some of my actions, at that time. I had been raised to be willing to take on anyone and never to back down. While that guideline is a good one in most circumstances, it should always be preceded by a stipulation that one should not back down *when one knows that he is right*.

Road rage can take hold of a person without advance warning. As I was driving down Highway 6, approaching a curve in the road around the hamlet of Gordon, one morning, an eastbound car sped across the highway in front of me, without stopping at the stop sign. Although I slammed on the brakes, I still had to swerve to avoid a collision and, in so doing, drove at high speed into a very shallow ditch. Fortunately, I was able to drive in and out without damage or incident, but the other driver did not as much as slow down to check on damage. This infuriated me.

It was about two miles for me, following the highway and onto the perimeter, between the location of the incident and the point where that gravel road intersected the highway again. It was about one mile for the other driver, but I was able to accelerate and intercept the car just as it reached the perimeter pavement. To prevent the car from getting past me, I blocked the road with my truck, then jumped out and dashed to the driver side of the vehicle.

There were three young males in the car, but, as I approached, the driver quickly rolled up his window and locked his doors. He could see that I was more than angry.

In frustration at this apparent cowardice, I kicked at the side of the door, creating a large dent in the door panel. At this point, the driver sped into the ditch and around my vehicle, then drove off at high speed.

By the end of the workday, I had forgotten about the incident. Such is the nature of anger: it rises fast and dissipates almost as quickly. However, at about 8:00 pm, the local RCMP arrived at my door. I knew the officer, and he recognized me. That familiarity, though, had no impact on his conducting of the duty to which he was assigned.

He enquired as to whether I recalled the activities of that morning. I had been raised to accept responsibility for my actions at all times, and under all circumstances. That interrogation was a test of that moral principle, but I admitted that I had done the damage that the other driver claimed that I had done.

The cop asked additional questions, which led to a discussion of why I had done so. I explained about the reckless driving component, and the other driver's failure to stop.

At the conclusion of the interview, this officer informed me that he would be speaking to the other parties, and indicating to them that they had a legitimate complaint against me for attempting the assault, and for wilful mischief, and that he would be recommending that they file the needed information to have the charges laid. However, he also indicated that he would be informing them that I had cause for a complaint under the Highway Traffic Act. It would be up to each of us two parties to determine if we wished to proceed. Ultimately, neither of us did.

The approach and handling of the matter belied the relative youth of this officer, and, in the end, provided the best possible solution to the altercation. If the police officer had not acted with understanding, as well as professionalism, I would have ended with a criminal record, and the other driver would have faced several costly Highway Traffic Act charges.

All of this took place because of one moment of stupidity by the other driver, and several moments of anger by me. It was a clear example of how a few seconds of poor thinking have the potential to ruin, instantly, a person's life!

However, this incident was not an isolated one, at least from my perspective.

During the course of my first marriage, I had a very difficult relationship with my father-in-law. One of the main conflicts revolved around his daughter's and my decision to build our home in the country, twenty miles from Winnipeg. It was his oft-expressed opinion that I should not move his daughter out of the city, and, in particular, out of the part of town where her parents lived. Indeed, in the year prior to building our house in Grosse Isle, my wife had insisted that we cancel our accepted offer to purchase on a home in Niverville, based on her father's wishes. In that era, we were taught to respect our elders. In this matter, I did not.

Because, I believe, of his opposition to our decision to locate to the country, my wife's father had not visited her new home in the eighteen months since we had moved into it. However, he continued to call her by phone, and we continued to go into the city to visit her parents, whenever they requested it.

One day, I received a call from my wife's dad, who asked to speak to her. His manner of dealing with me, and his continued expectation that we would "jump when he said jump" irked me immensely. I indicated to him that his daughter was unavailable (she was in the washroom), and he accused me of lying to him to keep him from seeing his daughter. I had had enough, and told him that there was no "f___g way" that I was going to let him speak to her just then. I told him that he had two choices: call back later and hope that I would put her on the phone, or come out to the house himself. I then hung up. He called back immediately. This time, I accused him of having no guts, and "invited" him to come out, bring his two sons with him, and see if he could manage to take me on. I told him that I knew he didn't have the courage to do so by himself. It was a direct attempt at provocation.

My wife's father responded by calling the RCMP, and telling them that his daughter was in danger, and that I had threatened him. According to the RCMP officer – not the same one with whom I had dealt two months earlier – her dad had indicated that his daughter was in danger, as well.

Throughout this time, my wife was unaware of the incident.

By now, I was furious. Although the confrontation had nothing to do with the police, except that they had been called to defuse the matter, I saw that anyone who did not support me was against me. That, too, is a hallmark of the rage that many people who cross the line into criminal action demonstrate. They cannot isolate the incident or their reactions to it reasonably, or quickly. I was pissed at the cop, now, as well as at my wife's father, and even at her. Two innocents, yet I was lashing out at everyone.

After I refused to allow the cop to enter or to speak to my wife, he returned to his unmarked cruiser, which was parked in my driveway. I waited no more than ten minutes, then called the RCMP detachment to tell them of an "unauthorized vehicle" in my driveway. They knew that I knew, and I knew that they knew that I knew who was in the car. I indicated that, if the car did not depart from my road immediately, I would be required to forcibly remove it, or simply disable it by deflating its tires.

At this point, my actions would have been sufficient for the police to determine that I posed a risk, and that they needed to verify my wife's safety. They could have entered the home without any warrant, based on these provocations. But they chose not to. Instead, the officer merely backed his car out of the driveway and parked on the public access road, in view of my living room window.

I was waiting for my wife's family to arrive, which I knew would not be occurring. But I wanted to allow enough time to be able to point out their "cowardice" later, even though the only member of the family with whom I had ever had a dispute was the father.

After about a half hour of the standoff, I upped the ante. I had two of the guns that I used in my hunter safety instruction course at the house, but no shells or bullets. I no longer hunted, but no one, except me, knew that I had no ammunition. I took the Cooey .22 into the living room, and pretended to clean it, in full view of the cop outside.

If I had been in his shoes, I most likely would have responded immediately by calling in backup, and arresting me. I was a very real danger, at this point. The RCMP officer, seeing the gun, could have felt immediate danger to himself. Fortunately, again, the cop exercised exceptional tolerance, and neither called in backup nor responded to my provocation. He merely waited.

My attempt at riling him had failed. Throughout the seventy minutes between the time of the initial call by my wife's father and the display of the gun, I had consumed six or seven beer, observed, in part, by the cop. Ultimately, I tired of the whole matter, and, being fairly well intoxicated, decided that I would end things for the day.

I approached the cop car, he rolled down his window, and I informed him that I was going to the nearby pub to "get pissed," as if I was not already at that state.

The cop possibly should have discouraged me from doing so, or arrested me as soon as I climbed into my truck. Instead, he simply advised me to be careful, and I drove away.

According to my wife, he then confirmed that my she was okay, telephoned her father to advise him, and let the matter drop. As I pulled into the hotel parking lot, I observed a marked RCMP car pull in to the lot, pause, and then proceed away. They were just ensuring that everything was under control.

Two very clear points were demonstrated in this incident. There are a great many very dedicated, very professional police who look after our safety, and often get abused in the process. Also, anger can turn a normally reasonable person into an out-of-control criminal in a split second, and the few minutes of disgusting behaviour should in no way be used to mark a person as an incorrigible.

Chapter 7

Another good cop, with whom I dealt many times, revealed just how easy it is to risk one's future, with a silly mistake. This cop was a real by-the-book type, who felt that it was not his position to judge people. He was responsible for enforcing the law, not interpreting it. On many minor incidents where he was dispatched to respond to a request by me or one of my investigators, he would complete the tedious paperwork in the same diligent manner as if he were processing a murder. He never complained about the pedantic nature of the job, and never complained or criticized any of the suspects with whom he dealt. He would process everyone with the same equal, effective manner.

But GS was disliked by many of his fellow officers, because he refused to stray over the line, and would not permit any of those with whom he worked to do so. As a result, some of the cops on the force did not trust him to "have their backs." That was extremely unfair, as GS would have risked his life to save an innocent person from a mere scratch.

However, being a police officer takes its toll on an individual, and on a person's relationships. GS's long hours (he often worked long after his shift ended, making sure that the information on his reports was completely accurate, following up on victims, and so on) eventually contributed to his marriage breakdown. It was not of his choosing, since he was extremely devoted to his family. I heard rumours, unconfirmed, that his partner found another person that she felt was more suitable to her.

GS and I had a very good relationship, and, wherever I could, I provided him with information on activities in the community that might prove to be valuable to him in his job. He, in turn, kept me informed on people of interest to me.

At first, after the breakup, GS handled things well, but the increased stress of continuing to put in the long hours, the "betrayal" of a relationship and the loneliness got to him.

One Saturday afternoon, he arrived at one of my clients' locations where he knew he could find me, and wanted to talk. He had been drinking heavily, and should not have been driving. For the better part of an hour we talked, or, more correctly, he cried and I listened. It was difficult seeing such a strong person exposing himself so thoroughly. After he had exhausted himself in this manner, GS decided it was time to head out looking for his ex-spouse.

I struggled, fruitlessly, to convince him to wait, at least, until he had sobered up. He wouldn't give in. I took his keys from him, but he retrieved a second set from his truck.

I pointed out to GS that, given the hostility of some of the other district police to him, he was risking being pulled over by one of them, and hit hard with charges. It would have ended his career, and he was a career cop. I pointed out that he was putting others at risk, but he insisted he was fine. He was far from it.

Ultimately, GS did leave, drunk, and drove home. I had, at least, convinced him he should do that, since he would not let me drive him home. Fortunately, the story has a somewhat happy ending, as he did make it home without incident, and eventually moved on in his relationship life. He retired a few years ago, after putting in several more years than he required to achieve full retirement. He was that dedicated. Yet, a few moments of emotional weakness almost cost an exemplary cop's future.

Chapter 8

Most of us are intimidated by size. In the businesses in which I worked, size impacted on situations. Yet, I knew of a hotel bouncer weighing less than 160 pounds, with no martial arts skills or formal fight training who could deal with any size and almost any number of unruly patrons. He used his head, more than his minimal muscle. I know other bouncers who, in spite of great size, were completely inadequate in their jobs.

Often, big, muscular bouncers actually attract unruliness and conflict. The psychology behind this anomaly is simple. After a few drinks of liquid courage, many guys want to prove their toughness by taking on the tough, mammoth-sized security people, thinking that this will enhance their reputation among their friends as being a great fighter.

Of course, liquid courage never makes anyone stronger!

But, on the other hand, taking on a smaller or average-sized person provides no degree of tough-guy image. If one loses to a smaller person, ridicule is likely to follow, and if one wins, there is no glory. If one takes on a big man and loses, friends may grant that the guy was just too big to deal with. If one takes on a big guy and wins, that's a badge of glory! So, ultimately, an average-sized bouncer, with average skills, is the ideal security, because he is not waving the red flag of toughness.

Even outside of the bar scene, size of one's opponent can be an intimidating factor, but very often a misleading one.

One such person was BF.

I crossed paths with this giant on three separate occasions. The first time I saw him was when I went to collect an NSF cheque repayment from him. At that time, I knew nothing about him, or his background. Collecting bad cheque debts had risks of its own, and I often exposed myself to great risk in order to collect a mere handful of dollars.

When I knocked at his door, I was met by a man that was only about 6'3", but weighed in at a well-muscled 280. In spite of the threat that his size posed, I demanded the payment on the cheque. He assured me that he would pay by the end of the week. I had heard that one before! Surprisingly, he kept his promise, precisely.

The second time that I crossed paths with him was more indirect. I had placed an undercover investigator in a business that was experiencing significant losses in inventory. The company, an exporter, needed to plug this hole that had cost them nearly \$90,000 in the prior three months.

While investigating the losses my employee identified a worker who was passing these goods out a remote door, to be picked up by her boyfriend.

Coincidentally, at the same time, the local police were monitoring this site, because one of their detectives had found a fence selling these goods in a local hotel, and wanted to track back to the source. Our client was unaware that the cops were involved.

I encountered them, as they sat in a red Reliant K-car, dressed in suits, blocking the back lane of an industrial area. Subtlety obviously was not their strong suit. When I asked them to back off for the sake of our investigation, they refused.

On the day that we concluded our investigation and provided our evidence to the police, they raided the female employees' home, to secure any stolen goods. The boyfriend, BF, was at the apartment at the time. He escaped by climbing out the window, but was quickly arrested. It was an easy "bust," since he was known to the police, and had reportedly acted as an informant for one of the officers in the past! Our video of him retrieving the stolen merchandise from the hidden location near the building didn't hurt, either. It was, to say the least, a strange coincidence.

Now, as to the most intriguing, and revealing contact that I experienced with this man.

He and his girlfriend had a small child together. He was unemployed, and, now, she also was unemployed. Both were facing criminal charges.

One day, while I was working in a local Penner Foods store, I happened to spot a man who I believed was preparing to shoplift a few items. I observed as he concealed numerous items in his pockets and jacket, before leaving the store.

As he left, I approached him. He was a sizeable man, and I fully expected that there would be a major confrontation. Instead, when I approached him, he turned to come back into the store, and began to cry, silently as he walked in. By the time we entered the interview room, he was sobbing, almost convulsively, but he had not spoken a word. At any time of his choosing, he probably could have pushed me aside and escaped, but he made absolutely no effort to resist or run.

In the interview room, I learned his name: BF. I had not recognized him in the eight months since he had been arrested, as I had not dealt with him directly, and had not associated him with the prior bounced cheque.

This person had every reason to run, and every probability of success, yet he had willingly faced the consequences of his actions.

As I processed him and retrieved the stolen goods, I discovered that absolutely every one of the ten items he had taken were for his child: Pablum, Kool-Aid, Heinz baby food a soother, and a small toy. \$27 total. Not one item was for his own use.

I was able to learn from him that he and his girlfriend had run out of money, and he was stealing to feed his child. Actual theft through need, instead of through greed, is extremely rare, contrary to popular belief.

Although I had established a firm policy for myself and my employees that anyone stealing more than \$20 was to be prosecuted, I decided that, in this case, I would act as judge and jury. I would not call the police.

However, as I prepared to set BF free, Peter Pauls, the store manager interceded. He had observed the interview, and told me I was not to release BF just yet. This was in contravention of my contract agreement with that retailer, and I told him so. Peter simply asked that I trust him, and that I keep BF there for a while. Although I was reluctant, I acquiesced.

Ten minutes later, Peter's assistant manager arrived in the office with nearly \$150 worth of baby supplies, plus some meat and other foodstuffs for the adults. BF insisted that he could not accept the gift. The manager pointed out that the items were not a gift. When BF was able to repay the store, he could do so at his leisure. None of us expected that the amount would be repaid.

Oddly, less than eighteen months later, BF returned to pay off the entire debt! He had received a suspended sentence on the major charges of receiving stolen goods, and had obtained a full-time job. Two years later, BF was still employed at that job. Unfortunately, I recently learned that he had run afoul of the law again. He had apparently become a drug user, and has had difficulty kicking the habit. It is unfortunate, since he showed more good than bad in my encounters with him.

Apparently, not only is there good in everyone, but there is a very realistic chance that, given the right opportunities, even repeat criminals can reform. I also learned not to judge a book by its cover, regardless of how big that book may be!

A very clear example of misjudging someone occurred in mid-July, 1992 at that same Penner Foods store. It was an illustration, as well, of some of the most disgusting police work I have observed, and of great civilian justice.

On some days at that store, it was not uncommon to apprehend six to ten sets of shoplifters in an eight hour period. With that type of volume, it would have been unrealistic to summon the police for each offender, as it would have overwhelmed the law enforcement and judicial systems. It was the primary reason why we had set the minimum criteria for requesting charges at \$10 initially, then \$15, then \$20, and finally, \$25.

At the time of this particular incident, the threshold was \$20.

In the middle of July, the wild rice picking season in Manitoba generally is just getting underway. It is a gruelling job, requiring that the harvesters ride in a canoe through the marshes, with one person paddling the boat, while one or two harvest.

The paddler, quite often, has to pole through shallow areas of mud and muck and, as the boat is laden with rice seed, it rides lower in the water, making navigation a backbreaking task.

The harvesters have only a marginally easier role. Each holds two flat boards (similar to paddles). As the canoe is pushed through the swamps, the harvester holds the one paddle horizontally over the interior of the boat, while using the other paddle to swoop the long rice stalks over top of the other paddle. The two paddles are raked together to beat the rice seeds loose into the boat. It is a tedious, repetitive undertaking that requires very strong shoulder and arm muscles and exceptional endurance.

Typically, a harvest day will last fourteen hours, from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm or later, for three weeks or so. Throughout that torturous time, mosquitoes, black flies and no-see-ums harass the workers mercilessly.

The harvest is such an undesirable job that it is left to the First Nations people to undertake it. I find it ironic that we non-natives freely and easily criticize the “laziness” of these people, yet a very few of us could endure the strain of conducting such a harvest, or digging Seneca root out of stony ground for twelve hours per day, four weeks in the hottest parts of the summer. Even the tough First Nations people find the insects unbearable, however.

On one Saturday in late July, five natives – two children, two women and one man – entered the Penner Foods store on Henderson Highway. Although I usually made every effort to avoid singling out potential shoplifters based on ethnicity or age, this group stood out because of their mannerisms. To me, it appeared obvious that they were in the store to steal.

I observed as the five proceeded to the aisle where the insect repellents and tanning lotions were located, and watched as two women handed four bottles of repellent to the two kids, who concealed them. Both children were under ten. They then moved out of the aisle, but the adult male returned and pocketed two bottles of repellent, on his own.

As they were leaving the store, I discreetly obtained the assistance of one of the store employees to make the arrest. However, two other aboriginal males entered the store at that time, and we expected that we would be facing a confrontation. We were wrong.

When I indicated that the two women and one male were under arrest and that the kids had to come back into the store with us, as well, all seven complied quietly.

Once in the detention room, I indicated that the other two males could leave, but they requested that they be allowed to stay and, since they seemed to be posing no problem, we agreed to their request.

Throughout the entire interview process, every one of them was friendly, cooperative and forthcoming. I made this fact clear in my incident report.

However, since the value of the goods was slightly over \$30, we opted to summon the police. They arrived within ninety minutes.

In my report, I had made it clear that the two late-arriving males were not part of the theft. I also documented the ages of the two children, who were well under ten.

When the police arrived, they began the entire process in an extremely aggressive manner, handcuffing the three males and separating the women from the men. The detainees had offered no resistance or reason to suspect that they posed any danger.

A few of them had no identification, and, so, the police decided that they were going to detain them in the district holding cells until they could verify who they were. This is fairly common practice, but police also frequently will allow such persons to find someone who can provide identification for the suspects.

In almost every case of shoplifting where no violence is involved, suspects were routinely documented, given a notice to appear and then released. The police decided that all seven of these people were going to be arrested and detained.

The interview that the police conducted also was extremely belligerent, with a few racial comments indiscriminately thrown into the questioning. Because there were so many people in this group, the police cruiser had insufficient space to transport the suspects, so the officers summoned a van from the central district station.

District 1 and District 3 are the districts where the most impoverished residents live, with a heavy concentration of aboriginal people. District 1 is Winnipeg's "skid row" area, as well, with, at that time, nearly a dozen hotels in a ten block radius. The Penner Foods store was located in District 4.

Penner's detention and interview rooms were located in the stock room area, on the east side of the building. The main street of access for the shopping centre is on the west side of the building. It was from the west side that the police van arrived.

I assume that someone had alerted the original officers to the arrival of the District 1 van, because those two arresting cops herded the group of seven out of the stock room, to the front checkout area of the store as the new police officers entered. From the east side of the building, one of the cops shouted at the District 1 cops "You should keep these ____ (a racial slur) where they belong: in your part of town."

That comment drew immediate attention to the situation from the more than forty people in the checkout area.

The second officer then met up with the new arrivals, and instructed them to bring the van around to the loading docks. He then returned to the natives that the police were detaining, and, as the two cops herded (I choose the word intentionally) the group along the front of the store, from the east side to the west, down the far aisle and back along the south wall to the east side loading docks, they commented loudly to the natives that they were going to have to "take these animals out to the garbage area."

The entire episode was extremely distasteful, and I commented to the cops that I did not think that these people deserved such treatment. One cop told me that it was the only way to get the message across.

This incident concluded shortly after noon.

Later that day (around 3:30) I apprehended one individual for theft of Kodak film with a value of \$38 – slightly more than the amount taken by the natives.

This fellow was from a very affluent background, was an elder in one of the local churches and a Sunday School teacher. He had a prior history of making insurance claims for a camera that was allegedly stolen, but, after a number of claims, the insurance company informed him that they would be investigating subsequent claims. Apparently, no further claims were made, and no case of fraud was ever investigated, with no charges ever laid.

When I arrested this person, he was extremely hostile. He informed me that he would get off on any charges, and that he would see to it that I was held accountable if this matter caused his scheduled trip to Europe to be delayed. That, of course, did not make me particularly inclined to view him favourably, and I had no hesitation in calling the police on him, even though he was nearly sixty.

When the police arrived, they allowed this person to call his lawyer, even before they had formally documented him or obtained his particulars. They treated him respectfully, in spite of notations in the incident report that indicated that he had acted in a non-cooperative manner. They prepared his Notice to Appear, and arranged for him to be released discreetly, even though he had no identification on him (He had indicated that his drivers licence was in his car. He was known to us, in part, because we had observed issues with him earlier and because of his involvement in the local church).

I had decided that I was going to follow up on the dispositions in both of the cases in which I had summoned police that day. The courts regularly sent us disposition sheets on people that we had arrested and had charged, so that we could arrange to release the merchandise that was being held as evidence by us. However, there were frequent gaps in the reporting, and often we were not notified about the disposition of a case.

The incident with the natives went quickly. They pled guilty, one received a suspended sentence (she had lengthy involvement with the police for property crimes) and two received fines. None were in any financial position to pay those fines.

The other case took much longer, and, in spite of numerous requests for information, our queries went unanswered. I attended at the crown offices in the law courts building over a year later, and found that the charges had been dropped –not stayed – against this well-heeled fellow. I was less than pleased.

However, the matter did not end there. I casually let another member of his congregation know about the incident, and that person decided to bring it up at the next church meeting.

The elder that I had arrested admitted to his actions, and the church sanctioned him by requiring him publicly to confess his sin. That Sunday, he stood up in front of the entire congregation and admitted his errors – both the theft and the attempt to conceal it.

In accordance with that church's policies, he was instructed to offer three times the value of his theft to Penner Foods, as restitution. The store declined, and, instead, asked that he make the contribution to a local soup kitchen. The shoplifter not only agreed, but chose to contribute, in Penner Foods' name, six times the amount stolen. He then proceeded, voluntarily, to stand in front of his Sunday School group and admit his errors.

I give full credit to this man, who, at first, arrogantly insisted that he would get off on all charges, but, in the end, more than atoned for his actions. He showed, ultimately, true quality of character. The same can not be said for the policed officers looking after each of the two shoplifting incidents that day. Perhaps, the first set of police thought that they were doing us a

favour by treating our thieves in the manner in which they did. Those police did not do us a favour: they did us all a disservice. Perhaps the second set, and the crown attorneys both thought that they were doing this almost-senior a kindness. They were not. In both cases, the cops acted poorly, and did more harm to their reputations than a dozen good deeds would have done.

Chapter 9

I have provided you with inglorious examples of bad cops and bad behaviour by cops. However, I want to counter that impression by telling you a little about some exceptional policing.

There was one particular cop in District 4 (the Penner Foods area) who, on every occasion in which I encountered him, went well beyond what was expected as a cop. Mostly, he did so because I rarely dealt with him when he was in uniform. Every time I encountered him while he was off-duty, he still provided exceptional commitment and professionalism, just as if he were on shift. Two incidents highlight this attribute.

This cop's last name was Lyons. He demonstrated the courage of a lion, on both occasions. Constable Lyons was not a big person. In fact, he was about an inch shorter than I was, and weighed in at about 185 pounds. But he handled himself like a man twice that size, heart and all.

The first incident should have been a very minor one. I had observed a man in his early forties stealing \$6 worth of Reilmeister stomach bitters, and pursued him out of a Food Fare store in East Kildonan, into the mall common area. There, I approached him, indicated that he may have forgotten to pay for some of our merchandise, and requested that he return to the store with me. He played dumb. I identified the merchandise, and told him where I knew that he had concealed it. He again denied it, so I placed my hand on his shoulder and told him I was going to have to compel him to return to the store, and, if I was wrong, he would be welcome to sue me. At this time, the guy decided to return with me.

I held onto his collar, lightly, as we walked back.

The problem that I faced was that this man was 6'5", and weighed 265. I was 5'11" and weighed 185. But, I had a job to do. The man was not, of course, going to be charged, but he was going to be documented, and barred from the premises. I also wanted to make sure that he didn't have more of our merchandise, before I released him. I didn't inform him of all these facts, so he might have assumed that he was going to be charged.

As we walked, he kept his hand in his right-hand pocket, where the bitters was located. I advised him to keep his hands in his pockets. I didn't believe that he may have had a weapon, but I had been surprised by knives and even hypodermic needles before, so I was vigilant.

As we entered the store, we approached a stack-out, on a pallet, of water softener salt. To my right was a mall exit, and to my left, a little further away, was another exit. As we reached the point between these exits, I felt this man tense, and I knew he was about to attempt to run.

As soon as he broke to his right, I used his momentum to swing him in a full circle, and he stumbled over and landed on the softener salt bags. I deliberately came down on top of him, with him face up. This was the safest position for me, as he would have had difficulty escaping. The store assistant manager – also a larger man, 6'1", 220 pounds – arrived, to see if help was needed.

The shoplifter discarded the two bottles of bitters, but we both observed him, and I demanded that he pick them up. At that point, the fight seemed to deflate out of the man, and he willingly got up, and took a couple of steps into the store with me.

Just at that moment, Constable Lyons arrived, off duty. He asked me if everything was okay, and I advised him that it was, but asked if he wouldn't mind walking this man back into the office with me. Lyons agreed, and informed the man that he was an off-duty officer, producing his badge.

Instantly, the shoplifter became belligerent, and, again, as he tried to break free, I was able to spin him around and against the wall. This time, Officer Lyons stepped in, and advised the man that he should calm down, as things would likely go a lot smoother for him if he did. The guy stood up again, and walked with us back to the office, sullenly.

Once in the office, though, he first attempted to take a seat in my office chair, and was required to vacate it. I sat him on an overturned milk crate, beside me.

This was common practice with people who had shown that they wanted to "play it tough." By placing him lower than I was, I was establishing a pecking order. Constable Lyons and the assistant manager both stood at the doorway, while I prepared my incident report.

At first, this guy refused to provide any information. That type of belligerence was not uncommon, and I was used to handling it. Lyons stood, quietly, as I conducted my interview. When he refused to give his name, I pretended to write on the form, and indicated aloud, "Suspect uncooperative. Refuses to give name. He had neither refused nor agreed, but he didn't like the idea of me suggesting in this "official" report that he was uncooperative. He stated his name, as if bragging. R___ H J___. He emphasized the middle initial. I pretended to write again, "Suspect has no identification," as if I hadn't heard him.

He repeated his name, exactly as before, but more loudly. I wrote it down, but recited it the way he had said it, as if mocking him. Because I had gained the upper hand on him in the earlier confrontation, I wanted to impress upon him that I could handle him. The reality was that I couldn't have, if he had wanted to fight, but he now felt that I could. This verbal abuse showed him that I was completely in control. Most times, that tactic worked well.

"Weight?" No answer.

"Weight?" No answer again.

"210," I said, writing down "250." His weight didn't matter, anyway. It just happened to be part of the form.

"265!" He almost shouted out his weight.

"No," I said, looking him over. "220 max. That's mostly loose fat."

This pissed him off.

"I'm 265."

"220," I said, and moved on. He was truly irked.

"How tall?"

He said nothing.

"Six one," I said, writing down what I knew his height to be.

"I'm six five," he declared.

"Stand up." I looked him over.

"Naw, six three at the most."

It was all intended to establish dominance and control, and it was working. He sat back down, almost slumping in the already low seating position on the milk crate.

Both the manager and Lyons were chuckling.

I completed the form, and told RHJ to stay put while I went to get a photocopy. He still had not been advised as to whether I would call the cops or not.

I was gone no more than three minutes. When I returned, RHJ and Officer Lyons were standing, with Lyons' forehead against RHJ's forehead, Lyons reaching up, and RHJ reaching down. Both were flailing away at each other, punching like Mike Tyson in a clinch.

I yelled at RHJ to stand back, and, immediately, he did so!

I was told by the assistant manager shortly afterward that, the moment I left the room, RHJ had said that he was going to leave, and tried to push past the cop. The cop merely told him he would have to wait, and RHJ attacked Lyons. Although he was outweighed by nearly

eighty pounds, and was more than a good half a foot shorter, Lyons made sure that RHJ did not leave.

I called Constable Lyons outside the office door, after telling RHJ to “sit the f___ down.” RHJ immediately did so, again.

I told Lyons that I had not intended to charge the guy until he assaulted a police officer, and that I would call dispatch right away.

Lyons simply responded, “It’s part of the job, Bob. I’m okay with it if you are,” and left it at that.

I released RHJ shortly after. I encountered him about three months later in another store, where he was, again, shoplifting. This time, he offered absolutely no resistance, and was released again. Why he gave in to me each time, I do not know. He could easily have handled me.

In the second incident, his wife and son came looking for him while I was “writing him up.” I consider myself very lucky that the two of them were disgusted with RHJ’s actions, because the son was equally as large as his father, in great shape and twenty years younger. I would have been in real trouble if they had wanted to argue the point!

Lyons, though, was the real star. He had no reason to step in to offer to help, had no reason to put himself at risk later, and had no reason to choose to give this guy a break. He did all of it because he was both professional and compassionate. He was a true cop.

The second incident that highlighted Lyons’ quality of character involved another large man, and, again, this police officer was off duty. This story, though, had a few more twists than the first, and involved the best and worst behaviours of several people, myself included.

LK was another of the oversized shoplifters whom I encountered over a career that spanned eighteen years. The vast majority of people with whom I dealt in that time frame were very ordinary people, of ordinary size, with very ordinary stories. But, of course, very ordinary stories would not be appropriate in a book about “wild animals,” so most of the people I have featured here are unique in some way or another.

LK was 6’3”, 245 pounds, and, in the early 1990s, was ten to fifteen years younger than I was. Until I was involved with him on this day, I had never seen him.

Most of our shoplifters (more than seventy percent) were regular customers, but those that stole to resell often only would show up in any store once or twice in six months. LK seemed to be just beginning his new career in theft.

When he entered the Penner Foods store, it was clear why he was there, and what he was after. As he stepped in, he looked to the meat department, looked around the store, grabbed a hand basket and immediately headed to the meat area and, in particular, the high-end steaks.

One of the butchers working in the department was Les Fright. Les was on the thin side and about 5'9", but he was a fearless individual. On many occasions, he had seen me leaving the store in pursuit of a shoplifter, and had rushed out to assist me, if needed.

When LK hit the meat area, he caught Les' attention immediately, and Les detected me watching LK just as quickly. For that, I was thankful.

LK didn't waste time. Grab the meat, fill the basket, head to the next aisle over, stuff the meat in his jacket and out the doors.

In less than two minutes, he had more than \$80 in stolen goods concealed and was exiting.

As he rushed out the door, I was on the dead run behind him. There was no finesse in this theft!

The entire incident happened so quickly that Les did not realize that we had left the store. It took him almost another minute to catch up to the action. That may sound like a very short time, but in such explosive situations, a minute is more than a lifetime.

As LK exited, I didn't let him get two steps beyond the doors before I shouted out that he was under arrest, and then grabbed him. I wasn't prepared for a run, since I run like an aged elephant, wasn't eager for a fight, and since I didn't stand a chance. I needed surprise, and a lot of luck.

As I grabbed LK, he turned on me, and I was able to throw him back against the plate glass windows of the store, adjacent to the doors. I was trying to swing him back through the doors, but, even with momentum on my side, LK was too big and too strong. I missed.

LK then grabbed me, and, like some sort of high-speed waltz, swung me around and threw me against the plate glass window, in retaliation. More correctly, he nearly threw me through the glass. This was a major mismatch in strength. With a lot less energy, I tried to reverse the tables on him again, but was barely able to swing him around into the dividing rail between the "In" and "Out" sets of doors.

LK easily threw me backward, into a couple of shopping carts. It was the carts that kept me from being thrown to the ground. I was losing this battle, and, at that point, lost my grip on LK as I struggled to keep my footing.

He used that break to run. I noticed, at that point, that he was wearing cowboy boots – not the best footwear for jogging! Of course, he had on his leather jacket, on a warm spring day. Leather is not light. He also had about fifteen pounds of meat inside his jacket. All in all, he was at a distinct disadvantage in a normal footrace. This was not a normal race.

While I was regaining my footing, LK was gaining a couple of large running steps on me. He was running to escape. I had to run because it was my job to catch him. I think that helped to slow me down a little, too. Before the two of us had run the length of the side of the building, he had tossed three shopping carts in my path, to hinder me. I probably could have hurdled them. I chose to run around them, costing me another couple of paces. He was now twenty yards ahead of me. As I pursued him across the parking lot of the hotel behind the store, he put another twenty yards between us. Clearly, this was not going to end well!

By the time that he had run a hundred and fifty yards, and was now into a nearby apartment parking area, I was almost fifty yards behind. It was then that I saw Les, speeding out of the far side of the Penners parking lot, into the apartment parking area.

While I was losing one step to every three of LK's, Les was gaining two to every three of this giant. He would catch him in another hundred yards or so, and he would have to face this huge man on his own for ten seconds or so, before I would catch them. I could almost visualize Les being pulverized by the man's strength. Apparently Les could not visualize it. He was gaining, with no letup.

Across the parking lot was a cross street, and a main avenue, with a four-way set of stop signs for the traffic. The moment that LK crossed the intersection, I watched a car jump the grassy boulevard, directly into his path. LK bounced off the side of the car and stumbled. Les was upon him.

The car, I found out later, was driven by one of our shoppers, who knew both of us and intentionally had blocked LK's path. She drove off without getting out of the car, as soon as she saw Les and I grab the man. She had more faith in our ability to apprehend him than I did!

In the few seconds that it took me to catch up to the action, LK had regained his feet, with Les on his back. It conjured images of a movie scene, with a tiny woman on some big guy's back, helplessly trying to restrain him. Les was tossed off in the way that someone would shed raindrops off an umbrella.

By now, most of the stolen meat had fallen out, some of it like Gretel's bread crumbs along the route of pursuit.

As Les held on like a tiny dog with a Frisbee in its mouth and the owner's hand on the Frisbee, LK attempted to free himself and run, at the same time. By now, I had caught up, and grabbed LK by the jacket collar. Les's weight and my hold managed to drag the thief to the ground, where I immediately grabbed him by the throat, with my thumb squeezing behind his windpipe. It always worked to sap the strength from an opponent, and worked this time, as well.

Once LK was completely weakened, I let go of my grip, and pulled his arm behind him, bringing him to his feet. Les had the other arm.

Alternately, we let go of each arm, instructing LK to remove his jacket. He complied with the first sleeve, but refused with the second. The bottom of the jacket was still zipped, so I zipped it up part way and pulled the jacket off his shoulders. This helped to trap his other arm, which I still held with one hand. We both sat him to the ground.

I instructed Les to take LK's boots off, so, ostensibly, if he fled again, he would be barefoot and at a disadvantage. That was not strictly realistic, since he would be able to run a lot faster with no shoes than with those cowboy boots, and he had already outrun me easily!

That was more than what LK was willing to tolerate. I suppose he placed great value on those boots.

Again, he was able to twist and turn enough to get back to his feet.

It was then that I realized that, even with two of us, we were likely to lose this fight. Just as Les had done, I jumped on LK's back, grabbing his windpipe again, but now, using my other hand for extra leverage. I squeezed and squeezed and squeezed. LK first went to his knees, then onto his face. I didn't loosen my grip one bit. I was both fearful and furious. That is a deadly combination, in any situation.

As LK lay face down in the mud and grass, he contorted and writhed, both in an attempt to break free and to catch a breath. I kept on squeezing.

A full twenty seconds after he stopped wriggling, I continued to squeeze. When he went completely limp, I let go. Yellow and green vomit and bile oozed from his open mouth, onto the ground. Then a white fluid, and a little blood. He lay still.

For another ten seconds or so, neither Les or I knew what to do. This guy wasn't breathing, wasn't trembling, wasn't doing anything, but liquid slowly ran from his mouth.

First, I pumped on his back, without response. Then I pounded on his back, largely from fear that I had killed him. Then, using all my weight, I put my knees in his back and released, several times.

After what seemed like five minutes, but was less than two, he coughed. Then he flinched, and coughed. Then he threw up. He was breathing again!

We waited for almost five minutes, until LK was able to sit up. The fight had gone out of him completely.

Just then, a four-wheel drive Jeep pulled up, and the guy stepped out.

“Everything under control?”

It was, I believe, Lyons. I had not seen him for nearly a year.

“Hang on,” he said. “I’ll park, and come give you a hand.”

Give me a hand was as literal as it was figurative. When he returned, he simply took hold of LK by the right thumb, gave it a twist backward, grabbed LK’s forearm, and said to him, “This is your choice. You can run again if you want, but I’ll keep your thumb.”

It was an incredible sight to see Lyons, smaller than me, with this man not so much as flinching, while Lyons escorted him along McLeod Avenue, down Henderson Highway to Penners. This long route was probably twice the distance that we had run, and in that time, LK didn’t offer the slightest resistance.

Les and I followed, like puppy dogs. We retrieved about half of the stolen meat. Once we entered the store and walked past the customer service desk, with LK, the cop, Les and myself, the clerk stopped me and handed me the remainder of the meat.

“A customer picked these up after your guy dropped them.” We had recovered every penny of goods!

Les stayed in the office for fewer than a handful of minutes, and then went back to his meat-cutting, as if nothing had happened.

Lyons took full control of the documentation, using one of my forms. Because it was a fellow officer phoning in the request for a car, one arrived within thirty minutes.

As LK recovered some of his bravado and toughness, he demanded that Lyons charge me with assault. He probably had legitimate cause.

Lyons handled it uniquely.

“Stand up,” he ordered LK. “Bob, can you stand beside him?”

I did.

Lyons then stood in front of both of us, less than three feet away. He pointed at my groin area, as he said to LK, “Let me understand this. You want me to charge him (he pointed his finger several times toward me at waist or groin height), charge him, with assaulting YOU.” He then pointed to the top of LK’s forehead.

He repeated the pantomime. “You want me to charge Him (pointing at my groin), with assaulting You (pointing at the top of his head).

Again, he repeated it. Three times in all.

Even with the six inch difference in height, the exaggerated gestures that Lyons used made it appear as if this giant was asking the cop to press charges against some midget.

LK was disgusted. “Oh, f__k. Forget it.” And he sat down.

Lyons hadn’t been abusive, had treated LK well, had been fair, and had not refused to press charges. He used psychology, ability and humanity to handle a situation that I had been unable to handle. Lyons was a one-of-a-kind cop.

The story of LK, though, didn’t end there. Two weeks later, my car broke down, and I needed a weekend to complete the repairs. For three days, I took the bus home. One night, about 9:45 pm, I was sitting at the back of a nearly empty bus when LK got on the bus and walked directly toward me. Instead of confronting me, he looked at me, and then returned halfway up the bus and sat down. He was unwilling to even be near me. I was quite content with that.

That should have concluded my history with him. It didn’t.

Two months later, I read in the Winnipeg Free Press about a man who had been stabbed to death at a house party, by another large man. One of the friends of the victim described the deceased as a “gentle bear of a man, who wouldn’t harm anyone.” The victim? LK. And he really was a bear of a man. I’m just not convinced, from my experience, that he wouldn’t harm anyone! It seemed to me that, even after his near-death episode with us, that LK was a man who was doomed to die in that time frame. But he certainly lives in my memory.

Chapter 10

Police generally were incidental to any involvement that I had with violent people. If they were summoned (which happened less than 1 of twenty times), their role simply was to formally arrest the person. I had the fun, they had the tedium!

More times than not in the hotels, I easily could have called the police. However, it was better for business and better for relationships with the clients, to keep involvement of the law to a minimum. There was more that occurred in some of those bars that was on the wrong side of the law than was going on across much of the residential parts of the city suburbs. They were hotbeds, often, of minor crimes.

As I talked about earlier, the Maryland Hotel was a focal point for several different ethnic groups, including a strong Portuguese contingent. Several of these people were tradesmen: carpenters and so on. Many of them came into the hotel directly after work, drank for a couple of hours, took the mandatory half hour dinner break, and returned early in the evening. They would remain in the bar from 7:30 or so until about 9:30 or 10:00, then head home to their families. In reality, their beverage room companions were more family than their spouses and kids.

The group tended to be fairly boisterous, but got along pretty well, in spite of their liquid courage. On occasion, though, disputes would arise among them. They would engage in some shoving and pushing, infrequent punches and a lot of yelling at each other, then they would acquiesce to my demand that they tone it down, and the night would proceed until after the first three dancers had performed. Then, they would leave, as a group.

One night, though, at about 8:00 pm, a bit of a fracas arose, seemed more intense than usual, then died down before I decided to approach them. The group carried on. About 8:30, the waitress who was serving the group came to me.

"One of those assholes," she said, referring to the two tables of Portuguese friends, "has a screwdriver sticking out of his leg."

These tradesmen often kept their tool belts on while in the bar. In hindsight, I probably should have been more vigilant about these potential weapons, but, until then, I had been given no cause to ban them.

The waitress disliked serving this group, claiming that they were both rude and poor tippers. None of the other wait staff had complained similarly, so I ignored her concerns.

The claim about the screwdriver concerned me, but I didn't really believe it was as clear cut as she said. I was wrong.

When I approached the table, I could see that the screwdriver had been buried through the work coveralls, up to the hilt, in one guy's calf muscle. There was very little blood, though.

I asked about the incident, and about the screwdriver. The entire table lied to me, and I knew it. Just an accident. He did it to himself. The guy agreed.

I suggested that he should head to the doctor. He agreed. But he would only go to the nearby General Hospital after they finished drinking.

The group continued drinking for almost another hour – two more rounds. Then, with the help of two of his buddies (one of whom I later learned had stabbed him), they headed to the emergency ward.

The stabbing victim didn't show up for a week or so, but returned with a severe limp, spending each night drinking with the guy that had wounded him, as if nothing had ever occurred between the two of them! The police never knew of the incident. Such was night life at the Maryland Hotel!

There were many people in that, and most other low-end city hotels, that almost lived on the premises. Their friends and their lives were interwoven with the fabric of life in these bars. I was no exception, at that time. Although I was attending university full-time while working full time at the Maryland, I was working there to support my spouse. We, though, had no relationship at all, and, because of the tension between us, I would spend my off-hours, sometimes, studying at the Maryland. At one point, we separated for some time, and I rented a one-room place in a run down rooming house on Sherbrook Street, two blocks from the Maryland. It had become my family, too. If it was my family, I certainly had peculiar brothers and sisters there!

One, for example, was a very good-looking man, who drove taxi, but spent his evenings off drinking one or two draft beer and swallowing quarter- half- and full hits of acid, one after the other. Most frequently, he had to be assisted home. A very likeable fellow, but a guy on an extremely steep downward slide to death, he was one of many with similar non-descript stories.

He had a couple of friends that dealt in marijuana sales. These brothers were both very decent people, whom I got to know personally even though I had an aversion to druggies. I found that who they were was superior to what they did, and was willing to overlook their actions. In any event, I rationalized, they were only selling to other friends of theirs, and did

not have an “outreach” effort to recruit new users. That, unfortunately, is the cheap rationalization used by many people to ignore crimes of their colleagues. At the time, it kept my conscience at bay, and I partied with them on at least five or six occasions.

These two brothers lived near Penner Foods. After I left the Maryland, I spent a couple of years working in another province, then returned to Winnipeg. There was a gap of five years from the last time that I had seen the two at the Maryland, and when I next encountered one of them, at Penners.

Actually, I observed the one brother several times, without him ever seeing me. I was curious, given his history, as to whether he also shoplifted. I suppose that, to some extent, I was profiling him as a druggie, a drinker, unemployed, and assuming that he might also steal. I should have known better.

In seven or eight visits to the store, he never once so much as acted suspicious. It was not because he was a good thief. It was because he wasn't a thief, at all. I was able to verify that, because I was able to observe him from a secure area of concealment, every time.

As I knew before, and as I learned many times afterward, just because a person does something deviant or socially unacceptable does not mean he is a bad person, or does everything on the other side of the law. Both brothers, it turned out, were very decent people with very bad habits. They were also very lucky, and never ran afoul of the local police force.

In addition to the very violent and very dishonest people in the Maryland Hotel, there were others with equally chequered, if not so extreme penchants. Today, I listen to the Toby Keith song about his bar, and the lookers and hookers in it, and think of one collage of patrons at the Maryland, in particular.

This collage consisted of two brothers and their sister. The sister always emphasized that she was not a hooker. She was not a street walker. She was an escort. Contrary to her pretentious declarations, she was a call girl. She was, in truth, attractive, but no beauty. Yet, in her capacity as patron of the bar, she was nice enough. She even provided additional revenue for the hotel, by occasionally renting an upstairs room for a night or a few hours. If she was no call girl, she must have liked watching television a lot!

She was a friend of my acid-popper, BT. Her two brothers, although not big, or tough, or even personable, were accepted into the milieu of the bar. One of the brothers was more than a little annoying, and a lot sneaky.

“Ron” regularly tried to sneak his buck knife into the bar. Twice I had caught him and barred him for a month each time. I didn’t care for him and didn’t trust him. He didn’t care for me either, and didn’t trust me, so we were even. Except that I always kept the upper hand. In spite of our friction, his brother and his sister and I always got along. I was not there to judge. I was there to maintain peace, and keep the bar revenues flowing at the same time. Both “Sally” and her other brother drank their share, and kept the peace.

Sally partied with us, one time, at the home of my two dope-growing friends. Another time, she accompanied The Wild Man, mentioned in an earlier anecdote, to a gathering. Friendships spread across many of the casuals and regulars in the beverage room. Sex was not a part of the connection, but drugs or stolen goods often were.

Shortly before I left my job at the Maryland, “Sally” disappeared. I did not inquire about her. A few years later, I heard that her brother “Ron” had stepped in front of a train in Alberta, committing suicide. It was not startling news. They all lived a life with risk, frequently in the company of death. Occasionally, one or another would chose to embrace death more aggressively.

It is sad to think that three people could disappear from our world so easily, and be forgotten so quickly, but the type of environment in which they existed lent itself well to making people disposable.

Chapter 11

Often, the line between crime and caring, between right and wrong became horribly blurred. In one of the hotels that I worked, I was told about an incident involving the fourteen-year-old daughter of one of the patrons. She had been abducted and raped. In this part of town, such crimes were not unfamiliar. However, although it seemed to be common knowledge as to who had done it, when that person was arrested, the police ended up releasing him for lack of evidence. Many of the stories that I heard said that the guy was a well-known snitch, and often traded freedom for information.

It was true that he had been released a number of times on minor theft incidents, but he did have a criminal record. It also was very unlikely that anyone could ever trade freedom from prosecution for such a disgusting crime in exchange for a few bits of information on low-level crimes or criminals. Nonetheless, the rumours grew.

One of the people who relied on these bits of innuendo was a fairly burly man, with a fairly solid reputation. He was particularly angered, because the girl was the daughter of one of his best friends, and his buddy was devastated, feeling helpless and worthless because of his inability to deal with the matter.

The girl, meanwhile, was having an awful time. Emotionally, she was a wreck. She left school because of the taunting of some of the boys in the school. She was depressed, but refused help for her problems.

It was more than three months after the release of the suspect that he disappeared. No one spoke of him.

In the early summer, his body was discovered in a bushy area inside the city limits. He had been rather severely beaten and mutilated. For weeks, no one was arrested, and everyone was pleased with that turn of events. In the minds of the bar population, he was guilty, had been convicted and appropriately punished. No tears were shed for him, and most of us cheered the result.

In the late fall, one man, "Pete", was arrested, based on anonymous tips. He was charged in the murder of this alleged rapist. For a few weeks, it appeared he would proceed to trial. Then, unexpectedly, charges were dropped. His court appearance was cancelled. Many of us cheered, again.

Over the next few months, stories that seemed to confirm his part in the killing emerged. Some were even told by him, and one time, alluded to in my presence. None of us spoke up.

No one was ever convicted of the guy's murder, to the best of my knowledge. "Pete" was never again involved with the police. Sometimes, in those bars, police were involved, but did not receive the cooperation that they deserved. I'm not even sure that they wanted this matter resolved.

From one day to the next, the environment could flip from volatile to festive. Halloween was one such occasion.

I had been working the Maryland for six months or so by that time, and had become quite comfortable in the bar. As I have indicated, it felt a lot like family there, sometimes.

I seldom prior and seldom since have dressed up for Halloween, as an adult, but this year, all of my wait staff and I decided we would work in costume. My take on Halloween is that it is an opportunity to masquerade as someone or something that is the alter-ego or inverse of your normal existence. I came as a baby.

Looking back, I concede that it either takes a lot of guts or a lack of brains to dress up as a kid in diapers, when you are supposed to be the tough guy in a tough bar. Yet, there I was, dressed up in nothing more than a diaper, a bonnet and a pair of shoes. I did have my soother with me, though, and that was my salvation.

This joke shop bauble was oversized, and hollow. The ring at the end also could be removed, and the bulb part of the soother filled with one's favourite beverage. At the time, mine was rum. After three hours of work, I was a very happy baby, in spite of having to defuse one minor fight while sucking on a latex toy.

By eleven pm., I was more than happy. I was starting, I think, to gurgle and coo a little. Thankfully, that night was relatively peaceful, with most of the more aggressive regulars partying elsewhere.

However, there was one big gorilla that I couldn't seem to get rid of. Wherever I turned, there it was, with a little sign asking for another beer, a banana in one hand, and a look of romance on its permanently distorted kisser. At least, I saw it as a look of romance, and I was more than a little frightened.

Exactly at midnight, the monkey chose to become involved in a little monkey business. She grabbed me, and planted a prolonged, rubbery kiss on my lips. Hopefully, anyway, it was a female gorilla. In any event, she was not one of the better looking patrons in the bar, and generally there were few that I considered to be Sophia Loren material.

When my shift ended, my car wouldn't start. The end of October in Manitoba rarely is summer weather, so I was grateful for the ride home provided by one of our drinkers. I was even more grateful that I did not have to take the bus, dressed as a two-year-old, and overjoyed that the gorilla my dreams did not offer me a nightmare ride home!

I liked my family, there, more so than I knew at the time. There were occasions when I got just a little more involved in their lives than I should have.

I had a waitress working with me that was the real life template for Carla, from Cheers. She was built like her, and was as crusty yet as likeable as Carla. She spent as much time giving her customers hell as she did interacting with them. Almost all of the regulars liked her, but probably didn't love her. She could instill a little trepidation in the drunkest drunk, or the loudest braggart. But she was extremely efficient, and always accurate with the hotel cash count.

"Carol" let few people into her personal life. She was friendly with the clients, but liked to keep some distance. Similarly, she did not socialize with the rest of the hotel workers. Carol was a little older than the rest of us, probably by ten years or so. For that reason, her interests were a little different, too.

She had a couple of regular friends that would show up at the end of her day shift, and they would go out for coffee and so on. Almost always, they were female friends. Her closest male friends were not invited to the bar by her.

Carol rarely showed a soft side, but you knew it was there, just like Carla. And she had a quick wit.

One shift, just before supper break, Carol was acting a little off-balance, forgetting drinks, miscounting change, etc. I asked her what the problem was and she told me that there was nothing wrong. For several days, she seemed in a constant state of distraction. One afternoon, I accidentally caught her in the hotel kitchen, crying.

It turned out that her best friend was dying, and would not survive even a few more days. A couple of days later, she died.

Carol was devastated, but the only day she took off was the day of the funeral. She depended on her job for her livelihood, and too much time off would cost her too much money. In the two days prior to the funeral, Carol confided a good deal to me about her family, friends and life. She was a very decent person, who had been hurt in relationships.

Apparently, that was why she had not committed to a more permanent relationship with the guy she was seeing. But this friend's death had crippled her emotionally.

I think she was appreciative of my solace, and the fact that someone with my reputation would be considerate enough to care. I was appreciative of the fact that this tough woman was willing to show tenderness, and trust me.

The day after the funeral, I gave Carol a poem that I had written. This was a stunning act for her, since no one in the bar knew that I wrote, often for friends, at their request. I had written everything from fables to poetry for many of them, yet was still viewed as a tough person.

When she read the poem, she cried for nearly an hour. She later confided to me that I had touched on everything that she had told me, and felt most strongly about, regarding her loss and her friend. I was glad to have been able to do it for her.

In the bar, not one other employee or staff knew of or suspected that Carol and I had been able to interact, and share in this manner. I doubt that any, except a few, would have understood. But, in spite of the harshness of the Maryland environment, it was filled with people, and they were people with feelings, hopes, loves and losses. It was an everyday place that those people outside of the bar had never taken the time to reflect upon.

Carol and I never spoke again about either the death, her feelings, or my gesture. That was best.

Chapter 12

There are seven more people from the Maryland that I consider to be representative of the people who live on the other side of the white-picket-fence type of suburbia that many of us consider to be safe. These people, too, have depth of character, and stories that may make some less ordinary folks cringe, and others wonder how a person could survive in that world. The world of the poor and the world of the common working class is a world that many people shun, yet is replete with wonderful anecdotes about intriguing people.

Some of those stories are about romance that would beat the best Harlequin romance. Others are more base than a cow moose rolling in a male moose's urine pit.

Margaret and JF were an interesting couple. JF was a Filipino, but was the biggest Filipino I have ever met, and the most gentle. Margaret was white, a little on the larger side, and an easy-going, gentle person. She was also one of the best waitresses in the hotel. Margaret probably was eight to ten years older than the twenty-year old male.

The Filipino community was well-represented in the Maryland, as they were in the nearby areas of the city. They largely kept to themselves, as did the other ethnic groups, and never, ever caused any problems in the bar. I had come to enjoy their company, more than any other ethnic pocket that frequented the place. I had come to like and trust JF.

Because of his size, JF was viewed as the protector of the smaller Filipino guys that frequented the bar. Because of his size and the fact that he was Filipino, he was often targeted for abuse by non-Filipinos. I had become his protector, while he protected his friends. This was a bit of a strange arrangement, to say the least.

JF never looked for a fight, and never fought in my bar. He did end up, though, getting in battles several times each week on the streets, but seldom was injured.

JF talked as if he were of below normal intelligence, but, in spite of the way he spoke, he was a smart, versatile and interesting fellow. I suppose that was part of the attraction that Margaret had for him. She, too, was more intelligent than she let on, and was an avid reader in her spare time.

JF made a few enemies, but not because of anything he did or said. Most of those who saw him as an opponent had more personal biases. One of those who had a dislike for JF was a biker named "Barry." He, too, was a fairly decent fellow, who did not generally look for trouble, but JF seemed to get under his skin for no reason at all.

One day, one of JF's friends reported to me that Barry was looking for JF to kill him. I took that information as truth, because I knew of what Barry was capable. For the better part of the early evening, there was no sign of either person. About 10 pm, though, JF came into the bar. One of his buddies quickly rushed to him. As I got there, JF was receiving word on Barry's intentions. I urged him to leave the bar, for his own safety. He was, uncharacteristically, unwilling to leave. However, I insisted that he would be barred for the night, and told him that I would take care of Barry. Joe wasn't too happy that I had to fight his battles, and wasn't happy that he had to, as he put it, "run from some little shit."

Barry was no little shit.

JF left within minutes, after I had told him that, once I dealt with Barry, I would let him know if it was okay to return that night. On reflection, today, I see that I played with fire a lot in that hotel!

After JF left, I didn't have to wait long before I had a chance to deal with Barry. The front desk clerk called the bar, to advise me that Barry was in the lobby, with a shotgun, looking for JF. Instead, Barry found me.

I wasted no time getting to the front of the hotel, to intercept Barry. I didn't want him anywhere near the beverage room, because I was certain that, if he couldn't shoot JF, he would most probably shoot one of JF's friends, as a consolation prize.

Barry was in a fairly crazed state, waving the shotgun around with one hand. I have no idea why, but his demeanour didn't cause me any fear. Although I knew Barry was capable of using the gun, I was equally certain that he would not use it on me. He wasn't the type of man to take out his frustrations on someone that he considered to be a friend, and we knew each other well enough to think of ourselves as friends, even though I'm sure that he never bothered to learn my name.

Just the same, he was extremely agitated. To this day, I have no idea why he and JF were so angry at each other.

It took several minutes for me to be able to calm him down sufficiently to talk. Several times, he attempted to get past me into the bar, and several times I had to block his way. Not once did he wave the gun at me, and even went so far as to make sure it was always pointed away. As irritated as he was, he was sufficiently in control to not put me in danger.

I have said that most fights take less than a minute or so, but seem like hours. This incident took almost fifteen minutes to conclude, according to the front desk clerk, but seemed like a few seconds.

Eventually, I was able to convince Barry that JF was not in the bar. I was also able to convince him that he would be barred from the hotel if he persisted in trying to get past me. He knew that I meant it. Slowly, Barry calmed to a mere ticked off state. But he was a biker, and he did not like to look bad.

“Damn it,” he told me, “I came here to shoot someone, and I’m not f___g leaving until I take care of it.”

With that, Barry pointed the gun at the concrete-webbed ceiling of the lobby and fired a blast into the cement.

From three feet away, the sound was not so much a noise, as an impact. The crumbling bits of concrete that bombarded both of us was secondary to the pressure of the blast. It felt like my head was crushed, for a fraction of a second, and then just a dull, distant ache. My head – not my ears – rang for a minute or two. I lost my hearing for the rest of that night, and, for a day after, there was a high pitched whine with me constantly. I was fortunate to not have been deafened, fortunate to not have been caught with ricocheting pellets, and fortunate that I did not have to deal with a biker with a gun who might have been willing to turn it on me.

Barry left as soon as he fired the gun, likely to evade the cops that he may have suspected that the hotel would call. I never saw him again. And we never even considered calling the cops. No one had been hurt, and the ceiling was only lightly damaged. It was a badge of honour, in many ways.

JF had more than his share of troubles, and I felt compassion for him. He had two real friends, as I saw it: Margaret and me. His erstwhile Filipino friends seemed intent on getting themselves into trouble and expecting JF to bail them out of it.

One of those bouts of trouble occurred well away from the Maryland Hotel. Another Filipino had become embroiled in a conflict with a native fellow. That conflict, as many in the area did, led to promises of retaliation, and arrangements were made for this Filipino to meet the native at a specific location.

The Filipino expected that the native would arrive with backup, and asked for JF to come with him, for protection. JF agreed, in spite of Margaret’s protestations. The Filipino was right. The native arrived with a few friends, but, unknown to JF, his Filipino buddy had also summoned a couple of his colleagues. This would be a brawl.

I learned details about the fight a few days later.

The native had produced a knife, almost immediately, and had attacked JF’s friend. JF had placed himself in the way, and had wrestled the knife away from the native. The fight

erupted, with JF stabbing the guy in the upper body. It was the only serious injury of the confrontation.

However, the police were called when the guy with the knife injury showed up at the hospital, and, within a day, JF was arrested for assault causing bodily harm. The injuries were not life-threatening.

The trial proceeded quickly, largely because JF did not want a lot of involvement by his friends. They, too, were less than willing to be identified and come forward. As a result, JF ended up pleading guilty. In his response to the sentencing portion of the hearing, JF failed to advise the court that he had wrestled the knife from the native, who had attempted to injure another person. He failed to mention that he was acting in self defence, because of the crush of guys on the native's side that were after him. He simply acknowledged that he had stabbed the guy. He was sentenced to six months in Headingley Jail.

JF had protected his friends, and even his enemy, right to the end, with his silence.

In the time that he spent in prison, only four of his so-called friends came to visit. Two of them were Margaret and me.

When JF was sentenced, Margaret was devastated. She asked me to compose a story or poem for JF, to make him feel better. I did, and she read it to him on one of her visits. Apparently, this six foot, 240 pound man-child cried when he heard it. For good measure, he cried again when I visited him, while he was thanking me for caring about him. I still have a copy of that poem.

Margaret visited JF three times per week, for the duration of his sentence. Just before I left the Maryland to move west, Margaret quit working at the hotel, too. I have never been able to locate either of them since.

If this was a tender romance, the relationship between "Lyle" and "Debbie" was of the more base type.

Lyle had a constant companion whenever he moved through the city – a fellow by the name of "Brian." Both were former bikers, but Lyle was the more dangerous of the two. He had been expelled from the Bravos gang because of his unpredictable and violent behaviour. Apparently, even the bikers could not trust him to control himself. That, in itself, should have sent fear through anyone crossing Lyle. Few did, even though he was of very average height. Lyle was a snarly sort, but, in my bar, he obeyed the rules, grudgingly. He was forever trying to push the envelope of tolerance, and seemed to know just how far to go before backing off.

I would not say we were friends. We tolerated, and, to some extent, respected each other. Lyle was someone that I regularly checked for weapons, because he was known to carry, almost always, either a knife or a gun. I had never caught him with a weapon in the bar. That offered me some comfort, but not enough that I would turn my back on him. If the Los Bravos didn't trust him, I certainly wasn't going to be stupid enough to turn my back on this dangerous animal. Except once.

The Manitoba Liquor Commission had strict rules. One of them was that we had to shut the bar down for the supper hour. That meant every drink had to be off the tables sooner than one half hour after the 6:30 shut down time, and no drinks were to be served again until 7:30. That rule was strictly enforced, as we never knew when an inspector might be present.

Another rule required behaviours surrounding our "exotic dancers." I have recounted those regulations earlier.

The third rule stipulated that we could have no more than three draft beer per person on a table: two on order and one not yet consumed. Consequently, as closing time approached, there was a rush to get the maximum amount of beverages in front of each dedicated drinker. The fourth rule tied in with the first and the third. Closing time was one a.m. All drinks had to be off the table by 1:30 am. So, we had to serve by 12:59, and the drinkers had to guzzle quickly.

There was a bit of illegal latitude for us in the hotel industry, here, though. Almost everyone in the seedy bars at 1:00 am would be regulars, known to the staff. If there was a stranger, we made sure that every drink was off the table by 1:28 am.

Lyle's girlfriend was one of my staff. Debbie was fairly attractive, a few years younger than the 32-year-old Lyle, and had enough people chasing after her that she didn't have to hook up with Lyle. She chose to do so.

Brian was like one of the buddies in the Wanderer movie: always at Lyle's side. He, too, was no large man, and was no where near as intimidating as Lyle. Just the same, biker credo says that you mess with one, you mess with everyone, so we all knew that if we had to take on Lyle, we would take on Brian and vice versa. It was not a welcoming thought, but, we had accepted our paycheques from the hotel, so we had to earn our pay by doing what we had promised to do. If I had ever had to tangle with Lyle, I would do so, and would know that I would be fighting Brian at the same time. Until this one night, I never had to deal with either or both.

I had two male waiters on staff, who were not the types that I would trust to back me up or do the right thing, in most circumstances.

These two were on duty the night that I ended up in my confrontation with Lyle and Brian. They were responsible for closing down the beverage room, and were responsible for making sure that all drinks were off the tables by 1:30 am.

Both of these guys felt very safe when I was on shift, and both had expressed this to me. In many ways, they were like the Filipino group, who had no hesitation in picking a fight because someone else could take care of the messes that they created. It was that cocky attitude that precipitated the incident with the two ex-bikers.

Lyle and Brian were the last two patrons in the bar, with Lyle waiting for his girlfriend to finish her shift, so he could take her home. There was no risk of MLLC inspectors being on site. As I mentioned earlier, Lyle loved to push the envelope to see what he could get away with, and this night was no exception. He was taking his time finishing his drink.

Several times, my waiters had cautioned them to drink up, as was customary. The instructions didn't hasten Lyle's consumption of his beer, whatsoever.

By 1:30, the two still had some liquid left in their glasses. Both of my waiters walked to the table, and one actually took the draft glass from Lyle's hands as he was taking another swig! It was more than bold: it was stupid. Lyle was on his feet and ready to attack instantly.

Brian wasted less than a fraction of a second before he jumped into the fray. I was quickly there, but Debbie was closer, and quicker. She tried to step in between the potential combatants, and was tossed aside by one of the two waiters. She stumbled, stood back up, and moved in again. I had a hold on Brian, while Lyle moved to attack my two waiters. Somehow, Debbie again got caught in the melee, but this time, she was severely cut near her eye. She bled rapidly and profusely.

The three were so intent on fighting that none noticed her. It was when my two guys cowered and Lyle jumped at them that I had to let go of Brian to grab Lyle. At that time, Brian noticed Debbie was bleeding, and called out to Lyle.

As soon as Lyle saw his girlfriend's injury, he went ballistic. The blood was covering most of her face, but she was still standing. Both my waiters ran from the beverage room, to the rear beer vendor refrigerator. It was an idiotic move, since there was no way out of the single-entrance room.

Lyle and Brian rushed toward the room, but I got there first. As I wrestled Lyle away, my two guys realized their mistake, and fled into the beverage room through one of the small shelving

doors that provided access to single bottles of beer by the bartender. Much beer was broken in the process.

Now, Lyle and Brian both wanted to chase the two. I was able to run interference for a few moments. Eventually, I was able to steer the two out the vendor exit door, and out into the back lane. I thought the matter was over, and went back into the bar. Within a minute, both Lyle and Brian returned, but this time Lyle had a large knife with him. He was going to finish off my waiters.

It was amazing how he was so anxious to defend his girlfriend, but had not so much as taken a few seconds to see if she was okay.

This time, I convinced both of the ex-bikers that my guys had escaped through the dining room and out onto the front street. The two former gang members headed out, with Lyle waving the knife.

Now that we were out front and my two waiters were nowhere in sight, Lyle knew that I had lied to him. He wanted to get back in to the hotel to find them. I wouldn't let him through the doors, even though he was waving the knife in my face.

Just at that moment, a police cruiser passed by and slowed down. I saw it coming and told Lyle to hide the knife before they saw it.

"I'm not afraid of f__g cops," he declared. He wasn't.

"Put the damn thing away. I don't need you getting hauled off while Debbie is inside bleeding."

My mentioning his girlfriend had an interesting effect on him. He put the knife in the back of his jacket belt, and seemed almost ashamed.

"Let's go find out if she's okay."

Brian then offered his own warning: if she was not okay, he was going to personally kill those two waiters.

Oddly, I let both back into the bar, and we tended to Debbie, driving her in Lyle's truck to the hospital. Her injuries, as it turned out, were fairly minor, and she received only three stitches for the one cut.

While we were waiting in the emergency waiting room, Lyle grabbed my left bicep, and squeezed hard.

"I owe you, guy. You're a good friend." It was the most peculiar statement, particularly given that neither of us even liked each other. He simply was grateful that his girlfriend was okay, and that I had been willing to help him, and even protect him from the cops.

For the most part, I believe that I handled the situation entirely incorrectly.

I only saw him twice afterward, and, shortly before I quit working at the Maryland, Debbie and he broke off their relationship. I felt sorry for anyone who would have dared to go out with her within the next few months after the separation. Lyle would not have tolerated anyone messing with his possessions.

Lyle and Brian were two of the most dangerous people that I have ever met, because they were so unpredictable. Yet, they were not the biggest or the toughest. They were Doberman dogs in a world of poodles.

Chapter 13

There were a couple of other Maryland patrons who many considered to be almost as dangerous. I disagree with that assessment.

The first was a 6'7" man, who rode as an independent biker. He worked as an orderly in one of the hospitals, and sold many of the prescription drugs that users of the day relied upon, as well as LSD. This was long before cocaine and crack cocaine found their way into Winnipeg.

"Ron" was a very calm, decent man, who kept to himself. He didn't seek out, or even want the company of other bikers. He lived in his own world, and showed up in the bar only one time each week. He and I talked frequently, which was very unusual since most of the others there had never spoken a word to him.

I know of two occasions where he actually stepped in between toughs to prevent abuse of a smaller man or an innocent. He had a moral conscience, except for his drug sales.

He did associate with some of the biker gang members, but it seemed to be more of a business relationship than a friendship.

In the time that I knew him, I heard many tales about how dangerous he was, but never saw any evidence of that side of him.

The hotel owner at that time was a man named Dave Pearlman. He was a smaller Jewish man, close to sixty years old. He rarely came into the hotel, preferring to leave day-to-day operations in the hands of his manager, Gordon Johnston. There was no need for him to be here, normally. It was Dave Pearlman who had hired me.

For reasons unknown, Mr. Pearlman came into the hotel one evening, and was having a coffee in the dining room.

Ron also was in the hotel that evening. Over a year earlier, Mr. Pearlman had arranged for his bouncer at that time to bar Ron from the property for an extended period of time. I understood that it had to do with Ron's drug selling, but he was no different than many of the other traffickers who frequented the place. He never sold openly, or on hotel property. Mr. Pearlman, though, had the right to bar Ron from the hotel, and had exercised that prerogative.

Ron didn't agree with the decision, and had carried a grudge.

When a frantic dining room staffer came running to me to tell me that Ron had Mr. Pearlman by the throat, I wasted no time arriving on scene.

Mr. Pearlman's feet were not anywhere near to touching the floor, with the very tall Ron holding him by the neck at his eye level.

I grabbed hold of Ron's fingers and pried them loose, then used my weight to press Ron against the wall. Instead of fleeing, Mr. Pearlman chose to stand in front of us, wave his finger in Ron's face, and warn him that he would charge Ron with assault.

At that moment I was less concerned with that very real promise than I was with Ron's reaction. Fortunately, Ron listened to me, as I explained that I would talk to the owner, but could promise him nothing. I also told him that Mr. Pearlman had every right to bar him, and charge him.

If Ron was as dangerous as others portrayed him to be, that moment would have been the time to verify it. Ron simply agreed to let me handle it, and left the hotel.

To Mr. Pearlman's credit, he had no hesitation in respecting and agreeing to my preference to forget the whole matter. I had been sufficiently successful as his bouncer, and had been so quick to step in to protect him that he indicated that whatever I decided was my call, and he would agree to it. He was a great owner and boss, and, although I already respected him, he raised an additional level in my eyes.

Ron was not charged, and was not barred. In fact, the day after I informed him that the matter was all cleared up, he returned to the hotel, six days prior to his normal routine visit.

He handed me a letter, sealed, in an envelope, to give to Mr. Pearlman. The boss later told me that it was a complete and genuine apology for Ron's actions. Both Mr. Pearlman and I agreed that it was the mark of a gentleman.

Chapter 14

The last regular of the Maryland who I want to tell you about is a person about whom I have already recounted a story. This was the guy from the Plaza that had been nicknamed The Wild Man. Of all the people in the Maryland, the guy who had started off as my nemesis became my closest friend, and one that I would trust under any circumstance. That is odd, since he also had easily earned the right to his nickname.

The Wild Man didn't look particularly wild. He did look dark and mysterious, with his good looks, dark hair, and the black cowboy hat that he often wore. He also was the primary reason that I insisted that no one was allowed to carry a knife in the Maryland Hotel.

Bert lived two apartments down from the hotel, out the back lane. In my prior interactions with him, he had been attending the Grant and the Plaza hotels, but had lived in the area near the Maryland for years.

In addition to an anger problem, Bert also had a drinking problem. It almost bordered on self destruction, on both counts. Because of his reputation and his actions, he often drank and sat alone. But The Wild Man was a good guy, on the inside, and did not often pick a fight. He was not afraid of one, though, and never hesitated a second when confronted. Sometimes, he reacted too quickly, and too violently.

Bert had a favourite table in the Maryland, between the dance stage and the bar area. Here, one table was set up, with the nearest other tables being toward the centre of the beverage room. The entrance between the kitchen area and the bar was located between Bert's table and the dancers' stage, and, inside that door, another door led downstairs into a morgue-like area. Here, old chairs and tables, broken equipment, and hotel room furniture was stored. It also led to the makeshift change rooms provided for the dancers. There was very little foot traffic in this area, because of the rules about interacting with the performers and because patrons were not supposed to use the kitchen entrance as a shortcut into the dining room or lounge area.

This was the safest place for the Wild Man to sit and mind his own business. He tried to do that a lot.

Bert had a few emotional issues. That was clear, as he sat and wrestled with them. The bouncer who had worked the hotel prior to me warned me about him, not knowing that I already knew the man. The bouncer, like most others, was scared of the Wild Man.

One evening, I heard a scream and a dull sound that I could not identify. I rushed around the corner of the bar to find Bert sitting at the table by himself, with a buck knife with a four inch blade stabbed right through the wooden and arborite table top. The dancer who had been performing had seen him pull the knife and stab the table, and, figuring she might be next, had fled. It was not she who had screamed. It was the Wild Man.

I gained a whole lot of respect that evening, when I walked over to him, and sat down at the table, with the knife still between us. The bar patrons told each other, and outside friends, how I had calmly walked up to the Wild Man, with his knife in front of him, and sat down without so much as asking, or flinching. It was true. I didn't flinch, or have a second of fear. People for weeks afterward came up to me to tell me how I had unbelievable guts.

That wasn't necessarily so.

One thing was perfectly clear to me. That knife was embedded so deep in the hard wood that no one in that bar, and probably not even King Arthur's knight – the one who pulled the sword out of the stone – could have budged that blade! It was absolutely the safest place, for me, that the Wild Man's knife could have been!

While the incident was great for my reputation, it was even better for my relationship with Bert. Until that time, the only real interaction I had had with him was the fight at the Plaza Hotel, a year earlier – an incident that he seemed to be unable to recall. This day, I became Bert's friend, and he mine.

I spent almost forty minutes talking to him, as he sat there. He was well accustomed to having people shun him, or expel him from their premises. Because of the façade that he wore, most people kept their distance, so the fact that I was willing to take my time to talk to him seemed to make a huge difference to him. It was a slow night, anyway, and, sitting there, I was still technically on the floor, so it was not like I was ignoring my duties.

Bert had recently attempted to develop a relationship with a woman. He was not much good at long term relationships, and his marriage had failed several years earlier. His wife had found that her new man – a gang member – provided her with more prestige, apparently. Even in the world on the other side of the law, prestige is important. It is just measured differently than in upper-crust America.

Part of Bert's sullenness, I believe, was in response to the way he dealt with that emotional slap in the teeth.

He had high hopes for this new relationship, though. Few of us really want to spend our lives in emotional solitude.

In our conversation, I learned that The Wild Man was so serious about this relationship that the two had talked about moving in together, and even having kids. Bert, it turned out, had always wanted to be a family man. His former wife, on the other hand, had been in no hurry, and liked to party hardy.

The prior week, he had been tested for sperm count. This was something relatively new, and the two lovebirds had discussed having him tested. It was not clear why there had been a question about fertility, in the first place. Bert had agreed that it was a good way to make sure that the two lovers were set to move forward on having kids.

The day that he had buried the knife up to its hilt in the table, The Wild Man had received the news: low sperm count. Extremely low.

I suspect that this matter may have arisen between he and his ex-wife, a few years ago. Bert never indicated or denied that the possibility was true.

The Wild Man had reacted the way he knew best. He had immediately told his girlfriend, and immediately broken off their relationship. He didn't want her to be stuck with a guy who could not perform. That word sent feelers of suspicion about the heart of the matter into my thoughts.

He didn't give her a choice. He would not burden her with the likes of him. So, all day, he had been drinking, instead of working. And he was thoroughly drunk.

I bought a few more beer for Bert that evening. I didn't buy so many that he got even more drunk, but I wanted to keep an eye on him, and kept just enough liquid flowing to keep him glued to his chair. At closing time, I partly carried, partly walked him back to his apartment block. In his apartment, the Wild Man was barely sober enough to be able to point out where a big chunk of plaster was broken away from the wall, near his ceiling. I could not understand what he was saying about it though. His words were completely garbled.

Two days later, Bert was back in the bar, sober. In the short time that we had to talk, he recalled trying to tell me about the wall. According to him, the plaster had been shot out, by him, with a .22 rifle.

It was amazing how many criminal acts occurred in that region, every day, that never made it to a police report!

The Wild Man made it his mission, it seemed, to stay on my good side and befriend me after that episode. He still got seriously drunk, far too often. However, he was much more subdued and far less surly around others. In fact, the few people who dared consider

themselves his friends began gravitating to me, as well, and, virtually every night, I was declining an invitation to party at one or another person's place.

Bert, though, remained a bit of an enigma. Around me, he would laugh, and even began to pull practical jokes. Within a couple of months, he would occasionally even enter the bar with a smile on his face. And when he drank, he got royally drunk, but did not act in an aggressive manner.

That, unfortunately, can be a dangerous weakness, in bars like the Maryland. People that had formerly feared him actually began to taunt him, occasionally. He took those insults relatively well. But, from experience, I knew that those that nipped at his heels in the bar would not hesitate to gnaw out his throat in the darkness and anonymity of the back lane.

That came near to happening one night, when The Wild Man passed out on the curb near the hotel, and someone "rolled" him. No one, three months earlier, would have dared.

One night, Bert had not arrived in the bar by 11 pm. That was unusual, as he had become a nightly fixture. One of my regulars arrived at the vendor, and informed me that The Wild Man was outside, passed out, in the lane roadway.

I headed outside and found him, unconscious in his own vomit. It was a struggle to awaken him enough to carry him home to his apartment block. It was also a most unpleasant task, but, at least, he was safe.

A week later, I saw him for the last time. He informed me that he just didn't feel comfortable in the Maryland any more, and that he was moving away. I didn't ask where, and he didn't tell me. No tears, no long stories. He shook my hand, and we told each other that we would see each other around. It was a lie.

Chapter 15

There was a problem with having friends, when you lived a life that centred around territorial behaviours. Most of the people in the lower income, working class social brackets in which I existed lived that life. The problem was that you always had to stand by your friend.

My experiences in the more affluent circles told me that those people who were on the upward ride to success weren't burdened anywhere near as much with the responsibility of loyalty. Loyalty requires that you stand by your friend, even when things are tough. At least in the Maryland and Plaza Hotels, I had the luxury of being able to choose how deep my friendships would go, and whether that friendship would extend beyond the boundary of the hotel.

Many of the people I knew in that time would stand by a friend, no matter how wrong that friend was, or how far he had crossed the line of legality or morality. I was unwilling to maintain friendships that demanded that kind of commitment.

But, in my personal life, I had many friends that I was willing to help keep or drag back onto the right side of what I thought was the line of morality. I grew up with some, and came into contact with a few others accidentally. Friendships like those can cost a tremendous amount, but, I have found that, in the end, they were worth it.

In high school, my close friends were selectively chosen. They were very few in number. On the other hand, in a small country school, every one is a neighbour, so every one is a friend, of sorts, even when he is very unfriendly. As ludicrous as that sounds, it is a fact that is easy to illustrate. It takes the most extreme behaviour to shun anyone in such a closed environment, but it can be and is occasionally done. That fact is easy to illustrate, as well.

Through grade school, I honed my fighting skills. My parents had engrained in me the need to stick up for myself, and I did so. They also had impressed on me the need to stick up for those others that needed my help. I did so. I became, over a period of six to eight years, the bully's bully. That is, I would go after anybody that pushed someone weaker than himself around, and I didn't let up until that bully changed. So, even as a young child, I had more than forty playground fights under my belt by the time I was fourteen.

In high school, things got a little more serious. We teenagers now had muscle, and reflexes and skill, and our fighting required more finesse. That is where allegiances and gangs spring up. I was no gang banger, and hated the idea that a person who wanted to be a bully but was afraid to be one on his own could simply call on the strength of many to fight his fights.

When I was in my late teens, I experienced my first view of the lives of bikers. A rock festival in a small town where I lived – Woodlands – attracted only a few hundred paying customers. However, eight or nine of those were Los Bravos bikers. I had never seen bikes before, nor movies glorifying their inglorious lifestyles. Also at the rock festival was one very burly bearded man, who looked like he had just come down from the Klondike gold mines.

The bikers spent the better part of one afternoon, mocking him, but he did not retaliate or back down. In the early evening, three or four of the bikers left, leaving five behind. This seemed to even the odds a little, because, when those remaining hyenas started to tantalize the bearded man again, he decided it was time to get up and do a little dance for them: on their beer and food and fire pit! They took it, without one standing up to him. He spent a little time laughing at them, as did a few other observers.

Very late that night, though, some distance from the stage area, an ambulance arrived. Many of us thought it must be drug related. After all, it was around 1970, and drugs were becoming commonplace since the Woodstock festival.

The next day, we found that our bearded guy had been attacked by all nine of the bikers, as he entered his tent. They had not only beaten him, but had run a branch of a tree through the side of his abdomen. Not brave enough to fight him in daylight five-on-one, they had sabotaged him in the dark, nine-on-one. That began my disdain for bikers, that I carry with me even now, after having made numerous friends in that world.

The situation also taught me a lot about gang mentality. I look back on high school fights, and see that it played out then, too, without my being aware of it.

In high school, status and posture becomes important, partly as a consequence of guys having to preen and prove themselves for the girls. That leads to numerous conflicts.

I had my own cycle of conflicts, unrelated to that desire to impress. One of the serial fights that I had was with a loose group of four guys, two of whom were brothers. In that group, two of the members were pretty decent sorts, who did not have a reputation for seeking out conflict. Except, it seems, when it came to interacting with me.

The conflicts were typical late-teen stuff, with no meaning or long term consequence. Over the course of three years, I had five run-ins with various members of the group, but never with fewer or more than three of the four at any time. In those days, weapons were never used, even in mini-gang conflicts. There was a moral code for stupidity and bravado, apparently.

The conflicts often were forgotten within hours or days. One year, I had been involved in a three-on-one confrontation that amounted to little more than a bit of shoving and wrestling, a

lot of name-calling, and even more posturing. I don't believe that any one of us had so much as a scratch.

Five days later, it was Halloween. My buddies and I spent our night pulling the usual pranks, and driving around the countryside drinking. I presume that the group of four would-be opponents did the same. By 1:00 am, all the fun was done, and my group had all gone home. I encountered one of the other four, in his car, in our hometown. I pulled up along side him, we talked for a few minutes, and then he invited me into his Ford for a beer. For the next two hours, we drove around, guzzling a few brews and talking, as if we had always been friends. Of course, in the country, we almost always were.

The following weekend, I ran into this guy and two of his colleagues in the local bar. I was with five or six of my drinking cronies, too. The posturing was re-engaged. It was not my Halloween friend that started the conflict. Rather, it was one of the four with whom I had the most problems.

As we sat at adjacent tables, we traded insults. At one point, though, "George" got up and stood behind me, jawing away. I didn't lower myself to turn to face him, but kept up the verbal diarrhoea, I was great at the witticisms, and it always irked my opponents at that time.

It certainly irked George. Sitting across from me was my best friend. As I raised my beer bottle to take a drink, I saw his eyes go huge as he stared over my shoulder, and his mouth fell open. I had no time to react, before George crashed his draft glass down on my skull.

A few years earlier, another guy's skull had been cracked, when he took a beer bottle to the head. It hit him in the temple. He lost his hearing in the ear on that side, and had chronic headaches thereafter.

A beer glass is a little more forgiving than a beer bottle, and will shatter more easily.

Lucky for me, the beer glass broke. My skull didn't. However, I nearly was knocked out, and spilled my beer in the process. That ticked me.

I rose, turned around, grabbed George and literally dragged him outside. Then I kneeled down and rubbed his face in the parking lot gravel before letting him go and going back inside, to continue my drinking.

It was a minor incident, by most standards. Yet, it had the potential to be extremely serious. If he had hit my temple, I may have been killed or seriously injured. If my skull and the glass both had not been broken, I likely would have had a major concussion. In any event, if I had needed to go to the hospital, the police would have been involved and George would have faced criminal charges.

Luckily, none of those scenarios occurred. But the incident showed how fine a line exists between everyday life, and destruction of that life.

George and I were never close buddies, but, even after that incident, there were occasions when we shared a drink, and nothing was said of the matter. Unfortunately, George was killed several years later, a victim of his own drinking and driving.

While in high school, I never considered that I may, in years to come, be thrown into contact with a plethora of murderers, drug dealers and other violent criminals. I certainly never expected that any of my friends of those days would be among that group of deviants. Yet, a few were.

One of those friends came from a large family of Métis, in the community a few miles from my home. It was an interesting family. The head of the clan was an obese man, with a huge heart and a bigger smile. He was liked by everyone. Of his many children, I knew three, who were close to my age.

One of them went on to become a semi-pro athlete with a reputation for skill in fighting. That was strange, because he was one of the most mellow, gentle people that I knew. He was just like his dad, only a very small version of him. He was always polite and soft spoken.

His sister was in my grade, but not my classroom. Nonetheless, I had a crush on her, which she never knew of. She was no beauty, neither was she unattractive, She was just a nice person, again, like her dad.

Her younger brother was two grades behind me, so I did not develop any close bond with him. I did know him, though, better than most. He was a little different than his siblings and father. While not a loud or abrasive person, he also was willing to be heard whenever anyone appeared to want to come into conflict with him. He was not afraid of fighting, but didn't look for fights, either.

In some ways, he and I shared a similar philosophy about doing battle: never take a backward step. It was easier to recover from a few broken bones than from irreparably damaged self-esteem.

I lost contact with the three of them after I left high school. I had already married and divorced once before I saw the younger brother again. This time, it was in the Balmoral Hotel in Winnipeg. It, like the nearby Maryland, was a seedy place, but not nearly as violent as its neighbour. It also had fewer of the ethnic divisions, with a preponderance of natives and Métis as clients. It did have its moments, though.

“Don” drank there, occasionally. This was before my career as a bouncer. I drank there infrequently, too, as the hotel was mere steps away from my apartment.

One night, well after midnight, I left the bar. Outside, in the parking lot, Don was engaged in a lively push-and-shove match with three other drinkers. He was defending a friend, who had been abused a little by another of his opponents. Those two were in another scrum, doing a little sparring.

One of the three threatened to “get a gun” and blow Don away. They argued for about another minute, before that opponent left, moving toward a row of parked cars.

Don dashed off to the street, as well. He was parked just around the corner, and reached into the back of his truck toolbox and pulled out a thirty-inch long torque wrench. These wrenches are used to tighten head bolts in vehicle engines, and, consequently, are built quite sturdily. He came running back with this chrome and steel weapon in his hands, intent on defending against the threat proffered by the guy who claimed to have a gun.

I stepped in front of Don to calm him down. In those days, a certain code seems to exist that doesn’t appear to be in the rule book of fighting today: respect your friends. In a few moments, he was a little more calm, and even the two remaining fighters turned down the rhetoric a little. The third now came running back, without a gun visible. He spouted off a bit, before his friends convinced him to retreat.

However, as he left, he invited Don to be back there the next night, so that he could “take care” of Don.

For the two of us, the evening was over. We talked a little about old times, I asked him if he was cool, and, since he was, he walked to his vehicle and drove off.

Three days later, I read a news report about a guy who had been arrested for caving in the skull of another man, with a breaker bar, at the Balmoral the night previous. It was my old school friend.

I presume that the weapon was not a breaker bar, but the torque wrench that had been involved twenty-four hours prior to that fatal fight.

At the time, Don was charged with attempted manslaughter, as the guy was still alive. I didn’t follow the matter closely after that, but I recall that the guy died and Don was found guilty and sentenced.

Again, a moment of bravado, a few acts of stupidity, and two lives were ruined. Yet Don was, like his other family members, essentially a good guy, and a friend.

Chapter 16

Bars breed bad decision-making. Another friend that I met in a bar nearly got me killed, but allowed me the pleasure of meeting one of Winnipeg's famed family fighters.

The Ruggles family was well known in Winnipeg circles. They were a collection of three tough men, who seldom lost a battle, but didn't spend too much energy seeking out trouble. It seemed to find them. In fact, a couple of years ago, one of the Ruggles was arrested for shooting another person in the leg. After the police and the courts were involved, the victim actually asked that Charlie Ruggles not be sent to jail for the shooting. It seems that Charlie was doing what the family had always done: standing up for himself. The shooting was, according to the victim and the shooter, an accident.

I had very little involvement with the Ruggles over the past forty years. In fact, I had only one occasion to meet them, and the guy that "saved my bacon" was Charles.

In the mid 1970s, I hung around with a group of friends who frequented the Pandora Inn. There, I met two people: Tom (Ham) Berger and Poppa Haynes. I never knew Poppa by any other first name than Poppa, yet, by default, I became sort of his backup protector.

Poppa was friends with a couple of females with whom I worked. One evening, at a party hosted by one of the girls, Poppa and I engaged in a raw egg-eating contest. I have no idea who won, but I do know that both of us lost! No fewer than six raw eggs each can do awful things to the digestive tract, over a few hours! From that contest, Poppa and I became buddies.

He was a small person, both thin and short. He was exceptionally likeable and fun loving. Others in the Pandora told me that he sold drugs. Personally, I doubted that. But he was so popular with the ladies that, almost every night, some guy wanted to pick a fight with him. Most times, I admit, it was because he was friendly with their female friends.

When I met Poppa, his buddy was Ham Berger. Ham was a 230 pounder, just over six feet. He looked bigger. He, too, was easy-going, but, when a guy that size steps in beside a little runt like Poppa, he looks huge. And if you have just started picking a fight with the little guy, this big bugger doesn't look too inviting as an opponent. Almost always, Poppa's enemies backed away. That made them more resentful.

Ham couldn't be with Poppa every moment, though, so I became a surrogate bodyguard. It was fun, for the most part.

One summer day, we were in Grand Marais, near Grand Beach, partying. Also there were members of the Spartans and Bravos, and the Ruggles men. I knew few of them, at the time. Poppa was being his usual fun-loving self, and was off somewhere with a collection of friends. At one of the food stands, I was mingling with a few other new acquaintances.

In the group of bikers was a guy known as “Mac.” Mac was a rake-thin guy with long hair, bad teeth and a wicked cough. Rumour said he had tuberculosis. Most likely, drugs were involved, in my opinion. I’m not precisely sure what his affiliation with the Bravos was, but Mac used his contacts with them to his advantage.

He decided that he didn’t like me much, and said so. I assured him, in not very British English terms, that that was the best news that I had heard recently, given that I wasn’t sure why he had been allowed out of the coffin. (As I have said, I had a great way with the barbs that some of these low-lifes understood. After all, I was one of them). He took exception to my cheekiness, and invited a few of his biker friends over, so he could show them how he was going to beat me.

Mac couldn’t have beat me if I was cream and he was a high-speed mixer, but he liked to talk tough. The problem was that I wasn’t smart enough to know when to shut up, and continued to throw insults at him and provoke him. That didn’t sit well with his biker buddies. You take on one, you take on everyone, after all!

I was probably seconds away from a decent beating at the hands of the gang, before an arm around my shoulder saved the day. “You doing fine here? Anything I can help with?”

It was muscular Charlie Ruggles. Amazingly, the bikers, including Mac, found something more interesting with which to involve themselves, instantly.

Charlie walked away seconds later, not so much as saying another word. I never encountered him again, and I’m sure he didn’t remember this brief little incident for even ten more ten minutes. Yet, it was extremely significant to me. As I had heard from dozens of reports before and after that day, the Ruggles may have been tough, but they were decent. It’s hardly the image any of us have of violent criminals and gangs, but labelling such people as nice hardly sells news stories!

Bars are not the only places where I encountered my “wild animals.” One of my friends, during a period when we were both working diligently on a community charity project had a past both as one of the “rich kids,” and as one of the “bad boys.”

He, himself, told me that he began his “bad boy” era, when he held up a drug dealer with a pistol, at the age of sixteen. He had a choice: go to prison, or go to St. John’s Cathedral Boys School in Selkirk. He chose St John’s. It was there that he developed a taste for charity work and volunteering.

This guy came from a wealthy background, and received a sizeable annual disbursement from a trust fund set up for him. We used to joke that he was the only person we knew who could take \$60,000 a year, invest it wisely in the stock market, and end up with \$20,000. He did the same with his home, buying an old corner store in the north end, converting it into a single family home by investing nearly \$80,000 into it, and ending with a home that would sell for, at best, \$65,000!

Yet, he had an incredible heart. He was one of our best fundraisers, and put in the most hours as a volunteer on the numerous projects in which we were involved.

In 1986, I nearly cut off my left arm in an accident. A couple of weeks after having my tendons, veins, arteries and nerves reattached, I was wearing a very odd-looking cast contraption that consisted of a hard plastic frame with a series of elastic bands attached between my fingers and the cast. The rubber bands were intended to slowly extend the length of my re-connected tendons.

The day after I had this weird fishing pole cast connected, “Stuart” paid me a visit. We had a couple of drinks, and both Stuart and I thought it would be a good idea to go for a ride on his motorbike. It, in retrospect, was not a particularly great idea.

Within the short distance between Kanata and Redonda Streets on Pandora Avenue, we hit 150 km per hour, on a residential road! Stuart loved the thrill. I wasn’t so thrilled, since I was holding on to him with one hand, and holding my elastic fishing rod gadget in the air on the other side.

At 90 mph, those rubber bands were singing! I could feel the pain, not in my teeth, but in the top of my head! Still, the experience, afterward, seemed like a lark. It was one of the appeals of Stuart. He loved fun and excitement.

We occasionally drank, as a group, in a few of the Main Street bars. Given Stuart’s size and boisterous manner, we were all quite safe there. One day, though, Stuart asked to borrow \$100 from me. I didn’t ask why, because he was a friend and I knew he would repay me. He went back into the beverage room in which we had been drinking, and I assumed he was buying a couple of cases of beer, since we were going to his house to drink.

We had two cars with us. I drove to his place, and he joined those in the second car. His wife was at home, asleep, but we were going to be drinking in the basement, so there was no concern about waking her.

When Stuart and the other car arrived, there was an extra occupant: a female! This really ticked me off, but, even I was more livid when the two entered the bathroom together. They were there for less than five minutes, before merging, still fully clothed.

Stuart, fortunately, was not the type to cheat on his wife. More unfortunately, though, he was a recovering drug addict, and this female and he had just “shot up,” according to what I was told by a friend shortly afterward. I never confirmed the report with him, and he never denied it. Stuart and I spoke to each other only once after that. The next day, at one of our meetings, he repaid me, and apologized, because I made it clear that I did not want to deal with him ever again. I kept my word. Friend or no, I was not willing to allow him the luxury of falling off the wagon, even once. He had thoroughly betrayed my trust.

I cannot say that I miss his friendship, since who I thought was the real Stuart was an impostor. He was not, it appeared, a former drug addict, but an active one, and his charitable work most likely was nothing more than his own personal salve for his feelings of guilt. I have no idea what happened to him, or how his life has evolved, and care little to find out.

Friends don't always stand by each other, through everything.

Chapter 17

Friends come in many forms, and from many sources. In 1995, I was dating a woman who had a sixteen year old son, and a daughter. This son had a girlfriend, whose brother was a high-ranking member of one of the biker gangs. Over the course of the relationship between the son and the girlfriend, things were not always rosy. They often are not, at that age.

In my role as boyfriend to this guy's mother, I had, I believed, a certain responsibility to look out for her son, particularly given my background, and her son's girlfriend's family.

On one occasion, the son and girlfriend broke up. The girlfriend was devastated. Her brother came to the rescue, warning that, if the boy did not get back together with the biker's sister, he wouldn't live to see his next birthday. They reunited.

I was made aware of this situation, by the boy, a few weeks after it had occurred. By that time, the young couple was having more serious problems, and my friend – the boy's mother – informed me of the dilemma.

I, by now, was long past my fighting prime, but my brain still hadn't told me that I was a middle-aged has-been, not a twenty-something fighter. I chose to challenge the biker's authority, and prepared to deal with him.

I was lucky. The son and girlfriend made up, for a while. But that did not solve the issue, even though the boy wanted me to back off a bit. He wasn't welcoming the idea that he would be punished by the biker brother if I got involved. I was pretty sure that he would, too.

However, we opted for another strategy. The son would become a real loser around his girlfriend, focusing on school, going to church, insisting that she come. It was all designed to make him less attractive to her. It worked. The girlfriend broke off with the boy, and the biker stepped back. After all, he didn't want to saddle his sister with a loser like my friend's son.

Everything worked out well. I didn't have to find out, just yet, that I was washed up. No one ever informed the biker of my intervention. The son got his freedom. How some people, though, interpret duty to family and friends can be hard to understand. This applies both to my misplaced sense of duty and the biker's sense of protective loyalty to his sister.

Friends can sometimes turn on friends, in this violent world, but it is uncommon. Often, when they do, it becomes bitter, and, frequently, there is a female involved.

I was no exception. The friend had been one of my two closest buddies for years. Even after I married at the age of 20, we remained close.

But marrying at that early age seldom is a good idea, and my wife and I found that we were no longer compatible.

Unfortunately for all three of us, my friend thought that he was compatible with my wife, while my wife and I were still married, and living together. That, of course, hastened our breakup. That is, the breakup of me and my wife, but also of me and my friend.

If the bitter rift had ended there, all would have been fine. It didn't.

As part of my agreement so that I could facilitate the divorce, I agreed to give all the proceeds from the sale of our one-year-old house, that I had constructed from the basement up, to my wife. The basement recreation room had not yet been finished, and so I agreed to complete that task, in early summer, in order to increase the profits on the home.

My buddy was, at that time, working as a carpenter's helper. Even after this first incident between he and my wife, I felt that hiring him to help with the recreation room would make things move more quickly. He agreed to do some of the work.

Unfortunately, his promise to help was as hollow as his commitment to friendship, and he never showed up, while I worked at completing this task, in the hottest days of the summer, so that I could give the money to my wife. I felt this to be unfair.

In the meantime, my friend was dating my wife, and staying over in an apartment that I had funded.

On the day that I completed the house repairs, it was hot, it was the long weekend in July, and I was thoroughly irritated at my former buddy. I knew where I would find him – at my wife's place.

As I arrived outside the garden door entrance to the place, I saw him move across the living room, and then the lights went out. The room may have been black, but I saw red.

They had not locked the sliding doors. I threw them open, just as my friend yelled out, "What do you want?"

I showed him, instead of telling him. I had no clue exactly where he was, except for the direction of his voice, so I swung blindly.

I hit him perfectly, in pitch black darkness. Next thing I heard was him falling over the coffee table onto the floor.

My wife switched on the light, and there he was, unconscious and bleeding profusely. I called the ambulance. The dispatcher asked for details, and asked if I would wait until the police and the ambulance arrived. I agreed to do so.

My friend suffered a cracked mandible, but, when interviewed by the police, insisted that he did not want to press charges.

Being the clear thinker that I was, I told him and the police that if he did not press charges, I would be back to do it again. My wife convinced my friend to sign the statement.

On the way to jail, in the back of the car, I listened as the two cops suggested that they hoped I had made it worthwhile. They were sympathetic to my plight: a wronged husband taking care of business. They were incorrect.

I spent three days in the Public Safety Building, awaiting my bail hearing. My lawyer insisted that he could get me off. I, though, had had enough time to cool down, and insisted on pleading guilty. The judge, it seemed, disagreed with me. I was given a discharge.

I had not slugged my buddy because of his dalliances with my spouse. If that were true, I would have crushed him a couple of months earlier, when it first happened. I attacked him because he had not kept his promise to me. The police, the courts and even my ex saw it differently. Even the third of our group of three friends sided with me, and has not spoken to my wife's partner and our former friend for over thirty years, although they live no more than fifteen miles apart in the country.

One rash decision, in one moment of poor judgment and emotion, has cost several people a great deal. It is sad, though, that I – the one who should have paid the dearest price – have suffered the least for it. Many friendships were lost, and yet none of us are truly bad people. Three of us were persons who merely made bad decisions, at one or two moments in our lives.

That is the way with many of the crimes of violence committed in the poorer parts of town. Emotions overrule good thinking by otherwise good people, and lives are ruined.

My next story involves friends of mine, and my brother. It involves an attempted killing that was never, ever intended to be an attempt at killing. It was an exercise in sheer stupidity by all parties, and should be treated as such. I also am going to do my utmost from revealing any clues as to who the "criminal" in the story is, because he is a very good person, who was extraordinarily provoked.

I also wish to “let sleeping dogs lie” in this matter, since to regurgitate the incident would do no one any good. The “criminal” is a good family man, and still is a very good person and the victim – my brother – has long since died, at his own hands.

My brother loved fun, and he also loved to be the centre of attention. He was what some of us refer to as a “horse’s ass.” Aside from a love of practical but inane jokes, he acted like a buffoon, often. He had many friends, though, and few took his lame insults personally.

One day, a group of a half dozen of them were out at the local gravel pit, target shooting, with shotguns, at cans, and bottles and so on. My brother, Roger, did not own a gun, but was there for the fun.

He loved to provoke people. One of those present was a guy with a reputation for toughness, and for being a little slow. He was not slow, and was only moderately slow to anger. He was tough.

I knew this guy well. A couple of years earlier, my friends and I were at a social (a Manitoba evening of drinking, to raise funds for a specific cause). This guy was there, also.

For some reason, my best buddy and I seemed to command his respect and friendship. Regardless of how angry he may have been at any given time, if Doug or I told him to calm down, he would. No matter what we said, this tough guy believed us, and counted on us.

At this social, our friend was taunted by another person: the area tough man. We were all nineteen. This guy with the reputation for toughness was in his early thirties, and was the undisputed best fighter in the region. He wanted to see just how tough this kid – our friend – was. He kept antagonizing our guy, until “Joe” agreed to go outside.

When we heard that he was outside, by himself, taking on this dangerous older man, we both went out to our friend’s rescue. We ended up rescuing the tough older man, instead.

Outside, Joe was on top of the fighter, pummelling and punching away. He was shredding the fighter’s face. The whole time, though, tears were running down his face.

“Why are you always picking on me? Why are you always picking on me?” He repeated that phrase nearly a dozen times before we pulled him off. As soon as he saw who was interfering in his fight, the fight left him. He just cried for a while, got up and thanked us, and went back into the party.

He was so tough and so innocent that he didn’t know how tough he was!

Roger should have known better than to taunt him, though, particularly about his ancestry. Roger, most often, displayed very few smarts.

The details of the incident have been reported to me by others that were there, and by Roger, himself, so I am convinced that they are true.

Roger needled Joe and needled him until Joe could take it no longer. Finally, in frustration, he yelled at Roger, "You better start running, because I'm going to start shooting."

Roger told me, "I knew he meant it, so I ran."

He didn't run far enough. Joe counted, out loud, to twenty-five, and then fired.

Roger hit the dirt, rolling around and yelling, "I'm shot. I'm shot. You've killed me."

I heard those exact lines from everyone, including Roger. They struck me as funny then, and they strike me as funny today.

Roger, though, didn't learn.

When he went to the Stonewall Hospital to have the nearly two dozen pellets removed from his back, the hospital called the RCMP, as they were required to do with gunshot wounds. The RCMP sergeant arrived to question Roger about the matter.

"How did you get shot?"

"I was cleaning my gun, and it went off."

"So you shot yourself?"

"Yes."

"In the back?"

"The barrel was bent."

There were no charges laid. Perhaps one should have been laid against my brother, for stupidity.

One day, Roger added another twist to the story, when he and one of the others that had been present at the altercation were recounting it to me.

When the other guy got to the part about Joe counting to 25, Roger shot in his comment.

"He counted thirty, but he had to start again after 25 because he can't count any higher than that."

Fortunately for Roger, that comment never got back to our tough friend.

In our world, even attempted murder can be funny.

Chapter 18

I have documented a dozen or so stories about violent criminals so far, all with redeeming qualities. I know of one, though, that in fifty two years, I have never found a good trait to offset the bad that I know about him. That person is now serving a sentence in a mental institution in Saskatchewan for a murder and rapes of three women.

It is ironic that, the one person about whom I have nothing kind that I can think of to say is one that was defended by one of Canada's best criminal lawyers, and portrayed as a victim of his own psychosis. According to this criminal, he didn't commit the crimes willingly. Voices directed him.

It was reported that the "Black Angel" made him do it. There is no way that I can hear of the "Black Angel" without thinking of Flip Wilson's Geraldine, and her claims that "The devil made me do it," or "the devil made me buy that dress." Except Flip Wilson was funny. Dennis Proctor was not.

I grew up along side this killer and rapist. I did not grow up with him. I did nothing with him, except fight with him. My first childhood fight was against Dennis. I was six. He had the makings of a bully, at that time. I fought two more grade school fights with him, before Grade Seven. I lost all three. But I was getting better, and he was getting worse. I saw him as a bully, and I was being schooled by my parents in how to stand up to bullies. I learned.

When I was in Grade 3 or 4, I used to chum with this one kid: Jackie Oliver. Every recess and every lunch hour, we, like every other student in the four-room school, would walk and walk and walk the circle around the gravel path outside the school. Some would walk clockwise, some counter-clockwise.

One lunch hour, we came across a frog that had been partially squashed into the gravel, its hind legs and part of its abdomen flattened. It was still alive. I may have become a good fighter, but I was always a chicken when it came to harming small animals. Seeing this frog writhing made me ill, but I didn't have the stomach to put it out of its pain.

We walked a couple more rounds of the school perimeter, and now, someone had squashed one of the front legs of the frog. Its guts were oozing out. Two circuits later, another leg had been crushed. My friend could not stand it any longer, and killed the poor thing.

My buddy, Jackie, asked a few of the other students who had been torturing the frog. Several reported that it was Dennis. I never saw him do it, and I have no confirmation that he did, but it was consistent with what I knew of him.

My fourth fight with Dennis changed our relationship. He was picking on a younger student, and I stepped in. We fought. I won, conclusively. Dennis stopped harassing me, completely. We had one more fight that year, in similar circumstances. He lost again. He now wanted to be my best buddy, but he disgusted me.

In Grade 9, we both started attending nearby Warren High School. Dennis still seemed like a little puppy trying to be friends with the bulldog. I developed a strong friendship with the cousin of my grade school buddy. Dennis continued to try to ingratiate himself into our circle. One lunch hour, the two of us – Doug and I -- were sitting on the edge of the stage in the school auditorium, talking. Dennis came up behind us, bouncing a basketball. His next step was another of his truly idiotic moves. He bounced the basketball off my buddy Doug's head, while laughing.

Doug, a fireplug about 5'7" and 200 pounds, stood up, said "Excuse me, Rob," and went over to Dennis. He grabbed him by the front of the shirt, swung, and knocked Dennis out cold. As Dennis lay on the stage, Doug returned, sat down and we continued talking as if nothing had occurred. Dennis left when he regained consciousness, and kept his distance from us thereafter.

At least, he kept his distance, insofar as he and I knew. He had shown me no redeeming qualities, in eleven years, and I did not think he ever would.

Dennis was what we called a "bullshitter." Throughout his school years, he would brag about this or that, with almost all of it being false. He loved to embellish the truth. When he was confronted with facts to the contrary, he would often laugh it off, claiming that he almost had us believing him. That told me that he knew, damn well, that he was lying. He told no stories about seeing apparitions, or any similar tales. They were all tales of the great things that he had done. He liked to brag.

In contrast, he had several brothers and sisters, who did not brag, but, for the most part, what they said they backed up. Dennis's father, though, was known as a bit of a BSer, too, but he did so in a fun-loving way and was liked. My father and he were good friends, and a group of four of them played bridge every Sunday night for nearly ten years. Yet, Dennis was the black sheep.

When Dennis and I nearly crossed paths again, it was eleven years after the basketball incident.

In 1977, I spent every Thursday, Friday and Saturday partying with former school friends, who were still single, at a big old house at 255 Nassau Street. I was newly single, and was

enjoying every minute of it. The partying lasted into 1978, when I remarried and one of the homeowners left on a year-long North American bicycle tour. That left four of the original five country comrades still renting the house in 1979.

That was the year that Dennis, on a Thursday night, abducted a girl from Nassau Street and Corydon Avenue – not a hundred yards from where these former classmates were partying. He didn't know how close they were, and none of them knew how close he was. It was just ill timing and bitter fate. It was worse for the girl that he kidnapped, assaulted and killed. It was worse for the two women that he raped and left for dead near Birds Hill Park.

The courts agreed that he was suffering from some sort of mental illness, and he was locked away for psychiatric treatment shortly afterward. He remains locked up today, and is reported to still be a danger to the public. I sincerely hope that he continues to cling to his professed belief that hidden voices made him do it. I would love to see he and the Black Angel die in lockup. I believe it is more than he deserves.

I would not want my other killer and violent friends to be branded with the same iron as he is.

Chapter 19

I have told you enough, for now, about criminals that deserve none of our sympathy. I would like to take a few pages to talk about people of real compassion, who demonstrated an incredible power to set aside base emotions and deal with the criminals that they saw, in a human and often humane manner. These are the people of Penner Foods. Many of the Penner Foods managers and employees were of Mennonite origin, but many had left the church. They still clung to and practiced the high moral standards set by the church, however.

While I developed friends in Penner Foods, I cannot say that I developed lasting friendships. In some ways, the transient nature of those connections was much like the liquid nature of bonds at the hotels in which I had been employed. Yet, in the Maryland, Balmoral and Plaza Hotels, I was closer to the people in nature and background than in Penner Foods.

I had been raised in a Mennonite Sunday school, and still hold many of their values close to my core of beliefs, but I have none of the tolerant, passive nature of the core of Mennonite followers.

Having said that, the experiences to which I subjected my Penner colleagues frequently tested their dedication to faith. In some ways, those people lived vicariously through me, and I soothed my own more savage tendencies through my association with them.

That does not imply that the staff and management gave me a “free pass” to act irresponsibly. Many time, quite the contrary occurred.

In one minor incident, I was apprehending a low-level shoplifter when he became quite belligerent. I had already escorted him back into the building, and was walking him along the front aisle of the store, past the checkouts, when he attempted to break away. I was able to hold him, but he managed to deliver a fairly hard blow to an area where I would prefer not to be hit. I took him down to the floor, where he continued to attempt to use his feet and knees to hit me. One hit with his knee found its mark, and I decided that I had taken enough abuse. With my left hand holding his neck and shoulder to the floor, I ploughed him in the face with my right fist. In slow motion, his nose splayed out around my clenched fingers, and he instantly began spurring blood. He bled excessively and quickly, but he had suffered no more than a broken nose.

Larraine, one of the cashiers, immediately stepped toward us.

“You didn’t have to do that, Bob.”

I told her, bluntly, that I was not going to take any more of the guy's hits, picked him up, and pushed him into our detention office.

Lorraine was upset with me for quite some time, and often mentioned that I should not be so violent.

Several months passed, and the young hoodlum's name appeared in the paper. He had been arrested and charged for breaking into a home in Transcona and raping a young girl.

I took the paper to Lorraine, while she enjoyed her coffee break in the staff room.

"Do you think this guy deserved it now?" She did not reply.

I both know that I did the right thing in using necessary force to subdue the shoplifter, and feel that Lorraine may have had a point. Too often, violence was the end result of rather innocuous and petty thefts.

I had a reputation, though, that seemed to fuel incidents, and, too frequently, I did nothing to quell the growing image of me as someone that you did not wish to cross. The end result for Penner Foods, for example, was that, in one of their stores, their profits rose from a modest loss each quarter of the year to an average of \$25,000 in gains, almost exclusively due to the amount of thefts that we caught, and, as a corollary, future thefts that we deterred.

In addition, staff felt much more safe than they had. That same cashier, Lorraine, said to me one time, "Bob, I feel so much safer when you are here." It was not that I was able to solve all risks. I was not. It was probably more dependent on the very human tendency to look for protection. Most of us are not alpha or beta wolves.

The managers at Penner Foods reflected the philosophy and nature of the owner, Jim Penner. Mr. Penner had built the chain of five stores from a single corner grocery in Steinbach to an \$88 million per year operation. In truth, he did it by building a solid team of excellent people. They were excellent people first and excellent employees and managers second.

Jim Penner was no soft touch, though. He had a soft heart and a hard head, and came by his reputation deservedly.

I had a love/hate relationship with him. It began when I was hired.

Initially, I contracted through Peter Pauls, the manager of the Henderson store. He had checked my background, and, in spite of numerous occasions on which I had banged heads with the police, I had a clean record. My interaction record with the police, though, carried lots of reports of contact, primarily where I had been involved in fights and so on.

Nonetheless, a friend of Peter's on the police force, who had this inside information, suggested that Peter would be foolish not to hire me.

Within the first month, we had eighty-eight apprehensions for shoplifting, and more than \$5,000 in bad cheques collected. I did not like giving up or being beaten, and was tenacious. Three months after being hired, I finally met Mr. Penner. He called me into Peter's office. He began by pointing out that Peter should not have been the one to recruit me. That decision should have been made by him, so that I could cover all of the stores.

"Bob, if I had been in charge of hiring you, I wouldn't have done so. You had two strikes against you: your arrest for assault (for which I received a discharge) and the fact that you are divorced."

In the Mennonite community, that is almost as unacceptable as in the Catholic church.

"I am thankful that I wasn't in charge of hiring you."

What he was telling me was that he liked the job I was doing.

Mr. Penner and I had had another conflict of a business nature, and neither of us took kindly to the way it was handled. That dispute stayed with Mr. Penner for some time.

A couple of years later, I left Penner Foods, briefly, for an unrelated reason.

In 1989, Peter contacted me.

"Bob, Jim wants to know what you think about..."

Penner had asked Peter to ask me about this security company's background and, most importantly, its ethics. He respected my opinion and integrity so completely that my view was the one that swayed him in his decision as to whether to contract with this business. However, he was sufficiently headstrong to refuse to talk to me directly.

Two years later, he did contact me. He needed a good investigative team back in the store, since his bottom line was suffering. This time, he hired me himself.

His manner, though, was brusque; not with me, but with the managers that he had assembled to reintroduce me to the operation.

"I have told Bob," he began, "that I am placing a bounty on the first manager that he catches stealing." It was a hard-nosed missive, and unnecessary, given the loyalty that 95% of his people felt toward him. I'm not sure how his managers took that shot. I would have been sufficiently ticked off to quit.

In spite of that tough talk, though, Jim Penner would sometimes back down.

A couple of years later, we did have reason to sit down with a manager in a rural store who had been stealing. He was a long-time employee, and, like many of Penner Foods' staff and management, a friend of Jim's.

Mr. Penner insisted on being present for the exit interview. It went smoothly, and the employee was dismissed, with restitution made.

Jim Penner, though, could not maintain the façade of toughness for very long. On the drive home, the group of us – Mr. Penner, myself, another manager and Penner's accountant – stopped at a licensed dining room in a nearby town.

Mennonites are not permitted to consume alcohol, and, at that time, Penner's hometown of Steinbach was a "dry" community. It also was a very closed community, with everyone knowing everyone else's business.

It was several drinks and many hours before Penner's nerves had settled sufficiently for him to head back to Steinbach. He may have been tough, but he really cared.

He also had a huge heart. He routinely donated over a quarter of a million dollars to charity, and lavishly spent on Christmas gatherings for his staff. They were all paid well.

During a one-year period, when the two local giants in the grocery industry were having a price war, the independent grocers were caught in the squeeze. Many were laying off staff and cutting hours. Penner took a different approach. He put more of his own money into the corporation, stopped taking a salary, and had all the managers agreed to take a five percent pay cut. Not one staff member received a pay cut, and every one who was guaranteed specific hours still got those hours.

His people came above even his own needs. When he ultimately sold the business, in 1998, to Sobeys, he sold it for several million less than he could have received from another chain, just so that he could get job security for his staff.

Yet, Penner was not afraid to hit his staff with "the big stick," regardless of whether it was the politically correct thing to do. When a female employee was allegedly assaulted by a male staffer, Penner fired the male, even before the matter went to trial. However, during the incident, more information came forward that showed that the female had lied on her employment application about some very relevant information, that made her an employee that would not have been hired, if that information were known.

Penner came to me with the dilemma and asked, "Bob, what would you do if you were in my shoes?"

"I'd fire her, too," I answered. "Regardless of the fallout."

“That’s good to know,” he responded, “because I fired her just before I came to you.”

That type of integrity and commitment to principles is rare, yet, almost all of the people with whom I dealt demonstrated similar character.

The Henderson store had an assistant manager who was 6’4”, but was not a muscular man. He did have a curt manner, though, and often, people were intimidated by his silence and size. Dennis used that to advantage, to maintain a certain distance between himself and others.

The second assistant was the perfect manager, with a great balance between interpersonal relationship skills with his employees and good, diligent business sense. The three, with Peter at the head, made an excellent team.

In my career, one of the reasons for keeping friendships more casual than personal is that one never knows when you will be called upon to deal with a friend who has crossed the legal line. I had a job to do, and I would do it, regardless of the cost.

Peter had once told Jim Penner, in response to Penner’s suggestion that, since I was hired by Peter, I may be unwilling to turn Peter in if I saw him stealing, “Bob would turn his own mother in, if he had to. He would turn himself in.”

I have never been sure if that was a compliment or an insult, but it was true. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, I actually turned myself in when I assaulted my friend!

Peter’s very blunt statement of fact was proven, when I caught my closest confidante and friend defrauding the store. Our association went back a long way, and I considered this person to be a close acquaintance. I had spent many hours exchanging advice on our individual personal relationships with that person, and this friend had actually been integral in me being hired by Penners, in the first place.

I was not looking forward to conducting an exit interview on the employee, and indicated to Peter that, once I had concluded it, I would be quitting my work with the store.

Peter responded that the amount stolen (less than \$1,500) was not as important as my relationship with Penners, and that he would just let the matter drop. That was not acceptable. I had a job to do, and I would do it.

I made sure that there were no mistakes or gaps in my exit interview. Two managers sat in on the meeting: the assistant and second assistant. I also recorded the event.

The employee, in the very brief interview time frame, did not offer a reason or an apology, but admitted to everything, precisely and without hesitation. The lack of apology, to me, meant lack of remorse, and soured my opinion of the friendship. The interview concluded with

arrangements for restitution, including signing over the employee's car as collateral until the worker could come in the next day with full payment.

At the end, this person was released. The three of us, though, were far from done. So shaken was the 6'5" assistant and the second assistant that they asked if we could go across the street, to the Chinese restaurant, so that we could converse and calm down. After three drinks each, none of us was calm.

I needed to talk to another colleague in the business about this matter. I needed to vent. I visited with him until 3:00 am. When I got home, my wife was furious. "This woman" had been calling every fifteen minutes until midnight, at which time she indicated that it was vital that I call her back.

The next day, I did meet with the former employee. She had held back from apologizing, because she did not want to influence my decision as to whether to charge her. She wanted to allow me to do my job!

I was floored by her integrity, in the face of the potential to have her life ruined by a criminal conviction.

After apologizing profusely, she handed me a money order for the full amount: nearly \$1,800. She had told me about some of the losses that I had missed.

If that were the end of the matter, I would have considered that there had been an incredible demonstration of character by everyone involved. Yet, it did not end there. When I handed the money order to Peter, he refused to accept it. He had already talked to Jim Penner about it. I was directed to give her back the money.

My friend refused. I pressed the point, by showing her that I would tear the money order up if she did not take it. That way, no one would have the cash. She relented.

The matter showed me, again, that there is incredible goodness in people, even when they do dumb things. It showed me that I should allow for some flexibility in how I deal with people in my line of work. If I cannot demonstrate humanity, like the store management did, I am less than any of the criminals.

The greatest loss in this matter is not the loss of money, or the loss of a job, or the supposed weakness that the managers showed in their empathetic responses, but the loss of a friendship. I have not seen this good friend since. That is my loss, more than hers. She showed a weakness, while I showed a lack of humanity.

Before one jumps to the conclusion that the Penner Foods managers were all soft and typically Mennonite in their passive nature, I would like to disprove the theory.

I worked with Peter Pauls often, and saw many sides of him, as he did of me.

Prior to hiring me, Peter did most of his NSF cheque collections himself. On one occasion, he was collecting a cheque from a business owner on Main Street. When he arrived at the operation, the guy didn't want to deal with him. However, he had already let Peter into the building, so he could hardly slam the door in his face. Peter was there on business, and he meant business.

"What about this cheque?"

The guy basically told Peter to go to hell.

"I'll just take this as collateral, then." Peter moved over to a stereo system, and prepared to carry it out of the doors.

The guy responded by producing a machete, and threatening Peter, moving toward him. Peter thought that discretion was the better part of valour, and left the sound system behind, as he made a hasty exit. The cheque amount, though, was eventually collected.

The manager at the Broadway Penner Foods store was a very well-muscled weightlifter. He kept himself in phenomenal shape.

Broadway was a fairly rough area, with most of the clients being lower income families and individuals. There was an abundance of bad cheques passed, and the store manager accepted responsibility for collecting them. It was not a task that anyone else wanted to do.

One of the cheques was for a small amount: less than \$17.

The woman who had written the cheque lived on the third floor of a rooming house. The buildings generally were run down, and the stairs less than safe. Often, the stairways were less than the minimum width, allowed under the building code, of thirty-six inches.

Grant, the manager, climbed the stairs and knocked on the woman's door. As he tells it, she was immense. He estimates she was at least three hundred pounds and no more than five feet seven inches. That size of person was fairly common in the area, and few were in good health or good condition. She was neither.

As the manager demanded payment, she grabbed him and tossed him down the stairs, bodily. He rolled to the landing, stood up, then looked up at the woman, standing with her hands on her ample hips.

He looked at the cheque. \$17. He looked at the massive woman again. He looked at the cheque.

“Not worth it,” he said, and tore up the cheque. Some things just were not worth fighting for!

Cheque collecting was both challenging and fun, quirky and dangerous. I liked cheque collection, because it also gave me an opportunity to demonstrate fairness. You could see when a person was taking it on the chin, financially. You could also see when they were conning you, or sincerely wanted to pay but couldn't. It allowed you to make judgements and delay collection, demand immediate payment, find a way to help the person through tough times while still protecting the store's interest or simply challenge the person to come up with the cash or alternative immediately. It also could be very dangerous.

One of the Penners department managers, Gary Mousseau, decided that he would like to “ride shotgun” with me, so he could take on the job of collecting cheques. Both Peter and I thought this was a good, as well as fun, idea. We both had intimate experience with the many challenges of collection.

On Gary's first ride along, we had the good fortune of having a real variety of types of people with whom to deal.

The first call was to a low-rental garden apartment complex on Watt Street. We were using the store van, as I often did, to avoid having my own vehicle targeted, later, by disgruntled people that I called upon. At this site, I parked the van in a spot directly in front of the entrance to the housing unit. Gary remained in the van, on my urging.

I had collected a cheque from this guy once before, with some difficulty. I wasn't pleased that Penners had taken another one from him, and that it had bounced, but things were what they were. I would collect, or have him charged with false pretences.

The guy was a very average-sized person, medium height and on the skinny side. He had a wife and two young children, so he deserved some latitude. Nonetheless, I had dropped by the prior week to collect, and his wife claimed he was not home. I knew otherwise, since I had seen him in the upstairs window as I left.

The entrance to the place was basic. A small foyer, with a set of stairs to the right, leading up to the bedrooms.

Gary watched as I rang the bell. I knew that this guy was home. The wife answered the door. “He's not home.”

I told her that she was lying. I also told her that her husband was a coward. I further told her that her chicken-shit husband was going to be spending time in the lockup, because I was going to have him charged with false pretences. I also told her that I was going to circulate his name to all of the other retailers in the area, so that he could be blacklisted (I already did circulate such a list, every month). All of these statements were intended to provoke either her or her husband into coughing up the cash.

As I had arrived, I had seen the husband's face in the window on the stairwell, so I knew he was overhearing my comments.

My poking and prodding worked. Eddie jumped toward me from the stairwell, intending to surprise me. He was the one surprised. I moved back, and he fell on the landing. I merely said to him, "Don't worry, Eddie. I'll just take this to the police tonight on my way home." I walked away, with him on the floor.

That threat worked. When we got back to the store at 9:15 pm. Eddie had already been in to pay the cheque, in full.

But the incident had a definite effect on Gary, sitting in the passenger seat of the van. All he had seen was feet and body hurtling at me from the stairwell, as I talked casually to the woman. He didn't know what had been said. He didn't know that I had anticipated the attack. When I climbed into the van, he was shaking like an aspen leaf.

"Are a lot of the people like that?"

"No," I responded. "Some of them are dangerous."

The next call was to another unit in the complex. This time, Gary came with me, reluctantly. At the front door, the guy opened it part way, and when I told him why I was there, he asked me to come around to the side door.

I found that to be suspicious.

When we got to the side door, I could see a baseball bat leaning against the full-length sidelight window. The guy opened the door, and grabbed the bat.

I indicated to him that I hoped he tried, so that I could add assault with a deadly weapon to the fraud charges for the cheque.

"What are you talking about? I was just moving it out of the way." He then paid the \$42 cheque, in cash, plus fees.

Gary, now, was quivering like a frightened pup. He had a little difficulty regaining his composure before he climbed into the truck.

"I don't think I can do any more tonight, Bob."

I convinced him to carry on a little longer. I had another treat in mind.

The third call was a little out of our way. We took a side trip to the North End, with its reputation for toughness and violence. It also was home to a substantial Métis and First Nations population.

It is, I suppose, human nature to stereotype people based on their race. In Winnipeg, the First Nations are viewed suspiciously by many, and most associate violence and crime with people in the North End.

As we pulled up to the upper/lower duplex just off Mountain Avenue, a three hundred fifty pound Métis man, shirtless, stood in the upstairs window with the curtains open. Gary looked at the man, and at the cheque. It was the right address.

"You coming?" I asked. "He could be a bit of a problem."

Gary had had enough.

"I'm sorry, Bob. I just can't go in there."

I left him sitting in the van.

When I returned with the cash for the \$200 plus cheque, Gary couldn't believe it.

"He didn't put up a fight?"

"Naw. He knew he couldn't win."

I didn't tell Gary until the next day that I had already arranged to pick up the money from this guy. He had called us even before we got the cheque back from the bank, and had offered to come in right away. I had told him to hang on to the money until the cheque came back, and we would arrange to stop by. This was that day.

I also did not tell Gary until later that I knew this very likeable, very gentle fellow quite well, and that his wife was a registered nurse. They had just fallen on temporary hard times. Probably, I should not have perpetuated the stereotype with Mr. Mousseau.

A month or so later, I ran into the guy, and told him all about the incident. He thought it was hilarious!

Gary was a great guy. It was just that not everyone is cut out to find the fun in a job that can offer great risks. He didn't ask to ride along again, and Peter and I had a good chuckle about the evening. I suppose I should have chosen more typical cheques to go after that night, but I couldn't resist the chance for a little humour.

It would be easy, too, to label everyone who bounces a cheque. They all could be charged with fraud or false pretences, and all could become instant criminals. However, with very few exceptions, they are very ordinary people, with ordinary lives. Many "criminals" are.

The people at Penner Foods could respond forcefully, when required.

During one shoplifting incident, we needed to arrest three men, who, in my judgment, were likely to resist. They did, aggressively. I had summoned the second assistant manager and a departmental manager to help out with the apprehension. Both were willing.

Bringing the three back into the store was accomplished with great difficulty. Each of the people, it turned out, had very lengthy and very violent records. Each demonstrated why they had been convicted. They were tough, and not afraid to use whatever tactics they needed.

Harry, the second assistant, had one of the three – the tallest – by the wrists. The guy also had Harry. As the guy attempted to break Harry's hand, he let go and reared back to hit the shoplifter. The guy hesitated, allowing us to overpower him.

Simultaneously, I was dealing with a guy that I had encountered before, in another life: the hotel industry. He was a bricklayer and had the muscle to crush bricks, although he was not tall. He was a little easier to handle, mostly because, I think, he knew me from the Maryland. I had never been involved in a fight with him prior.

The departmental manager had another fairly tall suspect, but he was less aggressive than the other two, and, once we got a couple of more back-up staffers to help out, gave up the fight. If the first thief had been able to take on Harry before we could help out, Harry may have had major problems. However, he had shown, on frequent occasions, that he was willing to stand toe-to-toe with anyone, when he had to.

For a group of people that had no fighting backgrounds, these were great persons to have on your side.

When the police arrived, they, too, had problems with two of the suspects. Harry stayed, to help out.

The third suspect was released on a Notice to Appear. He was the least violent of the three. The other two were taken into custody.

The third one, once out of earshot of the police indicated to me, "You better hide your ass, because I'm going out to my car, get my shotgun and blow you away."

I could tell that he was not joking.

About an hour later, another cop in the district telephoned to tell me that they had stopped a car with the third guy, and another male in it. In the car was a loaded shotgun. Given the chance, my shoplifter would have, indeed, blown me away. Both of them were arrested.

This was another story that could have ended there. It had ended satisfactorily, with all goods recovered, the thieves arrested and convicted, and the Penner staff showing incredible courage, given their passive, non-violent religious teachings. The story didn't end there, though. At least not for the bricklayer in the group.

About a year later, I arrested him again for shoplifting. He was arrested, resisted, was subdued and was charged. The next evening though, as I was working in my back yard, he drove into the back lane in his car.

He made a sign across his throat with his hand and pointed at me, indicating that he was going to get me.

I was enraged. I intercepted the car at the end of the lane, and grabbed him by the neck, hauling him part way out of the driver's side window.

"If I ever see your f__g face around my place, ever again, I will kill you." I was not about to have him hurt my family. Fortunately, I never encountered him again in the area where I lived. I am sure that I would have carried through on my promise.

This guy, to my knowledge, never "mended his ways." Colleagues in the investigative business encountered him from time to time, and, on most of those occasions, he remained violent.

Chapter 20

Often, the violence that retail investigators experienced across the city stemmed from desperation. When one is facing arrest, panic is the first reaction. When one is facing arrest by someone other than police, there is a tendency to disregard the authority of the position or the legitimacy of the arrest, and there, then, is more of a willingness to resist. Couple that with the reality that many of the investigators are poorly trained at many aspects of detection, reaction and conflict and the likelihood of fights increases.

Many of the violent acts that occur in those retail settings are the result of improper techniques on the part of the special constables or private investigators.

A colleague working as a “floorwalker” in the Zellers adjacent to the Henderson Penner Foods store was not one of those poorly trained personnel. She had many years of experience in the business, and the best track record for number and value of apprehensions in western Canada. We often challenged each other in the same way that competitive athletes would do, to stimulate our efforts at detection of thieves.

However, Zellers had a practice of rotating their investigators from store to store, one week per month. While this process moved fresh faces into the stores, it also broke whatever momentum may have developed by a “hot” floorwalker in his or her store.

Lori and I worked well as a team, and worked well in coordination. We would not only assist each other in risky apprehension situations, but we would also exchange information on shoplifters so that the same person or group would not be able to victimize each other’s store. One of the shoplifters was a guy who had provided Lori and five of the Zellers management and staff with very strong resistance. The six had barely managed to bring him back into the store. She described him and provided me with his name, so that I could be on the lookout for this fellow, and be prepared for the fight that inevitably would ensue.

The following week, she was assigned to another store, with an investigator that I knew from another Zellers arriving for the five days.

Late in the week, an incident occurred in Penners that smacked of coincidence, and I could hardly wait to inform her of it, upon her return.

This incident involved the theft of about \$25 worth of baby foods and a \$6 ring of kielbasa. It also involved a serious altercation.

The shoplifter could easily have passed as a lumberjack in town for supplies. His bright red beard, ruddy complexion, plaid flannel shirt-jack and work boots spoke of a hard and wild life.

When I stopped him outside the store, next to his van, I did not notice that he wore a buck knife in a sheath on his left hip. It was hidden under the loose-fitting shirt-jack.

Typically, when you allow a suspect to proceed too far away from the entrance to the store, it provides him with an increased sense of opportunity to escape, and increases his willingness to resist. That happened here.

It wasn't a major fight. As he turned on me, "Glen" accidentally stepped off the curb edge of the sidewalk and stumbled. I went down on top of him, and the fight was pretty much over. I let him up, and he began dusting himself off as I held onto his shirt. It was then that I saw the knife.

As he dusted himself off, he slapped at the knife sheath, opening the top clasp. As soon as his hand moved in that direction again, I reacted. I grabbed his hand, whipped his arm behind him and up nearly to his shoulder blade, and, with my other hand, tossed the knife aside. The immediate pain opened his hand, and he swore.

But my actions caused him to redouble his efforts, and we fought for several seconds before I was able to choke him from behind. It was my favourite move: finger and thumb meeting up behind a person's windpipe. Not being able to breathe left people with few options. They could fight for a few seconds and risk permanent throat damage, or give in. Most were smart enough to give in. Glen did.

After making Glen pick up the merchandise that had dropped out from under his jacket, I escorted him back into the detention room.

Another oddity in the business of violence is that, frequently, the vanquished party will become very compliant, once detained. That, in itself, is not odd. But both parties often will end up exchanging pleasantries, or even share a laugh. The loser has come to respect the winner, and the winner has the opportunity to be magnanimous.

In bar fights, combatants often will end up having a beer together, sometimes even that same day. It is a quirk, I suppose, of male interaction.

This occurred between Glen and myself.

"You're pretty good." It was his first comment to me.

"You didn't do too badly, either."

"I don't lose many," he told me.

As I wrote up the report, we talked. He was on welfare. His girlfriend had been laid off. He needed stuff for the house: PineSol, kid's food, the garlic sausage, and a two-pack of batteries.

"I'm in shit," he said.

If welfare found out about the van, he would be cut off. In those days, recipients were not permitted to have a licensed vehicle, and only minimum equity in a home. Welfare would claw back benefits if the asset was discovered.

"It's too bad about the sausage and batteries," I indicated.

If those items were not included in the theft, he could argue that everything was needed and essential for the family. The courts were much more lenient when kids' health was at the core of the thefts than when the items stolen were ego items or stolen for resale.

"Can you do anything for me here?" He wasn't begging; just asking.

I had already called the police, and had been told that it was a slow day. The car would arrive shortly. I had not yet priced and entered the list of stolen goods.

I grabbed the two questionable items, and, lifting one of the false ceiling panels, stuffed them in the ceiling. I would write up the report without itemizing those goods.

One other adjustment was necessary. The altercation. Any violence, and the circumstance of the arrest would change. I indicated that, when arrested, he had come in voluntarily. Actually, he had, but it had taken some physical "convincing" before he agreed to do so. My view was that he was a good guy, and had done what anyone in a panic may have done. I wasn't 100% convinced that he was going for the knife, anyway. We hadn't bothered to pick it up.

I actually had an interesting story to tell Lori about this guy next week. He was the brother of the roughneck that she had warned me about. I took a Polaroid of him to show to her, and suggested he might want to stay away from Zellers.

He let me know that he had already been barred from there a while ago, so he had no intention of going back. I didn't think to enquire further.

The police arrived, documented Glen and released him from their custody. As they left, I asked him to hang back for a minute. I wanted to go through the van to make sure he had no additional stolen merchandise from other stores.

We walked to the vehicle, where he retrieved his buck knife. Inside, the only stolen goods was a toilet seat from a nearby K-mart. He asked me to return it for him. I did, and provided them with the information on him. They photocopied his picture.

That was the last that I saw of Glen. He pleaded guilty to the theft at his first hearing, and got a slight rap on the knuckles by the court.

The surprise, for me, came the next week, when I told Lori about apprehending her shoplifter's brother. She knew that he had a brother, because she had arrested the guy months earlier. I showed her the photo.

"That's not his brother! That's him!"

Without realizing it, I had fought with, beaten, and arrested the guy who was supposedly so dangerous and so violent. If I had known in advance, I most certainly would have lost that fight.

My opinion of Glen was that he was a decent fellow, who knew how to fight and used it when necessary. He was a good guy, committed to his family, and not a chronically obnoxious or dangerous person. Yet, from Lori's perspective and experience, he was just the opposite.

That is the way it is with many of those habitual criminals. They are everyday, often decent people, who deal with life in the manner that works best for them. Often, that way is violent.

Chapter 21

Violence, though, came in many forms. In the early 1990s, AIDS became a very real risk. Police were trained in how to search a person who might have AIDS, or, equally as risky, how to search a person who might be an habitual drug user and have a hypodermic needle in his or her pockets.

Private investigators and in-house security staff of major retailers received no such training. The risks were higher for them, because they were the first point of contact with high risk persons, who often shoplifted to secure money for their drug habits.

Probably the pinnacle of peril came when one was forced to deal with a drug user who also was a prostitute. They were fairly common, even in Winnipeg.

Druggies will use whatever means, whenever available, to obtain the money for their habit, generally. Many of the Safeway stores in our city, at the time of the next incident, were experiencing a rash of theft of meats, but not small amounts. Shoplifters were bringing carts to the meat department, loading up with hundreds of dollars worth of product, and then dashing directly out of the stores to awaiting vehicles.

As part of my community follow-up on shoplifters, I would visit local bars and hotels, to see what was being fenced. It was here that I discovered the theft rings.

In Penners, we were not quite so vulnerable and exposed. Our reputation for fighting and success at detecting shoplifters had cut our thefts to a minimum. Nonetheless, there were both desperate and determined thieves who would occasionally try their hand in the stores.

Our meat department and floor staff had been trained in detecting warning signs, and often were able to deter theft before the shoplifters got beyond picking up the items, let alone escaping.

As a result of this success, we had cut coverage in the Henderson store to 15-20 hours per week, which left 55-60 hours of the store's operating hours uncovered by security.

On a Saturday afternoon, though, I was on duty. Two women, clearly not in great shape, entered the store, gathered up slightly more than \$700 worth of meat, and headed straight for the exit. I brought them back in easily, in spite of their resistance.

The holding area for this store had recently been taken over for other uses, so I was forced to bring them upstairs, through a secondary stockroom, to the management offices. The on-duty manager assisted, since the two continued to struggle.

During the climb upstairs, the more violent of the two, a woman in her mid-thirties but looking to be nearing fifty, clawed at my face, embedding her fingernails into my right cheek. She raked down an inch or so of flesh, with three fingers, just missing my eye. I was able to pin her arms, but she had already done significant damage.

If she had been male, I would not have hesitated to use a good deal of force at that point, and that male would not have resisted further. My mistake was in treating her as a female. She was less than that.

The second female, once another staffer arrived, recognized that she would be wise to discontinue resisting, and became compliant. That allowed the duty manager to call the police. Being a Saturday, they were busy, but we believed that we could hold these two without problem, as long as was necessary. We did end up holding them, but with significant problems.

The more violent, more haggard of the two, it turned out, was well strung out on drugs. Her eyes, among other evidence, showed that.

By placing my hand on her throat and putting my upper body weight on my arm, I was able to sap her strength. There was no need for a more aggressive chokehold. I continued to sit on her stomach, though, to hold her down. I expected a long wait in this position.

I had never allowed my staff to use handcuffs, and carried none myself. My belief was that the cuffs would impart too much of a sense of power to my guys, and they would likely

overuse them. At this moment, I wished I had not established that policy. It would have been so much simpler to spend a few seconds wrestling with this woman to handcuff her than to sit on her for the hour or so that it would take the police to arrive.

Over the years, response time to our requests for police officers had gotten progressively longer, partly due to our recognized ability to apprehend, subdue and hold suspects. There usually was no immediate threat requiring urgent response.

In this case, I would not even have the luxury of being able to document the suspects.

The duty manager thought that it would be advisable to summon Peter, the store manager, from his night off. This was one of the more sizeable thefts, and he had wanted to see who these people were who had become so desperate and emboldened as to shoplift in this daring manner. Peter arrived within fifteen minutes.

Peter generally was a mellow fellow, who rarely displayed anger, and almost never got involved in my apprehensions. For some reason, though, he was irate.

Immediately, he went to the prostrate female, yelling at her and calling her down for her actions. His words were far from kind.

Already high and unpredictable, she responded. I should have been more vigilant, and made sure that she was well under control, but, by the time Peter had arrived, I had already let her sit up, leaning against some cartons of merchandise. I crouched in front of her, to prevent her from escaping.

With immense fury, she launched herself at Peter. I was able to grab her from behind as she moved toward him, but my left hand came up near her face, and she clamped down with her teeth on my fingers. I had to use my right hand to pry her jaws loose, but, in the process, she bit deeply into four of my fingers, drawing blood and exposing lots of flesh. I also had drawn her blood when I had pried her mouth open. I now had open wounds on both hands and my face.

Peter was apologetic to me, but still angry toward her. Even after the police had been alerted to a dangerous suspect that we were having trouble controlling, Peter continued to rail at the woman.

When the police arrived, the documentation went quickly, even though the woman was uncooperative. One of the cops knew who she was, and confirmed her identity through the other suspect. She was the daughter of a high-ranking police officer, who, essentially, had disowned her because of her lifestyle.

Years earlier, she had turned to drugs, then to prostitution to support her habit. Her addiction was so deep, and she was so worn down and dilapidated that her customer base as a hooker almost was nil. She had turned to brazen theft to find the money needed to fuel her drug diet. Both of the thieves were transported to the lockup to await their hearings.

The following day – Sunday – I received a call from Peter. He was in turmoil. No one in the store worked Sunday, and Peter was no exception. He was a dedicated member of the local Alliance church. Today, though, he needed to make an exception. I knew why he was calling, because the same people who had called him about the matter that Peter was anxious about also had called me, immediately after speaking to him. The police.

The woman's identity had been confirmed. She was who they suspected her to be. She also had full-blown AIDS. It was imperative that I go to the hospital immediately for treatment and arrange for testing.

It should have been a shock to me. I should have been furious at the woman. Peter expected me to be. Oddly, I wasn't.

Peter could not apologize enough, or make sufficient amends, convinced that he had caused me to have a potential death sentence hang over me. I tried, repeatedly, to tell him that it was not his fault. I chose to be where I was, do what I did, act how I acted. It was my job, and there were risks.

On that day – Sunday -- I went to the hospital and had the wounds cleaned, and received a tetanus shot and an AIDS test. The risks and the possible outcomes were explained to me. Even though I was completely terrified of needles, I took the mandatory three tests spread over eighteen months, to determine if I had been infected. Fortunately, I hadn't been. For some unknown reason, though, I was not concerned about the potential, one way or another, throughout the ordeal.

The other thing that I have wondered about, even until today, is why I had no anger toward the woman. Indeed, my first response to Peter when we talked, at length, on the following Monday, was that I felt badly for the drug addict. I might die of AIDS. She most definitely would. I had a risk. She had a certainty. I felt sorry for her.

Within two years, she was dead, and I was clean. I don't think Peter, even now, has fully forgiven himself for agitating the woman. He should know, though, that even that experience taught me a little more about life, and tolerance, and understanding. She had no hidden desire to infect me or kill me. She was just fighting to survive.

Desperation fuels a great many actions, and many crimes. I have had numerous injuries inflicted on me over the years at the hands of desperate people.

One of those was a long haul truck driver. I had arrested him on two earlier occasions for minor theft. The second time that I had picked him up, I had called the police. He was barred from Penners, Zellers, and the Pharmasave store in the mall.

The third time that I apprehended "Steve" was in the dead of winter. Temperatures outside were minus 30C, with a wind.

By this period in my work at Penner Foods, I had set up a catwalk from which I observed customers on occasion. It was not an ideal spot, since I had a difficult climb down from the perch and a long run to the front of the store when I needed to arrest someone. I had been in the catwalk for nearly an hour when Steve entered the store with his wife. I had no time to retrieve my parka before he grabbed two cans of mushrooms and a couple of other canned items, worth less than \$5, and headed for the exit.

I managed to approach him midway across the parking lot, and he began to run. I finally caught up to him in the rear of the mall complex, behind the Zellers and near a liquor store.

He turned to fight, and I caught him by the front of the jacket.

Several years earlier, I had severely damaged my left arm, with extensive nerve and residual tendon problems remaining after therapy. Still, it had not impeded, in any significant way, my ability to handle myself in a fight. I usually compensated for the weakness by protecting that hand. It was used more to strike than to hold.

Steve grabbed that left hand, though, as I held his jacket. The air was frigid, and the damaged hand had lost the ability to detect hot or cold sensations. It was freezing and paralyzing quickly. He caught my pinkie finger, and began to bend it backward. I could feel the crunch as he broke it, half way in the back of the palm portion. The bone bulged, but the skin did not break.

He continued to wrench the finger, and, anxious to prevent him from tearing it completely, I began pounding at his face with my right fist. The first two blows did their damage, and he went to his knees. He held on to the finger, though, and I continued to hit him, as hard as I could. He no longer was twisting the hand, but he had not let go. I have no idea if he even realized, at this point, that he was holding on. I pounded and pounded, possibly as many as fifteen to twenty times. His face already was a mess. Finally, he let go.

I was absolutely frozen. I picked up the first two cans of goods and, cradling them in my arm, retreated quickly back into the Penner store. Two of the managers had been alerted to the fight by a customer, and they met me at the entrance.

I directed them to where I had left Steve, unconscious. He was no longer there. They did find him quickly, though, disoriented, about fifty yards away, and brought him back to the store.

In the end, I had to get the hand, badly broken, immobilized in a cast for two months. Steve, as well, suffered a broken nose, and a cracked mandible and orbital bone, as well as very significant cuts. This was all over a few cans of mushrooms and other goods, valued under \$5.

He had reacted desperately, in an attempt to escape. I had reacted desperately, in an attempt to prevent very significant injuries. Yet, for the most part, Steve was a regular guy, at a regular job, who felt the need to involve himself in petty theft, that nearly mushroomed into a crime that would have been much more serious.

After a period of time in this type of environment, even the threat of violence can cause concern.

Chapter 22

I had had a dream, on one Friday night, about a guy with a black jacket and camouflage hat coming into the Penner store from the west entrance, picking up a hand basket, moving to the bunk at the head of aisle 4, where cartons of Du Maurier cigarettes were on display. In the dream, he picked up six cartons and placed them in the basket before walking down aisle 4. There were more details.

I sat with Peter, the manager, on the Saturday morning and told him about the dream. We had shared many peculiar stories. This was one of the more peculiar ones. After coffee, I went to work on the sales floor.

At 2:30 pm., exactly the time that I had noted in the dream, a guy wearing a camouflage hat and black jacket entered the store from the west entrance. He picked up a basket, moved to the cigarettes, and picked up six cartons, before proceeding down aisle 4.

I racked my brain to retrieve details about the next sequence of events. *Along the rear to the produce area. I pass by him, and go to the bulk foods. He moves along the rear to aisle 8, which he enters. Aisle 8 opens directly onto the west exit.* Everything happened as it should have.

What happens next? I sensed it was not good.

I recalled. *The guy meets up with a woman. His back is to me, her face facing in my direction.* I headed to the end of 8. There they were.

I couldn't see him concealing the stuff, but the movements looked like he was. She was watching for anyone who might enter the aisle.

He turns, and I see the carton of smokes just before he zips up his jacket.

Now, I was in a panic. What happens next? What happens next?

Then it hit me. *He heads outside. I catch up just as his feet leave the concrete pad at the entrance and he steps into the travel lane of the parking lot. He turns, with a gun in his hand and shoots. All I hear is the explosion, and I remember nothing else.* That had been the end of the dream.

Now, in real time, he is leaving the store. I rush to catch up, catching him just as he enters the travel lane of the parking lot. He turns. He raises his arms, and slides right out of his jacket! The cigarettes spill to the ground, and he is shirtless, running. I am so relieved at this turn of events that all I can do is stand there, laughing, and laughing. There was no gun.

I look as he runs across Henderson Highway, pick up the six cartons, and head into the store.

I go directly to the lunchroom, where Peter is having his afternoon coffee.

He looks at me, and at the Du Maurier cartons. "Him?" is all he says.

Peter and I climb in his car, to find the guy. He shouldn't be too hard to spot, shirtless in mid autumn. We don't find him.

Peter and I talked about this matter several times afterward. If I had not told him, in advance, of the dream, we both would have chalked it up to imagination. But we had, indeed, talked about it. It was an amazing experience, and one that I can only attribute to coincidence and being attuned to the risk potential in the store.

The violence, fortunately, had been all in my head, and no one was injured, no gun used.

There is one more quick anecdote involving Penner Foods, that I think highlights the delicate line between those on the criminal side and those on the law enforcement side.

I apprehended a shoplifter for a minor theft. This guy had a fairly lengthy record, mostly for property offences, but he was no more violent than many of those others that I caught. He had not been compliant, but he had not been overly keen on fighting. He resisted, and that was sufficient for me to call the police.

While we waited for the cops, he continued to mouth off, but offered no more resistance than he had when initially arrested. I continued to insult him. We were both barking at each other, like two yappy little dogs. He posed no real physical threat to me, since he was only about my size, and our little wrestling match earlier had shown me he was not a very talented fighter. His record of violence likely came about because he was unwilling to back down, and his background went back several years.

His name was similar to mine. The incident report that I had developed was very similar to the police formal incident report, but the names of arresting party and suspect were in closer proximity on my form than on the police official reports.

When the police arrived, they, in error, checked my name on the police outstanding warrant database, instead of the suspect's. There was a warrant outstanding.

They informed this guy that he had an arrest warrant because he had failed to show up for a hearing on a seatbelt violation. He looked perplexed. He had never had such a ticket!

Then, I realized what had happened. I, indeed, had such a warrant, having pled not guilty to the violation, and then had forgotten to attend the trial, nearly six years earlier.

The police checked his name, now, and found other outstanding matters, for far more serious crimes. He was handcuffed and arrested.

Unfortunately, I, too, was wanted. The police asked me to walk ahead of them as we left the store, so that no one would suspect I, also, was being booked. I was not handcuffed.

On the ride down to the station, my suspect had a heyday. In the cruiser, as we passed people on the sidewalks, me sitting beside him in the back of the cop car, he would butt his head against the window and nod toward me to draw attention to his fellow prisoner. He thought that the whole incident was extremely funny. So did I, I confess. In the twenty minute ride and processing time, we shot verbal barbs at each other and had a few laughs. We were, temporarily, comrades in arms, although hours earlier, we had been combatants.

The attempt by the police to save face for me failed. I told everyone at the store what had transpired, and was the butt of good-natured ribbing for weeks afterward. It had been a humorous experience!

Chapter 23

I earned the nickname, Psycho Bob in one of the Food Fare stores to whom I contracted. That name came from two incidents.

The first involved a rather scrawny shoplifter who had a lengthy history with the police, including crimes with weapons. I knew him, and knew that, regardless of the amount that he shoplifted, I would be calling the police on him when I apprehended him. The theft occurred at a Food Fare in a low-income end of town.

That store had no room that I could use as a detention area, so I often documented thefts while standing with the suspect in the produce preparation area of the stockroom. That area was right next to the stockroom exits.

Produce department staff do a lot of culling and trimming of produce, and, therefore, need a supply of sharp knives. Wayne, the department manager, liked to stick the knives between the edge of the stainless steel prep counter and the wall.

As I was interviewing this suspect, we both leaned with our backs against the front lip of this counter. He stood to my right. I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, that he had glanced over to the two knives a couple of times, early in the questioning. As I continued to document the incident, I observed, discreetly, as he slowly slid his left hand along the counter, edging toward the knives. As I wrote, I pretended to be oblivious. His hand slid closer and closer.

Wayne had been working a few feet away, and saw the guy's arm reaching over. He was about to shout a warning when I rapidly swung my right fist down on the guy's hand, just as the hand was ready to grasp one of the knives. The guy pulled back and yelled. He then lunged for the knife, and I pounded his wrist hard. He never got the knife.

When Wayne realized that I had been watching this guy all along, he knew he had a tale to tell to the other staff. Within days, every Food Fare knew of Psycho Bob's escapade.

The next week, that reputation was solidified, when I arrested two guys who had stolen several packages of chicken breasts. One of the guys was awaiting charges for fraud, involving several incidents where he had defrauded older homeowners in a construction scam.

I had chased the first guy, who was about ten years older than I was, across that Food Fare parking lot. As he ran, I clipped his heel with my foot, he stumbled forward and slid face first under a pink Cadillac – his own car! Instead of picking him up, I dragged him out from under

the vehicle, and continued to drag him for about another ten feet before I brought him to his feet. His palms were a little scraped and his fancy shirt ruined, but he was otherwise okay. His buddy, who had run in a different direction, returned within minutes after I had hauled the first thief into the store. We were still at the front of the building, near the cash office and a stack-out bin of apples. The second guy came at me, and I used the first as a shield. As I held the first guy, his partner attempted to pry my fingers loose from his buddy. I used their combined weight, and hooked my suspect's feet from under him. He tumbled over the his partner and the apples, sending hundreds of them rolling across the floor.

Now, I was free to go after the second guy, who ran from the store, and didn't return. Before I documented my chubby fraud artist, I made him pick up every single apple and restack them. In the back of the store, I documented him, without realizing his criminal background. He was eager to avoid charges, and offered to buy the chicken, and pay for all the apples. In total, he coughed up nearly \$100, for a ten dollar theft. I released him, but the act of making him rearrange the produce display amused all of the staff and many of the customers. So was built my Psycho Bob nickname at Food Fare.

Chapter 24

The thin edge on which some people in law enforcement operate occasionally places them close to being no better than the criminals that they have sworn to defend against. I have found that, the more intensely and intimately one works with hardened criminals, the more likely law enforcement people are to become defensive and quick to respond to threatening situations.

A person cannot afford even a fraction of a second in which to think, “Am I at risk?” or “Is that guy going for a weapon?” or even “Is he getting ready to attack me?” You must be ready to react instinctively. That unthinking moment makes you more defensive, knowing that you can not afford to be wrong, or your life may hang in the balance.

Many peace officers make the wrong choice.

Yet, I know of many cops that, although exposed routinely to the gutter side of life, hold themselves high. I know of cops that work the North End during their shift and then volunteer on North End charity and outreach programs during their days off. I know of a police officer that was so distraught over an error that he had made as a cop that he took his own life. I know another that committed suicide, in the early 1960s, years after being assigned to attend at one of the last executions by the province. There are many more examples of dedicated, humanitarian officers.

There are a few that are worse than some of the criminals with whom they deal. A handful of these have been damaged by the repeated exposure to the seedy side of life. One spouse of a cop that I know has complained that he had gone from being a loving, gentle, religious man to being abusive and cynical. They have filed for divorce. Divorce is common in law enforcement. The job changes a person.

Even at the low end of law enforcement, I found that the job had changed me, although I recognized the risk and fought it. Once I retired from the field, much of my defensiveness and anger dissipated. I was less stressed, less cynical, more open and embracing of life.

There are some cops, however, that should find it difficult to justify who they have become.

There are incidents in every major city where a cop has been found to be participating in criminal activity. Two cops in Winnipeg, Jerry Stolar and Barry Neilson, participated in a major break-in, and stole a very valuable RV. They were caught and convicted of killing a relative of one of the cops, who they believed, may have “squealed” on them.

I experienced a petty incident with one officer who, while on the force, offered to buy my investigative business from me. I did not agree, even though I had been contemplating retirement from the career. He knew of that consideration. Yet, a week or so later, I received a call from another guy in the investigative business, who had been informed that my client base was up for sale.

Who was “selling” my client base? The cop that had offered to buy it from me. This was such a petty attempt at fraud as to be almost idiotic.

However, he was not the only officer to demonstrate great stupidity. I arrested another one who had a bad habit of stealing merchandise from stores, and then attempting to return those goods for refunds. I arrested him, and called the police. I overheard, as the attending officers appeared to be attempting to establish an alibi or motive for him, discussing with him how he may have been under stress, may have been having marital problems and so on. It took a great deal of effort on my part to see that charges were filed.

Another cop was arrested for his third shoplifting incident, of a minor nature. Frustrated at his arrogance and unwillingness to reform or refrain, I called the police. The attending officers made several attempts to convince me to drop the charges. I refused. They pointed out that he had been moved from a more prestigious posting the department, to the level of park police, because he had been accused of raiding other officer’s lockers. That solidified my determination to charge him, even though they had told me the story to illustrate that he would likely lose his job.

The day after I insisted on charges being processed, a radar cruiser parked itself outside my house, on a residential street. It was there three of the next ten days. A couple of days after I arrested that cop, I was stopped for a vehicle defect: a burned-out backup light. Why the cop decided to stop and test the vehicle, when it was the only flaw and when there was no possibility that he could have spotted it, can only be guessed at. Instead of issuing the customary warning, and in spite of the fact that I fixed the light on the spot, the officer insisted that I had to take it to the police station to be checked. That was contrary to established practice.

Over the next couple of weeks, every call I made to the police for shoplifters took double the usual amount of time for the cops to arrive. They blamed it on high demand. I blamed it on retaliation.

I had a few tools, as well. I promised that I would call in every shoplifting incident, regardless of how minor. I did. I also promised to turn every NSF cheque over to them for false

pretences charges. I did. Several of the cheques were for under \$15. The calls for shoplifting hit those cops that I was targeting. They hated writing the reports, and the calls could only be delayed for a limited amount of time. The cheques, though, were another matter.

False pretences were handled by the fraud squad – the plainclothes cops. One of those was Sergeant Ray Garipy. “Bald-headed Garipy” he often introduced himself as. He was a very good and very likeable cop, close to retirement.

After I had hand-delivered my third batch of over a dozen cheques each, Ray dropped in to visit me.

“What’s going on here, Bob?”

I explained that I was out for revenge, and that if the cops with whom I had an issue wanted to enforce the letter of the law, then, by Christ, I was going to give them the need to enforce the letter

Of the law in every situation.

“But Bob, I’m getting hit here. This was none of my doing.”

He was right, In my eagerness to exact a pound of flesh, I had struck back at innocent, well-intentioned cops. I promised that I would back off. Ray then offered to “speak to the guys.” My response time to calls improved dramatically after that, if my relationship with the cops never recovered to former levels. They, like gangs, look after their own.

Shortly after I had a suspect that I had arrested show up at my home and threaten violence, I stopped completing the incident reports in front of the suspect. In many cases, I would write up all the details except for my particulars.

I had adapted my incident reports to be identical with the Winnipeg Police reports, so that it would be easier for them to transcribe the information, and they would have less of the tedious paper work to do. Almost every cop appreciated that gesture.

Whenever an officer would attend, we would step outside of the detention area, and he would confirm my data: name, address, phone number, etc.

One day, at a Coles bookstore, I made an arrest of a shoplifter who was high on PCP – angel dust. This compound, in addition to the high that it provided, also provided the user with a sense of invincibility, and incredible strength. I had heard tales of persons using angel dust who had torn muscle and tendon straight off the bone, without feeling the pain.

This shoplifter was typical. He was quite small; probably no more than 5'6" and 135 pounds, but he was stronger than the Tasmanian Devil.

Eaton Place had their own security force, and one of the patrolling guards had seen me approaching this suspect. He came to assist. The guard easily was six feet, two hundred and twenty pounds. At the time, I was pushing two hundred pounds. We outweighed the guy three to one.

In spite of his size disadvantage, this thief nearly was more than the two of us could handle. I had his right arm extended behind me, with my left arm being used as a lever to push his elbow forward. The guard had his left arm locked in a tight grip. Even so, this little guy was able to swing his arms forward, and almost toss us off of him. I nearly dislocated the guy's arm in an effort to hold on to him.

We were eventually able to subdue him sufficiently to handcuff him. Of course, we called the police.

One of the two cops that arrived was a big, burly cop with whom I had had problems prior, and with whom I would have problems afterward. He had displayed a bad attitude whenever I had dealt with him.

I had completed the incident report, and, as the other cop was attempting to interrogate the suspect (who had passed out in our custody and would not rouse), I filled in my name and other data.

The big cop looked at it, and said, "What's your name?"

"It's right here," I said, pointing to it. This form was identical to the police form, so he would have known that, anyway.

"I asked you, what's your name?"

I repeated that it was right there, on the form.

"I need you to tell me."

I had no intention of telling him, in the presence of the thief. He may not have been unconscious, and, given his recent actions, certainly was dangerous.

"We can step out in the hall and I'll tell you."

"You'll tell me right here."

I think that I know, based on our past interactions, why this cop was being so insistent, but he was not going to get his way.

"I'm not going to tell you in front of the suspect."

"If you don't, I'm going to turn him loose right here."

“You do, and I’ll be calling the station, and filing a LERA complaint.”

The officer, being the senior of the two cops, turned him loose, anyway. I immediately contacted dispatch, and then filed an internal complaint, rather than a Law Enforcement Review Agency complaint. The suspect was re-arrested and charged, and, as far as I was informed, the cop was reprimanded. Yet, he didn’t learn. I had another run-in with him, later.

Some of the actions that cops take in the course of fulfilling their duty are done with the best intentions, but cross the line, nonetheless.

Very early in my investigative career, I had arrested two people for shoplifting several clothing items. The theft had been typical teamwork. The guy had picked out the items and handed them to the woman. He would then instruct her as to where to conceal them, while he stood guard to avoid detection. Eight to ten items were involved, with most going in the woman’s purse. One shirt was not completely concealed inside her own clothing, so the husband helped to tuck it in. They were, most definitely, both shoplifting, she under his directions.

When I arrested them, neither offered any resistance.

When the police arrived, they re-documented the pair. It was then that the husband denied involvement.

The police had perused my report, and knew differently. The male, though, was adamant that he should not be charged. It was all his wife’s doing, he insisted.

I could see that the officers were getting angry.

Soon, the guy resorted to yelling at his wife, berating her for being such a fool, criticizing her for stealing, and getting him into trouble.

It was obvious that she was intimidated, and very frightened of him.

As he waved the back of his hand in his wife’s face, the cop seemed to interpret that she was at risk.

The shopping cart that they had pushed outside, containing the few items for which they had actually paid, was still in the interview room.

One of the police officers shouted a few epithets at the guy and rammed the shopping cart, hard, at the man. He then repeatedly rammed the guy several more times with the cart, while making specific racial slurs.

It was likely that this officer had stepped well over the line in the amount and type of force that he was using. However, those facts never made it into any report, and no one ever brought up the matter.

He had acted exactly as I would have wanted to do (except for the racial comments), and I actually commend him for using a little frontier justice.

The fact that he advised the man that, if the woman ever so much as showed up with a mark on her, the cop would hold the guy accountable probably saved the woman from future beatings, as well.

The cop had done what he had sworn to do: protect innocent people from harm.

Over the years in my line of business,, I have had several employees move on to become cops. With one exception, they have become great cops.

One, Graeme McGinnis, had a background that lent itself well to understanding people that lived near the periphery of the law. He was one of the success stories among my employees. He had a couple of brothers who also worked for me, in a former career. His older brother, Randy, was a good friend, as well. Randy looked like a tough guy, with one of his front teeth missing. He was a stocky guy, around my height, but outweighing me by forty pounds. Graeme's father drove bus for Winnipeg Transit, and had a reputation for being a tough and rugged man. Graeme had another brother around his age, and an older sister and oldest brother.

The McGinnis brothers and I very nearly found ourselves in a conflict with the law, long before any of us entered into the law enforcement field. We found ourselves in a different kind of enforcement field.

I had been aware of an incident where a fellow had taken advantage of two of his female employees. The McGinnises also had heard, and both of us were set on straightening this worthless thing out. The McGinnis brothers got there before I did, and put the fear of the Lord into the disgusting man. I merely offered to do the same to him as the McGinnises (I will not say which ones) had also offered. Within the month, this person had resigned and moved out of province. Good thing for him. Good thing for us, too.

Graeme has an understanding of human behaviour, because he has seen all sorts of examples, up close. His past was not one of daily church-going and devout ministries, either. He had his own youthful wild side. Several of the people with whom he associated developed their own lives, near or on the other side of the law.

Graeme, while not a law breaker, knew how to bend the laws as a youth. One day, he and his brother borrowed my car. They returned it with the battery shattered and my radiator shredded by the broken fan. They had been driving so recklessly and taking such quick turns

with my Plymouth Duster that the battery had broken loose, crashed into the fan, which, in turn, was bent and cut into my radiator. It was all in good fun.

I encountered Graeme once, when he was partnered with another detective. They were responding to my request for police to arrest a woman that I had caught, and who confessed to stealing \$35,000 in cash from her employer. These two detectives would later jokingly get on my case, because they had only been able to get her to confess to \$18,000!

Graeme continued with the police force, and has become a well-respected cop. The best cops often come from a background where they have learned to relate to and empathize with felons, in some measure.

He was one of the few officers involved in the Cross/ JJ Harper inquiry to not be criticized by the presiding judge. He was a good man, as well as cop.

One of the good cops, but not such good people that I dealt with was the cop who had been shot my a former friend of mine. Richard Donovan, after being shot, carried on with the police, becoming a skilled hostage negotiator (although there was not much call for that line of work in Winnipeg).

But he had a troubled personal life, it seemed.

Rick had been involved with a woman while he was not yet divorced from his wife, and court battles with both of them brought out some questionable characteristics.

Yet, Donovan was a dedicated father, to his own son and to the son of his girlfriend. There was no question that Richard wanted what was best for them. However, what he thought was best was not necessarily what others thought was best.

In the course of his divorce from his wife, Donovan ended up in seemingly endless hearings, exams for discovery, requests for particulars and so on. Over the course of two years, he spent a small fortune on legal bills, in an effort to minimize his support payments.

I was instrumental in having his court case cost him so much, as I guided his wife through the paperwork and research, prepared her hearing notes and trial speech, and, when Rick appealed the judgment, preparing her Appeals Court factum. He lost the Appeal, and incurred further cost.

He applied for custody of his girlfriend's ward (it was her sister's child). I became involved in that matter, as well, doing the same work for his now former girlfriend as I had done for his ex-spouse.

Through the process, Rick retired early from the force, at an age long before many cops retire. He then claimed to have no income other than his pension of about \$29,000. We proved that he should have income imputed to him, in the amount of \$34,000, thus increasing his support liability, based on an imputed income of just over \$63,000.

Eventually, Rick was ordered to pay child support in the range of \$500 per month to his former girlfriend, and roughly \$250 to his ex-wife. He had run up such legal bills that he ended up signing over many of his assets to his new girlfriend. He still had reported income of less than \$2,500 per month, yet bills to pay, including private school tuition for his son, that ate up two thirds of that amount, before day-to-day living expenses were factored into the equation.

There were several incidents that occurred that I am sure infuriated Donovan about me. His ex indicated to me that he blamed her for bringing me into his life. In fact, it had been what I saw as an irresponsible and arrogant attitude that involved me in the process. I often said to his ex that Rick had forgotten that cop is spelled "C – O – P," not "G – O – D."

I spent a good deal of time investigating him, checking into his background and assets, determining current behaviours, and so on.

At one point, he threatened to have criminal harassment charges laid against me for stalking him. Of course, since I was legally entitled to investigate him, those charges would have been dismissed immediately, if they were ever filed. Knowing that, I taunted him by calling up his desk sergeant and enquiring as to when they wanted me to surrender myself so that he could proceed.

On another occasion, I had attempted to serve Rick with court papers. I could see him sitting on his couch as I rang the doorbell, but he would not get up and answer. So, I faxed the papers to his station the next day, with a note explaining why I had had to choose this method of service: because he had been unwilling to answer the door at home. I have no doubt that other cops saw the incoming faxes, but that was not my concern.

One of the incidents that clearly upset him the most occurred after a brief afternoon court appearance involving his former girlfriend.

In earlier testimony, a witness had claimed to have seen Donovan dragging his girlfriend, by the hair, down the corridor of the apartment complex where the two lived. The witness further testified that she had seen Donovan kicking at his girlfriend while he was dragging her. His girlfriend had also testified to that incident.

In rebuttal testimony, Mr. Donovan suggested that the witness had misinterpreted what was happening. He did not deny dragging her by the hair, but denied kicking her. He suggested that what the witness had seen was him lifting his leg to protect himself from being hit in the groin by his girlfriend.

No one testified as to the ability of a woman, holding desperately onto her hair while being dragged, to be able to let go and swing at Donovan's groin. It would have taken superhuman strength and immense guts, in my opinion.

The entire purpose of this brief afternoon court session was to present this rebuttal evidence. The judge dismissed the court, and prepared to exit.

After we had all risen, I leaned in from the back row of the observers' area, toward his girlfriend in the front row, and asked, loudly, if she found it odd that a man with no balls would be protecting his groin. It was a reference to an inside joke that his girlfriend and I had been discussing. The girlfriend found it tremendously funny. Donovan did not. The next morning, his lawyer attempted to have me removed from the courtroom.

As I have said, my presence around Rick seemed to provoke him.

It provoked him, apparently, into actions that I would have thought that even the dumbest person would find too risky.

One morning, I awoke to find that someone had slashed two of my tires, while I parked on the street. Given the circumstances in which I found myself, I had a pretty good idea who it was, but to confront that person without evidence would have been less than a waste of time. He would have been alerted to the fact that I suspected him. I replaced the tires.

I started parking my car in the back yard drive area, but a second set of tires was slashed.

This time, I set up a camera system, and a motion-activated yard light. Several weeks went by, with no further vandalism. One night, though, I heard the breaking of glass as I lay in bed, in the basement of the house. It was nearly 4:00 a.m.

I had been checking up on Mr. Donovan for several weeks, and had not only found that he stayed up very late on most nights, but that he occasionally left the house by car. I documented those trips.

When I went out to investigate the sounds that I had heard, I discovered that the rear window in my 2000 Toyota Echo had been smashed, and a large cinderblock was lodged in my car's back seat area. Directly, I went out into the back lane to look for evidence. I found nothing clear that I could pursue. I ran the short distance to Donovan's house: a mere two blocks away. There, I found the lights on. His car had been parked in the front, on the road. I felt

the engine cowlings and discovered that it was still quite warm, as if it had been recently driven. I took a few photos of the car in the dark, making sure that I was not seen from his house window.

The next day, I gathered the evidence that was available. I tracked the cinder block back to a stack in the back lane, two houses from Donovan's. I matched the tire tracks to tires on Rick's car, and to a route that coincided with the route taken, according to evidence. At least, the treads matched the tracks exactly. I matched boot prints, right down to the right size, that matched boot prints leading to Donovan's front yard from his car. I correlated those to boots that he had worn. I documented a scuff on the rear bumper of his car that matched that which would have been left by a cinder block being taken from the trunk.

Lastly, I viewed the available videotape. The motion sensor light had not gone on, for two reasons. The person had stayed out of range of the movement sensor and the light was focused along the driveway and gate. The vandal had "lucked out." Whoever had tossed this 30 pound brick into my car rear window had done so over a six-foot fence. It would have to have been someone who had good strength and height. Donovan was 6'2", 235-250 pounds. The videotape showed limited evidence. Whoever had travelled down that lane and stopped outside the fence just moments prior to the window being broken had a vehicle with a taillight pattern that matched Donovan's, right down to one burnt out bulb.

With all of this evidence, I submitted my information to the police. However, they proceeded reluctantly. Ultimately, they called Donovan in for an interview. I was informed that he was accompanied in the interview by his current girlfriend, who also lived in the house. I was unable to confirm or reject this fact.

About a month later, no charges had been laid. I enquired several times, and then suggested I should go to LERA and complain. Shortly afterward, I was informed by the police that they felt that there was insufficient information on which to go.

At no time did I observe the police come to check the scene. I am aware of no occasion on which they examined Rick's car, for traces of cement residue. At no time did I find them actively investigating anything to do with the physical evidence that I still had.

Angered that the police had, in my estimation, attempted to protect one of their own, I filed a small claims action.

After the presiding magistrate heard the evidence, she concluded that she had no doubt that Donovan had committed the vandalism, and judged against him for over \$1,200 in damages.

She also indicated that she agreed that there was not sufficient evidence for a criminal conviction. Donovan never appealed the findings against him.

This was a decorated cop with nearly thirty years of service on the force. He had endured being shot and had undoubtedly endured many incidents of provocation and violence directed at him. He had revealed himself to be a dedicated father, concerned, genuinely, about his children. Yet, he had shown such a lack of intelligence and judgment as to let his anger get the best of him.

If a cop, with years of good behaviour, can lose control momentarily and risk his reputation and his future, then why do we find it unfathomable that someone whose life is filled with violence, suspicion and poverty, would cross the legal line?

Chapter 25

The most risky situation in which my company found itself occurred, not in a hotel or retailer, but in a courier company in Thunder Bay.

For several months, we had been working undercover in the Winnipeg depot of this international company, attempting to discover the source of significant losses and thefts from the secured holding area for prescription and over-the-counter drugs that were en route to various pharmacies. We had had little success at finding whoever had been orchestrating the thefts, but did uncover a couple of employees who had been stealing and selling other, more poorly secured goods.

Our investigation, though, led us to Thunder Bay, where Purolator had a depot that was not too distant from the Lake Superior port. The Port Authority also was stationed near this building.

I placed an undercover investigator in this facility, posing as a general labourer. Very often, when we stationed an investigator in a factory, office or other corporate business, we would attempt to assign him to the most menial tasks, such as janitor or day maintenance person.

The lower that a job appeared to be, the more likely that people would take chances in front of him or her. Most people often were more willing to talk about matters that they wanted to keep secret, or discuss clandestine activities, in the presence of someone that they considered to be inferior. Thus, that is how a good number of people viewed the guy doing the Joe-jobs, cleaning waste baskets, mopping floors, and similar tasks. That willingness to dismiss someone's capabilities simply based on socio-economic position was a great advantage to us, and led to many successful covert investigations.

In this instance, there were no menial jobs, except for cleanup. Our guy was scheduled to be a relieve cleanup person and picker.

Because we had to ship him in from Winnipeg, we needed a good cover. His story was that he had split with his wife, and was in Thunder Bay because she wouldn't look for him there, and, consequently, he would be able to avoid support.

It was a good cover. The advantage of the story was that it said that he was willing to try to bend the rules and the law. That made him more palatable for acceptance by other workers who may have a similar deviant inclination.

It was a well-established psychological principle that people will disclose information to another to the same level as that person already has disclosed. He had revealed that he was skipping out on a legal obligation.

The cover worked well, for a while. He was readily accepted into the general worker population. His problem was that he had no idea as to when he should listen and say nothing. He asked too many questions, and had little success in breaking through the barricades put up by whoever was stealing pharmacy drugs.

We did have some success in another area, however. Over time, we were able to put together a probable line of action that the thief or thieves was taking. We also discovered that one of the drivers was deviating from his route into the Nickel Belt area of northern Ontario. Thirdly, we found that the company was employing two of the local biker gang members in the facility. One of them was the brother of the local bike gang chapter president. We also uncovered a connection between the gang and a female worker at the Port Authority. This offered a potential avenue for them to move goods in and out of the docks.

Once we had compiled our data, I forwarded the information that we had to the Ontario Provincial Police, and let them look after it.

In the meantime, my investigator was arousing suspicions with his needless and inappropriate questions. I attempted to re-train him, and focus him on listening instead of talking, to no avail.

Some weeks after we had covertly passed on what we knew, the OPP “took down” one of the Purolator drivers on the route that we had earmarked as a possible problem: the Nickel Belt run. In the courier driver’s truck was a stash of illegal drugs and weapons, valued at over a million dollars. He was arrested and charged.

Within days, the brother of the biker president was found murdered. Apparently, whoever had killed him had decided that he was the source of the leak inside the Purolator facility.

This development was extremely alarming. Once the gang discovered that they had made an error, once they recognized that my employee may have been a plant, and once they decided that this witness and snitch needed to be taken care of, my guy wouldn’t stand a chance of survival. I pulled him out of the operation that day.

I had loaned him my car while he was in Thunder Bay. He was to rent his own vehicle, though, for work. Evidently, he failed to do so, opting to use my distinctive 1990 red Dodge Colt 200 as his vehicle to go to and from work. I was unaware of this.

I should have been more cautious, and done my own homework. I failed to do so.

Because we still had to conclude the investigation, I took over, but, this time, from the outside. I watched, for days, from over a mile away from the depot. It was not enough. One day, one of the employees at the distribution centre drove down this desolate untraveled road, and found my car parked. I can only surmise why he was on this road, as it led to a remote part of the port.

For whatever reason, though, he had spotted the car, and he drove directly back to the depot. Within the hour, the car driver came out of the building, entered his car and proceeded toward me. A second vehicle, with one of the two inside employees who had been identified by my investigator, followed.

This road led into the desolate dock area, but it was the only road. To prevent being trapped on that stretch of gravel, I moved onto a side road, where the pursuit began. The two vehicles were not giving up, and the OJ Simpson, slow-speed pursuit continued for upward of twenty minutes. Finally, I was able to lead them back onto a stretch of pavement intersected by several roads. Here, I shook the truck and car, but re-engaged with the car minutes later. Since the truck was not nearby, but I suspected would show shortly, I chose to lead the car back onto a private road that had a turnaround at the end of it. I looped around, and managed to come up on the road ahead of the car. Now, I had the upper hand, since he was blocked off. By my guess, I had less than a couple of minutes, before the truck showed up.

I tucked a small tire iron in the back of my belt and jumped out of the car. The other driver jumped out of his vehicle, as well, and came straight for me. I was able to intercept him, spin him around and slam him up against my Dodge Colt.

In very specific street language, I let him know that if he so much as showed on the same road as I was in an attempt to follow me, his ass would be mine. I also warned him to alert his buddies.

Normally, that type of bravado would have had little effect on the biker types. However, the fact that I had not fled, but cornered him, and the fact that I had stuck around after the arrest of the driver earlier in the month possibly warned them that I meant what I said.

I was able to conclude some more minor business for Purolator prior to departing for Winnipeg.

These people don't mess around. Just the suspicion of someone talking to the police can have dire consequences. Yet, they carry on in everyday jobs, right under our noses, and with little suspicion aroused.

Chapter 26

Not all violence is associated with drugs or theft. My former high school teacher, for example, was a member of the Manitoba legislature and an historian, who became the victim of a home invasion attempt, long before the term became common.

In 1969, he was teaching high school in Warren, Manitoba. Mr. Johansson was not a large man; probably no more than 5'6" or 5'7", weighing 170 pounds. Nonetheless, even at that size, he had a calm, determined manner that instilled fear and respect in every student in the high school.

A simple stare, or a few words could send chills throughout you, and no one crossed him. He was probably the most feared teacher in the school, but not because he was, in any way, violent. None of us had ever heard him so much as raise his voice.

He was also a dedicated educator. Students learned from him. Or else.

One day, though, we arrived at school to hear word that he had been critically injured. He had been shot.

Living in the West End of the city was no picnic, even in the late 1960s. It was decaying, and tough, if not rough.

From what we were informed, he had opened the door of his apartment, in response to a knock on the door. In the hallway, stood a man with a shotgun, levelled at him.

Mr. Johansson had the presence of mind to slam the door shut, but still took the full impact of the blast in the torso.

Severely injured, he managed to call the police emergency line.

Much of his insides was destroyed by the discharge, with several organs shot partially away.

He maintained consciousness, and was rushed to hospital, clinging to life.

Our classroom lost him for several months, as he recuperated. Not only did he recover, though, he returned to his job teaching our class.

I recall, precisely, the day that he returned.

My buddy and I, taking advantage of the man that even we feared, had converted the overhead projector screen into a dart board. We were taking turns, before the start of the school day, tossing our compasses at the target, then using a wooden pointer to swipe at the darts that stuck too high for us to reach. We would swing the pointer at the compasses, they would fly across the room as we hit them, and land on the floor, near the door. We would retrieve them and repeat the process.

As I swung the stick at my compass, that was embedded near the ceiling, I broke it loose easily. The compass sailed across the room, slowly. I watched it arc, and, at that moment, the classroom door swung open. The compass continued to arc, downward. I watched it make its descent, just as a foot, with a leather oxford, stepped into the doorway. The compass hit, point first. It stuck, like an archery arrow, in the toe of the shoe.

My eyes followed the path from the toe, up the leg and abdomen to the face of --- Wally Johansson.

It was his first day back at his teaching job. None of us had known that he would be returning that day.

Mr. Johansson looked, passively, at the dart in his foot. Then, ever so slowly, his gaze rose, fixing itself on me.

Then, slowly, he let his gaze fall, again, to his foot. Once again, he fixed his stare on me.

“What,” he began, “do you think...” His line of sight followed downward to his foot, then ever so slowly, back to catch my terrified stare.

“you are doing?” The words came out slowly, calmly, quietly. But they vibrated in my and Doug’s heads.

What did I think I was doing?”

About that moment, I think I was either wetting my pants or wishing I were miles away. I was doing neither.

I had just “speared” Wally Johansson. The story circulated quickly, and I was a bit of a cause celebre for several days. I would rather that it had not been spoken of!

I have met Mr. Johansson on several occasions since then, and he is not the terrifying man that I had recalled. In fact, I find him a somewhat gentle, yet intense person. But his ability to withstand the shotgun blast from five feet away, summon police, remain conscious and still recover so fully as to recommence his career tells me that he is an amazing person!

Chapter 27

There are times when we just do not realize how close of a call we may have had with death. In 1970, I had just moved to the city, and was working, during the day, as a copyboy with the Winnipeg Free Press. At night, I drove as a delivery person for Gondola Pizza on Pembina Highway.

One of my delivery calls took me to a motel at the corner of Pembina and Harrow Street. I knocked on the door and, instead of opening the door, the occupant simply called out for me to come in.

The room was a simple motel unit, with a bed, some low-end furniture, and not much else. There were two occupants: a young man and a young woman. Both were sitting on the bed. I put the two pizzas that they had ordered down on the night table, and told them how much they were. As I recall, the two were under \$8.00. Instead of digging out the cash to pay, the man reached over beside the bed, and picked up a .22 Remington rifle.

"Have you seen one of these before?" He held the gun, not pointed at me, but pointing to a spot about halfway along the wall between the two of us.

I was naïve. I had been in the big city less than a handful of months, and knew nothing about holdups. Guns were used for target practice, turkey shoots and hunting.

"Yeah. That's a Remington, isn't it?"

I remember the guy looking at me, and then looking at the stock of the gun, then back at me.

"Yes, you know it?"

I told him that I did.

"I've got a single shot. It's a Cooney, and my brother and I have an old hex barrel Hudson Bay .22"

That sparked his interest. For a couple of minutes, we discussed guns, and target shooting. He told me that he was up from the States for shopping. I knew nothing about the States, because I had not, at that point in my life, even been further south than Winnipeg.

After three or four minutes of talking, the guy pulled out twenty dollars, US money. I didn't have a clue about exchange rates.

"No change," he said, waving me off as I attempted to count out the money that he had coming back to him for the \$8.00 purchase.

He insisted on giving me a \$12 tip. At my day job, I earned \$112.50 every half month, for 85 hours of work! Of course, I thanked him, told him to have fun shopping, and continued with my deliveries.

Three days later, while I was delivering proofs between departments at the Winnipeg Free Press, I caught sight of an article. A man and a woman had been arrested at that same motel. They had held up a delivery driver and threatened to shoot him!

I had been within seconds of meeting that exact fate, at the hands of those two people, and the possibility had never even crossed my mind. Seconds can be the thick dividing line between violence and safety, between life and death, between criminal and common citizen.

In 1978, I worked at a job neither related to law enforcement or “bouncing.” As manager, I had nearly fifty employees working under my direction. They were, for the most part, teenagers. I had three sets of brothers working there. One set, the McGinnis brothers, I have already discussed. Another set of siblings were never involved in law enforcement, and, until one fateful moment, never involved with anything on the other side of the law.

But mental illness doesn't discriminate when it chooses its victims.

One of the two brothers, unknown to the rest of us, suffered from delusional thinking, and was diagnosed, after the fact, as a schizophrenic. One would have to be, to shoot one's sister, wouldn't he?

This guy was a normal, well-behaved person. He had no outward indicators, in his teen years, that he was suffering from any mental issues. Yet, slowly, over ten to fifteen years, he began acting irrationally. Treated as an outpatient for his problems, he continued to function satisfactorily in the community at large. Until one, day, seeing things that were not there, he shot his elder sister, dead.

Should such an act condemn a man forever? It will, indeed.

There are incidents of violence that start with nothing more than typical male bravado and posturing.

A neighbour of mine in Manitoba's Interlake got in a minor dispute with an acquaintance, at a local motor hotel. They carried on to a party, where one of the men retrieved a gun, and shot his buddy, killing him.

The police knew who the suspect was. They attended at his parents cottage, and searched the place from top to bottom, without finding him.

A couple of days later, in the presence of his lawyer, he turned himself in to authorities. He had been hiding under the insulation in the attic of the home while the police searched, but apparently at the bottom, and not the top.

This guy was not a large man, and, it is quite likely that the gun made him feel much bigger. Instead, he has not only taken a life, but destroyed his own, as well.

In an incident that sounds more like a cheap novel plot than reality, a group of young male friends in the Interlake decided that they needed some extra money, and decided that they needed to rob a bank to get that cash.

They pulled off the armed holdup at a credit union some distance from their homes, obtaining a modest amount of money.

Weeks later, having escaped being caught, they were gathered to divide up the loot. Two of them got into a heated argument about the size of each share. One started to drive off in a huff, but was shot by his partner in crime.

These were young men from respectable families, with prison guards, politicians and even accountants in the family tree. A couple were casual acquaintances that I had met, on occasion, at local gatherings. Now, one is dead and other others are convicted felons. It is hardly what they expected when they set out to earn some quick cash, but male bravado often leads to acts of stupidity!

Chapter 28

The Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission recommended that the Winnipeg Police stop referring to a suspect by his or her ethnic origins, in order to reduce prejudices. Their recommendation says that “The Winnipeg police department cease the practice of using race as a description in police broadcasts.” That has proven to be almost impossible to do, and, the logical extension of that would be to stop referring to suspects by sex, age, weight and so on.

If a person is aboriginal in appearance, he is aboriginal in appearance, and all the politically correct language and biases will not change that fact. Similarly, if a person is shabbily dressed, that is the best way to describe him. If he is nattily dressed, say so! If he is an overweight male, don't hesitate to describe him as such. Those labels are descriptors and not indications of prejudice.

I am part Jewish, part Gypsy, part Scottish, part Welsh and part Icelandic. My mother was born in the USA, my kids are British, French, German & Ukrainian, in addition to my genetic contributions. Their kids are native, French, Polish and probably four or five other races.

The problem is not in being described as being of any of these ethnic backgrounds. Any and all of them have, at one time or another, been the subject of poor or even good jokes.

If I am careful with my money, it is not because I am a Scot. If I have a wanderlust, it is not because I am Gypsy.

The AJIC provided a plethora of excellent recommendations to decrease racism as it pertains to police operations. Many have, unfortunately, not been put into practice. The label of “native” and “white” and “overweight” all may be subjective, but they have value in, at least, framing a general impression of a person's appearance.

It is when we use the labels for no benefit that we are encouraging prejudice. At the same time, we can apply labels to indicate a positive trait. I have recounted details about the natives, who shoplifted mosquito repellent and that were mistreated by Winnipeg Police. You will recall that I talked about their diligence and hard work when rice-picking or digging Seneca root. That may demonstrate racism, but I stand by my words, because they are factual.

Similarly, I have found that the people that I approach with the greatest reluctance when I anticipate a fight or resistance are native. This is not because they resist more, or are more

violent. For the most part, they are less inclined. But they offer the toughest fight, even though I consider them to be the poorest fighters.

One of my first challenges when I began bouncing at the Plaza Hotel came from a native, and a middle-aged one, at that.

This person had been a regular thorn in the side for my two predecessors, yet he had continued to return to the bar, day in and day out. He had been barred from the premises on two prior evenings, but no one had informed the day staff. He would arrive during the day, and drink until mid-evening, becoming more loud and drunk as the night progressed.

When asked to leave, he would refuse, a fight would ensue (which he would lose) and he would be tossed from the bar. However, it took both bouncers, and he would put up stiff resistance.

When my turn came, I chose not to fight with him. I went to him, and spoke quietly.

“You remember that you were not supposed to come back in here?”

“Yeah.” He was mumbling.

“You know we are not going to give you any more to drink.”

“F__k you.”

“You are going to have to leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere. F__k you.” He was not acting aggressively; just refusing to leave.

“You’ve got a little bit left in your drink. Why don’t you enjoy your smoke and your beer.”

He said nothing.

“When you are drinking that beer, think about tomorrow.”

He looked at me, blurry-eyed, not understanding.

“Think about how much the bruises that you will have are going to hurt. They won’t hurt today. You might have fun fighting me. Think about tomorrow, when the bruises that I give you start to hurt. Enjoy your cigarette. I’ll be back when you finish it.”

I didn’t suggest that I would be back when he finished his drink, as that might have taken all night. I didn’t act tough and posture for a fight. I simply asked him to look a little further forward than he was used to doing.

The guy, as he took the last drag on his smoke, staggered to his feet and left. He did not return for several weeks. I saved a fight, he saved some bruising, and no harm was done.

He was not a “drunken Indian.” He was a middle-aged man who drank too much, and still wanted to feel like he was important enough to be considered a man. I have talked, in this

book, about other drunks, most of them white. Sit inside most bars for a while and you will note how unfair the “drunken Indian” label is.

I did not shame him in front of others. I did not abuse him. I did not call him down. I simply pointed out, quietly, that he was going to leave. Period. I just gave him a dignified way out.

As I said earlier, many of the natives, in my opinion, have hard heads. That is, they will continue to fight and resist, long after a typical white guy would have given up. Maybe that comes from being pushed around daily. You learn to “lean into the wind.” Am I labelling. Damn right!` And I admire those natives who show that kind of fortitude.

In the two bars in which I acted as the enforcer, the great majority of my conflicts came, not with natives or Asians, or even bikers and wannabees. Most, by far, of the people who wanted to cause trouble were the average white guys, with a few drops of liquid courage replacing the few brain cells that they used to have. They were not regulars. The rest of the patrons were there, because that bar was their home away from home, or just plain “home.”

It was always the natives, or the Asians, or the gangs that got the attention and the press. They had the more high profile conflicts, perhaps, but, even though they, collectively, were the majority in those beverage rooms, they were the minority when it came to problems.

In the retail world, prejudging and profiling is common. A youth enters a store: watch him. He will steal. A native enters a store: watch him. He will steal. A senior enters a store: ignore her. She won't steal, and if she does, it's because she is desperate.

Those stereotypes annoyed me.

A colleague of mine worked as a “floorwalker” for the Zellers store on Henderson Highway. She rarely stooped to racial targeting. Possibly that was because she was half black. She also was very attractive. Both of those factors should have worked against her, since they drew attention toward Lori. They did not hamper her at all. She was the most successful store detective that Zellers had ever had. She succeeded because she looked to the situation and opportunity, rather than solely the person.

We became quite competitive, in a friendly way. One day, over coffee, Lori asked me if I had noticed that most women with peroxide red hair stole more often than other people. I hadn't noticed that.

To find out if she was accurate, we both watched all the women with peroxide red hair in our stores for the next week. In five days, I caught six women, she caught three with the red dye

look. I caught three other people, while Lori caught two. That should have proved that women who dyed their hair that very bright colour were more likely to steal, right?

At Penner Foods, I was able to set up a catwalk, from where I could watch every customer without me being seen by the clients.

Over a six month period, I counted those whom I thought to be over sixty, and those youths whom I thought to be under eighteen. That visual guess would be confirmed or denounced whenever I apprehended and documented a shoplifter.

In that six months, I caught just over two hundred fifty persons for theft. Of those, 95 were over sixty years of age. I had estimated that 38% of those clients, before I documented them, were seniors, yet 41% of the shoplifters actually were, so I was 3% low in my estimate of the senior population. The problem was that, based on my visual estimates, the ratio of seniors to non-seniors in the general shopping population of Penners was quite different. Only 27% of the shopping mix were over 60, meaning that the senior seemed to be over 1.5 times as likely to be a shoplifter as his representation in the shopping mix would suggest.

We had a nominal youth population in the store. There was a nearby middle school and grade school, but the high school was some distance away. However, in the evenings, the Zellers and Pharmasave attracted more youth. Our youth shopper population made up only 7% of the mix, yet our youth shoplifters constituted 9% of the total apprehensions. They were 1.3 times as likely to steal as their numbers warranted. So, indeed, a youth was more likely to steal than the average customer. Interestingly, though, the seniors were the most likely to steal, contrary to stereotyped image. The senior, as well, almost never stole through need!

Our native population was small: less than 4% of the shopping mix. Similarly, their propensity toward theft was only marginally higher than their population ratio, so they were no more likely to steal than the typical white shopper. That shoots the "thieving Indian" theory all to hell.

Lori conducted a more informal, but similar survey in Zellers. The youths stole slightly more than at Penners, the seniors stole slightly less, and the natives stole a little more often, but stole items of a much larger value. In general, then, the stereotypes were dismissed.

One of the common elements that is found in most of the in-house reports of shoplifters and many of the police reports involving crime on the street is the description of clothes. Few of those people involved in street crime or petty crimes are described as being well-dressed. Many are in blue jeans, cheap jackets and so on. That, in part, is because lower-income people make up the bulk of low-end criminals, and they tend to have poorer, shabbier clothes.

But it is also part of the unintentional stereotyping that occurs. If we observe only those people who look poor, we will catch only those people who look poor, regardless of crime. In turn, because we have caught only poor people, we will continue to watch poor people, because we have learned that that is where the crime occurs.

In the course of my investigative career, I have had the opportunity to investigate wealthy, average and poor people, in their environments. Hidden cameras don't discriminate: they see what they see.

One episode highlights the myopia of people under scrutiny, though. We had installed a hidden camera, under the direction of a national drug store's district manager, in a pharmacy, to catch employees that were stealing cash. We were assured that the location of the camera was secure, even though we thought it to be too exposed.

Sure enough, an employee spotted it on the first day, and challenged the district manager about it.

"You know those armed holdups that have been happening? The police have asked us to set up these cameras to catch them. You might even see an undercover cop car outside sometimes."

The employee bought this lame excuse. As his shift changed and the evening staff came on, he pointed the camera out to the new staffer. The two then peered out the window to see if the plainclothes cop might be there.

One hour later, the new staffer was seen taking money from the till and pocketing it.

When I interviewed her and asked her why she had stolen, even with the camera focused on her register, she replied, "But I was told it was only watching for those holdup guys."

Since when can a camera discriminate?

She was not the only purely dumb crook. I caught one middle-aged employee who had been seen stealing \$25 on one of her shifts. She was a long-time and trusted worker, so we gave her the benefit of the doubt. She knew every one of my staff, and often was responsible for signing them into their shift at the drug store where she worked.

After over a month of watching her intently, I caught her stealing again. She had just signed my worker on to start his 1.5 hour assignment on the floor.

When I asked her why she had started stealing again, after six weeks without taking anything, she replied, "You didn't arrest me for stealing in this last month, so I thought you couldn't be watching me."

I didn't catch her because she wasn't stealing! That fact hadn't hit her.

The lesson in these two stories is not how blind some people can be, but that everyone is subject to temptation, and even the brightest make mistakes. By labelling and stereotyping, we are making the mistake of missing out on potential problems, or branding someone unnecessarily.

That is the real issue that I have with profiling. Labels aren't the problem. Ignorance is.

Am I immune to this ignorance and intolerance? Far from it.

In 2001-02, I encountered a native in a situation where I, like many others, showed my prejudices.

I was exiting the Winnipeg Square parking lot on Fort Street and Portage Avenue at rush hour. I was unable to fully enter Fort, due to the amount of traffic, and the red light at Portage.

As I sat there, a native, quite inebriated, staggered out in front of the cars stopped at the light. He put his hand on hood of the first car and held up his other hand, as if directing the traffic to stop. It already was. He proceeded to the next and the next car, doing the same. He was doing no damage, and was not holding up traffic, as it was a long red light.

Suddenly, to my left, a young guy, shaved head, burly and short, burst out of his car and jumped the native. I watched as he took the guy to the ground, and hit him, twice.

I looked around. No one was moving. No one was yelling at the guy. No one was honking his horn. The young guy hit the native a couple of more times. Then he stood up and kicked him. Still, nobody moved. Including me. Then, he bent over the guy and hit him a few more times. About twenty seconds had elapsed.

I jumped out of my car and grabbed the man. He immediately stood back, put both hands in the air, and said to me, "Sorry, man. Sorry. He was being an asshole."

I told the guy to f__k off, and he did so. The light had now just changed.

The native stumbled to his feet, appearing slightly cut. He attempted to put his arms around me and thanked me over and over.

Instead of helping him to the side of the street, I told him just to get going. I could have taken the time to help. I was not blocking traffic with my car. I had nowhere urgent to go.

So why did I reject him? He was a drunk native. Pure and simple. I have been told that what I did was courageous. That is pure BS. What I did was disgusting. Everyone should have helped to protect the guy from being assaulted. I should have taken the time to treat him like a human being, instead of like an injured dog. I am ashamed to say that I failed to act with true humanity on that day, because of my own thinly concealed biases.

I do not want to tell you that all killers are great people, who deserve our compassion. Nor do I want to suggest that every violent criminal is a wonderful party person and great guy to have as a friend. I have known fewer than two dozen killers and another couple dozen violent individuals, and there are, on average, twenty-five to thirty killings in Winnipeg each year, and a few hundred assaults. Across the entire province of Manitoba, there are less than thirty percent more of these types of deviants. My encounters occurred over a period of forty years, meaning that I met less than 2% of the province's violent "bad guys." Much has changed in the world of gangs and drugs since I worked in my seedy hotels.

The criminals, too, may have changed, and become less human. I cannot say whether that is the case or not. What I can say is that there was decency in almost every person that I met on the ugly side of the law, and some very unpleasant traits in some of the most supposedly upstanding people around us.

Middle class Canada strives to rise, and become affluent. The lower income people struggle to stay afloat. There is a big difference between being stressed about the inability to become rich or maintain a high standard of living and being stressed about knowing if you can keep the heat on, put food in your family's mouth or if you will be evicted from your home. One is trying to survive; the other is trying to succeed. Survival requires frantic and immediate actions and reactions, just to hold your own. Success requires planning, and short as well as long-term strategies for moving forward.

Those of my friends who are on the lower end of the socio-economic scale are different from middle-class North America by the scope of opportunity, income and experience. Many are more "educated" in life than those in the upper social echelons. They have a unique perspective on life, and unique priorities. They act, through necessity, more in response to the moment than to the future, as the future is much more distant for them than it is for many others of us. That immediate reaction to life causes immediate actions that, frequently, would

not occur with the benefits and luxury of reflection – an advantage more often available to people in more affluent, instead of effluent, toxic environments.

I ask, therefore, that you do not rush to judge people who have committed despicable crimes as being thoroughly despicable. Most probably, there is goodness in almost all of them!

About the Author

Few writers can match the engaging writing style of Robert Lee. His minimalist method of enticing mental images from a single phrase, or urging complex emotion from a few sentences drives action throughout his works. Yet, Bob Lee can draw us meticulously and inexorably through the most detailed or complex scenarios, while captivating us with each word.

Whether you are absorbed in the convoluted mental struggles of Lawrence Mason (Inferno Inside), the unworldly twists and turns of the Sentinels (Council of the Pure), the ethereal adventures of the nymphs and sprites (Gypsy Lee's Fairy Tales, Fables & Yarns), or the heart and tragedy of true life anecdotes about murders and rapists (Wild Animals—People I Have Known), you will bond intimately with each of Lee's characters.

Fiction or non-fiction, Robert Lee presents brings you immense and unique reading experiences that will compel you to call for more of his works.

Bob draws on his diverse and unique experiences for many of the stories in his fiction works, and for the facts and concepts that permeate his non-fiction writing.

Raised in an impoverished rural environment, he brings the "Huck Finn" sense of wonder to his perspectives on life and the people that enrich that life. Bob sees his plethora of experiences in the corporate world and in the investigative field as phenomenal sources of ideas and information to augment innovative story lines. You, his valued reader, are able to live the lives of his characters, vicariously, due to the depth of those episodes.