

Chapter One

COPS AND ROBBERS

"Why the hell would I want to wear a bulletproof vest anyway? Nobody ever fired a gun at me, for crying out loud. When I start worrying about getting shot, that's the day I leave this job!"

The veteran police officer laughed good-naturedly as one of the younger members was being measured for a bulletproof vest just before the shift began. He would have reason to regret his words before the end of the day.

As I left the station that afternoon, the radio operator informed us of a robbery-in-progress at a nearby supermarket. According to the store manager, who had called police from the safety of his upstairs office, the suspects were stealing money from several cashiers at gunpoint.

When a security guard tried to intervene, one of the robbers placed a revolver to his head and pulled the trigger. Although the employee heard a clicking sound from the weapon as the hammer fell, fortunately for him it did not discharge. The suspects pistol-whipped him until he collapsed, and then fled the store. The two robbers made their getaway in a waiting car just as our members arrived on the scene, so the chase was on. We soon learned that at least one of their firearms was in good working order, because the suspects fired several shots at the police during the pursuit. A Dog Squad member fired one round in return, but neither of the crooks was hit and the chase continued.

The senior policeman who had joked about bulletproof vests half an hour earlier was crouching beside his car as they drove past. He dove for cover in a nearby gutter just as the suspects fired one round that narrowly missed him. He didn't quit the job that day, but I never heard him joking about bulletproof vests again.

One of our motorcycle policemen also got involved. During the pursuit, the suspects pulled up beside him and pointed a revolver at his helmet. He was forced to drop his bike on its side so he could use it for cover until they moved on. I joined the chase as the suspects sped eastbound on Broadway. I followed two cars behind them until the traffic ahead stopped for a red light. The suspect's vehicle, with nowhere else to go, crashed into the rear of one of the stationary cars. Suddenly the high speed chase was over. I caught a momentary glimpse of a robber leaving his getaway car through the driver's side door as I emerged from my black and white.

As I drew my service revolver and started to give chase, I heard shots fired on my right. It was too late for me to stop running, so I continued on my way past the getaway vehicle until I ran into a man standing beside the car in front of it. Everything happened very quickly, of course. I didn't know if this was the man I was looking for, but I grabbed him anyway and placed him against a nearby car at gunpoint. I have no idea to this day what he said to me during the next few seconds. Whatever it was must have struck a

responsive chord because I immediately released him and continued on my way. I joined another officer who had just collared a suspect in the middle of the intersection. I helped to handcuff him as we struggled on the hood of another car that had stopped at the red light. The driver stared open-mouthed through his windshield as we proudly dragged our catch back to my car.

The shots I'd heard when I ran past the getaway car were from other officers exchanging fire with the second suspect on the passenger side. He subsequently surrendered after he ran out of ammunition. By the time we returned to my police car he was in custody. Members recovered two handguns inside the getaway car, as well as a large amount of stolen money from the store. The passenger's revolver had functioned all too well, albeit inaccurately. The second handgun, which the driver had used on the security guard, was an ancient but still operable .45 caliber revolver. The suspects had loaded it with ammunition from a .45 caliber semi-automatic. For some reason, perhaps because of different-sized casings, the rounds hadn't seated properly in the cylinder. That mistake had apparently saved the security guard's life.

I searched our suspect again when we arrived at headquarters and found an expensive gold chain later used as evidence in another court case. He had stolen it during a jewelry store holdup in a different municipality. Then I guarded the prisoner in an interview room while the detectives put their case together. I tried to get a statement from him, but he was far too streetwise to discuss his involvement in the robbery. The remainder of our conversation was surprisingly civilized, however, considering the fact that we could well have been faced with the possibility of shooting one another only twenty minutes earlier.

His criminal record up to that point was already lengthy, with numerous arrests for assaults and robberies. He was a heroin addict with an expensive habit, so he stole to feed his arm. He and his accomplices were successfully prosecuted for several armed robberies that had occurred in Vancouver, including one where a store owner had been shot. After talking to the robber, and examining his criminal record, I believe there is no chance this individual will ever rehabilitate himself. Because society chooses not to permanently incarcerate dangerous career criminals, people like him return to pulling armed robberies after each short stint they serve inside prison. It was a miracle that no one was hurt that day, despite heavy gunfire from both sides. As for the gentleman I had unceremoniously pointed my gun at during the foot chase, I saw him interviewed on TV later that evening. It turned out that he was the driver of the car our suspects had rear-ended at the red light.

During his TV interview he was kind enough to compliment our police officers on how they handled the robbery arrests. I found out later that after I confronted him and then left to pursue the real suspect, two more officers had noticed him standing there and again threw him up against his car at gunpoint. This time he had faced a police shotgun. Fortunately, he was tactful enough not to mention all of this unpleasantness on TV.

What the TV reporter didn't realize was that the unfortunate bystander was actually a senior commissioned officer from another police force. The plainclothes officer must have been very pleased to see these particular crooks in handcuffs, because the squad he headed had been assigned to find them and take them out of circulation. In fact, the officer was on his way home after a busy but fruitless day of coordinating the search when the suspects rammed his car. That they hit his car, out of all the thousands of vehicles passing through the city that day, has to be one of the most bizarre coincidences I ever encountered on the job.

My career with the Vancouver Police Department almost ended before it had a chance to begin. It happened the day I graduated from Block One at the Police College. I was faced with a vexing dilemma as I drove home from the graduation ceremony because I had forgotten to visit the bank the day before. My wallet was empty and I needed money so I could join my classmates for a celebration that evening.

My problem was that I was wearing my police uniform for the first time ever in public. My bank closed in five minutes so I didn't have time to make it home, change, and then drive back. There were no instant teller machines in 1975, so I had to go directly to the bank and wait in line to withdraw some cash. I dreaded wearing my uniform inside the bank because I didn't want to be the object of curious stares, but there was no alternative.

As I stepped out of my car, a clean-cut gentleman in a suit approached from the direction of the bank's front door and yelled at me. "Where is he? Did you get him?"

He must have wondered why a policeman was driving an Austin Mini, although all he saw now was me wearing the familiar blue uniform. Obviously he expected me to play the role of policeman, despite the fact that I didn't really feel like a policeman at the moment. "Slow down," I said. "What are you talking about?"

"The guy who just robbed us! He just left the bank! He had a gun!"

This was real, not a training simulation! The complainant was an employee of the bank. He had just followed a robbery suspect out the front door as I was parking my car. The suspect could have walked south, east or west as he made his escape, although the employee was sure he'd turned in my direction. I hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary as I pulled up, but of course I wasn't expecting trouble. If the witness' account was accurate, the suspect must have walked right past me as I was parking my car.

The employee used his thumb and forefinger to illustrate the diameter of the barrel of the suspect's handgun. The circumference of the circle looked howitzer-sized to me. That meant the weapon was not a pellet gun, which has a noticeably small bore. I knew then that this robbery suspect was carrying a real handgun, not an imitation weapon.

I took a quick look around the crowded parking lot. None of the pedestrians looked like bank robbers to me, although of course at this time I hadn't been given a detailed description of the suspect. What the hell does a bank robber look like anyway? As my eyes swept the parking lot one last

time, I caught sight of a male in his twenties sitting in the driver's seat of a nearby parked vehicle.

I looked at him and he stared back unflinchingly. I didn't see any indication that he was nervous or frightened. I hesitated for just a second, wondering what to do next. My first instinct was to walk over to the car and talk to him, although at the time it never occurred to me to draw my service revolver. That could have been a fatal mistake. The holdup procedures I'd just been taught at the academy were still fresh in my memory, and I made the decision to step inside the bank and begin an investigation.

Admittedly I was a little scared, perhaps even more than a little scared, but I was far more frightened of screwing up the call than I was of getting shot. As the first policeman on the scene of a serious crime, policy dictated that I enter the bank, obtain a complete description of the suspect and phone it in to the communications center. I walked into the bank to find the usual state of confusion that accompanies an incident like this. The bank manager locked the main doors behind me to prevent potential witnesses from wandering off, as well as to keep out curious bystanders.

Two unusually calm tellers, each carrying a piece of paper with a hastily scribbled description of the armed robbery suspect, approached me as soon as they recognized the uniform. I immediately phoned the communications center and relayed this vital information to the operators so they could broadcast it to units in the area. Without the written descriptions I would have wasted valuable time getting organized. I thanked them profusely for their help. In all the subsequent holdups I attended over the years, never again was I given such prompt and able assistance by bank staff. Although they always did the best they could, considering the frightening circumstances, most robbery victims are understandably very distraught after looking down the barrel of a handgun.

As soon as I finished my conversation with the communications operator, I hung up the phone and waited for the police to attend. The real police, that is, because I didn't really consider myself part of the department yet. I just wanted someone to take over the crime scene so I could leave. The sooner that happened, the better.

I did not have long to wait because a Dog Squad car raced up to the front of the bank within two minutes. The constable's canine partner was barking excitedly from the back seat, eager to catch a crook. As I approached his car, the constable looked me over curiously and asked me where my portable radio was. Because I had neither the time nor the inclination to tell him what I was doing there in the first place, I just shook my head. He helpfully tossed me his spare radio and drove off to search for the suspect. I had never used a portable radio before, so I just stuck it in my back pocket and returned to the bank to await further assistance.

Ten minutes later, detectives from the Robbery Squad (later changed to the Major Crimes Squad) arrived to begin their investigation. One of them immediately approached me since I was the only uniformed officer at the scene. "Okay, you're assigned to the call. I want to see your reports on my desk before you go off-duty today."

I attempted to explain to the detective that I wasn't really on duty, despite the fact that I was in full uniform and carrying a police portable radio. He looked me up and down, shook his head in bewilderment and then walked away. I followed him like a lost puppy because I was concerned that I would screw up his investigation somehow. He tried to ignore me. I got the distinct impression he thought I was pulling his leg, and he was clearly not amused.

I gave up on him and began taking statements from witnesses. They were all documented in my first police notebook, which until today had only contained entries about simulated criminal investigations and training exercises. I thought my ordeal was over when the policemen officially assigned to the call finally arrived to take charge, but the original detective approached me again. "We think the suspect might have left prints on the counter. Arrange for the Identification Squad to attend."

I didn't dare touch the portable radio, so I hesitated, then replied, "Yes sir. I'll use the phone."

He gave me another puzzled look, and impatiently ordered me to use the portable radio because he was certain they were already on the road attending another call. Since I was not yet assigned to a patrol car, I had no call sign or any other means of identifying myself to the radio operator. Rather than arguing with the exasperated detective, I decided to use the serial number engraved on the exterior of the radio case as my call sign. I successfully transmitted his request, but only after some fumbling while I tried to find where the transmit button was. The operator was obviously intrigued at the use of this strange call sign, which consisted of a four-digit number that was not even close to any of the car numbers then in use. Nevertheless, she dutifully passed the message along to the Identification Squad.

By this time I wanted desperately to leave the bank, but I still needed money for the night's celebration. Consequently, I had no alternative but to join the long line of irate customers we'd confined inside the bank as potential witnesses. Even though I'd already written down their statements, they still had to wait until one of the tellers replenished her recently depleted cash supply and reopened her wicket. Only then could they complete their own financial transactions. They looked on, perplexed, as the policeman who had disrupted their schedules now joined them in line.

One of the tellers who had provided me with a written description when I first entered the bank eventually came to my rescue again. She walked over and led me by the arm to her wicket, which was now liberally coated with a film of gray fingerprint powder. I finally left the bank with the cash for my evening's entertainment safely tucked away in my uniform pants pocket, happy to have survived my first call as a policeman.

I have no idea whether the man I observed sitting in his car was actually a bank robber. Perhaps it is best that I didn't find that out the hard way. I was not used to carrying my service revolver; to get involved in a shoot-out at that stage of my career would probably have been a mistake. It takes years of experience to become a competent police officer, so at the time I thought and acted more like a civilian than a policeman. Maybe I

should have at least taken down his license number, but the idea never occurred to me until later that night in the bar.

Since the suspect probably walked right past me as I got out of my car, I often wondered what went through his mind when he saw me. It was fortunate that he was not trigger-happy, because at that distance he couldn't have missed. I checked the file years later. No one was ever arrested for the offense, and the investigators never generated any information about the suspect's identity. The case will probably never be solved.

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Vancouver has always had an alarmingly high number of bank holdups for a city its size. The reality is that most bank robbers are drug addicts, and we have more than our share of addicts here. Many use a fist stuck in a jacket pocket to simulate a weapon and then hand the teller a holdup note. Most of these suspects are eventually captured, usually through their own incompetence, but sometimes with the assistance of bank cameras and other security measures.

Having said this, it should be noted that not all bank robbers are as harmless as the losers mentioned above. On a regular basis, police run across heavily-armed individuals and well-organized criminal gangs that pose an extreme danger to the public and to the police.

There is no question that crooks could probably realize a higher return from less risky criminal activities. Often it seems to be little more than a matter of prestige that drives suspects to pull bank jobs again as soon as they finish serving time for their last holdup. Despite increasingly sophisticated security precautions taken by financial institutions, bank robbers just keep coming back for more.

The danger posed by these individuals was brought home to our department several years ago when one of our police officers was shot twice by a particularly vicious robbery suspect. The officer, who was flagged over by a witness, interrupted the suspect while he was making his getaway immediately after a bank holdup. The policeman was gunned down before he had a chance to return fire. Fortunately, the officer survived. The robbery suspect eventually killed himself as the police closed in on him, rather than face the consequences of his actions like a man.

Bank robberies are not without their share of risks for the offenders themselves. One of Vancouver's less fortunate robbers, a transient, first came to our attention when he was arrested by two skid road beat patrolmen. They found a loaded handgun tucked inside his belt as they searched him. He was sent to jail, but was almost immediately released on bail. That day, he walked into a Granville Street bank and held it up. His luck ran out inside a nearby fast food restaurant shortly after he fled the bank. When a determined policeman attempted to arrest him, he pulled out a weapon and pointed it at the officer. The robber died almost instantly after he was shot once in the chest. It was, in police jargon, a "good shooting". One of our local TV stations managed to get a close-up shot of the ghastly expression on the suspect's lifeless face as he lay sprawled against a serving counter. They showed that film clip repeatedly on their nightly newscasts over the next few years whenever they needed to spice up a crime story.

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One of our officers drove down a lane near Davie Street during a quiet day shift in the late seventies. Two pedestrians walking toward him split up as he passed. Out of curiosity he watched them in his rearview mirror as he negotiated the rest of the congested alley. His diligence was rewarded when he caught sight of them panicking suddenly and running away. At the same time, he heard a report of a holdup alarm from a nearby bank over his police radio.

One suspect disappeared immediately. The policeman gave chase on foot as the other suspect ran between two apartment buildings and ducked around a corner. The officer, fearing an ambush, wisely decided not to follow him right away. He took advantage of what little cover there was behind some shrubs growing around an apartment building doorway. He then edged cautiously toward the corner.

His precautions were justified. Seconds later the gunman emerged from his hiding place and opened fire. He had apparently been waiting there to ambush his pursuer but had become impatient. The robbery suspect fired two shots at the policeman and fled. Both shots narrowly missed. Investigators later recovered bullets embedded in the wooden trim of the doorway where the fortunate policeman had taken cover. The suspects were eventually identified after committing other offenses.

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I made my first bank robbery arrest almost by remote control. In fact, I didn't even see the suspects until after they were already in jail. It began with the routine check of a well-known heroin addict on the Granville Street Mall.

I hadn't been a policeman for very long, but one of the first things I learned was to recognize a hype, or heroin addict. At that time the Granville Street mall was heavily populated with addicts. As a group they were very much involved in the full spectrum of criminal activities, so a policeman interested in making arrests would usually meet with success just by checking drug addicts between radio calls. If there were arrest warrants outstanding, the addict went to jail. Because addicts frequently carried illegal drugs, weapons or stolen property of some type, a quick frisk often turned up enough evidence for a charge. At the time, the Charter of Rights existed only in the twisted imaginations of a few civil libertarians and naive politicians, so the evidence of a criminal offense obtained during a justifiable, routine street search was usually admissible in court.

Identifying a drug addict is not as difficult as it might seem. It is not so much that they all look alike. At any given time there are thousands of addicts in the Lower Mainland, from all levels of society. Many live a relatively normal existence and never set foot in the skid road area. Most of the addicts that chose to become part of the heroin subculture that existed on Granville Street in the seventies tended to act, dress and talk in a similar, distinctive manner. It was easy to verify drug involvement by asking them a few simple questions and then checking their arms for "tracks," a term used to describe the scars caused by repeatedly injecting narcotics.

The first addict I checked that day was obviously very nervous, and for good reason. Although it was a warm summer day, he was wearing a hip-length leather jacket and carried another new and expensive-looking leather jacket. He couldn't explain how the second jacket had come into his possession.

It soon became obvious to me that the second jacket must have come from a local department store, so I accused him of shop-lifting. As I did so, I laboriously turned the sleeves inside out and claimed knowledge of a hidden serial number that would enable me to trace the garment back to the store. He denied the theft, of course, and I was temporarily at a loss about what to do next.

At this point another officer joined me and offered some timely advice on how to handle the situation. We agreed out loud that criminal charges were in order. The addict became despondent, and finally offered to exchange information for his freedom. He was currently on parole, which meant he could be charged with breach of his parole conditions if he was caught stealing. He had only just returned to the street after a lengthy stay in a federal penitentiary, and he did not want to go back inside again. Heroin withdrawal is a painful, unpleasant experience.

The best he could do was to promise to meet me the next day with some good information. We told him we wouldn't charge him with breach of parole right away, although we might change our minds if he disappeared overnight. This is not the recommended way to run an informant, so I knew the odds were he wouldn't show up tomorrow.

There was no doubt in my mind that he'd stolen the jacket. He had conceded that by virtue of his failure to provide us with a reasonable explanation for its origin. However, there was still insufficient evidence to proceed with formal charges at this stage of the investigation unless I could find out which store the jacket had been stolen from. We sent him on his way and I seized the second jacket and placed it in our property office so that at least it could be returned to its rightful owner, if indeed the theft was ever reported to the police.

I showed up early for the meet. Much to my surprise, the informant arrived right on schedule. He was nervous, and clearly did not want to go back to jail. Having renewed his love affair with heroin since his latest release, he had good reason to value his freedom.

He got right to the point. He claimed to be in possession of important information about two bank robbers, but refused to reveal more until I guaranteed I was not going to send him back to jail because of the stolen jacket. I promised him truthfully that I had no intention of doing so, and he readily accepted my word. He then pulled out his address book and made a point of showing me an entry he'd made there, as if it were proof of his veracity.

He pointed to two names, both French Canadian. According to the informant, they were staying in one of the better hotels in the West End. The address was still valid, he claimed, because he'd just been up there the night before to sell them heroin. The two suspects had apparently hired female companions for the evening, so they were in a good mood that night. In fact,

during the drug transaction they had bragged about the amount of money they'd stolen during their last bank job.

As I pulled out my notebook and began copying down the room number from his address book, he warned me that he'd deliberately transposed two digits of the room number when he originally made the entry, ostensibly for security reasons. He readily provided what he guaranteed to be the correct room number, and then left in order to score some heroin to soothe his rattled nerves.

Of course I had some real concerns about the accuracy of this information. His little trick with the room number left me even more uneasy. If it turned out he was lying, I would at the very least look like a fool. Even worse, if the room was actually occupied by innocent tourists, and detectives mistakenly kicked in their door because of my information, we could end up with a civil suit for false arrest. The potential for disaster seemed obvious even to an inexperienced policeman like myself.

First of all, it seemed too easy. I knew from experience that almost everyone I dealt with lied to me, even if they had no reason to be untruthful. On the other hand, why would this informant have gone to all the trouble of fabricating a story for me? He could just as easily have skipped the meet and avoided me for the next week or so, hoping that eventually I would forget about the theft charge.

I decided to forward the information to the robbery squad and then crossed my fingers. They sent word to my sergeant the next day that the robbery suspects were now in custody. The detectives had kicked in their hotel room door and interrupted a drug party funded by proceeds from the robber's last holdup. The arrests ended a crime spree that had included at least two hold-ups here in town, along with several others across Canada. Unfortunately I soon lost my informant when he was returned to jail on other, unrelated charges.

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Most banks have security cameras installed to record the actions of robbery suspects. The hold-up photos in the eighties were black and white and tended to be somewhat grainy and indistinct, although the quality seems to be improving lately. Nevertheless, they could still be very helpful to the investigators, especially if the suspect had made no effort to disguise his face.

I occasionally carried copies of some of the better quality holdup pictures inside my uniform hat while I patrolled the skid road area. I did this even though I was aware that the odds of identifying and arresting one of these robbery suspects from their bank pictures were next to nonexistent. In fact, it would be the golfing equivalent of scoring a hole in one.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of a particularly quiet month working day shift in the skid road area, I decided to try to capture at least one of the subjects featured in three of the best current bank pictures, all from recent downtown robberies. I stuck the photocopies in the visor of my car each morning and referred to them whenever I had a chance. Primarily, I guess, I just wanted to see if it could be done.

It turned out to be even more difficult than I'd anticipated. The biggest problem was driving in heavy city traffic while simultaneously examining thousands of faces on the sidewalk. The process was complicated by the need to avoid jaywalkers and other cars on the road.

I was shocked at how many of the thousands of pedestrians I drove by actually resembled my targets. In order to check out each possible suspect, I found that I had to stop my patrol car immediately and approach the individual on foot before he had a chance to disappear. That sometimes meant leaving the car parked in the middle of a busy street and crossing heavy traffic to get a closer look.

Several people looked so much like one of my suspects that I had to put the picture beside their faces to finally eliminate them. Some of these people were not amused by this procedure, but I made a point of showing the more amiable individuals the photo I was comparing them to. Most readily agreed that the resemblance was amazing. Once they understood what I was after, nobody walked away mad.

Near the end of the month, I found myself scheduled to work with a partner for the day, even though I usually worked alone at that stage of my career. I suspect he thought my plan to catch a bank robber was a little strange at first, but he soon entered into the spirit of the chase. Although we checked several individuals who fit the descriptions as we drove through the skid road area, none of them were bank robbers. After several hours of this, we were about ready to stop for a coffee when we spotted yet another potential suspect walking down a Gastown sidewalk.

We stopped immediately and approached him on foot. Although he did not try to run away, he looked very nervous and uncomfortable. He was a white male, about thirty-five years old, with gray, balding hair and a full beard and mustache. After a quick frisk to make sure he wasn't carrying a weapon, I compared him once again to one of the bank pictures I had been staring at all month. He seemed identical in every respect, although the quality of the photocopy was admittedly not the best.

We finally knew for certain we had our man after we compared the shirt he was wearing now to the description of the clothing worn by the suspect several weeks earlier during the holdup. Apparently he had not changed his wardrobe since then, because the clothing matched perfectly.

We arrested him and read him the official warnings as we placed handcuffs on his wrists. During a thorough frisk we found two thick money rolls in different pockets. When confronted with this evidence, he readily admitted having committed the bank robbery. He told us that he had left for Vancouver Island after the holdup to lie low with friends until the heat died down. He had just stepped off the bus a few minutes before we stopped him, certain in his mind that no one would be looking for him after all that time.

A background check showed that he had a previous record for armed robbery, as well as a long history of mental illness. He had already spent time in mental institutions after committing similar offenses because he was always found to be unfit for trial due to insanity. This robbery charge was also dropped and he was subsequently sent to a hospital for further

treatment. I imagine he's still holding up banks every time he leaves the institution.

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Detectives traditionally become involved in criminal cases only after all the excitement dies down, because patrol members usually do the preliminary investigation of most offenses. However, on one occasion when a carload of our detectives drove by a bank on Hastings Street on their way to lunch, they had an opportunity to do some good, old-fashioned street policing. They couldn't help noticing a man wearing a ski mask run out of the bank's front door. He was in no mood to stop when they tried to arrest him.

They gave chase, of course, but lost sight of him as he sprinted into a low-rent housing complex. Their suspicions that the bank had been robbed were soon confirmed when they heard the holdup alarm call to that address on their police radio. Unfortunately, by that time the suspect had already disappeared.

My partner that day was fairly new on the job. Although he lacked experience, he was keen and best of all, in excellent physical condition. I was overweight and out of shape at the time, so we agreed that if we had to chase anyone on foot he was the designated runner. We monitored the situation over our radio and drove to the east side of the project to block off one of several convenient avenues of escape.

As we pulled into the parking lot, my partner spotted the suspect sprinting toward us, now minus his jacket and ski mask. He saw us at the same time, did a U-turn and ran in the opposite direction. We left our car and gave chase on foot.

Fortunately, my partner was able to keep up with him, because I soon dropped behind. Although the area was quickly inundated with blue uniforms, it was my partner who eventually tackled him and held him down until reinforcements arrived. I resolved to lose some weight as my heart stopped racing and I gradually recovered my breath.

I recognized the bank robber from several years earlier when he had been a very active pimp in the West End. After being found in possession of a number of stolen guns, he had spent several years in prison and had recently been released. He soon became addicted to heroin, which he paid for with the proceeds from various criminal activities. Today he looked like a man with one foot in the grave.

The holdup today had not gone well for him. The teller he tried to rob told him to go to hell and stubbornly refused to turn over any money. Running into a carload of detectives on his way out of the bank had been the last straw, and he returned to prison a broken and dispirited man.

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On one particularly quiet night I covered another unit at a domestic dispute in a West End apartment. The boyfriend was very intoxicated, and I had a long conversation with him while the other officer chatted with his irate girlfriend. He was at that stage of drunkenness where he was indiscreet enough to want to impress us with his criminal bona fides. He began by hinting vaguely at his involvement in several bank robberies. Although his

stories were not specific enough to use as evidence against him in court, he revealed enough to convince me he was telling the truth.

He then lectured us on the Vancouver Police Department's response to holdup alarms. It soon became obvious that he was quite familiar with our procedures. In fact, his detailed criticisms of our behavior were identical to those I'd heard many times from Vancouver police officers. I found myself nodding my head in agreement as he talked.

He went on to compare our holdup procedures with those of a city police force in Alberta, where they had the ability to shut down major intersections by remote control. This would effectively snarl all adjacent traffic routes immediately after bank robberies, thereby trapping the getaway car. It was an interesting and informative session.

When tempers finally cooled down, we did a quick search of the apartment and then left. It was strange to hear criticism of our work from the perspective of a drug addict and acknowledged bank robber. In fact, I always felt he would have made a fascinating guest lecturer at the police academy, although his drug habit probably left him little spare time for such niceties. We confirmed that he had an extensive criminal record. We also discovered that he had at one time been acquitted on charges of attempted murder after he fired a .45 caliber round through a Vancouver policeman's windshield during a bank robbery. The officer ducked just before the bullet entered the headrest behind him. Furthermore, we received information that the suspect habitually kept a loaded revolver under his bedside table, the one place we hadn't searched that night.

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One of the most bizarre robberies I encountered seemed routine enough at first. I was assigned to take a holdup report at a bank in South Vancouver near the Oak Street Bridge. I arrived less than five minutes after the suspect left the scene. As I entered the building, I was greeted by a middle-aged lady who politely asked me if the bank had just been robbed. When I informed her she had guessed correctly, she smiled and said she had seen something that might be of assistance to our investigation.

She had become suspicious when she observed a man acting strangely after leaving the bank. She watched from a distance as the suspect jumped into his getaway car behind the bank, changed his clothing and then sped off. As a result, she was able to provide us with a description of the car and suspect, and she was even quick-witted enough to write down the license plate number. She was a perfect witness, something all too uncommon at a time when many people are increasingly reluctant to get involved.

I immediately transmitted the plate number and vehicle description over my radio to other units in the area. I also made certain that the information was passed on to police forces in the adjoining jurisdictions, because in the space of a few minutes the suspect could well have driven through several different municipalities. Once that was done, I placed my portable radio on a nearby desk and settled down to the monotonous task of interviewing witnesses and writing reports.

Gradually I became aware of increasing activity on our radio channel. Judging by the excited voices and snatches of siren noises I heard, there was

obviously a car chase somewhere in our area. I ignored it, since I had more than enough to do already. Then I heard the sound of police sirens filtering into the bank through the front windows.

I found out later that one of our cars spotted the suspect vehicle soon after I gave our radio operator the description. The suspect refused to stop when they tried to pull him over, so they were now in pursuit. For some bizarre reason the chase had wound its way back through the city to the same bank he had robbed only ten minutes earlier. The suspect drove right by my location and finally dumped his getaway car in a front yard just a block away. It was truly a classic case of a criminal returning to the scene of the crime, although surely that couldn't have been his intent.

The robber was not ready to give up yet, however. He leapt from his car and started running. Our members pulled in behind him and gave chase on foot. They were quickly joined by a member of our dog squad, who released his German Shepherd to run the suspect down. The dog, in his eagerness to capture a bad guy, grabbed the first running figure that crossed his path. Unfortunately, that turned out to be one of our officers who was also hot on the trail of the crook. By the time the unlucky policeman separated the dog from his pant leg, the robber had used his head start to put some distance between himself and the local constabulary. The dog soon began tracking again and tried without success to pick up the trail from where the suspect had last been seen.

There were a lot of police cars in the area by this time, but I decided to leave my reports for a while and join the hunt anyway. It was too good an opportunity to pass up. While checking the lanes several blocks west of the bank, I came upon a man jogging toward me with a German Shepherd hot on his heels. I had obtained a brief suspect description earlier from witnesses, but I had only seconds now to compare the individual running toward me with that description. I had to make an immediate decision. This guy didn't look like a bank robber, but then again what the hell does a bank robber look like anyway? The dog was certainly not acting very aggressively toward the jogger, but it was common knowledge that some of our police dogs were less gung-ho than others. I drew my service revolver and ordered him to drop to the ground. He hesitated for a second, then decided not to argue and did as he was told. I cringed as he ended up face down in the middle of a mud puddle. I approached him carefully to get a closer look. After determining that he was unarmed, I had a short conversation with him that convinced me I had stopped the wrong man. He lived in the neighborhood, it turned out. He explained that he'd unwisely decided to walk his dog when he became curious about all the commotion outside, even though his instincts had warned him not to. I apologized and gave him my name in case he wanted to complain. Instead, he accepted my explanation and actually giggled as he began to relax a bit. When I left he was trying to scrape some of the mud off his clothing. He never did make an official complaint about his treatment at my hands.

The real bank robber remained at large for almost a week before he was finally arrested. We learned later that for several months he had been commuting to the Lower Mainland area from his home on Vancouver Island

to pull bank heists. After each holdup he would take the ferry back to the Island and keep a low profile until he ran out of money to support his drug habit. Then he would return to Vancouver and rob another bank. He always changed his clothing immediately after leaving the bank, and then took several other precautions he hoped would fool the police. His methodical behavior led to his downfall this time when he left his pants in the getaway car he had abandoned so hastily. In the pant's pocket was his British Columbia Driver's License, complete with a color picture and an address where he could be located. That one mistake eventually put an end to his series of unauthorized withdrawals.

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