

Chapter Two

VIOLENCE

I grew up in a small city in Atlantic Canada. On Halloween night the local rowdies used to congregate in the downtown area, under the watchful eyes of the city constabulary, to raise a little hell. For the most part it was harmless fun and just a matter of letting off steam, especially when compared to other parts of the province where it was customary each Halloween to set fire to the area's historic wooden bridges. The practice was discontinued only when there were no more of these landmarks left to torch.

One year I happened to be standing near a good-natured policeman who was monitoring the Halloween festivities while conversing with a particularly attractive young lady. I watched out of the corner of my eye as one of the locals, emboldened by the contents of a mickey of bootleg liquor, pulled a tomato from his pocket and casually approached the cop from behind. He drew back his arm and drove the tomato with all his might into the unsuspecting policeman's neck. It knocked his hat off and stunned him momentarily.

I will never forget the range of expression on that young man's face during the next five seconds. First there came a look of exultation as he turned to one side and began to make his escape. That look of triumph melted away instantly, to be replaced first by horror, and then by frightened resignation. Another cop, anticipating the attack, had moved in from behind and collared the perpetrator before he had a chance to disappear into the crowd. His feet never touched the ground as he was picked up and thrown bodily into the back of a nearby paddy wagon. As the van left the scene, everybody agreed that this particular gentleman was in for an unpleasant evening.

Although I never had problems with the local police, it always seemed quite reasonable to me that somebody who picked a fight with a cop should be thumped resoundingly and sent on their way. In fact, I could not understand why anyone would be stupid enough to want to fight the police in the first place. The Chicago Democratic Convention aside, many young people from my generation still had respect for authority.

When I was in my teens, I heard stories about the infamous Vancouver Police jail elevator from acquaintances who had traveled across Canada. It was a world that was foreign to me, but still I found the idea of becoming a policeman intriguing. For a while it looked like I was heading for an engineering career, although I had spent several years working as a bouncer at the local legion and in university pubs. After dropping out of university, I hitch-hiked around the country and across Europe. I was eventually offered a job with the Vancouver Police Department while in the middle of training to be a naval officer in the Canadian Armed Forces at the Esquimalt naval base. By the time I joined the department at age 24, I felt I was ready to handle the challenge of police work.

Still, the violence I experienced firsthand on the job came as quite a shock to me. I learned rather quickly that many people didn't share my small town concept of the policeman as someone you respect and obey. In fact, one of my first lessons was administered by an unassuming lady we arrested for shop-lifting on Granville Street. Store security caught her after a short foot chase and held her until our arrival.

I had no trouble talking her into the back of the wagon. Then when the security guard pointed out that she was still wearing the fur coat she'd just stolen, I tried to convince her to give it to me so I could return it to the rightful owner. Even though I was reasonable and polite, she angrily refused my request.

Policemen fresh out of the academy need time to develop a proper presence on the street. That presence consists of a self-confident and comfortable use of the authority that comes with the badge, mixed in with common sense and a good sense of humor. Perhaps I was still using the cocky, overbearing tone that recruits sometimes adopt until they learn to vary their approach and attitude with each situation. For whatever reason, the shoplifter quickly became very hostile and aggressive, and then began swearing like a longshoreman. When I finally gave up on negotiating and climbed into the narrow compartment to retrieve the coat, she went berserk, clawing bloody furrows down the left side of my face and ripping my glasses off while I tried without much success to fend off the blows.

My upbringing left me with an aversion to hitting women, but that inhibition soon disappeared when I heard her grinding my glasses into the metal wagon floor with her boots as she continued trying to scratch out my eyes. Unfortunately, every time I tried to subdue her, my elbow would connect with the confining walls of the wagon compartment. Another policeman reached in and grabbed her arm. We finally managed to get handcuffs on her after a violent and bloody struggle.

The other officers on the scene were very amused at the spectacle once the fight was over. Although I had to endure some mild ribbing, nobody else seemed surprised at the ferocity and viciousness of her attack. I eventually learned the hard way that women are by far the dirtiest, most vicious of fighters. In fact, most policemen have a great deal of respect for their fighting ability.

It is also an unfortunate fact of life that when citizens watch police scuffling with a woman, they inevitably sympathize with the female and are often quick to make a second-hand complaint against the officers involved, regardless of the circumstances. Driving back to the station at a crawl because I couldn't see the road without my glasses left me with a new respect for the fighting prowess of the fairer sex.

Another of my early altercations was a very humbling experience. It began when I got into a dispute with a prisoner I was moving from one floor of the jail to another, by way of the elevator. He was much smaller than me, and also much more obnoxious. As the elevator doors opened on the fifth floor, the two of us rolled out onto the concrete floor, all the while punching and kicking each other. I did my best to choke him, but unfortunately that

left one arm free. My vision clouded as a lucky punch connected with my nose, causing it to bleed profusely.

Because I was on top, my nose spewed blood all over him. That amused the officer I was working with at the time so much that he had difficulty helping me out in any meaningful way. The drunk suffered no injuries, and went to his cell with a smirk on his face knowing that he had bloodied one of Vancouver's finest. My partner insisted on calling the rest of the jail staff to our floor in order to show them the bloody evidence of my fighting prowess, or lack of same. It was not one of my better moments.

People assume that police are highly trained in the art of self-defense, but when I went through the academy, nothing could be further from the truth. We learned a few simple come-along holds that were supposed to help us control someone resisting arrest. We were also taught how to handcuff a suspect. The rest of our time was spent running and swimming and doing pushups.

There is no easy way to train someone with a middle class upbringing to deal with the kind of vicious, crazed attackers he or she is certain to encounter on the job. Perhaps a highly-skilled expert in one of the martial arts might have a slight advantage on the street, but it takes many years of intensive training to achieve that level of expertise. There are no secret holds, moves or punches that offer a distinct advantage to a policeman in a fight, at least none that we were ever taught. It would be safe to say that many policemen are just as out of shape and unskilled at fisticuffs as the rest of the population. Although the training has improved a bit since I joined up, the most valuable lessons about self-defense are still learned on the street, the hard way.

The law does allow a police officer to use the minimum amount of force necessary to effect an arrest, and in the academy recruits are lectured exhaustively on the proper use of force under the Criminal Code. Unfortunately, real life situations allow a cop only seconds to react, and even less time to remember all the relevant legal precedents learned during training.

A wise police officer learns how to size up the situation immediately upon arrival at a call. There is seldom time for hesitation and polite greetings. I would always ask a simple question to whomever looked like he had the biggest problem. Any question would do. "How are you doing?" was my favorite. The answer, or the tone of his or her reply, would often give me a valuable hint as to what was coming next.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that a small percentage of the hundreds of incidents police are involved in daily will result in a violent altercation. Some people fight because they're drunk; some fight because they don't particularly feel like going to jail that day; some are just vicious animals who will hurt anybody who crosses their path.

Our only advantage in a fight is that we frequently, but not always, outnumber the bad guys. The fact that we are sober while most of our opponents are not is helpful. A recruit soon learns that one-on-one does not make for a fair fight, because it is always safer for both sides if the cops

outnumber the crooks while fighting them. With enough help on hand to assist in the arrest, a policeman can use less-harmful tactics and still ensure his own safety. While there are some officers with boxing training who can pummel an opponent to his knees, all policemen must consider the fact that they wear a gun which can be used against them if it inadvertently leaves its holster during a fight.

After the first few altercations, an officer learns how to read situations more accurately and to anticipate trouble before it starts. There were times when my instincts warned me I was about to be clobbered by someone I was dealing with. A preemptive strike was then necessary to prevent a sudden alteration of my facial features. I found those kind of instinctive reactions to a perceived threat difficult, but not impossible, to explain months later in court.

Individual officers have to learn the hard way which techniques work best for them. For instance, while escorting unruly fighters out of crowded beer parlors, I discovered an effective way to control prisoners who were reluctant to cooperate. Often they had to be removed quickly and cleanly so that nobody else in the bar had an opportunity to join in. The easiest method was to grab them by the hair on the back of their head and steer them toward the nearest exit. Quite simply, wherever the head goes, the rest of the body must follow. The downside was that this tactic appears brutal to the general public, even though it is perfectly humane and harmless.

Although we were issued blackjacks when we joined the department, nobody ever carried them. For many years we weren't allowed to use wooden nightsticks, apparently because there was concern the media might make an issue of it. When nightsticks were finally issued, the beat patrolmen who needed them the most were still not allowed to carry them for over a year because of image concerns. Many of us preferred using heavy metal flashlights for protection anyway. I carried mine all the time. Just holding it in my hand, at the ready, was often enough to deter potential assailants.

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Of course handcuffs are extremely useful for controlling suspects. As I gained experience, I made it a practice to handcuff everybody I arrested as soon as possible. Even those I did not perceive as a threat found themselves wearing steel bracelets until they arrived at the jail. I saw too many policemen punched by their prisoners when their attention wandered momentarily. The cuffs also made it more difficult for prisoners to run away, although more than one suspect has escaped from the police while handcuffed behind his back.

Handcuffs are not an infallible method of securing prisoners. It is not uncommon for budding Houdini understudies to secrete a handcuff key or lock pick on their person. An agile prisoner has no difficulty bringing his handcuffed wrists from back to front by slipping them under his legs. He then has limited use of his hands in front of him; which poses an increased risk to the police. Even if the cuffs remain on and behind a prisoner's back, a violent suspect can do a lot of damage with a head butt to the face. This is known to rugby players as a "Scottish handshake" when it is done face-to-face.

While still a rookie, I was assigned to transport a transsexual to jail after he was arrested for robbery. The arresting officer had handcuffed him before he was placed in the wagon as he was familiar with the prisoner's foul disposition and violent reputation. As I opened up the back door of the wagon at the rear of headquarters, he threw the handcuffs in my face, hitched up his skirt and attempted to make a run for it. We found out later he had used a broken pen refill to pick the handcuff locks.

I managed to grab him by one arm as he clawed at my eyes and fought desperately to break loose. I ended up swinging the prisoner bodily through the air in a circle, hoping that eventually a wall would intervene and knock the fight out of him. The door at the back of the station opened just at that moment. An unsuspecting police officer emerged to be suddenly confronted by the world's ugliest flying object spinning in his direction out of the darkness. In an effort to ward off this startling apparition, he reflexively threw up his fists. One of them connected solidly with the transsexual's forehead, knocking the fight out of him and ending the struggle.

The officer merely shrugged off the incident without even breaking stride. As I walked the prisoner into the well-lit jail lobby, I began to sense that something was wrong when he started screeching like an injured dog. A deep cut on his forehead sprayed blood in every direction as he screamed in my face, attracting a supervisor whose curiosity was now well and truly aroused. Fortunately, he recognized my prisoner and remarked that he was well aware of the prisoner's violent reputation.

The officer we'd met at the rear of the station approached me later on and mentioned in passing that if there was a problem I should just send the Internal Investigations Squad detectives to him for an explanation. As a rookie, I appreciated the offer far more than he may have thought. Even at that stage of my career I was aware that incidents like this could quickly mushroom into a nightmarish situation, even though we had done nothing wrong. As it turned out, this time there were no repercussions.

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As far as I'm concerned, there is no such thing as a fair fight when someone demonstrates serious intent to harm a police officer. In the end, the only thing that matters is winning. Losing a fight with a dangerous suspect could mean being disarmed, and that could ultimately result in fatal injuries. I can remember seeing film footage of prison inmates practicing methods of disarming policemen during a face-to-face confrontation. Too many policemen are killed with their own weapons.

I didn't hesitate to use whatever methods were necessary to protect myself. I was confident that I could justify that use of force in a court room later, should that prove necessary. It should be pointed out that some violent tactics are, of necessity, used only sparingly by police officers. For example, hitting someone on the head is avoided except as a last resort because of the potential danger a head injury poses. Any injury to a suspect's head is often immortalized for posterity in a color mug shot, because anyone charged with a serious criminal offense is usually photographed and printed in the jail immediately after their arrest. Defense lawyers love to bring copies of those pictures into court in order to elicit sympathy for their clients.

Defending oneself from an attack by an aggressive suspect was, at best, a necessary evil. There was often a fine line between self-defense and the use of excessive force. It was important to remember that society, the courts and the department were always standing over your shoulder, waiting to pounce should there ever be the slightest indication that line was crossed.

I rarely had to resort to punching people in the face, even though during my twelve years on the job I was involved in literally thousands of altercations. One particular incident happened at the end of a busy night shift. I was exhausted by that time, but en route to the station I stopped to cover another officer assigned to a disturbance call at the front of an old house in the West End. The fight was over by the time we got there.

I stood on the stairs directly in front of a seated bystander, waiting for the assigned unit to obtain details for his report. I talked briefly with the bystander, but since he wasn't directly involved in the altercation, I focused my attention on the original suspects at the top of the stairs. Although the bystander was obviously drunk, he seemed docile and I was not expecting trouble from him.

Suddenly, for no reason, he kicked me from his sitting position. His foot caught me squarely between the legs, and the intense pain took my breath away. Even though I was tired, my reflexes were still intact. I instinctively reached way back and punched him solidly in the face. I heard his nose break and blood started dripping from both nostrils. The fight ended as quickly as it started.

I had no trouble putting handcuffs on him. He immediately apologized profusely for what he'd done, stating in a distinctly nasal voice that he had no idea why the incident had occurred. I was desperately tired, and I did not relish the idea of taking him to the hospital to get his nose straightened and then spending two hours writing the Crown Counsel reports. Therefore, I eventually decided we were even and let him walk away. He had no previous record, and the matter ended there.

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Another violent incident was just as unpredictable. I stopped a prostitute who worked the Granville Mall area to question her about a recent trick rip-off. She was not usually belligerent when I checked her, although she and her pimp were notorious for hundreds of strong-armings they had perpetrated over the years. Most of their victims were originally her tricks. Her criminal career peaked but did not end during one subsequent incident where a seemingly docile victim had suddenly panicked in the middle of one of their tag-team robberies and accidentally ran her over with his car.

On this day I asked her first about the whereabouts of her pimp. I discovered that he was presently pumping iron during one of his annual vacations inside Oakalla prison. She took offense at my suggestion that she would soon join him there if I got my way, and showed her displeasure by suddenly flicking a burning cigarette butt into my face.

It bounced off my glasses as I ducked. At the same time, my reflexes took over and I threw a punch in her direction which connected with just enough force to quiet her down momentarily. The glancing blow did no noticeable damage to her face, but I'm sure it must have smarted. As she

was put into the paddy wagon for a trip to the drunk tank, she regaled the wagon driver with a stinging assessment of my pugilistic skills. "This pig punches like a goddamn sissy. He couldn't even knock out a girl!"

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Yet another incident occurred in front of a hostile audience. It was a typically busy Friday night and my partner and I were working the West End in plainclothes. We attended a riot in a downtown bar that involved a dozen or so drunken football players. Anyone who crossed their path was fair game, so there was lots of action, as well as lots of blood, in and around the bar.

As was usually the case in the early hours of Saturday morning, everyone in the downtown area seemed to be intoxicated. The bar was empty when we arrived. We located the football players by following blood trails down the sidewalk. To get their attention and defuse a potentially explosive situation, we then arrested their ringleader for drunkenness in a public place.

As the prisoner stepped reluctantly into the back of the wagon, he paused to turn and address the crowd. Although I believe strongly in freedom of speech, the last thing I needed was an exhortation to his friends that they should rise up against the authorities. I was acutely aware that we were grossly outnumbered by drunken behemoths who were incapable of rational thought and thus dangerously susceptible to suggestion.

As the prisoner gathered his wits together to make a farewell call to arms, I cracked him gently on the top of his skull with just enough force to make him flinch. As he ducked, I nudged him with my foot into the compartment and closed the door behind him, effectively ending the uprising before it could be instigated. Without their leader, the crowd began to disperse almost immediately.

As I turned to leave, a face in the crowd suddenly jumped out at me. I saw the bloated features of a senior commissioned officer who was well known then as a strict disciplinarian. He was also reputed to be a man without a sense of humor.

Apparently he was in the middle of a divorce at the time. Rumors had circulated that he was so lonely at nights he would climb into his company car and drive to calls he overheard on his police radio, hoping to find some breach of discipline on the part of officers attending these calls. He looked me over carefully, as if memorizing my face, then walked away disgustedly with his nose in the air.

As I waited nervously for parade the next day, I was concerned that the high-ranking officer might have misinterpreted my love tap as use of unnecessary force. Sure enough, someone spread a rumor that he'd written a scathing memo to be read out on parade that day. I anticipated it with growing alarm.

The memo was anticlimactic. Instead of chastising me, he found something far more sinister to complain about. Several uniformed members who had covered our call, he wrote, had been seen without their hats on. He reiterated the vital importance of wearing hats and ties in order to preserve the image of the department, and promised that in the future, offenders would be severely disciplined. Since we had worked plainclothes, we were

safe from any repercussions arising from the memo. We went out on patrol that night with a clear conscience, grateful that our ever-vigilant management team had once again shown us the importance of adherence to the all important dress code regulations.

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Nostalgia, as they say, just ain't what it used to be. I have the distinct impression, however, that most of the fight calls we attended in 1975 were far less violent than the fights we broke up when I left the job a dozen years later. The beer parlor mini-riots were always loud and raucous, and there were often piles of broken glass and bodies on the floors when we arrived. Injuries in the seventies were usually superficial and the problems ended when we carted away the participants for a night in the drunk tank. Most of the miscreants awoke from their revelry with only a hangover, because a night in the tank did not mean they acquired a criminal record.

During my first year on the job I was called to the Hotel Vancouver lobby one evening to deal with a drunk annoying the staff. He turned out to be a logger about my size, very drunk but obviously in good physical condition. I was still learning how to be a policeman, so when he refused to leave after I asked him politely, I was temporarily at a loss for words. When I put my hand on his shoulder to escort him out of the lobby, the fight was on.

During the altercation that followed, a man in a fancy black suit approached me twice and asked politely if he could be of assistance. I had no idea who he was, but I turned down his help each time, stubbornly determined to make the arrest by myself.

The two of us wrestled on the floor of the hotel lobby for about ten minutes until his strength finally started to fade. We ended up fighting on the front stairs at the entranceway on busy Georgia Street with me sitting on top of him, banging his head repeatedly into the concrete so I could get him handcuffed. I got one cuff on, but by this time I no longer had enough strength left to attach it to his other wrist. The man in the suit had disappeared and my fighter was still struggling, so I finally yielded to common sense and used my portable radio to have another car drop by and help me slip the last handcuff on.

I subsequently learned that the helpful man in the black suit was with hotel security. Apparently my stubbornness was the subject of much amusement when the area cars heard the story from him later after I cleared the call. I vowed then and there that I would never let my pride get in the way of requesting backup whenever necessary.

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My partner and I received a call to St. Paul's Hospital emergency ward about a drunk annoying the staff. He had apparently entered the emergency ward the hard way by crashing through one of their glass doors. A nurse informed us that the drunk was a giant of a man, and that he was waiting for us around the corner. His size was indeed intimidating. He was also twice as drunk as he was huge, and three times as stupid. He stood defiantly with his back to the wall and introduced himself by informing us that he did not, under any circumstances, feel like going to jail tonight.

We did not want to fight this man, and there weren't enough policemen working in the entire city to carry him off to jail. It was time for Officer Friendly to take control of the situation. In a very pleasant tone of voice, I said, "We're going to give you a break tonight. We're going to handcuff you in the front instead of behind your back, but only because you're such a nice guy."

Very gently, but as quickly as possible, we placed the cuffs around one meaty wrist and then the other as he tried to make up his mind how to respond to our polite request. The handcuffs were barely big enough to fit. The drunk was bewildered by this gentle treatment, having obviously expected a brawl. Before he could form the intent to object, he found himself securely handcuffed and under arrest.

The prisoner almost flattened the tires of the wagon he stepped into. The load was so heavy we felt obliged to warn the driver that his front end would be a little light for this trip to the drunk tank. We seized a rifle and replica revolver that the drunk had hidden inside his pickup truck.

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During the time we walked a beat on the Granville Mall, my partner and I were always conscious of projecting the proper image to the criminal element we dealt with. This was especially important inside some of the seedier beer parlors. While a liberal activist might describe a policeman's tough demeanor as machismo or power-tripping, we knew that our safety often depended on the way we handled different situations. Many of the patrons inside these beer parlors were openly hostile to the police, and they always outnumbered us. What that meant was that if someone made a point of confronting us, he had to be dealt with firmly and appropriately.

Our reaction to a direct challenge to our authority was always watched carefully by everyone present. The rare policeman who showed fear, or who failed to back up another member during an altercation, soon acquired a bad name on both sides of the Thin Blue Line. He would inevitably run into problems on the street with troublemakers who were more than willing to take advantage of any weakness in his character. At the same time, other policemen who learned of his reputation were reluctant to depend on him at calls he covered.

It is often said that you can smell fear, and there is much truth in that. I have seen people so surprised upon being confronted suddenly by the police that they lost control of their bowels. In fact, a police dog sometimes follows fear scent when tracking a criminal fleeing on foot after the commission of a crime. Therefore, a policeman learns to disguise any overt signs of his own fear, or lack of confidence, in order to gain the respect of the people he is dealing with. A lone policeman confronting an unruly mob will be watched closely by potential troublemakers for any sign of weakness. It is often only the officer's calm demeanor and authoritative bearing that allows him to influence their behavior. Should he fail to project an image they can respect, or at least fear, he will quickly find himself trampled underfoot. This posturing, by the way, is sometimes mistakenly perceived as arrogance when it slips out during a routine traffic stop.

When I was first assigned to a walking beat with a regular partner, a drinker inside one of the toughest bars in our area soon put us to the test during an otherwise quiet walk-through. As we approached the exit door to leave, a full beer bottle sailed over our heads and disintegrated against the juke box. By the time we turned around, the place was as silent and peaceful as a monastery. I'd never before seen so much feigned innocence or lack of expression, and it was clear that a spontaneous confession on the part of the culprit was unlikely. Nor was there any possibility of obtaining fingerprints off what little was left of the broken bottle.

I've been hit in the face with a beer bottle, and I can vouch for the painful damage it can cause as it shatters. Had we walked out of there without taking any action, our nightly visits to that premise would have deteriorated rapidly into one confrontation after another. The regulars would soon spread the word that we failed to respond to this challenge to our authority. We had to do something, but we had no idea who threw the bottle. Our alternatives were, to say the least, limited.

Without further ado, we immediately walked up to the likeliest looking candidate, slapped handcuffs on him and dragged him out of the bar. At the same time, we made it very clear to everyone that this particular individual had been selected at random to atone for the sins of the guilty party.

He proclaimed his innocence immediately, but we explained to him that someone had to go to jail for the offense as an example to others who might contemplate repeating that type of behavior. He heartily agreed that it was wrong to throw bottles at the local beat cops. Understanding our concern, he thought the matter over for a moment and then promptly fingered one of his fellow patrons as the culprit. We removed the handcuffs and sent him on his way. Of course he wouldn't have been charged with anything anyway. We found the man who'd actually thrown the bottle at us making his way out the back door moments later, and put him in jail when we uncovered outstanding warrants for his arrest.

Undoubtedly this arbitrary abuse of our authority would not meet with the approval of most lawyers. It certainly would have been difficult to explain had the man we originally arrested complained. Neither of us felt very good about what we'd done, but the thought of fighting our way through that bar each night to regain lost respect made the alternative we'd chosen much easier to live with.

Coincidentally, the alleged suspect in that case turned out to be a crook we had arrested once before. We hadn't recognized him at first because he fancied himself as somewhat of a chameleon and had changed his appearance since we'd last checked him. He also fit the profile of a bank robbery suspect on the loose at the time, so we sent his name to the detectives in case he was responsible.

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When you see so much real-life violence as a cop, it is easy to forget that most citizens judge police-related incidents in terms of what they've seen in television cop shows, or perhaps their childhood fights in the schoolyard. I lost track of the number of times I'd be struggling with a fighter, perhaps a drunk or some unruly miscreant resisting arrest, only to

hear bystanders complaining angrily about police brutality. In fact, I have been involved in several altercations where I was doing my damndest to subdue a violent suspect, only to have bystanders who had nothing to do with the incident march up to demand my badge number so they could make an official complaint about my conduct. At first I was surprised by this reaction, and more than once I searched my soul trying to identify what, if anything, I was doing wrong.

Was this a legitimate arrest? Yes. Was I using too much force? No. Had I caused the problem in the first place? Never. Well, almost never. I do have a sense of humor, after all, and I have always felt free to express my opinion, no matter how distasteful that might have been to the person I was addressing. Inevitably some people objected to my remarks, and a few individuals unwisely expressed their disagreement by throwing a punch. Nevertheless, I didn't deliberately instigate fights.

Was I lacking in public relations skills? All modesty aside, the answer to that would have to be a resounding no, although I suspect one or two of my supervisors might disagree. I disliked most of the crooks I dealt with, and I had difficulty disguising my contempt for them. However, on more than one occasion I turned potentially controversial situations into minor public relations coups for the department.

For instance, I once covered a policeman who still had much to learn about tact during an arrest at a crowded beach. He had tried to collar two rambunctious drunks by himself, and the fight was on. By the time I got there, he was in deep trouble. The crowd, for whatever reason, was decidedly hostile toward him, and nobody was offering to help. I knew it was not going to be an easy call when disgruntled citizens began asking for my badge number before I even arrived at the policeman's side. Breaking my portable radio over the head of one of the culprits as I subdued him did not make me any more popular with this crowd.

By the time we dragged these two jerks into the back of my wagon, indignant Vancouverites were actually lining up to complain about our behavior. It looked like the Internal Investigations Squad waiting room was going to be pretty crowded come Monday morning. Then one of the suspects started kicking loudly against the back doors of the wagon while screaming obscenities and threats at us and at the curious bystanders around us. I noticed that almost everyone in the group involuntarily took a step backward as soon as the disturbance started. The crowd went silent and their concern was evident when one citizen asked timidly, "What did they do, officer?"

"Murder," I replied with my straightest face, knowing the miscreants inside the wagon would forgive for this outrageous slur on their character by the time they sobered up. Now some people in the crowd were actually cringing each time the suspects banged on the wagon doors. One woman asked in a concerned voice, "Can they get out of there?"

I sucked in my beer belly and placed my hands on my hips in a woefully inadequate imitation of John Wayne. "Don't worry, ma'am. They're going straight to jail. You have nothing more to fear from them."

There were no more complaints from this crowd, and some of them even wandered by to congratulate us on our arrests. Many said, "You

couldn't pay me enough to do your job," a phrase I was to hear thousands of times during my career.

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Another incident that could have turned into a disaster for me happened during a particularly beautiful spring day. I was assigned to cover other units who were checking out a report that a drunk was annoying passersby in an East End neighborhood. As I pulled up, the drunk punched a policeman who was interviewing him and then bolted for freedom. My endurance during a foot pursuit was always limited at best, but I took a short cut with my car and managed to catch him in the middle of some bushes.

A struggle ensued, and my quarry, to be frank, got the worst of it. As I fought to handcuff him, I could hear a woman circling the bush area, screaming at the top of her lungs, "The cop's beating him up! I can hear him beating the guy up! Everybody come and be a witness!"

When we emerged from the bushes, my prisoner, a career criminal I recognized from previous arrests, looked somewhat the worse for wear. The lady was soon joined by her husband. Encouraged by the arrival of reinforcements, she planted herself in front of us and screamed in my face. "You beat him up! I can see the marks, pig! I knew it! I want your badge number! I'll have you fired for this!"

The prisoner ignored her, but I was furious. "Nobody got beat up here, lady. You make a false allegation about me, and I'll sue you for everything you're worth. I hope you don't mind losing your house."

I saw her husband put his hand on her shoulder to leave, but she was having none of it. She turned to the prisoner and pointed in my direction. "This pig beat you up, didn't he? I know he did!"

I will admit to feeling a sensation of impending doom. At this point the drunken villain could have accused me of carrying out the Lindbergh kidnapping and she would have cheerfully verified the allegation.

The prisoner fixed her with an icy stare. "Nobody got beat up, lady. Now why don't you piss off and mind your own business." Her husband dragged her away, and I could hear her yelling threats against me all the way to her house.

As I turned to the prisoner, my hostility toward his previous antisocial behavior receded. "You know you could have caused me problems. Why didn't you?"

He laughed. "I did something stupid with that other cop because I was drunk, and I got what was coming to me. I got no complaints. You were just doing your job." The wagon driver pulled up at that point, and I had him drive my prisoner home to sober up.

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I had similar problems while working by myself one day in the skids. I was flagged down by a citizen who pointed out two drunks who had just rolled an elderly Chinese gentleman for the contents of his wallet. The bloodied victim was seated on a nearby curb. The two suspects started off in different directions as soon as they saw me. I grabbed each by an arm and the fight began. I tried to control them both and ask for assistance on my

portable radio at the same time, but it wasn't long before I realized I was in trouble.

Not one bystander offered to help. I started hearing the usual cries of "police brutality," even though all the elements of the scenario in front of them should have been enough to convince even the most cynical of citizens that, in this instance, I was wearing the white hat. The innocent victim was still sitting there, bleeding from his forehead. There was a witness beside us who was yelling that the old man had been robbed. The odds of two against one should have made me the underdog. Regardless, the verbal abuse continued until the suspects were finally overpowered and locked inside the paddy wagon.

* * *

Polls show that an overwhelming majority of our citizens support the police, but I think it would be more accurate to state that they appreciate having someone to do their dirty work for them. Clearly most of our citizens enthusiastically endorse the work that police officers do, at least up to the point where something goes wrong. Then they generally prefer to wash their hands of any further responsibility, in my opinion.

* * *

I'm sure most responsible citizens believe that any form of violence is unacceptable in our civilized society, but in real life some justifiable assaults never make it to a courtroom. I attended a service station on the corner of Terminal and Main Street at around three in the morning for an assault call. There was a trail of broken street signs and overturned newspaper boxes leading to the scene. I found two battered and bloodied victims on the pavement, waiting impatiently for medical help and whining for the police to take some type of action against their attackers.

It took a while to sort out what had really happened. Eventually we were able to determine that our two victims, both very drunk and obnoxious, had vandalized the neighborhood as they walked home from a bar. Both had lengthy criminal records. When they reached the service station, they stopped to hassle two young couples pumping self-serve gas for their car. When the intrepid duo picked a fight, the two young ladies locked themselves in the car and their companions set out to defend their honor. They were both college athletes, and in short order they literally kicked the stuffing out of the two drunken rounders.

I met the victims at the hospital later as they were sobering up and licking their wounds. Between sobs and moans they arrogantly demanded that their attackers be jailed immediately. It was difficult to keep a straight face as I tried to explain to them how slowly the wheels of justice turned, and how I wouldn't even want to take a statement from them until they sobered up. I promised I'd be in touch, and for all I know they are still waiting.

* * *

I encountered much the same situation in the largely-ethnic, working class neighborhoods of the East End. Junkies often broke into houses there at night while the occupants slept. Often the head of the household would awaken to find a burglar going through his belongings. Their first reaction

was to take care of the problem themselves, and then call the police to clean up the remains. These homeowners had worked hard for what little they owned, and they were usually more than willing to defend their families with their lives.

By the time the police were notified, the burglar was usually quite pacified, albeit rather difficult to identify under the clotted blood. The conversations were usually much the same.

"Officer, I caught this guy breaking into my house and beat the shit out of him. What are you gonna do with him?"

"Oh, we'll be happy to put him in jail after he gets his face put back together in the hospital. Now, you say you were in fear for your safety and had to use minimal force to protect yourself from this man?"

"That bastard? I am not afraid of assholes like him. He broke into my house, so I beat the shit out of him. What's wrong with that?"

"No. No. No. What you mean is, you had to use force to defend yourself against him. Right?"

"Oh yeah, right. I see what you mean. You're right. But I guess he won't be breaking into any houses for a while, eh?"

"No, I wouldn't think so. Not until he gets off crutches, at any rate. Please feel free to call us again any time you find more customers." It was nice to play to an appreciative audience.

* * *

I ran into a similar situation where a rounder from the skid road area wandered into an East Indian restaurant and decided to dine and dash, or eat-no-pay as we used to call it. Unfortunately for him, the restaurant was staffed by militant Sikhs who, rumor had it, were receiving paramilitary training before returning to India to fight government troops. When I found him ten minutes later, he was at the bottom of a whirlwind of activity, similar to the tornado created by the Tasmanian Devil in a Bugs Bunny cartoon. I'd seen a similar tornado once before when a suspect we were chasing on foot inadvertently stumbled into the path of a carload of Drug Squad members.

When the action finally subsided, there were several athletic-looking Sikhs in turbans standing quietly beside their prisoner. He resembled a crumpled pile of debris on the ground. It was apparent that his knowledge of geography was second only to his skill in self defense when his only comment on the episode, in between spitting out newly loosened teeth, was, "But they're only Pakis. I didn't think they were that tough." Word circulated through the skids quickly, and I never did hear of another eat-no-pay at that restaurant.

* * *

Perhaps the most embarrassing off-duty incident I was ever involved in came early in my career. I stopped off at a corner store on my way home from a party. As I walked back to the milk cooler, a grubby-looking young man staggered into the store, knocking over displays and screaming obscenities. The girl behind the counter was frightened, so when I walked up to the till I advised her that I'd stand by while she called the police.

I didn't identify myself as a police officer because I didn't want to arrest this drunk on my own time. On the other hand, I couldn't leave her

there alone with a violent drunk. Fortunately for me, the problem seemed to solve itself. Before she completed the call to 911, the drunk somehow managed to find his own way out, leaving a trail of stolen chocolate bars behind him.

I was relieved the matter had ended peacefully, having heard many times about the perils of getting involved in off-duty incidents. My reprieve ended when I emerged from the store and found the drunk lying on top of my Austin Mini in the parking lot, vomiting on the hood and urinating into his pants. I was tired and very reluctant to become involved, but I had to do something about him now. I pulled him off my car and deposited him on the sidewalk so I could make a clean getaway. He was still very aggressive, and he managed to kick me in the shins as I moved him.

Congratulating myself for handling the situation so deftly, I was about to limp back to my Mini when I caught sight of the drunk crawling groggily on his hands and knees across busy West Fourth Avenue, where a continuous stream of traffic threatened to end his promising drinking career. I couldn't leave him to his fate now, because as a cop I was technically on duty 24 hours a day. Had anybody witnessed me tossing him off my car, I would no doubt face some awkward questions at an inquest if a passing motorist subsequently ran him over.

I pulled him back onto the sidewalk as a car narrowly missed him. He objected, mumbling something about suicide. The fight was on, and we wrestled on the sidewalk for five minutes. At one point I grabbed his leg to prevent him from crawling back into traffic again. He then tried to jerk out of my grip. I suddenly found myself holding a plastic artificial leg, while he continued crawling into heavy traffic on his three remaining limbs.

I knocked some sense into the drunken amputee and pinned him to the ground until he finally passed out from his exertions. I then phoned for a wagon from the store, but I was told that they were all busy and I'd just have to wait my turn like everyone else. As they say, you can never find a cop when you need one. It was a good half an hour until I finally got rid of my prisoner. The incident became my favorite contribution when the conversation at coffee turned to the topic of off-duty arrests.

* * *

I know one Vancouverite who has an interesting war story of her own as a result of an incident she and I were involved in. She had picked up a young man in a bar and then offered to drive him home in her fancy sports car at the end of the evening. As she got to know him better during the car ride, she soon discovered that he was a jerk. Having had enough of his crude behavior, she pulled over at Main and Pender and ordered him to get out.

He refused, so she removed her car keys and walked one block to the police station at Main and Hastings for assistance. I happened to be at the Public Information Counter on another call when she walked in. I'd already spent a busy and violent Friday evening policing the skids, and the night was only half over.

She was very upset and frightened when she asked me to escort her back to her car and get rid of her unwanted passenger, and I really did feel

sorry for her. I had reports to write, but I agreed to help, thinking that it would only take a couple of minutes.

As we walked south on Main, several bottles thrown in our direction exploded near us on the sidewalk. The projectiles had originated from a group of five or six drunks standing by the bus stop on the other side of the street. Had I been in a better mood, I would have called for additional units and arrested them. However, it was extremely busy at that time of night, and I was well aware that by the time cover arrived the suspects would be long gone.

Instead, I told her to stay where she was and then charged directly at the group. They obviously had not expected a frontal attack, and froze in their tracks. I barged into them at full speed and luckily managed to knock them all down at once like bowling pins. I didn't stick around to savor my strike, and none of them tried to follow us as we started off again in the direction of her car. As we approached we could see her passenger door was open. The good news was that the unwanted guest was nowhere to be seen. The bad news was that in the five minutes she'd been away from the car, someone had ripped her stereo out of the dash, leaving a tangled mass of wires hanging where once a mighty Blaupunkt had blared. She was in shock by now, and just managed to choke out a quick thank you before driving off into the rather dubious safety of the night.

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