

Chapter Four

HAZARDS OF THE PROFESSION

The job could be dangerous at times, but an incident that I found more frightening than any physical threat to my well-being occurred just after midnight during a particularly busy afternoon shift. While driving the paddy wagon, I was called to the skid road area by another policeman to transport a female drunk to the detoxification center. We put her into the back of the wagon without any problem. I then spent ten minutes covering the officer on another disturbance call nearby.

We arrested another drunk there, and I put him in a separate compartment and drove directly to the detox center to unload. As I opened the door to remove my original customer, she turned to the detox staff member standing nearby and pointed directly at me. "He hurt me!"

We both ignored her, because she was obviously intoxicated. We rolled her into the facility in a wheelchair, and then stood her up in front of the reception desk for processing. I returned to the wagon and retrieved the second prisoner, who by this time was already trying to sleep off his celebration. Having completed my part of the process, I then stood near the counter in case the civilian detox staff had a problem booking the drunks I'd brought them.

I was day-dreaming, staring off into space absent-mindedly, when I heard the female drunk declare, "That big cop. He beat me up and raped me!"

I looked in her direction, very much alert now, to find her pointing a very shaky finger squarely at me. She was in her thirties, and once might have been almost attractive. Now, however, her hair was matted with dirt, and her tattered and filthy clothing had vomit stains front and back from the short wagon trip. I could smell the pungent odor of cheap wine, vomit and filth from where I stood ten feet away.

The staff were nearly as startled at the allegation as I was. Their reactions were all different. Most of them just looked down to their paperwork, clearly embarrassed or upset with what they had just heard. One male staff member shook his head and smiled knowingly in a gesture of disbelief. What worried me the most was a female staff member whose face now mirrored disgust and horror. I knew instinctively she believed the drunk's story.

The atmosphere in the office, while subdued, was clearly strained at this point. The drunk repeated her allegation, then stared at me as if daring me to do something. It was clear the next move was mine, and I made a supreme effort to keep the fear from showing in my voice. "Go ahead. Tell them your story. We're all listening."

She looked around the room as if seeking support. By this time, however, everyone was keeping very much to their own counsel, sensing they might soon serve as witnesses during a very serious investigation into

my conduct. When nobody else seemed interested in her allegation, she seemed to sag, and stated plainly, "Okay, I was lying. The pig never raped me, okay. I made it up."

There was no questioning the veracity of this last statement, as it clearly had the ring of truth to it. For me, it was as if a death sentence had suddenly been lifted. I would have been hard pressed to account for every second of my time between pickup and delivery of the prisoner, and of course it would have been necessary to prove the allegation was false. Physical tests, the same ones performed during the investigation of any ordinary rape, might well have shown evidence of sperm in her vagina. She was a prostitute, after all, albeit a bargain discount variety of working girl. I would have to hope that further testing would prove beyond any possible doubt that the deposits weren't mine. On top of that, the staff had all witnessed the allegations she had made about me. Frankly, I had to admit that she had sounded unusually sincere at the time, considering her advanced state of intoxication.

While in all probability I'd have been able to disprove the charge, that was among the least of my concerns at the time. My reputation as a good street cop was the most important thing in my life then. To put it simply, the fact that a sexual assault accusation had been made against me, no matter how frivolous or improbable, would have stayed with me for the rest of my career. It is difficult for someone not on the job to understand the devastating significance of this type of allegation. Frankly, I doubt very much that I could have lived with the disgrace, real or perceived. I know a policeman who took his own life after a similar, unfounded incident.

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I quickly developed an immense amount of respect for fire and the damage it can do to the human body after spending some time inside burning buildings. Structure fires are downright frightening, especially when viewed from the interior of the structure, and I have to admire the courage of those people whose job it is to fight fires.

Having said that, it is important to point out that policemen and firemen have little in common with respect to the jobs they do. Union spokesmen sometimes try to play one profession off against the other at contract time by quoting work-related injury figures and other statistics. These comparisons never really prove very much. Police and firemen work in completely different environments. Frankly, I wanted nothing to do with their world, especially after hearing a policeman explain how he once reached into a burning room to grab hold of a victim lying just inside the door. When he tried to pull the victim to safety, the charred body disintegrated and all he managed to rescue was a forearm.

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My first fire was one of the worst experiences of my life. It began innocently enough one night when we heard an alarm ringing a block away from our beat. We walked over to investigate and found a man standing outside a derelict three-story house which had a secondhand store at the front. Apparently he was the caretaker there, and he explained in a disinterested manner that he'd just noticed a fire inside the building,

although he had made no effort to call the fire department yet. The thick smoke already billowing out of the ground floor windows meant there was a well-entrenched fire somewhere inside the dilapidated, wood-framed structure.

We called for the fire crews to attend and stood on the sidewalk to await their response. It soon occurred to us that this building, like many of the remaining older houses scattered throughout the West End, might have been divided into apartments. We mentioned that to the caretaker, who was now sitting on the fender of a nearby car having a cigarette. He seemed surprised at the question, as if puzzled as to why we would be interested. After some thought, he grinned sheepishly and confirmed that there were indeed tenants residing inside the burning structure. That was not what I wanted to hear.

We entered the house through a door that led into the ground floor hallway. The smoke inside was already dense, but we could still see well enough to make our way from room to room. We immediately started kicking in doors and waking the tenants because there was a good chance the structure could burst into flames at any moment. It was not an easy task. Many of the inhabitants were derelicts who had to be shaken awake because they were in a drunken stupor when we found them. Some stubbornly refused to leave their rooms.

I started inhaling noxious fumes with every breath I took inside the building. As breathing became more and more difficult, my partner kicked in the door to the room where the fire must have started. He and I stood at the entrance of what we later discovered was a one-room apartment situated directly behind the secondhand shop. There was fire and thick smoke in the room, but we could still see the shape of a person lying on a burning bed to the left of the doorway. He was horribly burned. The flames that enveloped him had transformed him into a charred, shriveled caricature of a human being. I knew instinctively that he had to be dead, because nothing could have survived the inferno inside that room. I yelled to my partner that we should forget him and get the rest of the tenants out. The fire was already spreading through the walls and floors, and I was concerned we would all be trapped inside if we didn't get on with the evacuation.

As we turned to leave, I glanced back inside and caught a glimpse of the victim's leg flexing in slow motion. I realized the movement was probably just the result of his muscle tissue contracting from the heat, but I also knew there was a small chance part of him was still somehow clinging to life inside that charred body shell. I wouldn't go in there after him. I couldn't. Not with the room burning around us. It was my decision to leave the victim where he was, and for the moment that was what we did.

We left for the second floor and continued our attempts to rouse the other tenants. Other policemen, alerted by our calls over the radio for assistance, joined us. With their assistance, we finally managed to evacuate everyone else from the premises. When my partner returned to the fire room on his way out of the building, he managed to grab the victim by a leg and drag him into the hallway in an act of courage that impressed the hell out of me.

When I next saw the victim, he was sprawled on the doorstep awaiting an ambulance. What used to be a face was now just a featureless, hideous blob. A sporadic stream of bubbles emerged from a slit where his mouth should have been, evidence of a fragile spark of life somewhere beneath the charred surface. He never regained consciousness before he was finally pronounced dead a short while later at the hospital.

I know there was nothing we could have done to save him because he was burned to a crisp by the time we arrived. That is not to say that I have never regretted the pragmatic decision to abandon him to his fate so we could save the rest of the tenants. Frankly, that choice was made at least in part as a result of my reluctance to enter the fire room out of fear for my own safety. In fact, I always regarded the incident as one of the few times on the job where I was tested and found wanting. As a street policeman, I discovered that the experience of taking calculated risks could be, at times, extremely exhilarating. On the other hand, the consequences of failure during some of the more challenging situations were sometimes extremely difficult to deal with. Happy endings were rare in my line of work. Years of nightmares about this fire served as an unpleasant reminder of my shortcomings.

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The best thing that ever happened to skid road hotels was the installation of automatic sprinkler systems. Most of the fire calls I attended as a policeman were the result of smoking in bed. Many of these fires would have been disastrous if the sprinklers hadn't extinguished the flames before the fire could spread.

During one fire that quickly filled an old rooming house hallway with smoke, two of us who arrived before the firemen kicked in the door of the fire room. We expected to find a charred corpse inside. What greeted us instead was a soggy mattress and a shower of water that soaked us both through to the skin. There was no sign of the occupant because he had left for an evening at the bar. Best of all, there was little danger that the fire would consume the entire structure, along with many of the residents, after working its way into the walls where nothing could stop it. It was well worth the cold shower not to have to deal with another serious burn victim.

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It was one of the coldest days of the year. I showed up for work that particular Sunday morning with a mild hangover. I rolled the passenger-side window all the way down so I could inhale massive amounts of cold, cleansing oxygen as my partner for the day drove through the East End. The streets were deserted. It was just after daybreak, and there was a low fog that shrouded the frost-covered houses along our route. Since radio wasn't holding any calls for us, our first stop was to be a coffee shop for much-needed nourishment.

Nobody else was awake at this hour, and the bitterly cold morning air went a long way toward restoring my well-being. I was fascinated by the way mist was drifting around the darkened houses we passed, but a wisp of fog near one half-open window on the second story of an older frame house caught my attention for some reason. I asked my partner to drive around the

block so we could have a second look. We stood on the sidewalk for a minute, trying to determine if it was indeed smoke coming out of the window or just fog.

Even from close range it was difficult to tell the difference. We knew it was wiser to err on the side of safety, so we called the fire department and started banging on the two front doors of the house. The downstairs occupants joined us on the porch moments later. When no one responded from the upstairs apartment at first, we decided we'd have to kick in the door. Before we could do so, a young man with fresh burns to one arm suddenly barged out through the entranceway. He seemed stunned, and mumbled something about his room having caught fire. According to him, there was no one else inside. Because he seemed to be quite intoxicated, we decided we should check the apartment ourselves.

We ran upstairs and found the bedroom just starting to burst into flames around the area of his bed. As soon as we were sure there was nobody else left behind, we ran outside to wait for the firemen. They were able to extinguish the fire quickly before it had a chance to spread to the rest of the house. When they threw a smoldering mattress out the front door, it was obvious that smoking in bed had caused the fire.

As the freezing air sobered up our victim, he readily confessed that there had been a minor mattress fire hours earlier when he'd stumbled into bed after a night of power-drinking. He had apparently fallen asleep after lighting a cigarette. Instead of calling the fire department, he had simply thrown a glass of water on the mattress and then passed out in a drunken stupor until we woke him up by banging on his door.

We had driven by just as the smoldering embers burst into flames again. The young man would undoubtedly have died from smoke inhalation if we hadn't awakened him when we did. He never even bothered to thank us as he was led off to the ambulance for treatment of his burns, although the downstairs tenants were grateful that we saved their house and their lives.

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If only I had a dollar for every time a suspect told me, "You're only doing this because I'm _____!"

You can fill in the blank with all the common colors, races and professions. Nobody ever wanted to accept the simple fact that they had been arrested, or otherwise dealt with, primarily for the same reason people climb mountains: "Because they're there." No, whatever happened must have happened because all cops are racists. Stupid people rationalize their actions in stupid ways.

Allegations of racism always get prominent media attention. When a member of any minority group happens to get shot by the police, critical headlines are inevitable, regardless of the actual circumstances of the incident. Extremist groups claiming discrimination against their particular race or religion tend to use such incidents as a focal point for media attention to their cause. The issue of racism quickly overshadows the facts of the case, especially where controversial allegations can be distorted and exploited to further the aims of unscrupulous activists.

Individual police officers must face a form of trial which is frequently conducted by members of the media. Reporters will discuss the case as if they have done a complete and impartial investigation, and of course they usually haven't. Often evidence of dubious value or relevance will be produced in news stories in an attempt to prove the police officer has erred in some way. During this process the officer finds himself serving as a visible representation of society's real or perceived sins against its minorities, and the press are fully prepared to sacrifice his career for the greater good of society, even if he is completely innocent. For instance, any previous allegations of racism against a policeman will be held up as undeniable proof that he is a bigot, and therefore undoubtedly guilty of whatever current allegations he faces.

The reality is that police officers are no more prejudiced than the society they are drawn from. Having said this, it is important to note that officers cannot allow their prejudices to influence their judgment or decisions. There is a good reason for this. With the possible exception of political office, there is no other line of work where an individual's treatment of everyone he deals with is more carefully monitored. The necessity of fair and even-handed police behavior is regulated by the criminal and civil courts, human rights commissions, royal commissions, internal review boards, the media, peer pressure and vigilant supervisors.

What the activists seem to be saying, if their accusations are to be accepted at face value, is that policemen as a group are deliberately killing minorities at random in situations where, in theory, a WASP suspect would merely walk away undisturbed. That concept defies logic and is directly contrary to my experience on the job. Without corroborating evidence, how can any rational person conclude that a policeman who defends himself against a man attacking him with a knife is prejudiced, solely because the person he kills happens to be of a different race? Unfortunately, few in the media see fit to defend individual police officers against this type of vicious and unsubstantiated allegation. By the time a policeman is cleared of all accusations during a trial or inquest, it is usually too late to repair the damage done to his reputation.

I find it less than amusing to hear the left-wing lunatic fringe calling for all police officers to be tested for racist tendencies, and then fired or not hired in the first place if they don't pass. Social scientists believe they have come up with methods of analyzing test subjects in order to weed out those whose ideas don't match their own concept of the ideal new-age, public-relations oriented police person. This concept is impractical and unrealistic when a person's career may depend on someone's interpretation of an ink blot. Such a blatant violation of their own privacy and civil rights would, of course, be unacceptable. Despite this, they seem more than willing to subject a policeman to such indignities. It always reminds me of ancient times when people accused of witchcraft were tested by dunking their heads under water. Anyone who drowned after several minutes without air was deemed to have flunked the test and posthumously pronounced guilty.

There is no such thing as a reliable test that can prove a policeman is racist. There is no litmus test for racism other than the quality of the

individual policeman's work itself. There are, at present, more than enough safeguards built into the system to monitor each policeman's actions on the job and weed out those who would abuse their authority.

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Whenever I hear a debate about freedom of the press, I always flash back to the disturbing image of a newspaper photo we were shown at the Police College. It was obviously nighttime when the picture was taken. Two of our members had been photographed holding an explosive device they were examining while standing beside a garbage can. The incident must have dated back to a time when the department didn't have the well-respected RCMP bomb squad to call on, because from one blue-uniformed arm dangled all the components of a genuine time bomb. It consisted of several dynamite sticks, batteries and a clock, connected with a length of wire.

Most of the details of the object they were examining so intently have blurred with time, but not the expressions on the faces of those two policemen. A news photographer had apparently crept to a position beside the cops while they were cautiously removing the device from a garbage can. The instant the bomb emerged from its hiding place was also the moment he chose to take his picture.

The policemen, with their concentration resting solely on the deadly object they were examining, must have thought their lives had suddenly come to an end. The brilliant fireball of light as the camera's flash went off in their eyes must have seemed like the last thing they would ever see, because the sheer, stark look of terror on their faces was unmistakable. It would seem clear to me that this photographer had been willing to risk their lives just to capture a good photo opportunity. Sadly, that kind of attitude is not uncommon.

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My first run-in with the media came during a warrant attempt at a house on the East Side. We had information that a robbery suspect, believed to be armed, was holed up inside the house. When a supervisor asked for additional units to surround the house so the suspect wouldn't be able to escape, TV crews were monitoring the broadcast with their scanners.

Even before we had a chance to set up for the arrest attempt, one marked TV van had already parked directly in front of the house and another was sitting nearby with its engine running. Even the stupidest crook knows what overt media presence outside his home means. The element of surprise, often the best protection a policeman has when attempting to arrest an armed suspect, was now lost.

We had to leave our positions behind cover in order to ask the TV crews to move. The cooperation we received was minimal at best. Their attitude was particularly galling since the media know that if the suspect somehow twigs to their presence before police on the scene have an opportunity to get organized, there is a good chance of provoking a premature and violent response from the criminal. Naturally this could result in some spectacular footage, especially if somebody gets shot.

The media's justification for inserting cameramen into the middle of serious and volatile situations is that the public have a "right to know". Of

course what they are really saying is that the public have a "right to be entertained," since the footage obtained at great risk to the cameramen as well as to policemen nearby is valuable only when it contains graphic scenes of violence and mayhem.

The facts underlying the original incident could quite reasonably be reported without the accompanying dramatic footage that serves only to entertain and titillate. The reality is that nothing grabs viewer's attention better than controversy and the sight of blood. A news show without ratings does not sell advertising.

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I once saw footage of a cameraman who was nursing a slight gunshot wound, inflicted while he was filming an incident involving a barricaded gunman. I was shocked to hear him deny on camera that police, who had surrounded the area of the gunman's house, had ever asked him to stay out of harm's way. I found his story a little difficult to swallow. He obviously must have known the nature of the call and the address where the suspect was calling from, because he wouldn't have been there in the first place if he hadn't heard the details on his scanner. How much warning does a normal person need before moving out of the line of fire? When the injured cameraman then suggested that somehow the police were not working hard enough to protect him, my blood boiled.

I remember experiencing similar problems with the media at many of my man-with-a-gun calls. It was a constant battle to keep some of the most aggressive cameramen out of range of a potential firefight. We also had to worry about citizens drawn to the scene out of curiosity. Most importantly, we had to stay out of the line of fire ourselves, while at the same time maintaining a vigil on the suspect's location so that we didn't bump into him unexpectedly, or inadvertently allow him to escape.

There is seldom enough manpower to safely cordon off and evacuate an entire neighborhood. However, when a shootout does occur, the media will always ask why this was not done. They never mention the fact that some of the policemen at the scene who could have been used to contain the suspect had instead been kept busy herding adventuresome cameramen safely out of the way.

One of the most reprehensible techniques employed by certain members of the media involves what I call "grieving widow" interviews. This technique is utilized to best advantage after a police-involved shooting. Anyone who witnesses an incident where deadly force is used against a suspect will naturally be excited and upset immediately afterward. If that witness happens to be the person responsible for summoning police to the scene, or perhaps a friend or relative of the deceased suspect, he or she will often experience overwhelming guilt because of their role in the incident.

Before the initial shock has a chance to dissipate, bystanders are naturally susceptible to manipulation by unscrupulous reporters who shove a microphone into their faces. Conversely, a policeman obtaining a statement from a witness must be careful not to taint that statement in any way by coloring it with his own viewpoint, as best illustrated by the classic "Just the facts, ma'am" of Dragnet fame.

The reporter's questions will be anything but neutral. "How do you feel about the police gunning down your nephew right in front of you? Do you think it was necessary for the police to shoot that young man, since he was only threatening them with a knife, while they themselves had guns? According to you, the man the police emptied their revolvers into was a quiet tenant; don't you think they might have over-reacted? Do you think it is right for a human being to die like that?"

An unethical reporter can easily create controversy or raise at least one contentious issue at even the most straightforward of police calls. At the tail end of the piece, he or she need only state that the police have many questions to answer in order to suggest that something is amiss, even if that is clearly not the case. Only those eyewitnesses whose accounts contain controversial viewpoints will survive the editing process to make it to the evening newscast. The more emotional their response, the greater the impact.

Bystanders who haven't actually seen enough of the incident to make a reasonable judgment about the appropriateness of actions taken by police officers are often subsequently portrayed as neutral eyewitnesses by inept reporters. The possibility that their opinion may be influenced by mitigating factors, such as drunkenness or a lengthy criminal record, is seldom mentioned. On the other hand, the police must interview these witnesses before their story can be influenced by others. Investigators must get a coherent statement from them that will eventually form part of the evidence for a trial or inquest. I saw coverage of a local police-involved shooting that featured eye-witness accounts from two grubby-looking bystanders. Subsequent investigation by the police revealed that neither of them had actually been present during the incident.

A thorough investigator could take weeks to piece together the complete story behind a serious incident, but the media demand a neat and tidy solution in time for their next deadline. Because the police will not or cannot comment on the investigation before all the facts have been gathered and analyzed, an information vacuum is created. It is a void that some unscrupulous members of the press are happy to fill with malicious speculation. Whenever I was involved in a serious incident and then heard a completely different story emerging from the well-paid lips of a talking head during the next newscast, I couldn't help but question the credibility of everything else I saw on their show.

I've met a few reporters socially. They always profess to be surprised when they discover that many policemen regard the profession of journalism as somewhat less respectable than prostitution. Many of them are decent people, and they usually just shrug their shoulders and remind their accusers that, after all, it's only a game, isn't it?

I also had an opportunity to peer into the private lives of some prominent media types during the course of my police duties, and I was always appalled by the way they could cheerfully invade the privacy of others while zealously protecting their own dirty linen. The most revolting human character trait has to be hypocrisy.

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The Granville Mall beat men had heard rumors about a particularly flashy pimp who had just moved up to Vancouver from the United States. Since he had allegedly been flashing handguns in front of various street people, we were eager to talk to him. My partner and I were traveling through a quiet neighborhood on an errand when we unexpectedly spotted the distinctive Lincoln Continental that this pimp was reported to be driving.

We pulled him over without incident. After a thorough search turned up no sign of the weapons, we arrested him for being in the country illegally and turned him over to the immigration department. His car was left on the street, parked legally. We knew he enjoyed hurting the prostitutes he coerced into working for him, and after talking to him for a while we confirmed to our own satisfaction that he was indeed a thoroughly despicable person. We were also well aware he had a good lawyer, and that he could potentially prolong his stay in Canada indefinitely by appealing any deportation order. That meant he could continue his lucrative trade as a pimp in our city.

There seemed to be nothing we could do about this pimp, until a senior detective who overheard us discussing our dilemma began carrying on a rhetorical conversation. What if, he speculated, our pimp friend had not bothered to make his bank payments back home, now that he had moved his operation to Canada? What would happen if someone notified an American repossession company just across the border that there was a beautiful Lincoln parked on a Vancouver street that belonged to an American bank? What indeed!

As we had anticipated, the ugly American was released from custody later that week. I have no idea what happened to his car, but I do know that he never saw it again. We learned the story of the rest of his stay in our country through the police crime bulletins and the local newspapers. Apparently much of this pimp's status and manhood emanated from his flashy car. Now that he traveled everywhere by taxi, he lost any chance he'd had of gaining a substantial foothold in the lucrative prostitution business in Vancouver. In fact, his associates on the street now shunned him and his girls began to mock him openly.

His stay in Canada finally ended after he rented a cheap sedan and tried to run over one of the local working girls who had just rejected his latest business proposal. She took exception to being struck by a lowly Chevy and called the cops. The pimp was eventually sentenced to a lengthy jail term, after which he was slated to be returned forcibly to his native land by immigration officers.

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One pimp who developed an instant dislike for me made his feelings known by punching me as my back was turned to him. I was at the jail attending to another matter when this particularly unsavory individual, part of a load of prisoners already destined for Oakalla prison, slugged me for no reason. I wanted dearly to repay him in kind but circumstances in the form of an attentive supervisor conspired to protect him from immediate retribution. He laughed in my face as I stood there impotently nursing a bruised side.

I checked his records before he left, but as far as I could tell I had never arrested him before and it seemed the attack had taken place solely because of the uniform I happened to be wearing. He was currently appearing in court on a vicious rape charge, a fact that his fellow prisoners were not privy to. There is a good reason these matters are never discussed. Convicts are well known for their hatred of sex offenders, a part of the inmate code that seems to have survived intact over the years.

I mentioned the circumstances of our altercation to the sheriffs escorting him to Oakalla. I realized afterward that another convict had moved unobtrusively to a position beside us and might have been eavesdropping on the conversation. Apparently, word of his status as a sex offender had indeed leaked to the prison population. Shortly after his arrival at Oakalla, he suffered an unfortunate accident when he somehow tripped and fell down a flight of stairs, breaking both his legs.

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Siphoning gas is the preferred method of refueling for downwardly-mobile crooks who haven't got the nerve to fill up at a self-serve station and then drive off without paying. Because sniffing gas fumes, and sometimes even drinking gas itself, is a cheap but deadly high, siphoning gas from other people's tanks has more than just the obvious side benefits. Most people who regularly park downtown have some form of locking gas cap to prevent such thefts, so you can imagine the joyful expression on one youthful offender's face when he discovered an unattended Recreational Vehicle with no lock whatsoever on its tank.

He quickly pulled his stolen car alongside this unexpected prize. Under the cover of darkness, he removed the cap, inserted one end of the plastic siphon tube into the opening and sucked deeply to start the flow of gasoline. Unfortunately for him, the tank he had chosen to pilfer was in fact a waste-holding tank full of sewage.

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I have never been much of an athlete. In fact, I tend to carry around far more weight at belt level than I should. For many years my idea of exercise was walking ten feet to the bar to order another beer. That was why I was particularly amused at the scene I witnessed on Hornby Street one busy Friday night. Two of our most athletic members, a well-respected male and female team from our shift, were handling a routine call on the sidewalk. A particularly cocky young man had emerged from the crowd of partiers that had gathered to watch. Obviously feeling the effects of too much booze, he began taunting the police.

As drunk as he was, he could still run fast enough to elude the frustrated police officers each time they gave chase. He would run away until they gave up, and then follow them back to the sidewalk to resume haranguing them while they attempted to finish their report. The members were, of course, carrying a heavy load of equipment and they were understandably tired after a long night on the street. However, they were also joggers, and the bottom line was that they simply couldn't catch him.

The young man, emboldened by his success, became increasingly more annoying. It was like waving a red flag at a bull. By the time I dropped

by in the wagon to cover the call, he was still at large and there seemed to be no sign of an early end to the impasse. Any thought of surrender was unthinkable at this stage of the game, because the situation had gradually evolved into a direct challenge to police authority. I suggested shooting the runner in his kneecap to slow him down, but the officers were not amused.

I watched the spectacle for a while until I noticed that the runner's attention was fully focused on the two frustrated police officers on the sidewalk. I walked quietly onto the roadway on the outside of a line of cars until I was well past his position. I then doubled back to the sidewalk as quickly as my overweight body would allow, knowing full well that if he got away from me now, the story of my presumptuous stratagem would quickly be related to the entire shift.

He actually caught sight of me out of the corner of his eye as I lunged for him, but the alcohol had dulled his senses and he hesitated just long enough that I had the opportunity to grab him by the collar. His feet never touched the ground as I walked him to the wagon and tossed him into the back for safekeeping later in the drunk tank. In the violent world we policed, this particular skirmish was unremarkable and trivial. In the end, however, it was the little victories that made the job so enjoyable.

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Rumors about an incident with a darker side made the rounds of our department several years ago. A well-respected policeman who was known for his effectiveness at arresting crooks suddenly began receiving threats from a group of active criminals who frequented his beat. The threats were taken seriously after he learned that one of the crooks had discovered his unlisted home address from a baby-sitter. The rounders openly boasted to their associates on the street that they planned to pick a night when the policeman was on duty to visit his home, pour gasoline around the circumference and burn it down. They were well aware that his wife and children would be inside the house at nighttime, thanks to the baby-sitter, but they made it clear that this would not deter them at all.

The policeman did everything in his power to discourage the threats, but the rounders just shrugged off his warnings and put word out on the street that the only way they would drop the plan was if he stopped interfering in their criminal activities. The criminal justice system could do little to protect his family, and in the end it was clear he would have to take care of the problem himself.

More by luck than anything else, he happened to spot the suspects parked in a vacant lot across the street from his home. It was a dark night, and they had no idea he'd spotted them. They seemed to be discussing their plan of action, secure in the knowledge that until they actually committed a crime there was nothing the police could do to stop them.

The policeman considered calling 911, but in the end left his phone on the hook and instead went to his gun cabinet. Moving quickly under the cover of darkness, he left his house by the back door and made his way to a position near the car. He then fired one 12 gauge shotgun round into the trunk.

He was surprised at the amount of damage he caused. As he watched, the trunk flew open and the tire nearest to him exploded dramatically. The driver did not need further prompting. His car sped off with one bare rim leaving a trail of sparks to mark its progress away from the quiet neighborhood. The cop later learned from his sources on the street that the rounders had apparently decided to call off the vendetta. In fact, they never returned to his neighborhood. When he checked the communications center the next day, he discovered that none of his neighbors had bothered to call in the shots fired, even though the single shotgun blast had sounded to him like a small nuclear detonation.

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One of my favorite stories about the justice system concerns a pleasant-looking but obviously distraught young lady who approached a policeman on a quiet West End street one afternoon. She had been raped, she sobbed, and the suspect was still holed up in her apartment.

The policeman called for a cover unit as the victim led him up the stairs to her suite. He knew the chances of a rapist remaining at the crime scene were remote, but he had to give it a try before traveling to the hospital to begin the complicated process of investigating the rape. He opened the door cautiously and discovered a very surprised young man sitting on the couch having a coffee. The complainant instantly shrieked out a positive identification of the young man, and he quickly found himself handcuffed and under arrest.

It is a rare crook who doesn't make at least a token attempt to deny the charges against him, no matter how overwhelming the evidence to the contrary. This one was no exception. He said he'd just met the victim on the street that very morning while window shopping. She had befriended him and invited him up to her place for a sociable coffee, and he had readily accepted. He emphatically denied that sexual intercourse had ever taken place. He claimed the victim had excused herself to shop for the ingredients for dinner at a corner store just a few minutes earlier.

The investigator found his story more than a little incredible. Still, something about the case troubled him, although he couldn't say for sure what was wrong at first. The victim was still adamant she had been raped, so he sent her to the hospital for tests. He then called for a wagon to transport the tearful suspect to jail. While they waited for transportation to arrive, the desperate suspect had one last inspiration. He begged the cop to take him to his apartment nearby. According to him, they would find irrefutable proof of his innocence there, although he would not elaborate further.

By this time the policeman's instincts were telling him that something was very wrong, and he agreed to accommodate this one last request. At the door of the suspect's apartment they were warmly greeted by an effeminate youth who spoke with an exaggerated lisp punctuated by gestures from a particularly limp wrist. The lad took one look at their handcuffed prisoner and immediately began begging the startled cop not to take his lover to jail. All the prisoner could say was, "See! See! I told you I didn't do it. This proves it. I'm gay!"

He was released shortly thereafter when his story was confirmed. Further investigation showed that the female had traveled all across the province making false rape complaints against complete strangers. She was mentally ill, of course, but not sick enough that she could be confined to an institution for treatment. The damage she had done to innocent people's lives was incalculable. Our department took what limited steps it could to make sure she would never again be able to repeat her offense.

* * *

On one occasion we ran into trouble when we arrested a crook in his hotel room after we discovered there were outstanding warrants in his name. The man's landlord packed all his possessions into suitcases because he knew the crook was now vacating the room for other, less comfortable accommodations at the jail. When his belongings were forwarded to him in prison, however, his prized hash pipe was nowhere to be seen.

His defense lawyer accused us of stealing his client's hash pipe during the arrest. He threatened to sue us, and he bragged that he would use legal aid funds to cover the cost of dragging us before a civil court. The suit never went ahead because the budding young Clarence Darrow realized his client, who was already on probation for another offense, was prohibited by the conditions of that probation from possessing or consuming drugs. In order for the civil trial against us to proceed, his client would have to explain why he had been in possession of the drug paraphernalia in the first place. We never did hear from the lawyer after that revelation.

* * *

Three of us were called to a comedy club where the live entertainment had been rudely interrupted by a table of neatly-dressed drunks at center stage. The two couples were told several times to shut up or leave, but they responded by threatening the staff. The meanest of the two men was particularly big, so the bartenders had good reason to be concerned. The heckling continued unabated for an hour until management finally decided to call the police.

The whole bar was watching their antics with disgust. The couples were obviously very drunk or very stoned. We tried the polite approach first by warning them that they were headed for jail if they didn't leave immediately. This attempt to defuse the situation was markedly unsuccessful, and they escalated their misbehavior by screaming obscenities and threats into our faces.

Most of the crowds we encounter at these incidents are neutral, if not downright hostile toward the police. This audience, a full house, had obviously listened to the yahoos at center stage for long enough, because they began to yell out support of our endeavors.

The two couples still refused to leave. Consequently, we arrested the loudest and biggest male for assault by trespass, since he had ignored the bouncer's original request to leave. He was totally out of control by this time, so I was not surprised when he swore at us and refused to come without a fight. In fact, he threw a roundhouse punch that narrowly missed rearranging my face. A policewoman and I removed him from the club by grabbing his

arms and pushing him forcefully toward the door. The patrons gave us a standing ovation as we left, which was a first for me.

Once outside, we handcuffed our prisoner and tossed him into the paddy wagon. The second male was wise enough to keep his distance and passively monitor the situation, but both wives went berserk and had to be arrested. The wagon was rocking from side to side on its suspension as the three prisoners tried to kick their way out through the locked doors. I followed the wagon to the station, and heard them screaming threats against us all the way to jail. We had a fair amount of trouble processing the arrests, but to me the standing ovation we got from the audience was well worth the effort.

* * *

I traveled the width of my district at high speed one night to an emergency call, only to be canceled at the last second and diverted to investigate a stabbing that had just occurred back at the other end of my area. Two men at that location had interrupted a prowler breaking into their car. When they confronted him, he attacked them with a bayonet. One victim had been stabbed in the chest, and by the time I arrived on the scene with my brake linings smoking, his blood pressure was too low to measure. He was sent to hospital as soon as paramedics could stabilize him for the trip.

His friend had wounds to his neck and head that didn't appear serious at the time, but we sent him to hospital as well. Later it was discovered that the tip of the bayonet blade had penetrated his skull. Both victims survived, thanks to the prompt response by Emergency Health Services crews.

A dogmaster found the suspect responsible for all this mayhem nearby. I whipped around the corner to cover him when I heard his radio broadcast. As I drove up I could see the policeman wrestling with our stabbing suspect on the ground. The scene was surrealistically illuminated by the flashing wig-wag headlights of a police car. The blood-stained bayonet was on the ground beside them. A very excited police dog maneuvered frantically to try to help his master, although he was definitely having trouble finding an opening as the two combatants rolled on the ground during a desperate struggle.

I could tell when the dog finally found what he was looking for by the sound of a piercing scream unlike any I'd heard before. By the time I emerged from my car to help subdue the attacker, I could see the dog had chosen to bite the suspect's most vulnerable and sensitive area. Once he'd sunk his teeth into solid flesh, he started shaking and tugging at it, as if attempting to tear a chunk of flesh from between the man's legs. The screams signaled the end of the suspect's attempt to resist arrest, however, and we had no further problem handcuffing him.

I have talked to a number of violent offenders who have had run-ins with police dogs. The vast majority of them freely admitted that after these encounters, they never stopped looking over their shoulders while committing crimes. I would be willing to bet that the worst of their nightmares featured a massive German Shepherd lunging out of the darkness.

* * *

Mistakes are something a police officer must eventually learn to accept as part of the job. Modern police work is incredibly complicated at times. The number of different and challenging situations a cop now encounters makes it inevitable that things will not always go as planned. He can only hope that these errors will turn out to be minor and will pass unnoticed. A wise police officer learns from his mistakes and then puts them behind him, regardless of how embarrassing they are.

And yes, they can be embarrassing. Early one Sunday morning after the bars had closed, I was assigned to attend a nightclub on Hornby Street because the janitor had recovered a stick of dynamite from under one of the tables. This came at a time when there seemed to be a lot of dynamite circulating throughout the underworld. In fact, one enterprising individual had recently been using a stick of the explosive to convince bus drivers that he should ride for free. Not surprisingly, nobody argued with him and he traveled several bus routes without paying his fares until he was eventually apprehended by the police.

I soon identified the red cylindrical object recovered at the night club as a real stick of dynamite. Procedure dictated that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police bomb squad be called for the dangerous task of disposing of all explosives we found, so I asked the radio operator to make the appropriate notifications. Members of the bomb squad had a reputation for coolness under pressure. Most seemed very confident in the way they handled what surely must be one of the most stressful jobs in police work. Fortunately there was no sign of seepage or crystallization on the dynamite, two indications that nitroglycerin might be present on the outside of the red cardboard exterior. In that case the dynamite could explode just from rough handling. I anticipated that there would be no complications and accepted a coffee while we waited for a member from the bomb squad to be called out from his home.

We were there for half an hour until a middle-aged man dressed in neat civilian clothing walked in and greeted us with a confident smile. He walked over to where we had left the dynamite on a table, picked it up, examined it closely and then tossed it casually into the air several times, catching it in the palm of his hand as if it were a beat man's baton made of wood instead of high explosive.

I marveled yet again at the bomb squad officer's casual disdain for danger. When the individual finally sat down to join us for a coffee, I anticipated hearing some interesting war stories. After what must have seemed like a very puzzling conversation to him, I eventually discovered he was not the bomb squad expert I'd been expecting. In fact, he was the owner of the club. The janitor had called him at home and he'd dropped by out of curiosity. He knew nothing at all about explosives, and I was doubly grateful when the genuine expert arrived to safely dispose of the dynamite.

* * *

We were hot on the trail of a robbery suspect, and we knew he'd just ducked into a skid road hotel on East Hastings Street. We hurriedly described our man to the desk clerk. He nodded knowingly and told us the number of a room he'd rented recently to someone matching that description. We ordered

him not to make a warning call to the suspect while we made our way to his room. After running up several flights of stairs, we stood outside the suspect's door for a minute, listening. We were hoping to get some indication of how many people were inside and what they were up to. All we could hear were rustling sounds, as if the suspect had hopped into bed already.

We promptly kicked the door in, hoping to surprise him in the event he was armed and prevent him from disposing of drugs and other evidence out the window. I went inside first with my weapon drawn, but stopped in the doorway as the action in the room froze in mid-stroke. There was a man lying on the bed, but he didn't quite match our description, although I immediately recognized him as a criminal I had arrested before. The prostitute beside him was in the process of plying her trade. She stared at us blankly as the object of her desire slowly retracted to a mere shadow of its former self, leaving her empty mouth frozen open in the shape of an "O".

My partner stepped back into the hallway as I stammered an apology. He was just in time to see the door of a room down the hallway open. The occupant popped his head outside to see what all the excitement was about. It was our suspect! We ran to his doorway and grabbed him before he realized what was happening. The evening ended happily for everyone but the robbery suspect and his frustrated next door neighbor, who probably to this day flashes back to a very traumatic moment in his life every time he goes to bed with a prostitute.

* * *

Another incident proved almost as embarrassing. We had been called to a dark lane on a Peeping Tom report, but there was no one there when we finally arrived. Several of us then got out of our cars in front of the reportee's address to discuss something that had happened at a previous call. As we gossiped, I glanced over my shoulder and gasped at what I saw through the basement window of the apartment building.

The couple inside were oblivious to the commotion caused by our arrival, and their passion was clearly visible through the open drapes. We had undoubtedly found the object of our Peeping Tom's interest. I made an inane remark as three heads wearing police hats all stared in the same direction, awestruck. "Now we know what got him interested, eh?"

I almost had a heart attack when a male voice rang out loudly from a darkened balcony only a couple of feet above our heads. His words were dripping with sarcasm. "Presumably the same thing you're looking at, officer!"

When I had recovered my composure, I thanked our helpful citizen. He told us he had phoned in the original call when he had noticed a young man staring into his neighbor's window. I could almost hear the grin on his face when he cheerfully wished us a good night as we left.

* * *

When I started as a policeman, heroin was the drug of choice with street addicts. Hypes used to carry several capsules of heroin inside powdered balloon ends called bundles, which they usually secreted in their mouths. When approached by the police, they would simply swallow the bundle. Often it became a race between us and the addict's stomach as to

who finally got possession of the drugs. Most hypes could regurgitate the bundle at will after the police left, but some had to wait for it to complete its dangerous passage through the digestive system.

We were walking through a crowded Granville Street bar when our eyes met those of a very nervous male wandering from table to table. His hand shot toward his mouth as we lunged at him. By the time my hand closed around his throat, he had managed to swallow what he'd been holding in his hand. At the same time I was trying to keep the evidence from disappearing, my partner gave him a love tap to the stomach to discourage him from swallowing.

Even as I realized we were too late, I was conscious of my partner's hand plunging deeply into the hype's belly. I watched as the suspect's already pale complexion suddenly became even whiter and he gasped loudly in pain. I quickly released my grip on his throat to give him a chance to breathe normally, so any chance of recovering the drugs disappeared as he swallowed once and then gasped for air.

After he regained his composure, he lifted his shirt and showed us a massive wound on his abdomen, complete with neat rows of fresh stitches. He explained he was dying of stomach cancer and had just left the hospital after recovering from a serious operation. There did not seem to be any fresh damage as a result of our drug search, and he declined our invitation to have his surgical scars checked out in the hospital.

He cheerfully admitted swallowing the drugs, although he claimed there was only one cap inside the balloon. In fact, he sincerely apologized for spoiling our drug case against him, and graciously wished us better luck next time as we said our good-byes.

* * *

I was involved in a similar incident one evening while working security for a rock concert at the Pacific National Exhibition. We had been asked not to make any drug arrests that night as we were short-handed and could not spare the manpower to process the charges downtown. Our job there was simply to keep the peace. I saw several drug transactions near me during the concert. It was almost as if the traffickers sensed they had some form of temporary immunity that night, because they were not at all subtle while they went about their business.

On my coffee break outside the stadium, I watched as two young men talked about twenty feet from me, oblivious to my presence. I saw one hand over several bills. In return, the other placed something in his friend's shirt pocket after reaching inside his jacket.

I'd already had a long, frustrating day on the street, along with an extremely aggravating evening at the concert. It was as if they had waved a red flag at a bull. I charged at them with as much energy as I could muster. What they saw was a massive, bellowing figure in a dark blue uniform running at full speed down a slight incline toward them. They froze in their tracks. Before they could move I had both of them turned around and pinned securely against the side of a semitrailer.

The first priority was to seize the drugs before they had a chance to disappear. Unfortunately, when I reached into the pocket where I expected

to find the evidence I needed for a drug charge, there was nothing there to find. What I did discover was a plastic security tag hanging from the pocket, and I realized to my horror that what I had seen was one of them attaching the tag to the other's shirt. The tag gave the bearer permission to unload the contents of his truck inside the coliseum, a fact that the man now wearing the tag pointed out to me in a very loud, very agitated voice.

I apologized profusely for my mistake, and explained my actions to them as best I could. Another policeman stood by, watching with an embarrassed expression on his face, clearly anticipating a trip to the Internal office and wishing he was elsewhere. The man who had bounced the hardest off the trailer never did accept my apology. He threatened to sue me for everything I was worth, which at that time would have bought him little more than a month's supply of beer. The second person had a great sense of humor. He'd had several run-ins with the police during his youth. When he realized he wasn't going to be charged with anything, he was so relieved that he burst into laughter. In the end, neither of them made a formal complaint.

The easiest drug arrest I ever made occurred during a quiet day shift. We had received information from an informant that the occupant of a basement suite was dealing small amounts of grass through his side door. There was insufficient evidence to obtain a search warrant, and we decided that it was not worth spending time watching the apartment to obtain more evidence. We opted to use more subtle methods to put the trafficker out of business, although subtlety was a quality that was usually foreign to my style of police work.

The occupant was a scruffy-looking kid in his early twenties. When he answered the door, we took advantage of his surprise. Using my best attempt at a stern, officious tone, I said, "We know you're dealing out of this place. You wanna bring the drugs out so we can get this over with as quickly as possible?"

"Yes, Sir!" The suspected drug dealer emerged from his apartment thirty seconds later with a bag of grass about the size of a package of frozen peas. He held it out to us respectfully. In fact, he was so polite that we took pity on him and only charged him with Possession of a Narcotic, although the quantity involved could well have warranted a charge of Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking at that time.

I attended a motor vehicle accident in the 3000 block of East 1st one sunny winter afternoon to check a report of a car wrapped around a massive wooden hydro pole. The impact had obviously damaged the crossbars far above us at the top of the pole because I could see occasional sparks emanating from amongst the wires secured there. As we helped the ambulance crews extract a victim from his wrecked car, I pointed out the sparks to a fireman. He assured me there was nothing to worry about.

Just before the wrecker moved what remained of the car, I stood on its hood to examine the power pole's metal identification tag which was about seven feet above ground level. I needed the serial number of the damaged pole for my report.

As I climbed down, a traffic policeman who had been directing traffic a block away drove up with a warning. An off-duty B.C. Hydro lineman, stuck in traffic nearby, had noticed the sparks at the top of the damaged pole I was standing under. He approached the traffic officer, stating that the wires above us were very high-voltage lines that could snap at any time and begin whipping through the air. According to him, every living thing within a fifty foot radius of where the wire touched ground would fry instantly.

I believed him, but when I warned the firemen they just laughed and continued their discussion, which happened to be taking place directly under the damaged pole. I left them to it and completed my reports several blocks away.

I was curious as to whether or not the employee had been exaggerating, so I phoned the emergency line at the power company the next day. Their representative made some inquiries, and I subsequently learned that they had obtained high voltage readings almost halfway down the pole. In fact, the electric current had apparently reached a level just above where I had been rubbing dirt off the ID tag with my finger. The company representative told me that if it had been raining that day, our conversation would not have been taking place.

* * *

My partner and I were cruising aimlessly around the area of headquarters when a ghostly apparition suddenly appeared out of the misty night air in front of us. The individual was running awkwardly down the middle of Cordova Street at full tilt. I needed another jaywalking statistic toward my monthly quota that night so I jumped out of the passenger side as our car came to a stop. The midnight jogger seemed less than enthusiastic about meeting us and desperately attempted to flee. As we grabbed him in mid-flight, it became obvious that we would not have to handcuff him because he was already wearing somebody else's cuffs.

We returned him to jail just as reports of an escapee on the loose started filtering over our channel. One of the wagon drivers had apparently been knocked over by his prisoner as he opened the wagon doors at the rear of the jail. We locked the escapee up for the night, but not before giving him his jaywalking ticket. I always regarded this incident as the only occasion when the ticket quota system ever accomplished anything worthwhile. Fortunately for us, the cautious bureaucrats who monitored our performance could or would never define in writing the specific number of tickets necessary to meet the quota. Consequently, it was often possible to duck and weave at the end of the month if calls and arrests had left insufficient time to fulfill traffic enforcement obligations, but only if you had an understanding supervisor.

* * *

After taking numerous Breaking and Entering reports during the one month period we worked day shift, it was always a pleasure to switch to nights so we could have a shot at the burglars while they were most vulnerable to arrest. Although most break-ins in the suburbs occur during the daytime hours, the situation is reversed for the downtown areas. There was,

of course, never a shortage of incompetent or unlucky burglars to be caught because Vancouver has more than its share of break-ins.

I happened to be working during one particularly unlucky night for the criminal element. Four young men smashed out the garage door window of an automotive repair shop. They then entered the premises one by one through the opening to look for tools. We were lucky. An alert citizen called us immediately after hearing the sound of breaking glass, and we were already en route to an unrelated call in the same area when he phoned. As a result, we arrived in plenty of time to watch through the windows as the panicking burglars frantically searched for a hiding place. They soon realized they were surrounded with no way out, but they refused to leave the building when ordered to surrender.

Unfortunately for them, the garage interior was well illuminated, and we could see every move they made. For a change we were able to bide our time and bid for whose criminal career we were about to put on hold. The dogmaster got first preference, because nobody there wanted to argue with his enthusiastic police dog. The rest of us, like successful shoppers at a fire sale, ferreted out our chosen targets from their poorly-concealed hiding places and sent them downtown for processing. Mine was shielding his eyes from the light that betrayed his presence, as if the darkness underneath his coat sleeve could somehow keep him hidden from us. We left well satisfied with our night's work.

* * *

One night, a burglar with a warped sense of humor entered a building on my beat through a skylight. He arrived at the plate glass front doors to make his exit, only to find the law waiting for him because he had tripped a silent alarm inside the premise. We had to wait for a reference, in this case the building manager, to arrive with keys so we could take our suspect into custody. Meanwhile, the burglar explored the building methodically, leaving a trail of lights behind him to betray his progress until he was finally satisfied that all possible means of escape were blocked.

When all hope was lost, he contented himself with standing in front of us in the doorway, making faces and obscene gestures. He was comforted temporarily by the knowledge that he was protected from the wrath of the law by a quarter inch of plate glass. However, when the keys arrived he threw up his hands in a gesture of surrender and became the epitome of tact to avoid any chance of retaliation for his rude behavior.

* * *

Another burglar was confronted by the police as he emerged from the smashed-out plate glass window of a posh Gastown restaurant. He too had tripped a silent alarm during his break-in. He had probably spent most of his time inside standing at the bar, because he greeted us with a volley of unopened Scotch bottles. We retreated out of the line of fire, so none of us were hit by the barrage.

Fortunately, the burglar had not noticed me hiding to one side of the window, choking back tears of sadness at the tragic loss of good scotch. When he stuck his head out to taunt us, I grabbed him by the jacket and flipped him face-first onto the sidewalk. He gave the restaurant mediocre

reviews during a subsequent interrogation, but that may have been because of the poor service.

* * *

Sometimes, when I had to search a building for burglars, I preferred to have my revolver in my hand, at my side. It depended on how I felt about the call, and what I observed as I drove up to the building. Even with a police dog checking the premise ahead of us, it was wise to be prepared for the worst. Surprises occurred just often enough to maintain a healthy sense of paranoia. One foolish burglar hit a Police Dog over the head with a two-by-four as the dog searched a room we were about to enter. The dog took it personally, and his master was just as upset. During one search of a jewelry store which had been broken into through the front entrance, I peered around a half-opened inside door to find a burglar staring at me. His face was only a few feet from mine. He was arrested without a struggle, but the thought of what might have happened if he'd been armed with a knife or a gun stayed with me for a long time.

Such encounters are rare, but they do happen. Attending numerous false alarms over the course of years of routine police work tends to condition a cop to expect that burglars are usually long gone by the time police arrive to check the premise. Two friends of mine were searching inside a building when a burglar suddenly jumped out from behind a door and screamed at them. The surprise effect, and the fact that his face was painted jet black at the time, was enough to frighten even the bravest policeman. Under the circumstances, the burglar was lucky he didn't get shot.

* * *

During my first month on the road, I was on routine patrol late at night with a senior policeman when I heard the plaintive voice of an inexperienced officer working a one-man car talking excitedly to the radio operator. He claimed he was being followed by a suspicious vehicle. To the best of my recollection, this was at a time when American police were being ambushed by snipers. Frankly, the thought of a cop in a marked police car worried about someone following him seemed illogical to me at the time, although many years later a similar, and more sinister incident happened to me while I was working a one-man unit.

We sped off to cover him anyway, in case he really did need assistance. He informed the radio operator of his location periodically and made it clear that he could not shake the vehicle, no matter which way he turned. Several cars arrived on the scene simultaneously, and we boxed the suspect vehicle in so it couldn't escape.

We yelled at the six occupants to exit the car one at a time so we could check them out. Although there was much gesticulation and emotion on their part, they simply ignored us. It was not until we finally opened the passenger side door and removed one of the young men that we realized everyone in the car was Deaf. They were hopelessly lost in an unfamiliar city, according to the explanation one of them wrote in my notebook. Their first instinct had been to stop a police car to get directions. I doubt they ever understood what happened next. We apologized to them as best we could and drove away as quickly as possible.

* * *

Like the Deaf tourists, I too had difficulty finding my way around town when I first started working as a policeman. I had only spent a total of three days in Vancouver before I joined the force. Because I grew up in a small town, I had trouble coping with the busy city traffic I encountered for the first time in my life. My difficulties were compounded by the fact that I had a hard time with street names, so my street map was often the only thing that saved me from getting lost. More than once, when I was particularly pressed for time, I resorted to pulling over startled citizens to ask them for directions.

The first time I was ever assigned to work a one-man patrol car was a very proud moment for me. One of the first things I did was find a deserted street in a warehouse district and squeal my tires, just to see what it felt like in a police car. After committing this one illicit act, I began the process of learning to drive a police car, an art that is completely different from normal motoring . In addition to dealing with all the usual hazards of city driving, police officers must simultaneously monitor their radios, scan their computer terminals, and watch for anything out of the ordinary. It can get pretty hectic at times.

After the first few hours of driving aimlessly around my area, I started to relax a bit and enjoy the experience. My confidence quickly deteriorated, however, when I was assigned to drive a Calgary detective from the police station to the airport. We drove for ten minutes in circles before he tactfully mentioned the fact that we were headed in the wrong direction. By pooling our limited knowledge of the geography of Vancouver, we finally managed to make it to the airport in time to catch his flight. He was very understanding, but I caught him shaking his head in disbelief once when he thought I wasn't looking.

My navigational difficulties became a serious liability when my training assignment switched from the confines of the West End to the wide open spaces of the suburbs. One of my training officers, an excitable man with a great sense of humor, used to laugh out loud as I wandered endlessly through darkened streets like a blind man in a maze. He was a superb training officer, and he usually waited until I was inadvertently crossing into another municipality before tactfully pointing me back toward our jurisdiction.

One night as I attempted unsuccessfully to transport a prisoner downtown to jail, my training officer became more and more exasperated and finally refused to give me further directions. In fact, he just sat there and covered his eyes with his hands as we headed aimlessly through Burnaby toward Alberta. The prisoner was anxious to settle into a warm jail cell for a good night's sleep, so after a while he started guiding me through the maze of cul-de-sacs and dead-ends until I finally reached a familiar-looking street that I knew would lead me to the station. My training officer's eyes rolled back into his head every time he looked at me for the rest of the shift, but he submitted a good report on my performance to the academy anyway.

* * *

The conversation on a busy police radio channel seems almost impossible to comprehend when you first hear it. With experience, it is eventually possible to decipher useful information from a jumble of conversation, acronyms and static. Messages occasionally get garbled and misunderstandings occur from time to time, but after a while the subconscious takes over and monitors the radio for relevant information. It is not just a matter of listening for your own car number to be called, because you also monitor what other units in your area are doing so you can help out if necessary.

I was working the wagon one afternoon along with a reserve policeman when I heard our radio operator assign a West End car to a man-with-a-knife call. The suspect was standing in front of the reception desk at St. Paul's Hospital emergency department.

We were close by, so I grabbed the mike, informed radio that we were covering the call and switched on my emergency equipment. The reserve officer was bold enough to inquire over the sound of the siren as to why we were in such a hurry, and I remember wondering to myself why he would ask such a stupid question. After all, we considered the staff at the emergency department equivalent to family, so when they called for help we made a point of getting there as soon as possible. They didn't phone unless we were really needed. I had no idea what his problem was, but I intended to find out after the call was handled.

We were first on the scene. The wagon had barely stopped when I was out and running through the automatic entry doors of the hospital. There was only one man standing at the counter with his back to me. He was dressed like a typical rounder from Granville Street, which told me all I needed to know at the time to form a plan of action. I simply used my considerable weight to pin him up against the counter and handcuff him with one fluid but forceful move.

The prisoner was screaming and swearing by the time I got him cuffed. The only thing missing for the prosecutor's report was his knife, but I was confident that it would eventually turn up after a thorough search. I just hoped it hadn't inadvertently become lodged in his midriff when I threw him up against the counter. I looked up from my labors, ready to accept the expected accolades from a grateful public. Instead, I was greeted by stares that varied from bewilderment to downright amazement. Puzzled, I finally asked one of the nurses if this was indeed the man-with-a-knife they'd phoned in. Nobody said anything until my reserve piped up respectfully. "It wasn't a man-with-a-knife call. It was for a man with a knife wound."

Judging by the blood I now noticed on his stomach and my hands, this version of the call was starting to look more and more accurate. For a moment I was actually at a loss for words. Fortunately for me, our stabbing victim had already shown himself to be intoxicated and obnoxious by virtue of his rude treatment of the nursing staff before our arrival. We all agreed that he would be more comfortable in restraints until he calmed down enough to have his superficial wound treated. Meanwhile, I snuck out of the hospital as unobtrusively as possible, hoping that by the time the victim sobered up he would forget about our abrupt introduction.

* * *

Some mistakes were more serious than others. In the latter part of my career, the shift system made it impossible to work consistently with the same partner for any length of time. When I started out on the beat, however, I managed to pair up with a constable who had an excellent reputation as a street policeman and was still very interested in catching crooks. A good partner does more than just watch your back, although that basic precaution is important when you are walking through hostile bar crowds.

When you and your partner handle stressful situations together, you soon learn whether or not you can trust each other, and how each person thinks and handles different situations. We had already been working as a team for quite a while when we stumbled into a hotel room full of heroin addicts as a result of a radio call. One of the hypes was sick, so an ambulance crew we had worked with many times before was summoned to the scene to check him out.

Another of the room's occupants was well known to us because of his size and his propensity for using his fists against anyone who upset him. My partner singled him out for attention, and the two of them left the room two minutes later without saying anything. I guessed that my partner was pumping him for information but doubted he would be successful because of this particular criminal's violent reputation. Meanwhile, I had my hands full watching the rest of the crooks on my own.

When my partner burst back into the room with the rounder he'd been talking to, they were scuffling as if ready to start a fist fight. As soon as I saw that, I knew the altercation would have to be resolved quickly or we would find ourselves fighting our way out of the room. I used my flashlight to make an impression on his skull, but that only made him more upset. He turned on me with a bottle in his hand and raised it as if to strike me. It all happened very quickly, but not so fast that I didn't have time to draw my service revolver and point it at his nose. Fortunately, that got his attention, and we had him under control and handcuffed moments later.

My partner's eyes were rolling back in their sockets, so I knew instantly that I had screwed up somehow. It was not until ten minutes later when he very subtly rooted out a federal prison escapee from amongst the room's remaining occupants that I finally realized what had happened. The aggressive hype had used the trip to the hallway to tell my partner about the escapee, no doubt as a result of a dispute between the two thieves over a drug deal. The altercation had been staged to mask the informant's role. That kind of misunderstanding never occurred before or after this incident, and our partnership was very productive and rewarding right up to the end.

* * *

Another officer and I found ourselves becoming increasingly frustrated one afternoon as we sat a block away from a man-with-a-gun call. The call should have been relatively straightforward. Two ambulance attendants had attended a second floor apartment after a man phoned 911 stating that his roommate was sick. The roommate had refused treatment when they arrived; he wanted to be left alone for awhile. To reinforce his request for

privacy, he informed them there was a handgun in a briefcase in the next room. He threatened to use it to shoot them if they didn't leave immediately. The ambulance crew, having quite wisely retreated to call for assistance, were now sitting in their car around the back of the building, waiting for the police to attend.

The procedure in these cases called for all the officers attending to meet a block away from the scene to formulate a plan of attack. The next step was to move in and surround the apartment in question so the suspect did not have an opportunity to hurt innocent passersby or to escape. Officers would then talk to the witnesses and obtain a floor plan of the apartment and the adjacent hallway. Obviously the sooner that was done, the better, because once the scene was under control, we could negotiate an end to the incident without taking any unnecessary risks.

Unfortunately, the supervisor in charge of this particular incident was well known for his propensity to take charge of one call each shift, no matter how insignificant, in order to establish his presence and authority. He would then disappear for the remainder of the shift. The calls he seemed to prefer were, to put it nicely, usually less than challenging.

On this occasion, the supervisor quite properly used his radio to establish a command post one block away from the building. I have no idea where he was broadcasting from. We all met at the command post and awaited his next order. He seemed to be handling the call well, but at the point where he should have ordered specific units into the apartment building to secure the scene, nothing was said. As the call progressed, the members attending the call found themselves still cooling their heels a block away, waiting for instructions to move in. Those instructions never came.

The two of us decided that at the very least someone should join the ambulance crew. They were still waiting patiently behind the apartment building for someone to listen to their story. They greeted us with very puzzled looks. Although from experience they knew the police should have had the area surrounded by now, we were the first blue uniforms they had seen. They didn't believe us when we told them nobody else was anywhere near the apartment. We obtained the appropriate information from them and they cleared the scene in a big hurry.

When we attempted to broadcast the information we had just obtained, we were cut off by the supervisor. He was in the process of having the radio operator phone our suspected gunman and order him to leave the apartment and surrender. Our jaws dropped in unison. That meant the gunman would have to exit his apartment, take an elevator or stairs to the ground floor, leave the building and walk several hundred feet down the sidewalk until he ran across a policeman. The missing element of the plan was that there was no one anywhere near him to accept the surrender.

I could picture the suspect agreeing to leave his apartment after a little coaxing, but he would then have to push the elevator button with his nose since he was under orders to keep his hands in the air. Because no effort had been made to keep innocent civilians from entering and leaving the building, we would only recognize the suspect by the fact that he was the one holding his arms over his head. Once he'd made it outside, we figured

his best chance of getting arrested would be to wait for a police car to drive by and then flag it down, because none of the officers actually assigned to the call were close enough to accept the surrender.

Because we were standing beside the building even though we'd been told specifically not to move in until ordered to do so, we had to decide what to do next. We looked at each other and started laughing. Neither of us was particularly fond of this supervisor, and we would have been more than happy to see him fall flat on his face once again. On the other hand, both of us prided ourselves on our professionalism, although on our own terms. We realized without saying anything that we had to make sure no innocent bystanders got hurt.

Accompanied by another police officer who had wandered by out of curiosity, we entered the building. Luckily, we were just in time to grab the suspect as he walked out of his apartment. Someone else was assigned to do the paperwork, and we drove off for a much-needed coffee.

* * *

One incident that illustrates the perils of working with an incompatible partner occurred on a quiet Sunday afternoon. At this point in my career I was accustomed to working alone; in fact, I preferred to work a one-man car whenever I had the option. My partner that day was an experienced policeman who also preferred to work alone and still enjoyed catching crooks. The decision to assign us to the same car was a temporary measure instituted that day because of manpower requirements. Although we were good friends, we had only worked together once before.

I was working the radio and he was driving. We were assigned to the skid road area that day, but when a report of an armed robbery came in from the East End, we decided to cover the call even though it was outside our patrol area. The suspects were described as two drug addicts with a handgun. The thought of these two idiots getting away with such a blatant crime on a quiet day like this just didn't seem right. I made a decision that we were going to scoop these two, no matter what.

This was the first of a series of robberies the two men committed over the next two hours. The thieves stole a distinctive Volkswagen Bug after one of their store robberies. They then used the same car to attempt several other hold-ups, with each incident being reported further and further away from our assigned area as the suspects headed south toward the Fraser River.

I quickly found myself becoming obsessed with catching them. They were literally doing everything wrong, and it offended me to think they might pull off so many robberies without being apprehended. We tried to anticipate their next move, and for a while it looked like we were going to be successful. There was a lull in the action as we gravitated to the area of Southeast Marine Drive, near the city limits. A dog squad member thought he'd spotted the stolen car in that area, but he lost it before he could take a closer look. We started searching the Marine Drive area ourselves.

As we drove by a grocery store perched on a slight rise on the north side of Marine Drive, my heart almost stopped. At one corner of the building there was an individual peering cautiously around the corner. A second

person was standing to one side of the front door, looking into the interior. The scenario had the classic appearance of a holdup in progress, and I knew instinctively that they must be the two robbery suspects we were looking for.

As the suspects stared open-mouthed at me, I shouted at my partner to stop the car. I didn't want to broadcast, first because we were well out of our patrol area without permission, and secondly, inexcusably, because I didn't know exactly where the hell we were at that moment. Unfortunately, the more I yelled the more confused my partner became, because he hadn't actually seen the suspects and had no idea what I was talking about at first. Instead of stopping, he turned down a side street in an attempt to circle the block.

I was apoplectic by this time. When a citizen pulled out of his driveway, blocking our progress for several seconds, I screamed at him. Had I been driving, I would probably have pushed him off the road. By the time we arrived back at the store, I was totally out of control. Without waiting for my partner, I barged through the front door with my revolver drawn, only to find a puzzled clerk who had seen no sign of the robbers. Apparently, they hadn't even entered the store after seeing me. They had disappeared again.

By the time I dropped back into the passenger seat, the two of us were no longer talking. We gave up the search and drove back to our own area in silence. I decided that it was too late and too embarrassing to broadcast what I'd seen. I was so upset by then that I was almost convinced I'd imagined the entire incident. It was like waking up after a horrendous nightmare: you know you have to do something to save yourself from harm but cannot, no matter how hard you try. Then a unit from the area announced that he'd just recovered the stolen car we were looking for in the parking lot of a nearby temple. We checked, and sure enough the lot was less than a block away from the store I'd just invaded. The car was parked so it was not visible from the street because of a thick hedge. According to a witness, the suspects were last seen running into a wooded area on the south side of Marine Drive. A subsequent search by the dog squad was unsuccessful, and the robberies were never solved.

Fortunately, our friendship ultimately managed to survive the incident. I wrote our failure off to bad karma on my part, as well as poor communications in general. We never discussed what happened to us that day.

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ISBN 0-9699783-0-8