

## Chapter Eight

# AFTERMATH

I phoned my supervisor to tell him I'd drop by the office that afternoon to deliver a written statement to the investigators. Then I went for a long walk. I spent the entire morning thinking about the shooting incident. I had to determine for myself if my decision to take a life was morally and legally correct. I analyzed my actions from a tactical point of view, and then replayed them as they would appear if presented to a jury during a criminal trial.

I eventually concluded there was nothing I could have done differently to change the outcome. In retrospect, there was nothing I would have done differently either. In fact, I cannot recall ever feeling any guilt or remorse about the decision to use lethal force to defend myself. I was confident I had made the right decision.

When I first started walking I was tense and uptight. The exercise calmed my nerves, and I was feeling much better until I saw the morning paper. The front-page headline was dramatic: "COPS BLAST SLASHER!" I didn't make the connection at first, but of course it was our incident they were referring to.

About the same time I was reading my morning paper, the officer who had accompanied the corpse in the ambulance the day before returned to the morgue and used his key to open the cold storage locker where the suspect's body had been kept overnight. Officers from the Identification Squad and homicide investigators attended to watch a pathologist perform the autopsy. She discovered that five bullets had entered the chest cavity. They had each pierced vital organs, so in effect all five wounds were potentially fatal. Another round had entered his right forearm and passed through a bone, coming to rest just under the skin near his wrist.

The wounds were subsequently compared to the bullet holes in his clothing. When the investigation was complete, forensic experts decided that the seventh round, found on the pavement beside him, must have failed to penetrate his clothing and simply bounced off.

As I walked into the station that afternoon, I ran into someone who was able to give me a look at the seven bullets recovered after the shooting. Several of them were still coated with fresh blood from the autopsy. The rounds were all hollow points without copper jacketing, the same issue ammunition carried by all members of the department at the time. I was shocked to find that none of them had mushroomed, or expanded, as they should have.

In theory, hollow points are designed to expand as they encounter flesh, thus dissipating their energy inside the victim rather than passing through him and endangering others. That effect is commonly referred to as "stopping power." In simple terms, it means that a bullet will not only kill a man, but in the process impact him with enough force that he will

discontinue doing whatever got him into trouble in the first place. Ideally, if an attacker is shot in self-defense, the attack should stop and whatever weapon he is holding should drop from his hands.

In my case, the suspect received five fatal hits at point-blank range and still managed to continue his attempt to kill me. He should have collapsed and died from his wounds if the bullets had done their job properly. I felt strongly that since the bullets showed no evidence of expansion after impact, the issue rounds must have been defective. Consequently, I refused to carry them in my service revolver. I immediately bought some powerful, copper-jacketed hollow points and used them in my service revolver until the day I finally left the job. Even though carrying these rounds was contrary to departmental policy, I did not try to conceal the practice. When the non-issue ammunition was finally brought to my attention by a supervisor after a revolver inspection, I refused to exchange my rounds for issue ammo. No disciplinary action was initiated over the incident.

Approximately two years after the suspect was killed, I saw a local TV news clip announcing that the department had finally decided to retire the current issue ammunition, reportedly because some rounds were malfunctioning. In fact, the food line incident was cited as one example where the rounds had not performed up to the advertised standard. I never did hear why it took so long to replace the faulty ammo.

I delivered my statement to Major Crime Squad detectives that afternoon at the police station. I then spent a couple of hours explaining my side of the story to any policeman who happened to be passing through headquarters. This was important to me, because it was an opportunity to ventilate my feelings about the shooting. I also wanted to stop any false or misleading rumors about the incident before they had a chance to damage my reputation.

At that time my good name as a police officer was probably the most important thing in my life. As it turned out, the only harmful rumor that emerged from the episode concerned a detective from the Internal Investigations Squad. I knew him well, and had enjoyed working with him in the past as he was an excellent street cop. Unfortunately, he was incorrectly reported to have harassed me about an unfounded and unrelated allegation while I was in the midst of dealing with the shooting investigation. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I did my best to make sure that everyone knew that. Still, he was the recipient of some undeserved abuse because of this idiotic rumor. That fact alone bothered me for months.

Some versions of the shooting as portrayed by the media left me shaking my head in wonderment. While many accounts were less than accurate, the overall tone was not hostile. For the most part, I just ignored what I read, although I was upset when I first saw my likeness in the papers and on TV. The police department released an out-of-date picture from my academy days to the media without consulting me. Later, when I heard the department planned to release a more recent identity card photo, I went to the Identification Squad and summarily confiscated the negatives and all the copies of the photo from their files.

Later, when the media demanded background details of a personal nature, as well as information about commendations I had received over the years, a senior commissioned officer who knew me was kind enough to ask my permission first. I refused to allow any further details to be released, and the matter was never raised again.

For the next couple of months, until the inquest was old news, I would periodically get a phone call as I came on shift telling me to attend the Public Information Counter immediately. The message was always the same. There was a camera crew waiting there to talk to me, I would be told, and a reporter with them swore that the interview had been previously arranged by Superintendent so-and-so. The pretexts ranged from promises that the interview was about something other than the shooting, all the way to vaguely-worded threats that I was required to participate by order of someone from the senior management level. If they had known my attitude toward the hierarchy, that pitch would probably have been changed. In any case, I always refused to talk to them.

One reporter, I was told later, tried a more aggressive approach to getting a story. The knife used by the suspect to stab me was being held as evidence by the Identification Squad, presumably in case further tests had to be carried out. This reporter apparently wanted a good visual image for his story and felt that a shot of the knife would add dramatic effect. Not just any knife would do, however. He only wanted to see the knife I had been stabbed with, and it had to be produced before a certain deadline.

The detectives informed him they couldn't come up with the knife on such short notice because it was sitting in someone's padlocked evidence locker. The reporter became indignant. He demanded that they produce the knife immediately. If not, he threatened to slant his story in a way that would create some doubt that the man I shot had ever been carrying a knife, and then hint that there was a cover-up. The detectives called the reporter's bluff, and in the end he backed down.

Most people were understanding and sympathetic, but I will always remember the reaction of one particular senior commissioned officer, a man I never had the dubious pleasure of meeting. He appeared in our office area the day after the shooting for the first and only time I'm aware of. As I told my story to bystanders in the office for the umpteenth time, I watched a supervisor who accompanied him nodding in my direction and whispering something. Rather than approaching me to see how I was doing, this officer instead walked right past me on his way out the door without deigning to acknowledge my presence. I felt like someone with a communicable disease.

That is not to say that management ignored me completely. One supervisor called me into his office several days after the shooting. He informed me that another senior commissioned officer had recently witnessed me handling a call on the street without my hat and tie on. Instead of stopping to see if I needed any help, he returned to his office and immediately arranged to have disciplinary action taken against me by my supervisor. Later, while rifling through some old files, I found a copy of the report. It included my official response to the allegation, which consisted largely of one very obscene phrase. The standard joke for that episode was

that killing a man was less harmful to one's career than failing to live up to the department's strict dress and department standards.

Other encounters the day after the shooting were more productive. One corporal made a point of engaging me in a conversation in the stairwell. I hardly knew him at the time, although later he would be assigned to my team. He had collected some literature that described what had happened to other policemen involved in shootings, and he gave me copies before I left the building. Another supervisor, who was later shot and killed in the line of duty, also said all the right things and went out of his way to provide me with additional helpful literature.

I appreciated their assistance, although I never really had a chance to tell either of them how important their actions were to me. It was comforting to know that some of the things I experienced over the next few years had already happened to others. I have since passed copies of these articles to other officers involved in fatal shootings.

I also talked to the personnel officer the day after the shooting. I was pleasantly surprised when management agreed to my request that I be allowed to return to patrol duty immediately. Even though they offered me time off if I needed it, I declined. Although I would have to admit that throughout my career as a constable I frequently found fault with management decisions and policies, I was grateful that in this instance they had enough faith in me to let me make my own choice. In retrospect, I still believe that returning to work was the best decision in my case. On the other hand, I think that officers involved in similar incidents should always be offered time off before returning to the street, if they feel it is necessary.

The first order of business before I could return to active duty was to attend the range and pick up another service revolver. My own weapon was to be kept as evidence until the inquest was over. I disagreed with this policy, because I felt that once ballistics tests were carried out there was no reason it could not be returned. I really didn't want to carry an unfamiliar revolver on the street, but I had no choice in the matter.

I drew a replacement pistol from stores and tested it at the indoor range. I managed to achieve an average score. This particular revolver had seen better days, and it had a different feel than my own weapon. Regardless, it was reassuring to find that I could still handle a firearm without undo nervousness.

Coincidentally there was a reporter at the range on other business when I arrived. We had met before at a bar, so he knew who I was. Fortunately, he respected my privacy and did not take advantage of the situation in any way.

Patrol work was much the same as before, except for one minor problem. Usually my eyes automatically scanned the streets from side to side. Anything abnormal immediately leapt into focus. For the first few weeks after the shooting, however, every nut case or lunatic I passed on the street involuntarily diverted my attention from whatever I had been doing. I couldn't take my eyes off them, and I found that increasingly disturbing. Each time it happened my adrenaline levels soared for several minutes, and I had difficulty concentrating on my work.

Government policy had recently been responsible for moving hundreds of mental patients out of the institutions that had always been their homes. Of course, most of them gravitated to the skids. To remain effective on the job, I had to force myself to ignore their presence. Fortunately, with time, they soon returned to being part of the everyday landscape of the skid road area and I was able to focus my attention where it belonged.

I was assigned to my first knife call only a week after the shooting. We were summoned to a rooming house in the skids where a man and his wife were scuffling. The fight was still in progress when we arrived. They were both drunk. According to the husband, she had apparently been using him for target practice with her kitchen knives. We were able to arrest her without incident. He survived with only a cut to his right elbow where one of the knives had grazed him. I was pleased to find that I had no difficulty handling a knife call, but the real test was to come a week later.

I was on a transportation detail that took me out of my normal patrol area to the West End. As I passed through the intersection of Georgia and Granville, a prostitute flagged me over at a busy bus stop. She shouted something about a man carrying a knife. A young man had apparently sat down beside her and two of her friends and sniffed glue from a plastic bag for five minutes. He had then suddenly pulled out a buck knife and started menacing the prostitute.

"You owe me money," he had snarled. "I'm not afraid of dying. You can't walk away from it. You're going to get yours!"

As I pulled up I informed the radio operator that I would be out dealing with a man-with-a-knife call. I hoped my voice didn't reflect the apprehension I felt. It soon became evident that the suspect would not surrender his knife voluntarily. He still had it in his hand as I left my car, but for the next few minutes he continually switched its position. It went from his hand to his pocket, and then to the inside of a bag he carried. At one point the blade was housed, but then he melodramatically flicked it open again.

I immediately drew my service revolver and ordered him to drop the knife. While doing so I herded him toward the mall area and away from pedestrians in order to keep my line of fire as clear as possible. He completely ignored my request to drop the weapon. I did my best to stay close enough so that I could intercept him if he made a run at one of the bystanders, and far enough away that he would have difficulty stabbing me before I had a chance to shoot him.

What followed resembled a poorly choreographed dance routine. Both of us waltzed face-to-face, back and forth down the mall, always maintaining a constant distance apart. The suspect challenged me physically and verbally. Keeping track of the knife was like following the progress of one card in a shuffled deck, but I could not afford to lose sight of it for a moment.

I returned to the same state of emotion I had experienced two weeks earlier as I was being stalked. I found myself going through the process of preparing to kill another human being, just like the last incident.

I wanted more than anything to avoid opening fire this time. At one point, I managed to trip the suspect and began struggling with him on the ground while I held my revolver out of his reach. When I suddenly

remembered how I'd been stabbed during the last altercation, I instantly broke loose from him and jumped backward. It seemed like we had been facing each other for an hour by the time reinforcements arrived, but in fact two other officers joined me within a minute and a half.

We stood on three sides of the suspect and again tried to talk him into dropping the knife. I continued to cover him with my revolver. We seemed to have reached an impasse. Because I couldn't see where the knife was now, I didn't dare try to overpower him.

Suddenly he turned toward his only avenue of escape and momentarily presented his back to me. That was the opportunity I'd been waiting for. I grabbed his hair with my free hand and yanked him backward with all my strength. He was instantly buried under a sea of blue uniforms. I heard the sound of his knife hitting the concrete just as his body smacked against the pavement. He never realized how close he'd come to dying, although if he'd watched the late news he might have heard one TV station quote a witness as hearing me say: "The last guy who pulled a knife on me is dead now."

The next day I shared the editorial page of the afternoon paper with Ronald Reagan. The editorial misspelled my first name, although it did describe me as "gutsy." The headline read something like: "PUT HIS GUN AWAY." The thrust of this editorial was that whenever a policeman was involved in a shooting, he should be placed behind a desk until his name was cleared. The fact that I'd found it necessary to pull my gun for the second time in two weeks made me the perfect example, although they didn't in any way suggest that I had erred in judgment during either incident.

Even before reading the editorial I knew that if I'd shot the second individual my career would have been destroyed, regardless of the circumstances. Media pressure would have made certain that I was transferred to an inside job at least until the heat died down, but perhaps permanently. For someone like me who loved working as a street policeman, there would be no logical alternative but to leave the job.

Being featured in a hostile editorial had almost as much stressful impact as the incident itself, because among other things I considered it an unwarranted invasion of my privacy. To the department's credit, they ignored the editorial and allowed me to continue doing what I did best.

Another serious incident occurred just before the inquest. This call began as a result of a family dispute. An elderly couple had been baby-sitting their two-year old grandchild while their daughter and her common-law husband spent the night drinking and arguing.

The husband eventually broke into the grandparent's house at two in the morning and angrily snatched his child out of the crib. The elderly couple were concerned for the baby's well-being because of their son-in-law's drunken, belligerent state. When they last saw him, he was staggering down the street in freezing weather toward his apartment building, carrying their grandchild who was dressed only in pajamas.

Another officer joined me at their apartment to help. We knew the suspect was already inside his third floor suite because we could hear him talking to himself from our position outside the locked door. It was unclear at first how much of a threat he posed to the child, although there were

indications from what we could overhear that he was in a very agitated state of mind.

We wanted to listen to more of what he had to say to himself before making our move, but that option was denied us with the arrival of his drunken wife. We tried to explain in a low voice what had happened to the child, but she was very obnoxious and in no mood to listen. Instead of cooperating with us to protect her child, she yelled out a warning to her husband that the cops were standing outside.

It took a great deal of restraint at that moment not to punch her, but I resisted the impulse. While we waited for his next move, we heard a series of loud banging noises from inside the apartment. It appeared that he was nailing a board across the inside of the door to prevent us from entering. He continued to scream obscenities at us as we stood outside helplessly.

We had to decide whether the risk to the baby was great enough to justify forcing our way into the apartment. It soon became clear to me that this child was indeed in urgent need of our assistance. With that decision made, I felt that the sooner we made our way inside, the better our chances were of preventing further harm to the child.

The heavy wooden door looked like a tough one to kick in, especially now that the father had barricaded it from the inside. I'd attended calls in the building before, and I remembered that there was a common balcony outside all the apartments on that floor. We gained entry into the adjacent apartment and then jumped over to the balcony outside his front window.

His attention was drawn to us as we crept into the living room, probably as a result of another shouted warning from his wife. With an additional two or three seconds advantage we could have jumped him from behind while he was still hammering nails into the door. Instead he was able to duck into a darkened bedroom as we approached. We could not risk following him inside because we knew the baby was already in the bedroom and the suspect still had a hammer in his hand.

When he emerged moments later, he held his baby under one arm as he wielded a hammer over her head in a threatening manner. He made it abundantly clear that if we approached him he would use the hammer to harm the baby. He continued to use her as a shield between himself and the police while constantly screaming obscenities at us.

I kept my hand on the butt of my service revolver. While trying my best to calm him down by talking to him, I found myself instinctively sizing him up for a head shot. It was the only possible way of protecting the baby's life in the event he decided to strike her with the hammer.

Meanwhile, his drunken wife also managed to make her way into the apartment by way of the neighbor's balcony. She staggered into the living room, making her presence known by screaming at her husband and in general doing her best to provoke him into a violent act. My partner tried to restrain her, but she broke loose and drunkenly lunged toward her husband. He responded with a roundhouse swing with his hammer that only missed fracturing her skull because she stumbled and fell to the floor at the last second.

If he had connected he would almost certainly have killed her. He would then have joined her almost instantly with a bullet to the head from my service revolver, before he had a chance to injure the child. Undoubtedly this baby would have been better off with foster parents anyway. As soon as the other policeman regained control of the wife, we continued our negotiations to release the child. The baby was screaming hysterically by then. I seemed to be making very little progress with the father until suddenly he walked toward me and wordlessly handed me the hammer.

No details of the incident were given to the press this time and the affair ended peacefully in a courtroom several months later. I had originally charged the father with several serious offenses. However, for reasons the prosecutors could or would not explain to me, the charges were all either dropped or diluted. I ended up attending family court to give evidence on a very minor charge that I felt did not come close to reflecting the seriousness of his criminal actions.

The loving couple arrived neatly dressed and sober, arm-in-arm with a defense lawyer. When it became clear to me that the important issues of the case were to be totally obscured by the trivial nature of the proceedings, I simply walked away without looking back. It was the only way to avoid becoming personally involved with the increasingly bizarre inconsistencies of the criminal justice system.

\* \* \*

As the shooting inquest approached, I spent more and more time walking along the Fraser River dikes while trying to sort out a variety of thoughts and emotions. I ran the incident through my mind constantly, analyzing everything that had happened that day and trying to anticipate what kind of questions we would face at the inquest. I expected to encounter at least one hostile lawyer, because inquests these days frequently become bitter adversarial confrontations, especially when the police are involved.

The department showed no interest in preparing the two of us who were involved in the shooting for the ordeal we were about to face. Lawyers representing the city seemed to have other, more important things to do, so we finally went to the head of our union and asked for help. He was very sympathetic to our plight and did everything he could to make things easier for us. His first move was to check for indications that lawyers or activist groups with political motivations were showing an unhealthy interest in the proceedings. There were several potential mine fields that we had to watch for. We were fortunate in many respects, because no controversial issues had emerged as a result of our actions.

The suspect's next of kin very graciously expressed sympathetic understanding of our role in the incident. Most importantly, there was no indication that they intended to launch a civil suit against us. In America, grieving relatives often take time off from mourning to call a lawyer in order to seize the opportunity to turn a quick profit from the untimely passing of a loved one at the hands of the police. Canadians, of course, are now jumping on the litigation bandwagon.

As well, we still had the threat of criminal charges hanging over our heads until just before the inquest. Although I heard news reports that we

had been cleared of any wrongdoing by a prosecutor, I was never fully satisfied until I saw that assurance in writing. That did not happen until after the inquest ended.

Had the suspect we shot been a member of any minority group, I would have expected to find activists using the unfortunate incident to prove somehow that the police were prejudiced against that particular minority, regardless of the circumstances of the shooting. After any controversial incident of this nature, a policeman frequently finds himself the victim of various forms of harassment from activists and the media. All too often a cop discovers that his life has been seriously disrupted, perhaps changed forever.

Because of previous threats from criminals, I always refused to give out my address or phone number to anyone other than family and close friends. I even went so far as to withhold it from the department. As a result, when my incident occurred, no one bothered me at home because no one knew how to reach me. I know of other policemen in similar circumstances who have not been as fortunate.

Any special interest group with even the remotest connection to the victim can, and often will use an incident involving police use of deadly force to further their cause. Controversy brings activist lawyers to court seeking an opportunity to cross-examine the policemen involved, knowing full well that they will automatically obtain media exposure for whatever radical cause they happen to be promoting that day. They have nothing to lose. Any type of publicity is equivalent to free advertising, which will ultimately attract more criminal clients to their law firms.

On December the fourth our union president accompanied us to the inquest. He assured us that if something untoward happened, he would immediately intervene and demand that we be allowed a chance to obtain legal counsel. He arranged to have two competent lawyers available on short notice if they were required.

The city's lawyers finally approached us for an interview just before the inquest. We informed them that it was ludicrous to expect us to explain the entire story of the shooting in the ten minutes left before the proceedings began. We ignored them. Somehow I found it difficult to picture them representing our interests without any input from us. The fact that we now had lawyers on call in case the inquest blew up in our faces was incredibly reassuring.

This particular inquest into the food line shooting went as well as could be expected. There was very little in the way of evidence presented, with no Identification Squad pictures or diagrams, and no weapons or other exhibits introduced. We left as soon as our evidence was complete. When the television cameras followed us out of the courtroom, we politely refused comment.

The coroner's jury eventually absolved us of blame for the shooting, much to my relief. Some media pundits tried to make an issue of the fact that many Vancouver policemen at the time were not currently qualified according to departmental firearms standards, but that had nothing to do with us. As one of my peers reminded me, I had successfully met

departmental standards with my service revolver at the indoor target range, the outdoor target range and the 300 East Cordova Street that year.

The only contentious issue raised by the jury was in the form of a recommendation urging that police look into non-lethal methods of subduing armed persons. There were quotes in the papers stating that the Vancouver Police had only two alternatives when dealing with an armed suspect: either negotiate with him or shoot him. If that particular media version of the jury's recommendations was true, then I can only conclude that nobody listened to my side of the story. I did my best to explain that we had done everything in our power to dissuade the suspect from continuing his attack on me before we opened fire. In my opinion, there was no practical, non-lethal weapon in the world that could have saved his life that day.

A policeman stands a better than even chance of being stabbed if he uses a nightstick, flashlight, stun gun or pepper spray to disarm a hostile or deranged person who is wielding a knife, regardless of his own size, strength or experience. An individual who has gone berserk often possesses awesome strength. If he is also desperate enough to attack the police while armed with a weapon, he must be regarded as an extreme threat to anyone who confronts him. It is irrelevant whether the suspect is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, suffers from mental problems, or has simply decided to take out his suppressed anger on the first policeman he sees. There is no guaranteed safe way of disarming someone who is threatening to stab you. Anyone who claims otherwise is just plain wrong.

There is a simple way to illustrate the point. Try to defend yourself against a person who is wholeheartedly attempting to jab you with a rolled up newspaper. Then imagine that each blow he strikes is actually a stab wound. You will begin to understand the difficulty of defending yourself against a determined attack where any successful hit could very well prove fatal.

I have always been a believer in trusting the good judgment of the policeman on the scene as to how he should respond to any given incident. Therefore, I feel that a cop should not be faulted if he finds it necessary to use deadly force when confronted with a knife-wielding suspect.

\* \* \*

After the inquest, my work continued in much the same manner as before, until one busy night my luck almost ran out. Several of us moved in to break up a noisy party in an upstairs apartment at around two in the morning. I underestimated the size of the rowdy group congregating inside the apartment, and we quickly found ourselves dangerously outnumbered. Luckily we were able to push the worst troublemakers downstairs and out the door before they realized there were only a few officers on the scene. Wild parties like this one had the potential to evolve into full-fledged riots at a moment's notice.

This particular party had all the ingredients for disaster, so I was glad to see it break up without having to fight my way out the door. I stood at the top of the stairs by the doorway to cover the backs of other officers escorting some of the more violent individuals outside the building. As I turned around to take one last look inside the apartment, one of a group of people

congregating in the kitchen threw a beer bottle at me. It struck me right between the eyes, bending my glasses into a U-shape and shattering just above the bridge of my nose.

Blood spurted from the wound instantly and I felt as if I'd been struck with a baseball bat. I caught a very quick glimpse of a face that I was almost able to associate with the thrown object. Unfortunately, that was not enough to base a criminal charge on, although I was relatively certain I knew the identity of the person who was responsible. He disappeared before I had a chance to grab him.

I was transported to the hospital by ambulance. I required several stitches to close the wound on my forehead. I bought new glasses but they didn't fit until the swelling subsided a week later. I was lucky because the damage could have been much worse. I know of another policeman from a nearby department who lost an eye after being hit with a thrown bottle.

\* \* \*

I was working a one-man car when I received a call that people were fighting inside a skid road hotel room. Since I arrived before the assigned unit, I decided to remain outside the room. I didn't intend to do anything but listen until cover arrived. Fights and family feuds were seldom handled by a one-man unit, for obvious reasons. The desk clerk led me to the correct door, but it opened suddenly just as we approached it.

Two males walked out. The second one tried unsuccessfully to close the battered and broken door behind them as they left. They were both disheveled and there was a strong odor of booze surrounding them. Although they obviously saw me, they ignored my presence in a blatantly-obvious fashion that made them look all the guiltier and then started to walk by me in the hallway as if nothing was wrong. The clerk had mentioned that he'd seen blood inside the room as he walked by earlier, so when I saw blood splattered on the nearest suspect's glasses, I instantly decided to arrest them.

I ordered them to place their hands on the wall. Both of them were big enough to cause me problems, and I knew from their appearance and mannerisms that they were street thugs, probably with no great love for the police. Fortunately, they chose to comply rather than fighting me. I took no chances and forcibly pinned the two of them against the wall while I waited for assistance.

While I waited, I glanced out of the corner of my eye through the open door. The room looked like a slaughterhouse. I used my portable radio to hasten the arrival of a cover car and called for an emergency ambulance to attend. I was able to keep the two prisoners immobile until another unit arrived, although clearly they would have rather escaped. I have no idea why they didn't resist arrest, unless it had something to do with my sincere threat to shoot them if they tried.

The first policeman to arrive helped me handcuff the suspects, and then guarded them while I rushed inside the room. There was blood everywhere, but at first I could only see the victim's leg sticking out from under the bed. I pulled the body out from where they had stuffed it, removed two blood-soaked blankets and uncovered an unconscious transvestite

prostitute whose face now resembled a raw piece of meat. He had been brutally beaten and stabbed repeatedly.

The victim was no longer breathing, probably because there was a bed sheet tightly entwined several times around his neck. I was sure he was a goner. To my surprise, as I tore the garrote from around his throat he sputtered back to life. His breathing was shallow and sporadic. He did not regain consciousness immediately, and I still expected him to expire at any time. The ambulance arrived minutes later and took him to the hospital for emergency treatment.

We discovered in the course of our investigation that the same two suspects had carried out a reign of terror in the hotel throughout the evening, beating and robbing several different tenants before robbing and attempting to murder our victim. This victim sustained the most serious injuries. He ended up with serious and permanent damage to his brain, although he ultimately survived the vicious attack. The two suspects earned assault convictions, which added only a few additional years to the extensive periods of jail time both had already served in the recent past.

\* \* \*

I was called to the parking lot of a downtown business near the end of a busy day shift. Bystanders directed me toward the side of one of their company trucks where a drunk had wedged himself in between the chassis and an embankment. I woke the drunk up and told him brusquely to be on his way. He was probably only 25 years old, although it was difficult to tell, and he was covered from head to toe with grime. His clothes were also filthy and he reeked of a substance that I could not at first identify, but assumed might be some kind of glue.

He appeared to be quite groggy or stoned, so I didn't expect to encounter any serious resistance. As I bent over to lift him to his feet, however, he unleashed a kick that narrowly missed connecting with my face as I backed up. He then charged at me with fists flying, no longer just a harmless drunk. The entire work force had left their office by now, and they stood there, watching us fight. I used my portable radio to ask for help as I dodged his blows.

After I tried several times without success to calm him down, I began to wonder if he was under the influence of a drug like PCP, or Angel Dust, which can make the user very aggressive and extremely dangerous to deal with. I had a sinking feeling that this call was going to end badly.

I had no intention of wrestling with him in case he had a knife in his possession. I was certainly not going to hit him with my fists, because of the extreme risk of catching a disease if I skinned my knuckles in the process. As a result, I had no alternative but to hit him in the face with my metal flashlight, something I always tried to avoid doing if at all possible. I hit him hard enough that spittle flew from his mouth, but that didn't seem to deter him in the least and the fight continued.

At one point I managed to push him down to the ground. He crawled away from me and placed his mouth over the opening of one of the truck's gas tanks. He then proceeded to inhale fumes with repeated deep, gasping breaths. I realized then that what I'd smelled earlier was not glue or

solvents, but gasoline. All these substances are commonly inhaled by people truly desperate to get high. Inhaling gas fumes destroys the brain and eventually leads to death. From my experience working the skid road area, I was well aware that these abusers often acted in an extremely violent and unpredictable manner. Most of them did not survive very long on the streets.

All the fumes did for this individual was to invigorate him temporarily, and he soon came at me again for a second round. It was not his size that concerned me, or his fighting skills, which were primitive even though he was using what he must have thought were karate stances. I kept wondering if he had a knife on him.

I was relieved when cover finally arrived. We were able to handcuff our prisoner after a brief struggle. As we walked him to a wagon, the other policeman thanked the bystanders sarcastically for not coming to my aid when they knew I was having trouble controlling the suspect. Frankly, the possibility of a citizen helping me during a fight never occurred to me, because these days nobody ever wants to get involved.

I sent the gas sniffer to the detoxification center, but of course the next day he was released from custody and immediately returned to the same truck for another taste of the intoxicating fumes. We advised the company to get locking gas caps. Because he was already out on bail for two previous serious assaults, it seemed pointless to charge him with assaulting me. Prosecutors probably wouldn't accept a criminal charge in this case anyway. Nowadays, they seem to proceed criminally only in cases where police officers are hospitalized.

Even if the suspect did end up in a courtroom, there was always a chance he would be found not guilty because he was incapable of forming the intent to commit the offense. The criminal justice system can't do anything to help individuals like this, let alone protect the public from their violent behavior. They either kill themselves with the fumes they become so addicted to, or commit a crime so serious that the system finally decides they must be incarcerated for a while.

\*\*\*

There seemed to be no shortage of knife calls over the following two years. Almost everybody I dealt with in the skids carried a knife. Many of them would produce their knives at the least provocation, so stabbings were an everyday occurrence. My partner and I were parked near a bus stop one evening, relaxing after a call, when we heard a disturbance beside us. A male voice was shouting and swearing at bystanders. From the sound of it, I guessed he was trying to start a fight. This was a common scenario in the skids, of course, something we ran across every time we went to work. I was writing a report, so without looking up from my clipboard I simply yelled out the window as loudly as possible: "Get lost or you're going to jail!"

That threat alone was often enough to end most disturbances. Although most of the street people no longer feared us, they were usually reluctant to risk a direct confrontation with the cops because even in this new age of community policing there were still some policemen who didn't tolerate any blatant challenges to their authority. The policeman I was working with, a gentleman noted for his humor and understatement, looked

past me through my side window and stared at the suspect, who had by then stopped yelling.

"I don't think you should be impolite to him," he said to me calmly. "After all, he is carrying a knife."

That got my attention. I dropped my clipboard and made a speedy exit from the car as the suspect started walking toward me. I had my revolver pointed at his face before he took his second step.

For a change the suspect actually listened to what I was saying to him. When I ordered him to drop the knife, he did so well before he came within spitting distance. He was just another mental case, so we sent him to jail on a weapons charge and asked that a psychiatric assessment be done as soon as possible.

\* \* \*

I was driving up the narrow overpass at the north foot of Main Street one evening when a speeding motorcycle almost struck me head-on. He missed hitting me by inches as I slammed on my brakes and skidded to avoid him. The viaduct there is steep and curved, so oncoming traffic is not visible until it is almost on top of you. As I tried to do a U-turn to follow him, another motorcycle that had apparently been trying to keep up with him came over the brow at high speed. He almost lost control of his machine while trying to avoid hitting me.

I ignored him for the moment. I turned my emergency equipment on and tried to pull over the first bike as it sped east on Alexander Street. Instead of pulling over, he accelerated away from me and drove through a stop sign at twice the legal speed limit. I finally lost sight of him as he went the wrong way down a one-way street, still traveling at high speed.

After I transmitted a description of the bike and rider, a succession of other units tried unsuccessfully to pull him over as he continued eastbound through heavy traffic. At one point he just missed hitting the front of a police car that tried to block his passage at an intersection. The biker seemed quite willing to risk his life in order to avoid being stopped.

It is nearly impossible to catch a motorcycle in a high-speed chase because its superior acceleration and maneuverability gives it an overwhelming advantage over the under-powered police cars pursuing it. Since none of us were willing to follow him through red lights at the speed he was traveling, he soon disappeared again. I moved over to an area several blocks east of where he was last seen and began prowling the dark side streets. There were soon other police cars in the area, but nobody saw any sign of him for the next ten minutes.

I had almost given up hope of finding him until I caught sight of a single red light that flashed for only a second. It was a motorcycle driving down the lane with no headlights on. He had no way of turning off his brake light, and that bright-red light betrayed his presence every time he had to slow down.

I had to move fast to catch up to him. In doing so, I lost track of my location because there were no street signs in the lanes. The alleys were so dark that I almost missed seeing the motorcycle duck into a driveway. I

pulled in behind him just as he attempted to turn the bike around and make a hasty exit in the opposite direction.

I told my radio operator that I was out with the suspect, but unfortunately I was unable to give her my exact location. I knew I had to do something immediately to stop him or the high-speed chase would begin again. I jumped out of the car and pushed him off his motorcycle just as he started to drive away.

I remembered hearing about another high-speed chase years earlier. It had almost concluded when the motorcyclist finally lost control and fell off his bike while rounding a corner. However, because none of his pursuers did anything to stop him, such as parking a police cruiser on top of the motorcycle, he managed to climb back on and escape as the police watched helplessly in his dust. I was not going to let that happen to me.

My suspect was still wound up from the thrill of the chase, so I was not surprised when he got up from the driveway and tried to knock me down. I did my best to fight him off, but my flashlight just bounced off his helmet and he kept coming at me. In the old days I would have tackled him to the ground and wrestled with him until I managed to get him handcuffed. Now, because I didn't know whether or not he had a knife, I simply could not bring myself to get in close enough to gain control of him.

I tried to radio for assistance, but without a location to broadcast there was nothing the operator could do for me. As we struggled, I started flashing back to the shooting incident. I remember wondering if I was going to have to use my service revolver to stop this one from coming at me again and again.

I was lucky that night. Several of the cars searching for me arrived to help me handcuff the suspect before the situation could deteriorate any further. I was completely overwhelmed by fear, anger and frustration during the struggle, so much so that I had to struggle just to regain my composure.

I had calmed down by the time I arrived at the breathalyzer room twenty minutes later to process my prisoner. So had he, apparently. I found him relaxing against the basement wall, engaged in a friendly conversation with the breathalyzer operator, who had already removed his handcuffs. The motorcyclist was rational and somewhat apologetic now. He had no significant criminal history and no explanation for the way he'd acted. In fact, he dismissed his behavior as simply a matter of adrenaline getting the upper hand.

\* \* \*

During the next two years I gradually became aware of subtle and not so subtle differences in the way I handled certain critical situations at work. I knew something was seriously wrong, but there didn't seem to be anything I could do about it. This feeling of apprehension was heightened one day when I helped stop a car containing two suspects who had earlier been seen carrying a gun. To my horror, I found that when I pointed my service revolver at them, my hand was shaking. That had never happened to me before. It was normal and acceptable to experience a nervous reaction like this, but only after an incident was over and there was no further need for steady and absolute control.

My usual style when it came to subduing a hostile suspect could best be described as aggressive. Not that I went looking for fights! Common sense dictated that if I could sweet-talk a crook into handcuffs without a struggle, I did so. There was never any macho question of proving my superiority against the toughest person on the street, because I knew there was always somebody tougher, bigger or crazier waiting to deflate my ego in a very physical way. Only a fool takes risks unnecessarily.

When I say I was aggressive, I mean that whenever I was faced with an altercation, I preferred to get in close and end the struggle quickly, using sufficient force to effect the arrest but not so much that I caused a serious injury. I liked being in close. If I had a suspect I thought might be concealing a weapon, I felt supremely comfortable moving directly into their face and grabbing their wrists.

I very seldom got into fist fights with the individuals I arrested. Because I had no boxing skills to speak of, the odds of winning a fair fist fight were not in my favor anyway. Besides, punching a suspect is a very messy and inefficient way of gaining the upper hand.

If I stood in close proximity to an assailant, I had a golden opportunity to establish control because I was able to monitor the suspect's hands and facial expressions for signs that he was going for a weapon or about to attack. I could then grab or choke belligerents until I was back in control of the situation. When I encountered an individual in the process of confronting another police officer in a threatening manner, I usually positioned myself immediately behind the suspect. This distracting form of intimidation was usually sufficient to prevent any further escalation of hostilities.

After the shooting, I gradually found myself reluctant to get in close anymore. Perhaps it was because I was always expecting to face another knife attack, although that theory did not occur to me at first. Nevertheless, I was no longer confident in my ability to react to violent altercations appropriately. Without absolute control over my reactions, I soon experienced difficulty handling certain types of calls, specifically those involving violence.

At this stage, I still believed that my judgment was sound. In fact, the overall quality of my work remained at roughly the same level. However, I found myself making mistakes that I would never have made in the past. For instance, on one occasion I was assigned to a call, acknowledged it, and then promptly forgot all about it until I received a gentle reminder from the radio operator later in the evening. I eventually decided that I would have to do something about these problems before they got out of hand.

The symptoms were hard to ignore. I had a horrendous nightmare two nights after the incident where the man I shot tried over and over again to come at me through some kind of Plexiglas window. The episode finally ended with him fading away into the darkness. His face never reappeared in any of my nightmares.

In the months that followed the shooting, I had a series of increasingly disturbing nightmares, all of them featuring violent scenarios. Most ended with a death. They were, to say the least, unsettling. Another problem that I found particularly difficult to understand could best be described as an

internal twitch or nerve reaction that first appeared shortly after the shooting and occurred more and more frequently over the next few years. It felt like the nerves around my forehead were twitching, almost in a fluttering type of motion. I had no control over when this would occur, or how long it would last. It was a very uncomfortable sensation.

Although the problem did not seem to affect my health, I eventually had it checked out by specialists. I had mixed emotions when tests proved there was no physical explanation for the condition, because to me that meant I had psychological problems that I was unable to overcome by sheer willpower.

As my situation deteriorated, I tried to arrange with the department for an unpaid leave of absence to further my education. In my written request for the leave I made it clear that I hoped to use the time to deal with certain problems that had arisen as a result of the shooting. I could not elaborate on what these problems were because I knew that to do so might mean the department would force me to undergo some type of psychological treatment. I was also acutely aware that rumors about a mental illness could have a devastating effect on my career and reputation.

Going public with my problem was simply not an acceptable option then. I wanted to distance myself from work by taking a year off to write a novel and return to university part-time. Shift work meant that the only practical way I could complete my degree was with a leave of absence anyway. I hoped that over the course of a year away from the job, my problems would somehow fade away.

Similar requests by other members had routinely been okayed in the past, although there was no existing departmental policy governing leaves of absence. Nevertheless, I was led to believe that my application would also be approved without delay. For this reason, I was surprised when I received word one week later that I had been turned down.

The reasoning behind this refusal was never explained to me. However, it was suggested twice that I should instead consider resigning and then reapplying for the job when I wanted to return. This option was unacceptable to me. Since I had no friends at the management level, and because I was a middle-aged, white male, I was well aware that my chances of being rehired were, at best, slim. At the time, the job was still all-important to me. Despite my problems, I could not face losing my career as a policeman, regardless of what the personal consequences might be.

About two years after the shooting everything finally came to a head. My situation had deteriorated so much that I felt my only alternative was to book off work and see a psychiatrist. There really was no going back at this stage, and I subsequently spent six of the worst months of my life trying to deal with all the psychological problems that had accumulated since the shooting incident.

The stress of this process was incredible, even though I wasn't working on the street anymore. I soon found myself avoiding the downtown area around the station completely, and as a result I gradually lost touch with my job and the people I had worked with for nearly twelve years.

Although I forced myself to attend two or three social functions related to the job, I was never comfortable and usually felt distinctly out of place.

I sat on my couch at home for hours at a time as the stress and apprehension I experienced grew in intensity. Although I went for long walks in an attempt to relax, my thoughts always returned to the shooting. I reexperienced the incident over and over again, every day.

Strangely, part of my memory of the shooting disappeared shortly after the incident. I do not recall actually killing the suspect, or even hearing any of the seven shots fired. I do, however, recollect telling some of the policemen around me all about the shooting as I was treated for the knife wound at St. Paul's, so I guess I remembered it then.

At times I experienced a tumult of emotions as I came close to remembering what happened in the period of time between the suspect's final lunge at me while I was trapped against the van mirror and the moment I found myself on the ground, kicking him in the groin to stave off his attack. I tried repeatedly to bring these particular events back into focus, but I was never successful in doing so. I eventually came to understand that my recollection of the shooting was no longer accessible to me. Perhaps my subconscious has decided it would be unwise for me to know what actually went through my mind as I killed a man.

I experienced flashbacks that were, at times, devastating. For instance, I would be reading a novel when all of a sudden I would find myself back at the 300 East Cordova, experiencing the shooting all over again. The most unsettling symptom was the overwhelming sense of doom that gradually developed; I had a strong feeling that something horrendous was going to happen if I returned to work.

In World War II, pilots who had flown one too many combat missions were described as suffering from the "twitch." There was often a stigma attached to those pilots who "lost their nerve," and the British classified them in a category known as "Lack of Moral Fiber." When soldiers developed problems during combat, the condition was known as "shell shock."

It was only after the Vietnam War that the experts took these symptoms seriously. Eventually they identified Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, as responsible for the misery suffered by some individuals involved in extremely stressful incidents. The experts decided that I too was suffering from PTSD, but I made little effort to research the affliction or understand its ramifications at first. Even though I avoided facing the diagnosis of PTSD head-on, I gradually made some progress in coexisting with it as time passed.

One of the worst parts of the ordeal was the frustration of dealing with the Workers' Compensation Board. I had read many negative articles in the paper about the WCB. The minor brushes I'd had with their bureaucrats in the past left me less than impressed with their ability to deal with even a simple, straightforward claim. Unfortunately, I really had no alternative but to pursue my claim for PTSD with them. Meanwhile, I just hoped I could work my way through my problems on my own and eventually return to a normal lifestyle.

The WCB assigned an adjudicator to my claim. He talked with me for an hour or so at the WCB office about the incident and what I had experienced since then. I basically told him that I had to leave the job, one way or another, to protect my sanity.

I spent the better part of a morning with one of their staff psychologists. The interview in his office was a humiliating and depressing experience. Since I could hear conversations taking place outside his door, I knew that the secretary and anyone else nearby could in turn hear everything I said. The psychologist admitted that his background was primarily in family counseling, and he did not seem interested in finding out what was really wrong with me. Although he was polite and pleasant enough, he yawned constantly throughout the interview. The experience left me feeling confused and frustrated.

At the end of the morning's ordeal, I was seated in an empty room with a pile of cards and a small box divided into two compartments. On each card was a statement. I was supposed to consider the validity of those statements, then place each card in the appropriate box marked true or false.

Many of the questions were bizarre, to say the least. I remember thinking at the time that this test was preferable to describing ink blots, which was the kind of foolishness I had expected to encounter. As it turned out, interpreting ink blots might have been more meaningful. I subsequently checked in a psychology text book and discovered that the test I took was almost universally regarded as outdated and useless, except in certain carefully-defined situations. My circumstances did not even come close to fitting the criteria they listed.

I was well aware that the WCB would pass along a complete and detailed report about my problems to the department. I knew this meant that everything I told them would become common knowledge amongst the people I worked with. Therefore, I had to walk a fine line by telling the WCB enough to confirm the diagnosis of PTSD, while at the same time shielding from them private details that could destroy my reputation and what was left of my career as a policeman.

My biggest fear, now that my problems were out in the open, was that I would be left abandoned, without a career. The more details I told the WCB about my problems, the more bridges I would burn with the department and the tougher it would be to get hired in any other profession. I had only to think back to my own archaic attitude toward people with psychological problems to understand how a prospective employer might regard someone suffering from PTSD.

It was a classic Catch 22 situation, so I had little difficulty envisioning the worst-case scenario coming to pass. The danger was that the WCB would wash their hands of me, and I would then have to convince the department to let me have my job back. The more I revealed about my problems, the less chance I had of ever convincing the department that they could trust me to handle the extraordinary pressures of street police work again.

Meanwhile, the violent nightmares continued. Now they often included tumultuous dreams where I was in the midst of quitting the job when something catastrophic would happen to me.

Approximately six months after I originally booked off sick, I was finally notified by the WCB that they did not think I was suffering from PTSD. Instead, they claimed I was afflicted with something they referred to as "burnout." Their decision meant that the worst-case scenario I had dreaded facing was now a reality. This meant I was now essentially a man without a country, in imminent danger of losing my job unless I took immediate action to salvage what was left of my career. Treating the symptoms of PTSD was no longer a priority.

Therefore, I had to convince the two doctors whose permission was required for me to return to work that I was completely cured of the PTSD symptoms. Although I was in better shape emotionally than when I'd booked off, I was acutely aware that the original problems were still simmering in the background.

I still believed that something horrendous would occur if I returned to work, but I soon resigned myself to this inevitability and decided it was a risk I would have to live with. Frankly, if that meant that some individual unwise enough to attack me was going to get hurt in a big way, I was prepared to accept the consequences. I simply could not leave the job at that stage of my life. After all, I had nothing else to fall back on and police work was infinitely more appealing than unemployment. Besides, as much as I hated what the job was doing to my sanity, I still wanted to be a policeman.

I made a conscious effort to appear cheerful and normal, and I am quite certain that anybody who talked to me at the time agreed that I was ready to return to work. After getting clearance from the doctors, I arranged to return to my original job in the patrol division. March 24, 1987, was to be my first day back on the road. I was still determined to fight the WCB's decision not to cover the time I had spent away from work, but I knew that unless I was fighting from within the system I had no chance of succeeding.

On the Sunday before I was slated to return to work, I read the morning paper and noticed that the winning numbers for the 6/49 draw looked similar to the numbers I usually played. With growing excitement, I pulled my tickets out and compared the numbers. Although I immediately realized that they were identical, I still checked them several times to confirm that they matched. My wife thought I'd really gone off the deep end when I kept shouting and pointing excitedly to the paper and the ticket sitting on top of it. There was a moment of panic when I realized that the ticket I'd pulled out of my wallet was from the previous week's draw, but I quickly located the correct ticket and confirmed again that the numbers did indeed match.

We immediately shared the news with our families, and spent a sleepless night contemplating the vagaries of fate. My wife went to work Monday morning while I went by the lottery office to pick up a cheque for a rather large sum of money. The other half of the jackpot that week went to someone in Quebec. There were some anxious moments while I waited in the lobby for admission to the inner sanctum. For instance, one man who

approached the security guard told him that he thought he had the winning ticket on the last 6/49. His ticket turned out to be only a list of the winning numbers printed by one of the lottery machines, so he went away disappointed. It was a common misunderstanding, according to the guard.

My ticket was verified after half an hour, but picking up the prize was not as simple as I'd hoped. When you see flashy ads for the various lotteries, it is easy to forget the reason for their existence. Lotteries exist solely as a prime source of government revenue, or more properly as a slush fund used to buy votes. In short, lotteries are run like any other business. I had hoped to keep a low profile for a few weeks to give us time to make decisions about our future, but the reality is that publicizing winners is an excellent form of advertising for the lotteries. I was told in no uncertain terms that unless I agreed to a press conference, they would not issue me my money.

I fought this as best I could under the circumstances. In fact, I became quite vocal in my objections to their tactics. The man in charge suddenly became unavailable when I asked to see him. When a security guard was assigned to keep me company, I realized that it was either give in to their demands or walk out without a cheque. Since they now kept my ticket in their possession, I had no alternative but to agree to see the press just as closing time approached at the banks. As soon as I had the cheque in my hand, I mumbled something vague to the cameras and walked away from the podium before they could ask any silly questions.

I read in the papers the next day that I was planning to leave the job, even before I had a chance to make that decision. In the end I had little choice. I had been given a unique opportunity to start life over again. Considering the circumstances and timing of the windfall, it would have been folly to tempt fate by returning to police work.

On the other hand, it was, and to a certain extent still is, very difficult to put the job behind me. I have never encountered a finer group of people than the men and women I worked with in the Vancouver Police Department. To aspire to be a good street policeman is, to my mind, a fine and noble undertaking.

Being a policeman is much like being a member of a secret society, in that you are involved in a lifestyle that is universally misunderstood by outsiders. You develop a strong kinship with the people who share your belief in what you are doing.

There cannot be a job that is more challenging. Even with the gradual encroachment of restrictive court rulings and mind-numbing bureaucracy, a street policeman has been granted a unique mandate by society which often allows him to exercise discretion, judgment and common sense in the execution of his duties. Although most officers were willing to accept responsibility for their actions, in recent times there is less and less margin for error in a system that can punish a policeman's honest mistakes with ruination and even incarceration.

Nevertheless, leaving the job was the hardest decision I ever had to make. It is a difficult profession to leave behind in many ways. For instance, I still think like a policeman, and talk like a policeman, and it is impossible to express my true feelings on some controversial issues without betraying my

police background to civilians. I am gradually learning to live with the contradictions that come with retaining the values and judgments I acquired while on the job even though I am no longer a policeman. Most of all, I miss the day-to-day contact with the men and women of the Vancouver Police Department. Those associations simply cannot continue on the same level after you quit.

The only unresolved issue remaining from the job was my claim with the WCB to cover the six months I'd been off work. The day after I picked up the prize, the WCB asked if I wanted to close the claim. I was tempted to say yes. I wanted to start a new life, and I was finding it increasingly painful and distressing to deal with the WCB's handling of my claim.

On the other hand, my case could serve as a precedent for other similar incidents involving police-related shootings. I could not live with the possibility that another policeman might be denied help because this flawed WCB decision was allowed to stand. I told them that I wanted to continue with the case. My former union stood behind me and decided to assist me in the appeal process.

I finally got an opportunity to examine the WCB's file on my case during the appeal process. I immediately knew I'd made the right decision. There were things in that file that infuriated me. I spent hours going through it, identifying numerous mistakes and tracing certain ambiguities that might be of use to our lawyers. There were even memos about my case from psychologists I had never met, expressing opinions about me solely on the basis of other people's judgments. All the facets of my case had been dealt with as if they were part of an adversary process in a courtroom, except for the fact that there had been no one to represent my interests. Anyone dealing with the WCB should have access to legal representation right from the beginning of the process.

What I found most offensive was the expressed point of view by the WCB that anyone with problems similar to mine should simply look for another job. It was as if anybody who developed psychological difficulties as a cop should simply be written off as a liability, regardless of their record on the job and, indeed, their own personal interests and desires. I compared the contents of some of these memos with what I read in psychology textbooks. Despite my lack of expertise in the field, I began to form my own opinions as to what the WCB's bureaucratic double-talk in my file really meant.

There was light at the end of the tunnel for me when I finally located one particular chart in a psychology textbook. This one-page chart listed the symptoms characteristic to PTSD. It was then simply a matter of checking off a specific number of symptoms from the list to determine whether or not I had been suffering from PTSD. The results clearly confirmed that I had been suffering from PTSD all along.

I felt an overwhelming sense of relief when I was finally able to identify what had been bothering me all that time, despite a smoke screen thrown up by the WCB that had left me extremely confused. It was somehow comforting to know that others had managed to overcome PTSD. When a significant number of Vietnam War veterans returned with these same symptoms, some of the veteran's hospitals in America dealt with the problem

simply by refusing to acknowledge that it existed. Those so-called experts were proven wrong decades ago, of course, and there is no doubt in my mind that some of that enlightenment will eventually make its way across the border into British Columbia.

Scientists investigating Post-traumatic Stress Disorder have only recently discovered evidence that the condition has biological roots. It is apparently triggered by certain catastrophic incidents where an individual experiences overwhelming terror over which he or she has no control. Although commonly associated with combat veterans, police officers and victims of serious crimes, PTSD can also affect people from all walks of life if the trauma they experience is serious enough.

The effects vary from person to person. A traumatic event can actually alter an individual's brain chemistry. Thus the manner and rate at which their brain secretes certain chemicals, substances that the brain normally produces only when influenced by severe stress, may be changed. This means minor incidents can inadvertently trigger the "flight or fight" response, inappropriately alerting the body through adrenaline surges to react to a non-existent emergency.

People with PTSD are thus prone to symptoms like nightmares, flashbacks, irritability and sleep disorders. They may also find themselves overreacting to everyday occurrences, such as car backfires. Another part of the brain that regulates the way individuals deal with pain may cause some people with PTSD to experience emotional numbing, thereby changing the way they relate to others.

Reading the news reports about this research was another turning point for me in the process of dealing with my PTSD. Now that there is proof this condition actually exists, and that it is caused by a biological reaction, I can finally understand why certain unpleasant things happened to me after the shooting. Now I can begin the long process of healing myself.

It is difficult to explain how I feel about the symptoms I experienced after the shooting. For a long time I didn't believe PTSD existed, or comprehend how Vietnam vets could really suffer from it. When PTSD affected me personally, I found it next to impossible to deal with the symptoms, let alone the fact that I was suffering from a form of mental illness. It was much easier to confront a condition that had been scientifically proven to exist than to grapple with abstract concepts such as diseases of the mind.

I went through a difficult year in preparation for the appeal, which in the end meant that I would have to appear in front of a panel of three psychiatrists. They would make the final and binding decision about whether or not I had actually been suffering from PTSD. Before I could face the panel, however, I spent many hours being interviewed by another psychiatrist, an acknowledged expert in the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD and other stress disorders. He concluded that the original diagnosis of PTSD was correct.

In the end, the panel of experts also agreed with his opinion. They decided that I had indeed been disabled for those six months by PTSD, and that it was a direct result of the shooting incident in 1984. Best of all, the

WCB cannot overturn the ruling because the decision is legally binding. I wanted this precedent to be established so that the WCB will be obliged to help other police officers involved in similar incidents.

Unfortunately, things at the WCB have only worsened since then, and police officers with PTSD are often not getting the kind of help they need. I was glad to finally put an end to my particular ordeal with the WCB, but there is still unfinished business with regard to this problem. It seems to me that it will take one or more tragedies before the mindless bureaucrats are forced to deal with the deadly-serious ramifications of police with PTSD.

I wrote this book in an attempt to tell my side of the story about police work. I can only hope that as crime rates increase and policing becomes more and more challenging, citizens will realize that individual police officers deserve their support and understanding, especially during times of crisis.

## **READ SHOTS FIRED ONLINE**

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 – Cops & Robbers](#)

[Chapter 2 – Violence](#)

[Chapter 3 – Hot Pursuit](#)

[Chapter 4 – Hazards of the Profession](#)

[Chapter 5 – Life & Death](#)

[Chapter 6 – Deadly Weapons](#)

[Chapter 7 – Shots Fired](#)

[Chapter 8 - Aftermath](#)

You can order this book through any Canadian bookstore or on [Chapters.ca](http://Chapters.ca).

Copyright © 1997 by Gary Cameron

ISBN 0-9699783-0-8