

# Vancouver Gang Violence: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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# VANCOUVER GANG VIOLENCE: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article provides a historical description of key gangs and relevant events in BC, focusing on Vancouver, from 1909 to 2012 with a focus on the main incidents and themes of violence. A primary goal of this article is to dismiss the delusion that we are a more violent society today than ever before and face the harsh reality that violence and gangs in Vancouver are not new, nor are they a product of this new generation. While this nostalgic view of the past may be pleasing to our memories, an examination of newspapers and historical police documents suggests that violence in BC has been relatively constant for more than a century. From 1909 to 2012, gangs were consistently violent: there were murders, shootings, and gang fights. Innocent bystanders were shot, maimed, injured, and killed. Policymakers can't blame the new generation, media, police, video games, or rap music – it has always been a part of our social fabric. This recognition is important to our current understanding of the gang landscape in Vancouver and our responses to these violent affronts to our society.

## **KEY WORDS**

Gang; crime; gang violence; police; shooting; violence; murder; drug trade; organized crime; gang unit; history; drug trade; biker; Vancouver; Lower Mainland; British Columbia.

## Table of Contents

<i>The Early Years.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>The 1950s and 1960s: The Era of the Park Gangs.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>The Early Asian Gangs.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The 1980s.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Multi-ethnic street gangs.....	7
Pivotal incidents.....	8
<i>The 1990s.....</i>	<i>10</i>
The Russians, the Asians, and the Hells Angels go to war.....	10
Time to behave, triads warn.....	11
...One more chance to get the Russians.....	12
The Dosanjh brothers' demise.....	12
<i>Bindy Johal's Domination.....</i>	<i>12</i>
Bar Watch created.....	13
Bindy Johal's death.....	14
<i>The Vietnamese and Indo-Canadian Years.....</i>	<i>15</i>
The first Alkhalil is killed.....	17
Hells Angel murdered.....	17
Fiftieth Indo-Canadian murdered from gang violence.....	17
The Loft Six shooting: Death of second Alkhalil.....	18
Marijuana growth industry.....	19
Murder of good Samaritan Rachel Davis.....	19
Vancouver Police create pilot Firearms Interdiction Team (FIT).....	19
British Columbia Integrated Gang Task Force created.....	20
More Indo-Canadian deaths.....	20
Death of Innocent Lee Matasi.....	21
The McMynn kidnapping.....	21
<i>Recent Violent Years.....</i>	<i>21</i>
Dover Park shooting and death of innocent Holifield.....	21
Fortune Happiness shooting.....	22
Surrey six murders.....	22
Violence Suppression Team created.....	23
Gotham shooting.....	23
Oakridge Mall shooting.....	25
"Gangcouver".....	26
"There is a gang war and it's brutal".....	27
Hit to the United Nations gang, American-justice style.....	28
The Dhak/Duhre gang versus the Red Scorpions, Independent Soldiers, and Hells Angels.....	28
<i>Chapter Conclusion.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>References.....</i>	<i>32</i>

## Preface

On the evening of Saturday, January 19, 2008, Ricky Scarpino, his fiancé, and his bodyguard were driving to Gotham, the premier steakhouse in Vancouver. As Scarpino parked outside of the restaurant, two gunmen emerged from the shadows and shot wildly into his luxury SUV, killing him and his bodyguard instantly (Proctor, 1996; O'Connor, 2008).

I was one of the first attending police officers and supervised the crime scene. When four tactical armed officers arrived, I ordered them into the restaurant to check on the patrons' welfare, only to be confronted by another suspect exiting the restaurant with a pistol. As the police officers raised their assault rifles, he dropped the handgun (Grindlay, 2008). Several politicians, tycoons, philanthropists, and even a Hollywood movie star were enjoying their dinner when the chaos of BC gang violence invaded their peaceful evening (Spencer, 2008).

In response to this, and other incidents of gang crime, the media bemoaned how dangerous the times are. In February 2009, the RCMP's then-Deputy Commissioner, Gary Bass, stated that BC was experiencing "unprecedented levels of violence" (Vancouver Sun, 2009). This sentiment was further exaggerated by Wally Oppal, BC's Attorney General at the time, who said that "the shootings are an unparalleled wave of violence" (Vancouver Sun, 2009). Both of these well-connected, informed, and respected leaders suggested that gang violence is new and has never been seen before. Through objectively collected evidence, I will demonstrate in this chapter that the violence committed by and between gangs has remained historically consistent in BC. In fact, the RCMP publication *Youth Gangs and Guns* (Clark, 2006) indicates that there was no real onset of youth gangs in Vancouver until 1979 (p. 26). I show that gangs were in BC much earlier than the 1970s.

This article provides a historical description of key gangs and relevant events in BC, focusing on Vancouver, from 1909 to 2012. The breadth of this thesis does not allow for a comprehensive examination of the last century, so I'll focus on the main incidents and themes of violence. A primary goal of this article is to dismiss the delusion that we are a more violent society today than ever before. While this nostalgic view of the past may be pleasing to our memories, an examination of newspapers and historical police documents suggests that violence in BC has been relatively constant for more than a century.

## The Early Years

Gangs are not a new phenomenon in BC; they were reported as early as 1909, with the first significant waves emerging in Vancouver in the 1920s (Young, 1993). These were considered “corner lounge” gangs who profited from burglaries and thefts, with some use of firearms during robberies. They were geographically based; for example, the Collingwood Street Gang and the Cordova Street Gang.

In the 1920s and 1930s, police focussed on the opium dens, gambling dens, and other illegal activities of Chinese immigrants. In 1928, Shue Moy, a well-known Vancouver gangster and gambler, was implicated in a special police investigation that also implicated the Vancouver mayor and chief of the Vancouver Police (Dubro, 1991). Ultimately, Chief Constable H. W. Long resigned after allegations of corruption and payoffs (Dubro, 1991).

Gang violence in Vancouver waned during the late 1930s and into the 1940s, but 1944 saw the emergence of the Zoot Suit gangs in Vancouver, with similarities to the Zoot Suit gangs from Los Angeles. In 1944, tension existed between the merchant seamen involved in the war and the Zoot Suitors, who were too young to serve their country (Young, 1993). In July 1944, this tension culminated in rioting, a gang shootout, and robberies that left two VPD officers dead. The gang situation slowed until 1947 when up to three hundred youth from Kerrisdale and the East End met at 41st Avenue and Granville and brawled in a public intersection (Young, 1993).

## The 1950s and 1960s: The Era of the Park Gangs

In the 1950s, gangs began to congregate in the East End, Kerrisdale, and Point Grey neighbourhoods (Young, 1993). By the mid-1950s, gang activity in Vancouver had reached an all-time high and had several groups forming, including the Alma Dukes, Vic Gang, and Zoot Suits, which culminated in a gun battle in the 1100 block of Granville Street (Young, 1993).

In the 1960s, gangs in Vancouver appear to have been formed around parks, with the Grandview Park Gang being a predominant player (Young, 1993). They were joined by the Vic Gang, Clark Park, and Memorial Park West gangs, all of which were involved in the use and distribution of illegal drugs as well as the illegal importation of cigarettes and beer from the U.S. (Young, 1993). During the 1960s, some Vancouver gangs were associated with fascist and communist belief systems, resulting in clashes with the police and other youth (Young, 1993).

## The Early Asian Gangs

The first modern Asian gang in BC was recorded in 1967 as the Soccer Club, later calling themselves the Jung Ching (“Chinese Youth”), and finally, the Lotus Gang (Ennis, 1992).

Chinatown gangs soon emerged, which appeared to have international connections to Hong Kong and San Francisco (Young, 1993).

The powerful Red Eagles formed in 1976 from a group of Hong Kong Chinese (Ennis, 1992). That year, they were involved in a fight at a Chinese New Year party and stabbed a Bak Mei<sup>1</sup> gang member to death. Shortly after, a Red Eagle was charged and convicted of assault causing bodily harm and was sentenced to one year in prison (Ennis, 1992).

Ling Yue Jai (English name David So) formed the Lotus Gang in Vancouver in 1976 as a splinter group from the Jung Ching. This charismatic leader organized forty children of immigrant Chinese workers into the gang. They were very loyal to Jai, even when he was sent to jail for his part in a group of eight men using pipes to beat up two young Chinese men (Schneider, 2009). In 1978, Park Shing Lo (a former member of the 1960s Soccer Club gang) took over the Lotus Gang.

Another Asian gang, though short-lived, was the Ching Tao, identified in late 1976. This group was centred around Vancouver’s Templeton High School and was involved in a conflict with the Lotus Gang and Red Eagles, with several fights around Templeton High School and Britannia High School.<sup>2</sup>

The Red Eagles were quiet until late 1978 when several members wielding cleavers and machetes attacked members of the Ching Tao gang in Kingsland Restaurant at 987 Granville Street. Several people were injured and sent to the hospital and, fortunately, no deaths occurred (Ennis, 1992). From this point until 1985, multiple attacks occurred between members of the Lotus Gang, Red Eagles, and Ching Tao gangs, including an attack between the Lotus and Red Eagles at the Stardust Roller Rink in North Vancouver on January 16, 1979 (Ennis, 1992). The Lotus Gang was openly in a two-front war with the Ching Tao and Red Eagles gangs. The Red

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the breadth of this paper, the Bak Mei gang could not be examined in comprehensive detail. They were half of the former Soccer Club after that group split. They grew to over eighty members, but the fight and subsequent charges from the Chinese New Year fight with the Red Eagles gang decimated them.

<sup>2</sup> Britannia is the second-oldest high school in Vancouver, located at 1001 Cotton Drive on the East Side of Vancouver.



Eagles continued to be involved in street-level fights and assaults with various groups including the Lotus and Star Wars gangs.<sup>3</sup> The violence was generally limited to swarm attacks<sup>4</sup> and the use of knives, but no firearms (Ennis, 1992).

In January 1985, Jimmy and Lily Ming, who operated a popular restaurant in downtown Vancouver, were kidnapped. When the ransom of seven hundred thousand dollars was not paid, the kidnappers killed and butchered them; police found their bodies by a rural highway near Squamish (Gould, 2005). Some suspected the kidnapping and murder were the doing of Asian gangs at war, which intensified three months later when Ricky Choi, another popular restaurant owner in Vancouver, was shot outside his establishment. Choi was believed to be in the upper echelon of the Red Eagles, an enemy of the Lotus Gang.

## The 1980s

*Multi-ethnic street gangs.* In 1985, a group of students primarily from Killarney High School<sup>5</sup> became the Towa gang, which consisted of Indo-Canadians, Fijians, Caucasians, African-Canadians, Chinese, and Iranians. These men were involved in low-level petty crimes, with some violence (Ennis, 1992). Around this time, a large influx of Hispanic refugees came to Canada from Central America; many first entered North America through the U.S., specifically Los Angeles, and had experienced the U.S. gang lifestyle. These men met with the Towa, who had formed an alliance with the Lotus Gang, and together they formed the Los Diablos (The Devils). With the inclusion of these seasoned Hispanic gang members, the Los Diablos quickly dominated East Vancouver. Throughout 1985, the Lotus Gang was engaged in several more incidents of street violence, usually against the Red Eagles and/or Viet Ching.<sup>6</sup> The Vancouver Police formally began the Vancouver Police Gang Squad in 1986 (A. Hovbrender, personal communication, September 9, 2015). Incidentally, that year Vancouver also held the world exposition.

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the breadth of this paper, the Star Wars gang could not be examined in comprehensive detail. They first surfaced in 1979 and consisted entirely of Chinese immigrants who formed to fight against the Red Eagles. After the Red Eagles' assault on May 10, 1979, the Star Wars gang ended.

<sup>4</sup> Swarm attacks are large numbers of people against significantly smaller numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Killarney High School is located at 6454 Killarney Street in the East End of Vancouver.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the breadth of this paper, Viet Ching had to be excluded from a comprehensive examination. They were formed in 1981 from the remnants of the Ching Tao gang. They had connections internationally and were responsible for several shootings, attempted murders, and murders between 1981 and 1992.

In January 1987, a fourteen-year-old Lotus member was shot in the head while watching a movie in the Golden Princess Theatre on East Broadway (Vancouver Sun, 1987b). It was believed that the shooter, who was a seventeen-year-old male, was associated with the Viet Ching gang (Ennis, 1992). In early 1987, a pipe bomb was thrown through the bedroom window of a Lotus member's house, and in February 1987, a Lotus member had his car firebombed.

The fights continued with the Lotus gang in 1987 and brought an attempted murder at the Asaska Club (Ennis, 1992) in February, a gang swarming at Kitsilano Beach in May, and the Red Eagles assaulting a Lotus member at the Pacific National Exhibition (PNE; the equivalent of a state fair) in August. After a Lotus member was assaulted on September 1, a large gang fight occurred at Robson and Granville Street (Ennis, 1992) which culminated in a shooting outside of the Gandy Dancer Club in the 1200 block of Hamilton Street (Vancouver Sun, 1987a).

A gang called the DHJ grew in status through 1987 and soon came to the attention of rival groups such as the East Van Saints and Red Eagles. The East Van Saints formed in 1987 from a group of young men who played on the same hockey team. This was one of the first non-ethnically based gangs in BC. Members were Italian, Portuguese, East Indian, Chinese, Cambodian, and Filipino. They were predominantly formed out of a hatred of, and competition with, the Los Diablos (Pemberton, 1990). There were several fights and eventually a sixteen-year-old Los Diablos member was tied up in his home and shot in the head (Rose, 1987).

*Pivotal incidents.* In 1988, Vancouver witnessed one of its pivotal gang shootings of this period. The Woodland Bridge Shooting resulted from a running gun battle between members of the Gum Wah, Los Diablos, and Mara Latinos. At least six people were involved with over sixteen shots fired, and police seized several firearms including a shotgun, a 9 mm pistol, and a rifle. Two of the shooting victims were thrown out of a car in front of a responding ambulance unit (Engler & Munro, 1988). This garnered significant public attention, in part because it was similar to the types of shootings in large U.S. jurisdictions, and the emerging rhetoric was that it would not be tolerated in Vancouver (Hall, 1988). The ensuing media attention resulted in considerable recognition of the Los Diablos as a reckoning force on the streets of Vancouver. From this notoriety, the Los Diablos began to display many characteristics of Los Angeles-based gangs, such as using colours (red, white, and black), hand signs, and beatings for initiation purposes. VPD Gang Crime Detective Martin Turner described the Los Diablos as an “out-and-out street gang” (cited by Engler & Munro, 1988, p. 146).



This continued gang violence came to a head in November 1988 in response to the emerging presence of the East Van Saints around the Nanaimo SkyTrain Station. Los Diablos members went onto the SkyTrain platform and fired a shotgun round over the heads of approximately two hundred commuters (Vancouver Sun, 1988) to send a message of dominance to the East Van Saints (Ennis, 1992, p. 61). This set off a series of violent incidents between these groups.

In February 1989, just before 2:00 a.m., three drive-by shootings occurred within an hour (Ennis, 1992, p. 61). This Los Angeles-style gang tactic had abruptly arrived in the streets of Vancouver (Hall, 1988). These first shots ballooned into nearly forty in one year, increasing to almost sixty the year after (J. Grywinski, personal communication, April 4, 2013). This sudden and drastic increase in drive-by shootings and the potential for innocent bystanders to become victims was of obvious concern to the police and community. Incidentally, the Hollywood movie *Colors* (Hopper, 1988) had recently been released, which prominently featured gang members involved in drive-by shootings.

Shortly after this, the gangs and violence of Vancouver's East End progressed to the iconic cruising strip of Robson Street (Hall, 1989).<sup>7</sup> Between April 29 and July 9, 1989, this area hosted several incidents of large-scale violence between the Los Diablos and other gangs. These incidents put intense pressure on the police to respond: the violence was no longer contained to the east side of Vancouver and had the potential to impact innocent shoppers in the trendy Robson area. Of note was a double stabbing of two Los Diablos in the food court of Pacific Centre Mall<sup>8</sup> in June, followed by a drive-by shooting in July in the 1100 block of Robson Street, with the intended victims being Los Diablos (Ennis, 1992, p. 62).

This sustained, serious, and violent crime caused a great deal of concern for the annual PNE. There were several close incidents of violence that the heavy police presence was able to prevent (Ennis, 1992). This was the first time that VPD supplied a squad to the PNE due to gang violence (S. Elson, personal communication, April 9, 2013).

A significant event in the history of Vancouver gangs was the shooting at the Goldstone Restaurant and Cafe (J. Fisher, personal communication, April 11, 2013). At dusk in December

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<sup>7</sup> Robson Street is to Vancouver what Oxford Street is to London.

<sup>8</sup> A large underground shopping centre that stretches four city blocks.

1989, the eatery was full of college and high school students on break for the Christmas holiday. Just before the dinner hour, about six men, including Steven Wong, entered the restaurant. Three members of the Lotus Gang recognised them as Red Eagles. A fight broke out and a Lotus member, Tony Yeung, pulled out his semi-automatic pistol and started shooting. An innocent 41-year-old man was shot as well as one of the Red Eagles. Steven Wong used a pipe and severely beat the armed Tony Yeung, then called 911 and waited for police to arrive. Yeung died a few days later from his injuries. Although the incident was witnessed by hundreds of people, the police could never lay charges because they could not disprove Wong's claim that he acted in self-defence (Gould, 2005). Contrary to the usual unwillingness of the Asian community to assist police investigations, many witnesses came forward in this case (Jiwa & Watt, 1989), though police still required more evidence to disprove Wong's claim.

## The 1990s

*The Russians, the Asians, and the Hells Angels go to war.* In January 1990, five shots were fired in a drive-by shooting into the home of a Lotus member (Vancouver Sun, 1990b). Shortly thereafter, a Lotus member stabbed a Gum Wah member at David Thompson High School.<sup>9</sup> On April 22, Red Eagle Ngoc Tung Dang was shot in the 6800 block of Culloden Street as he sat in his car. His murder was suspected to be linked to his relationship with Russian gang member Sergei Filonov and their dangerous business of ripping off cocaine dealers (Hall et al., 1990).

On May 15, 1990, in one of the most brazen gang shootings recorded, Russian gang member Sergey Filonov was gunned down mid-afternoon at the popular Trev Deeley Motorcycles store on West Broadway.<sup>10</sup> Two men associated with the Hells Angels surrendered within hours of the murder, claiming self-defence (Hall, 1990a). Police located their getaway truck within the 4300 block of William Street in Burnaby, near the home of Lotus member William Woo (Ennis, 1992).

In November, VPD arrested a Dai Huen Jai member with a loaded 9 mm handgun tucked in the front of his pants during a traffic stop. One month later, VPD responded to two shootings: one involved member Ken Wong being ambushed by a man with a shotgun, and the other

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<sup>9</sup> David Thompson High School is located at 1755 E 55 Ave in the East End of Vancouver.

<sup>10</sup> West Broadway is a major road that runs east-west through the city of Vancouver.

involved Gary Phan checking himself into Mount St. Joseph hospital suffering from a gunshot wound that he claimed was self-inflicted (Hall, 1990b).

In December, eighteen-year-old Richard Soulie was charged with murdering Lotus member Kin Wai Lee (Vancouver Sun, 1990a). Lee had been found shot in the back of the head in a stolen car parked on South East Marine Drive in Burnaby (Ennis, 1992). The same month, several Lotus members were charged with kidnapping Cynthia Kilburn, the daughter of Vancouver business tycoon Jimmy Pattison<sup>11</sup> (Young, 1990). Eight people faced charges, most of whom were youth and therefore could not be named.

*Time to behave, triads warn.* From December 1990, a temporary lull in violence ended in February 1992 when a Dai Huen Jai member was shot in front of a house in a residential area of Burnaby (Jiwa, 1992). This was followed in June when a group of men argued in Bino's Family Restaurant in the 2200 block of Commercial Drive. Half of the group left and lay in wait for the other group (Dai Huen Jai) to leave, then ambushed them and shot at least one Dai Huen Jai in the leg. This occurred in front of several Vancouver bylaw officers,<sup>12</sup> yet this group had no concern for the presence of peace officers in uniform.

In 1992, the Lotus Gang was in conflict with the Flying Dragons,<sup>13</sup> Red Eagles, and Gum Wah. Several fights occurred and the violence resulted in the Richmond and Burnaby RCMP departments setting up their own gang units to supplement the efforts of VPD's Gang Crime Unit and Coordinated Law Enforcement Unit. Street violence, violent robberies, public attention, and the response by police led to older Asian organised crime leaders in Hong Kong instructing the street gangs to cool it (Haysom, 1997).

Detective Fisher (personal communication, April 11, 2013) credits the Dai Huen Jai, in conjunction with police efforts, as being responsible for the temporary lull in violence to come:

They brought together Lotus and Red Eagles' leadership to commit those series of robberies, so, you know, they were the ones that said, "The more you fight each other, the more the cops learn about you, so there's enough money for everybody, don't make war, make money." So that kind of changed the dynamic; we started to understand that this was more organized crime than retaliatory, territorially based gang crime.

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<sup>11</sup> Jimmy Pattison was ranked by Forbes magazine as the third wealthiest person in Canada.

<sup>12</sup> Bylaw officers wear a uniform and enforce city bylaws, such as parking. They are not armed.

<sup>13</sup> Due to the breadth of this paper, the Flying Dragons could not be examined in comprehensive detail. This group was involved in the distribution of drugs, the running of bawdy houses, and violence.

This was the beginning of true organized crime in Vancouver as well as a significant reduction in street violence, especially for Asian gangs.

*...One more chance to get the Russians.* In November 1993, Chicago-style violence came to Vancouver when a bomb that was meant to kill Aleksander Alekseev (25) and his brother Eugeniy (26) was detonated in their car underneath the popular Broadway Earl's Restaurant on a Saturday night. They were part of the Russians gang, and the bombing was likely in response to the East End Chapter of the Hells Angels clubhouse being shot up in October 1993. This group had experienced previous high-profile violence, including the murder of Sergey Filinov, who was shot and killed in front of Trev Deeley Motorcycles on Broadway in the late afternoon, and Taras Filinov (25), who was murdered by a shotgun bullet to the face on the grounds of the University of British Columbia (Walker, 1993). Once again, these incidents are further evidence of the false claims regarding the "good old days." Within ten days of the first bombing attempt, a vehicle belonging to Aleksander Alekseev was blown up; this time, the bomb detonated as he approached the car, sending parts of the truck over a block away (Bellett, 1993).

*The Dosanjh brothers' demise.* In February 1994, violence erupted in an event that arguably still impacts present-day gang violence in BC. On February 27, Jimsher Dosanjh (29) was shot and killed by two men in the 4900 block of Fraser Street. Dosanjh was a hired hitman who had been charged in March 1991 with the first-degree murder of Theodore Salcedo (25). The charges were stayed after witnesses recanted their stories (Middleton, 1994).

In April 1994, one of the boldest shootings in Vancouver's history occurred when Ron Dosanjh (Jimsher's brother, who had been killed six weeks earlier) was driving on Kingsway Street at 9:45 a.m. when a car pulled up alongside his and opened fire with an AR-10 semi-automatic assault rifle, with no regard for the lives or safety of others (Bell & Fayerman, 1994).

There would be no respite; in retaliation for the murders of the Dosanjh brothers, their gang associates accidentally shot and killed an innocent man named Glen Olson in a case of mistaken identity. A gunman armed with a high-powered rifle shot Mr. Olson multiple times as he walked his friend's dog. Olson lived next to one of the most infamous BC gangsters, Bindy Johal, who police considered a suspect in the Dosanjh murders (Clark, 1994).

## **Bindy Johal's Domination**

In August 1995, notorious gangster Ranj Cheema (27) was shot several times as he left a karaoke bar in the 8200 block of Alexandra Street in Richmond (Chapman, 1995). Also in

August 1995, a man was beaten unconscious by a group of gang members, and one member of the Village Posse gang was stabbed in the Champlain Place Housing Projects in the 3300 block of 58th Street (Vancouver Sun, 1995).

On November 2, the house of Paul Cheema, an associate of the Dosanjh brothers, was shot at five times (Clark, 1995). This occurred less than a week after a jury acquitted Bindy Johal, Peter Gill, Raj Benji, Michael Budai, Phil Kim, and Sun News Lal for first- and second-degree murder charges of the Dosanjh brothers (Still, 1995). By the end of the month, the Vancouver Police were exasperated: There were five drive-by shootings in three weeks, coincidentally beginning right after the murder acquittals (Lee, 1995).

*Bar Watch created.* The drive-by shootings escalated from people's homes to busy nightclubs; in the second week of December 1995 there were three separate shootings in Vancouver-area nightclubs. Manjit Buttar (21) shot a twenty-two-year-old tourist from New Jersey in Club NRG at 99 Powell Street. A shooting at the Steel Monkey in Coquitlam resulted in one man shot in the hand and another shot in the abdomen. The third shooting was in New Westminster at the Paradise Club, where a man was shot in the leg. Of concern for the police was that recently acquitted murderer Bindy Johal was present at the time of all three shootings (Hall, 1995). The same week, a twenty-one-year-old man was stabbed to death in a karaoke bar in Nanaimo, and another man (23) was shot in a bar in Port Coquitlam (Jiwa, 1995). On December 12, Bindy Johal was arrested for assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon, and breach of a bail condition at the Mardi Gras Club in Abbotsford (Canadian Press, 1995).

One of the few positive things that came from this spate of nightclub violence was that in December 1995, fifteen Vancouver bars formed the original Bar Watch Association, which still operates today (Kines, 1995). Unfortunately, the Bar Watch group was not yet in Nanaimo; on December 13, two rival gangs began to fight at the Top Karaoke Club, resulting in three people being shot, two being stabbed, and Liem Phong Mai (21) being stabbed to death. Cuong Chung (19) was charged with the attempted murders but not the homicide (Meissner, 1995).

In December 1996, Bindy Johal was arrested again and charged with the kidnapping of Lotus gang member Randy Chan for an incident that occurred in October (Hall, 1996). In October 1997, a known associate of Bindy Johal named Gurinder Khun Khun was shot several times as he exited his car in the 1100 block of East 62nd Street (Morton & Pemberton, 1997).

*Bindy Johal's death.* In April 1998, police investigated the murder of a twenty-nine-year-old man, bound and shot in the head and dumped in the 2100 block of Upland Drive. Another drive-by shooting occurred at Peter Gill's home, which was likely related to his relationship with Bindy Johal and his acquittal on the murder charges of the Dosanjh brothers (Keating, 1998).

In June 1998, eighteen-year-old Jimmy Nguyen was shot and killed outside of his home at East 43rd Street and Semlin in East Vancouver as he exited his flashy yellow Lotus car (Jiwa, 1998b). A month later, Vinuse News MacKenzie was shot in the head and killed in the 400 block of East 28th Avenue. Vinuse was the brother of Sun News Lal, who was acquitted of the first-degree murder of the Dosanjh brothers (Kines, 1998).

In October, the BC Government disbanded the CLEU because they had found the agency to be incompetent at its primary mandate, which was to investigate organised crime. Internal fighting and jurisdictional territorial beefs led to the demise of the CLEU and set back police efforts to investigate organised crime on a regional level (Hauka, 1998). Ironically, in the same month, a couple was kidnapped and murdered by gangs (Skelton, 1998b); in addition, Vikash Chand (26) was shot execution-style in Burnaby (McCune, 1998), and Peter Gill was chased down his street in the 1300 block of East 61st while a gunman fired eighteen shots at him (Skelton, 1998a).

December began with another friend of Bindy Johal being murdered: police found the body of Roman Mann (21) in Richmond, an apparent victim of a targeted gang shooting (Jiwa, 1998a). On December 14, 1998, two young men were shot and stabbed as they left a Vietnamese restaurant on Kingsway and Glen Drive. A week later, a young Vietnamese male was found shot and killed in the trunk of a car in the 1300 block of East 8th Street (Papple, 1998), while another Vietnamese gang member was found beaten to death in his apartment (Skelton, 1998c).

On December 21, another pivotal gang shooting occurred. The magnitude of this incident is due to the victim, notorious gangster Bindy Johal (Skelton, 1998c), the brazen nature of the attack, and the frustration of the murder never being solved.<sup>14</sup> Johal was on the dance floor of the Palladium Nightclub, surrounded by over three hundred partygoers, when a gunman came up from behind and shot the back of his head. Despite so many people nearby, the general

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<sup>14</sup> VPD considers a murder to be solved when Crown Counsel accepts the file for prosecution, whereas other local police agencies consider a case to be solved when they identify a suspect, regardless of what evidence there is to prosecute him or her.



consensus among law enforcement was that the quality of witnesses and video evidence were not enough to charge anyone with the murder.

## The Vietnamese and Indo-Canadian Years

Two young men died from gang violence at Madison's Nightclub in the first two months of 1999: Pardip Grewal (21) was stabbed outside, and a 28-year-old Vietnamese man was shot in the head and died in a gang fight outside (Skelton, 1999).

In February, rival Asian and Hispanic gang members engaged in a shootout at 5:30 pm at the busy transport hub of the Broadway SkyTrain Station.<sup>15</sup> With no regard for the proximity to numerous evening commuters, these gangs exchanged gunfire until the police arrived (Vancouver Sun, 1999).<sup>16</sup>

In April, another gang shooting occurred at a Vietnamese café in the 1200 block of Kingsway when a man came into the restaurant and shot at a group of men playing cards. In June, two cars engaged in a running gun battle in Richmond in the fairly populated area of Bridgeport and Number Three Road (The Province, 1999). In September, Vietnamese gangster Bao Quoc Phan was found murdered in the trunk of his car at Union and Campbell Street, just outside of the Vancouver Downtown Eastside (Kines, 1999). In October, twenty-three-year-old Sing Cooc, a member of the KCK (Kids Can Kill) Gang, was shot to death in a gang incident at a Richmond tea house. He was awaiting charges for attempted murder (Papple, 1999).

The year ended with two more gang murders when Hamed Hamidi (26) was shot multiple times as he filled his car with gasoline on West Georgia Street (Papple & Vallis, 1999), an attack which also killed 22-year-old Majid Mason (D. Moore, 2002).

In February 2000, Tuan Le (17) was shot and killed as he sat in his car outside the Fraserview Hall. His passenger (19) was also shot, and survived, and a 15-year-old girl took a bullet to the foot (Nanaimo Daily News, 2000b). This attack was soon followed by another when Richard Jung (16) was beaten unconscious at a karaoke club in Coquitlam and died in the hospital shortly thereafter. The police charged a fifteen-year-old boy with second-degree murder (Alberni Valley Times, 2000).

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<sup>15</sup> This is Vancouver's equivalent to London's Liverpool Street or Kings Cross, albeit with significantly fewer people.

<sup>16</sup> At this time the transit police were unarmed. They have since been issued firearms.

On February 26, 2000, Vu Ank Kha (26) was shot and killed in a hail of over twenty bullets as he left a Vancouver nightclub (Nanaimo Daily News, 2000a). The following month, a twenty-two-year-old Vietnamese gang member was chased down the street in the 1500 block of East 64th Street by two armed gunmen (Middelton, 2000). A few days later, a twenty-three-year-old Vietnamese man was found shot four times in his car in the 8000 block of Borden Street in Vancouver (Vancouver Sun, 2000c).

In April, a fifteen-year-old Vietnamese boy was walking down the street in Surrey with three female friends when a car raced up and fired several shots into him, critically wounding him (Zacharias, 2000). The following month, a VPD officer on routine patrol observed a male slumped over in his car, and after investigating, found another murdered Vietnamese man in his early forties (The Province, 2000). A week later, at a luxurious wedding venue, Michael Brar (22), the bodyguard of Ranjit Cheema, was shot and killed in the parking lot after a dispute with rival Indo-Canadian gang members (Bolan & Kines, 2000). The premier of the province was in attendance at the wedding when the murder occurred (Bolan, 2000).

On June 14, 2000, Surrey RCMP investigated a twenty-year-old man shot execution-style, while VPD investigated a stabbing homicide of Akhil Oberoi (17) on the ground of Moberly Elementary School (Vancouver Sun, 2000b). In July, two men in Richmond waited for a group of men to leave a karaoke bar before firing several shots at them; fortunately, no one was hit (M. Howell, 2000). Later in the month, a brazen gun fight erupted on Powell Street in Vancouver when a group of males shot at one another. Vancouver Police Dog Squad officers tracked the suspects and arrested four Vietnamese males, recovering four handguns (Vancouver Sun, 2000a). The same month, brothers Gurinder (22) and Bobby Johal (24) were shot as they left a fitness centre in Coquitlam. Gurinder died instantly and Bobby survived his gunshot to the leg (Culbert, 2000).

In early September, a man in Surrey looked out his blinds and six shots were fired at him, while in Vancouver a sixteen-year-old Vietnamese boy was shot several times as he parked his BMW in the 1700 block of East 35th Street (Papple, 2000). Later that month, Hardip Uppal murdered rival Indo-Canadian gang member Gurpreet Sohi in retaliation for a shooting that occurred the previous week when Rajinder Soomel (26) and Pramjit Gill (20) were shot in the 1200 E 59th avenue in Vancouver (Bolan, 2000).

In November, two gunmen entered the Leo Cheo Restaurant in Surrey and shot dead a seventeen-year-old Vietnamese female and nineteen-year-old Vietnamese male (Lovric, 2000). Less than a month later, outside the Tokyo Lounge in Vancouver, another Vietnamese male was shot but survived his injuries (Fong, 2000).

*The first Alkhalil is killed.* On January 18, 2001, Khalil Alkhalil (19) was shot and murdered in Surrey by Michael Naud, who also sustained gunshot wounds during the encounter. The incident was believed to be gang-related and tied to the drug trade (Kines & Bolan, 2001).

*Hells Angel murdered.* In March 2001, outside of the Bar None Nightclub, Nomad Hells Angel Donald Roming was shot in what began as a simple bar fight (Wilson & Middleton, 2001). The suspect in the murder, John Rodgers, died two months later despite the bulletproof vest he was wearing when a gunman shot him and the passenger of his car several times at a gas station on Oak Street (Wilson, 2001).

In July, four men were charged with the shooting of a twenty-one-year-old man in the Prodio Karaoke Bar in Richmond (The Province, 2001a). Later that month, Delta Police saw a spike in gang violence when they arrested four men with loaded handguns and an assault rifle; responded to a shooting at Gunderson Park during a children's baseball game, where seven people exchanged gunfire from two cars; and investigated another drive-by shooting at a known gang member's home (Bolan, 2001).

In December, Kelley Buttar (22) was shot and killed during a wedding reception at a banquet hall in Richmond. An RCMP Christmas party was being held in the same building, and many of the off-duty officers tended to other people who were shot (Bermingham, 2001). On January 2, 2002, the burnt body of Phouvong Phommaviset (26) was found near Number Eight Road and River Road in Richmond. He had been kidnapped in the middle of the night from his home in East Vancouver two weeks prior, where shots had been fired (Proctor, 2002).

*Fiftieth Indo-Canadian murdered from gang violence.* In April 2002, the gang slaying of Gary Sidhu was the fiftieth Indo-Canadian gang murder since the 1994 slaying of the Dosanjh brothers (Austin & Middleton, 2002). Also that month, innocent bystander Richard Lof (30) was the victim of gang violence when one of three Indo-Canadian males being ejected from Delanie's Exotic Show Pub in Surrey fired a handgun into the doorway as a protest to their ejection. Lof was struck and died in the bar despite the efforts of off-duty firefighters to save him (Middleton & Proctor, 2002). Jagrup Singh (26) would later be charged with second-degree murder (Bolan

& Morton, 2002). Later that month, in the 900 block of East 54th Street, two young Indo-Canadian males (21 and 19) were shot at 8:00 p.m.

In June, several police agencies held a community forum to plead with the Indo-Canadian community to come forward and help police reduce the violence (Hansen, 2002). Not all of the community was supportive of this initiative; in fact, Russell Chamberlain, prominent criminal defense lawyer for gang members, stated that he believed the police were holding the forum only to appease the public and divert attention off their incompetence, insinuating that the forum was evidence of the police's bigotry towards the Indo-Canadian community (Bolan, 2002a). Despite these efforts, within forty-eight hours of the forum the Vancouver Police were investigating a drive-by shooting in the 700 block of East 62nd Street where a young man was shot multiple times and survived (Bolan, 2002b.). Within a week of the forum, high-profile gang figure Robert Kandola (31) was shot and killed as he exited a taxicab in downtown Vancouver (Alberni Valley Times, 2002).

On June 28, 2002, at 1:00 p.m., two men were shot at Metrotown; one man, Michael Ly (22), died of his wounds (Burnaby Now, 2002). This brazen midday attack was another example of the ferociousness and complete lack of regard that these thugs have for other people not engaged in their immature conflict (Sandler, 2002).

In late November 2002, Burnaby RCMP began a murder investigation regarding two bodies found in the trunk of a car. Police had the vehicle towed, thinking it was simply an abandoned car. When the vehicle's registered owner was discovered to be a missing person, the police returned to the tow yard and discovered his body and the body of a woman inside. The murder had the earmarks of a gang homicide (O'Brian, 2002).

In December, at 6:30 p.m., five Indo-Canadian males were shot outside a Surrey Pub named the Hook and Ladder.<sup>17</sup> All of the males survived the gang shooting, albeit one was critically wounded with debilitating injuries (The Province, 2001b).

*The Loft Six shooting: Death of second Alkhalil.* On August 19, 2003, a pivotal moment occurred in the Vancouver bar scene when bullets started to fly in the Loft Six nightclub.<sup>18</sup> A fight between rival gang members ended with three people being shot dead and seven injured

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<sup>17</sup> This was a pub owned and operated by members of the fire department, and thus an unlikely place for gang violence.

<sup>18</sup> Not a member of Bar Watch.

(Hogben & Hall, 2003). This shooting was a catastrophe on many levels; not only was a bar with two hundred patrons turned into a mass casualty crime scene, but the impact of this shooting arguably continues today. One of the men killed was Mahmoud Alkhalil (19), whose gang-entrenched family continues to fight a war to avenge his death.

*Marijuana growth industry.* In October 2003, the RCMP, in conjunction with the BC marijuana industry, announced that BC accounted for over fifty percent of the total clandestine laboratories in Canada. This was in stark contrast to five years previous, when there had been none. By 2003, police had discovered over forty labs (Woods, 2003).

In December, a twenty-six-year-old Vietnamese male was shot and killed as he sat in a restaurant in the 1400 block of Kingsway in Vancouver (Spencer, 2003). The shooting appeared to be targeted and gang-related. Later that month, Shiv Dayal (20) was shot and killed, and the Richmond RCMP stopped his friends as they were trying in vain to get him to the hospital (Hansen, 2003). The shooting was gang-related.

*Murder of good Samaritan Rachel Davis.* In early January 2004, within a block of the Loft Six Nightclub in Gastown, another notorious gang shooting occurred. Rachel Davis (23) came out of the Purple Onion nightclub and saw a group of young men, gang members, engaged in a pushing match. When one man was knocked to the ground and was being beaten senseless by five other men, Rachel Davis courageously put herself in harm's way to protect this stranger. A gun was produced and several shots fired, killing one of the men and Rachel Davis. Four additional people were shot and injured (O'Brian, 2004b).

*Vancouver Police create pilot Firearms Interdiction Team (FIT).* In February 2004, the VPD formed the Vancouver Police Firearms Interdiction Team (FIT),<sup>19</sup> whose mandate was to support Bar Watch with a specific focus on deterring gang members from downtown bars (M. Howell, 2003; Austin, 2004). On February 29, a young gangster accidentally shot himself in the foot while threatening club-goers at the Caprice Nightclub on Granville Street (Birmingham, 2004).

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<sup>19</sup> I was a founding member of the FIT team with Sergeant Rod Pederson (retired). The team worked Friday and Saturday nights from 22:00-0:500 on overtime. While the team was in existence, downtown Vancouver had only one nightclub shooting. Many people suggest FIT led to the Inadmissible Patron Agreement in 2007. The FIT team cost \$215,000 per year in overtime.

In early March, two rival gangs fired over fifteen shots at each other outside of the Atlantis Nightclub in the 1300 block of Seymour Street. One man was shot in the leg. Two weeks later, seven shots were fired outside of the same club (O'Brian, 2004a). On March 8, Paul Dosanjh (27), who had survived being shot in the head at the Loft Six shooting, was murdered in the Gourmet Castle Restaurant in the 2200 block of East Hastings at 5:00 a.m. when gunmen shot him several times (Skelton, 2004). Within a week, a man fired a gun and hit a patron outside of the Au Bar in Vancouver (The Province, 2004).

In May, VPD responded to a report of shots fired (M. Roberts, 2004). On May 19, two people were shot outside of Club Voda in Vancouver, and another man was shot outside a McDonald's in Surrey (Woodward, 2004). This was followed in November with the shooting of two more Indo-Canadian men, in the parking lot of Newton Athletic Park in Surrey. Aklesh Chaudary (19) was shot and killed, and a twenty-four-year-old man was shot but survived (Zytaruk, 2004). On November 24, while Abbotsford Police were responding to a double shooting with one person dead, the Delta Police were responding to a shooting in the popular Keg Steakhouse restaurant where an Indo-Canadian male had been shot inside (Sin, 2004).

*British Columbia Integrated Gang Task Force created.* In December 2004, the British Columbia Integrated Gang Task Force was formed with a mandate to target gang violence throughout the province and support local police in their efforts to reduce gang violence. The Task Force was provided with sixty officers from various police departments in BC (The News, 2004).

*More Indo-Canadian deaths.* In January 2005, Surrey RCMP pulled over a suspicious vehicle and found the driver to be suffering from gunshot wounds and his brother, the passenger, already dead. Both Jatinder Natt and Sukhjinder Sohal died from this targeted gang hit (Vancouver Sun, 2005b). In February, Delta Police investigated the murder of Harpreet Khurmee (34) when he was found shot on Annacis Island (Bolan, 2005). Later that month, Mark Thrower was found shot execution-style in his Richmond apartment. Thrower was involved in the drug trade and had associations with both Indo-Canadian and Asian gang members.

Surrey RCMP dealt with another homicide in May when they responded to a shots-fired call and found Andy Rai (23) shot multiple times (Bolan, 2005). On May 13, Sandip Duhre was in a vehicle with Dean Elshamy at 72nd Street and Scott Road when gunmen arrived and shot several times into the car. While the intended target was likely Duhre, Elshamy died (Bolan,



2005). Vancouver Police also investigated a gang homicide in late May when known Asian gang member Michael Wong was shot to death as he got into his SUV in Chinatown.

Later that month, Abbotsford Police responded to several calls of a shooting in the University of the Fraser Valley parking lot just before 10:00 p.m. Upon arrival, police found Indo-Canadian Hartinder Gill and his girlfriend Lexi Madsen shot and killed (Bolan, 2005). In late September, Hardev Sidhu (27) was found shot to death in Surrey because of his involvement in gangs (Bolan, 2005).

*Death of Innocent Lee Matasi.* In December 2005, Lee Matasi, an aspiring artist with no gang affiliations, was murdered as he exited the Vancouver nightclub the Red Room. Dennis White (28) fired a handgun in the air as Matasi was leaving the club with some friends, and Matasi admonished White for his stupidity and recklessness. In an act of pure cowardice, White shot and killed the unarmed Matasi. Some might argue this murder is not gang-related; however, White's actions reflect someone displaying a gangster-like lifestyle.

On December 10, Burnaby RCMP responded to a shooting and found a young Indo-Canadian male shot dead (Vancouver Sun, 2005a). In April 2006, VPD responded to a shooting at a Chinese Noodle House in the 3100 block of Main Street and found six people shot, one of them deceased, in an apparent gang shooting.

*The McMynn kidnapping.* On April 4, 2006, Vancouverites were shocked as they watched media reports of twenty-three-year-old Graham McMynn being kidnapped by Asian gangsters. After a thorough and exhausting investigation, over two hundred police officers executed search warrant raids in fourteen locations on April 13, and located an alive but dehydrated and malnourished McMynn. This brazen kidnapping of a young man who was not associated to gangs or the drug trade caused significant fear amongst the community, and police were elated to have rescued him (Mulgrew et al., 2006).

## Recent Violent Years

The next four years were violent ones for the province of BC; specifically, from January 2007 to December 2010. In this period of time, one hundred and thirty-nine people died, several of whom were innocent victims who became collateral damage of the gang wars (Jingfors et al., 2015).

*Dover Park shooting and death of innocent Holifield.* On January 4, 2007, Richmond was the scene of one of the most frightening incidents of gang violence and ignorance. Several

men met at Dover Park, and when the meeting digressed, a running gun battle occurred with automatic rifles. This happened in a city park in the middle of the day. Over 150 rounds were shot and three people (Niki Tajali, 26; Vahid Mahanian, 30; and Sahand Askari, 22) were hit but survived (Bolan, 2007b).

January 11, 2007, would prove to be a pivotal day in the history of gang violence in BC. Kirk Holifield (35), father, hockey player, and good citizen, was mistakenly shot and killed as he left the arena because the truck he drove was similar to the one driven by the brother of one of the men attacked in the Dover Park incident (Bolan, 2007b). Holifield was a completely innocent victim of gang violence, and tragically would not be the only one in 2007.

In May, a thirteen-year-old boy was murdered in a premeditated gang fight at Terminal and Main in Vancouver. Four young people were stabbed, one of whom (Chris Poeung) died of his wounds. A fourteen-year-old boy was charged with second-degree murder, and the community was left shocked at the senselessness of the violence committed by mere children (Ngyuen, 2007).

*Fortune Happiness shooting.* In August 2007, VPD responded to a shooting at the Fortune Happiness Chinese restaurant at 600 East Broadway, where two people were killed and six were wounded. Two masked gunmen came in shooting at 4:30 a.m. (Vancouver Sun, 2007).

In September 2007, Gurmit Dhak and his girlfriend were eating in the popular Quattro Restaurant on the west side of Vancouver when two masked gunmen entered and shot them both (Hall, 2007). Dhak was a well-known gangster who had been convicted of manslaughter in 1999. Further concerning, and emphasising the differences in BC's gang landscape relative to other cities', was that the mayor of Vancouver at the time had lunch or dinner several times a week at this restaurant.

Less than a month later, Jason Louie (34) was found shot and killed in his Infiniti, which was parked beside Vancouver Technical High School, at 5:30 p.m. (Hall, 2007).

*Surrey six murders.* October 2007 brought some of the most disturbing gang murders that BC had seen in years. On October 19, in suite number 1505 of the Balmoral Tower Highrise, Jamie Bacon,<sup>20</sup> Cody Haevischer, Mathew Johnston, and Dennis Karbovanec shot four men, all involved in the drug trade and gangs, execution-style. Their names were Ryan Bartolomeo (19),

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<sup>20</sup> At the time of writing, Jamie Bacon is awaiting trial and has not been convicted of these crimes.

Michael Lal (26), Corey Lal (21) and Edward Narong (22). The tragedy of this is that two completely innocent people were killed as well: Edward Schellenberg (55), a repairman working in the suite, and Christopher Mohan (22), a neighbour who came to investigate after hearing the gunshots (Fraser, 2015). The murders were related to the drug activities of the Red Scorpions that all the killers were involved in. The investigation was challenging, but police received a break on April 9 when Dennis Karbovanec pled guilty to three counts of second-degree murder and agreed to testify against his co-accused (CBC News, 2009b).

Shortly after, on November 3, a high-ranking member of the Big Circle Boys was gunned down in front of his \$5 million West Side mansion. Raymond Huang (45) was a Dai Lo<sup>21</sup> in the Big Circle Boys (Baron, 2007). This murder taking place in such a wealthy part of Vancouver raised concerns about public safety, which grew exponentially three days later when another brazen murder occurred in the West Side at 2:15 a.m. This changed the face of gang enforcement in BC. Ronal Raj (31) and Ali Abhari (25) were stopped at a red light at Granville Street and 70th Avenue in Vancouver when two SUVs pulled alongside their car, boxed them in, and in a hail of automatic gunfire, murdered both of them on a major thoroughfare in the city. This was even more brazen given that two VPD officers were on the same road a block away doing a traffic stop with their emergency overhead lights activated. This attack demonstrated total contempt of the police and wanton disregard for the law.

*Violence Suppression Team created.* Within twenty-four hours, the Vancouver Police announced that despite their existing Gang Crime Unit, Firearms Interdiction Team, and commitment to officers in the Integrated Gang Task Force, they were creating their own Violence Suppression Team (VST). Deputy Police Chief Bob Rich stated that each individual community had to find ways to keep its citizens safe, and that this task force would be “a very much ‘in your face’” unit (Bolan, 2007a).<sup>22</sup>

*Gotham shooting.* In January 2008, another high-profile gangland shooting occurred, which was the focus of the first paragraph in this article. The murder of Richardo Scarpino and Gilles LePage outside the trendy Gotham Steakhouse was bold and brazen (Bolan, 2008d).

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<sup>21</sup> Dai Lo is the equivalent to “uncle” or made man in the mafia; a person of significance in the Asian gang world (D. Au, personal communication, January 2013).

<sup>22</sup> I was selected to lead one of the newly formed Violence Suppression Teams.

Throughout 2008, forty-one people would die as a result of gang violence. The breadth of this assignment does not allow for a detailed examination of 2008 and 2009, so these murders can be found in Figure 1.<sup>23</sup> By the third week of March, there had been twenty-seven murders in the previous eighty days. The latest was a gangland shooting where the victim, Hark Hans (28), was sitting in the parking lot of the Surrey Eagle Quest Golf Course when he was killed (Bellett, 2008).

Two more homicides occurred on May 9, 2008: United Nations (UN) gang member Duane Meyer (41) was shot and killed in a targeted shooting in Abbotsford (Bolan, 2008f), and in a separate incident, an innocent life was taken in a case of mistaken identity. Jonathan Barber (23) was shot and killed as he was driving Jamie Bacon's vehicle. Mr. Barber was a car stereo specialist and was returning the car when Cory Vallee shot and killed him, mistaking him for Bacon (CBC News, 2009a). At the time of this shooting, the contract on Jamie Bacon's head by rival UN gang member Clay Rouche was \$300,000 (The Globe and Mail, 2013).

In July 2008, VPD officers attended a Vietnamese restaurant in the 2400 block of Nanaimo Street when a fight broke out between twenty people. A twenty-five-year-old man was shot dead as other patrons fled the area. Ten hours previously, in the very populated and trendy West End of Vancouver, a twenty-one-year-old man was shot at Davie Street and Thurlow Street in a gang fight while people ran for cover (Cross & Sinoski, 2008).

On July 22, Abbotsford Police found Dustin Webster (25) shot and killed on a rural farm property that housed a large marijuana grow operation (Vancouver Sun, 2008), while VPD found Hung Bui in his car, shot several times in the head (Cross, 2008). Nine years previously, Bui and his friends were in a car that was attacked by rival gang members, and one of his friends had been killed. Bui also had a first-degree murder charge stayed against him and had been shot the previous year at the Fortune Happiness shooting (Cross, 2008).

In a demonstration of the deadly impact of conducting legitimate or semi-legitimate business with gangs, realtors Elliott Castaneda (30) and Mike Gordon (33) were murdered in Mexico in July and August, respectively. Both men were believed to have conducted several

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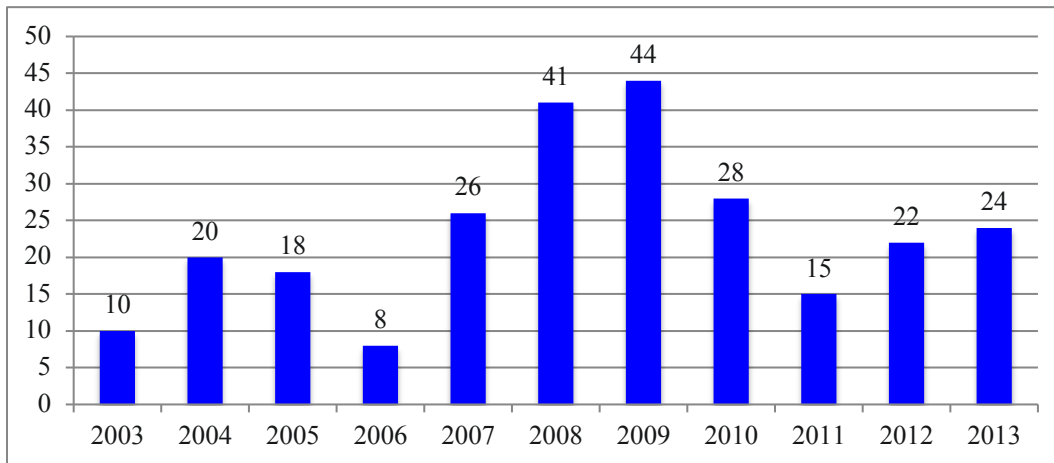
<sup>23</sup> Because I was assigned to working gang investigations, I have a greater sense of what the pivotal shootings and acts of violence were during this time.

property sales for members of the UN gang, and specifically its leader, Clay Rouche (Bolan, 2008e).

On August 30, James O'Toole, a young man from a wealthy family with a private school education<sup>24</sup>, was murdered at East 1st Avenue and Commercial Drive as he got into a taxi. This was a clear targeted shooting with automatic rifle gunfire captured on the taxi's in-car video system (Bolan, 2008b).

*Oakridge Mall shooting.* October 2008 was a violent month. Around 2:00 p.m. at Oakridge Shopping Mall, with lots of people around, Rakesh Naidu (34), a close associate of O'Toole's, was shot over twenty times (Bolan, 2008c). Jimmy Lee (33), who was linked to the Red Scorpions, was shot and killed in Surrey. Todd Krantz (28), a member of the Independent Soldiers, was found shot and killed in Abbotsford at the World Extreme Fighting Gym. Jimmy Le (26), a Red Scorpion, was found shot and killed in his driver's seat in Surrey (Bolan, 2008a). On the same weekend, Jody York, another Independent Soldier, had his million-dollar Langley home shot at (Bolan, 2008).

The violence continued throughout 2009, with forty-four gang-related murders. This was the most violent year from 2003 to 2013 (Jingfors et al., 2015); see Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Number of BC gang homicides from 2003–2013.

Source: Jingfors, Lazzano, and McConnell, 2015

<sup>24</sup> O'Toole went to Vancouver College, which is a boys' private school that I also attended.

“*Gangcouver*.” In 2009, the world media’s attention was drawn to the gang violence in BC. The BBC, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, CNN, *The Economist*, and even *Maxim* magazine either featured or requested a story on the situation. Bill Law of the BBC, Kim Murphy of the *Los Angeles Times*, and Patrick Oppmann of CNN were granted the opportunity to partake in a police ride-along with a gang unit in BC. Each reported on the stories of violence to their respective international audiences, resulting in a growing misconception of BC’s gang problem. Bill Law (2009) reported that there were “unprecedented levels of gang warfare that have left scores of people dead.” *The Economist*’s (2009) headline was “British Columbia or Colombia?” referencing similarities between Columbia, a third-world country rocked by a sustained narco-terrorist war, and Vancouver. I do not intend to minimise the impact of gangs in 2009, as it was significant. However, comparing a country whose homicide rate is 30.8 per 100,000 to BC, whose homicide rate was 0.97 per 100,000, even in this atypical year, is sensationalistic journalism.

On January 27, 2009, Andrew Cilliers (26) was shot in a targeted gang shooting in Surrey (Bolan, 2009c). A few days later, an innocent young man, Tyson Edwards (21), was stabbed to death outside Richard’s on Richards Nightclub. Edwards, a university student, had gone to the club after a night of studying to pick up his girlfriend when he was set upon by three members of the Dark Cloud gang. Nolan Swallow, Patrick Plowman, and Sebastian Miazga were found guilty of manslaughter four years later.

On February 3, Brianne Kinnear (21), girlfriend of gang member Jesse Marginson, was shot and killed in Coquitlam (Rankin, 2009). On the same day, Surrey RCMP responded to the shooting of Raphael Baldini (21) who was found dead outside his SUV (Keating et al., 2009). On February 8, another significant and brazen gang shooting occurred in Langley when Kevin LeClair (26),<sup>25</sup> a Red Scorpion, was killed in a busy mall parking lot. The shooting occurred at 4:00 p.m. and other shoppers had to run for cover as Connor D’Monte and Cory Vallee (UN

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<sup>25</sup> This murder was significant for several reasons. It occurred in a busy parking lot of a shopping mall, and several slugs were pulled out of a car’s child seat. The mother had just dropped the baby off at home because her husband was home sick for the day and available to babysit; otherwise, the baby would have been in the car and would likely have been a victim of collateral gang violence. In addition, LeClair is the quintessential BC gangster in that he came from a good home, with a nurse for a mother and a police officer father. He is a classic example of a “choice gangster.”



gang members) opened up on LeClair's truck with high-powered rifles, killing him instantly (Weisgarber, 2009).

British Columbians were further frightened and outraged when the wife of UN gang member Koshan Alemy was shot and killed as she drove his car with their four-year-old son inside. After she died, the car veered off the road and hit a tree, with her toddler screaming in terror (Brunoro et al., 2009).

In March, Delta Police found Sukhwinder Dhaliwal (32) shot and killed gangland-style in Ladner. He was on bail for drug and firearms charges (Bolan, 2009d). This was the twentieth shooting in only a few weeks, with nine being fatal (BC News, 2009b).

*"There is a gang war and it's brutal."* Later that month, VPD Chief Jim Chu went against the advice of his public affairs team by making the following obvious but brave statement:

As police, we've always been told by media experts to never say or admit that there is a gang war. Well, let's get serious. There is a gang war and it's brutal. (Bailey, 2009)

Less than a month later, Abbotsford Police dealt with the violence that Chief Chu spoke of when two young Red Scorpions were shot and killed within twenty-four hours of each other for their links to their gang's drug trade. Sean Murphy (21) and Ryan Richards (19) both died in separate attacks of gunshots in the rural farming community of Abbotsford (Wintonyk, 2009b). The following month, the two young men who took over Murphy and Richards' drug lines found themselves in the same deadly predicament: Joseph Randay (18) and Dilsher Gil (17) were both shot and killed because of their involvement with the Red Scorpions (Bolan, 2009e).

Another innocent victim of gang violence was taken in May when Christopher Witmee was standing beside a known gang member at the men's communal toilets in the Legacy Show Lounge when a gunman entered the bathroom and began to shoot (Wintonyk, 2009a).

In June, Red Scorpion associate Billy Rai (36) was found shot and killed in a targeted shooting in Abbotsford. In August, Red Scorpion Bobby Digorgio (24) and his girlfriend Jessica Illes' (21) bodies were found in a burnt car in an Abbotsford blueberry field (Bolan, 2009a).

On September 29, gunmen waited for Independent Soldier Randy Naicker to return to his halfway house on Cambie Street in Vancouver. Rajinder Soomel resembled Naicker and was the innocent victim of a gang shooting when the gunmen mistook him for Naicker, shooting him dead on the street outside of the halfway house (Quan, 2009).

*Hit to the United Nations gang, American-justice style.* In December 2009, a large blow against the UN gang occurred when law enforcement officers in Mexico refused Canadian gang leader Clay Rouche entry. They put him on the first plane leaving, which happened to be landing in the U.S. When he got off in Dallas, the Drug Enforcement Agency arrested him and charged him with the importation of marijuana. He was sentenced to thirty years in a federal prison (Bolan, 2013a).<sup>26</sup>

In January 2010, several Hells Angels were found guilty of various offences as a result of Project E-Pandora, in which a police agent<sup>27</sup> was offered \$1 million to work with the police in their investigation in the East End chapter of the Hells Angels. Six members and several associates were charged for a variety of offences, including drug importation and trafficking (Bolan, 2013b).

In February, VPD Gang Crime Unit Detective Dawn Richards advised the media that with proactive gang enforcement, the city had significantly reduced gang violence. She credited Project Rebellion and Project Torrent and advised that shootings in the city of Vancouver were down 35% over the last two years (Bolan, 2010c).

Vancouver Police responded to the first gang shooting of 2010 when Cliff Thammavongsa (22) was shot in his car as he stopped in the 1500 block of East Tenth Street (Bolan, 2010a). In July, Harchie Onas (31) was visiting his parents' home in Burnaby and was shot several times as he opened the front door, killing him (Bolan, 2010b). Later that month, Mandy Johnson (22), the girlfriend of long-time gangster Gator Browne, was shot dead as she stood beside him in a rural area of Abbotsford. Some believe that Browne pulled Johnson in front of himself to protect him from the bullets (Bolan, 2012a,).

*The Dhak/Duhre gang versus the Red Scorpions, Independent Soldiers, and Hells Angels.* In October 2010, another pivotal shooting occurred that set off another gang war in BC. The murder of Gurmit Dhak in the parking lot of the Metrotown Mall (Bolan, 2012c) resulted in many "tit for tat" murders over the next few years. This would also spark the conflict between the Dhak-Duhre group (who had some alliances with the UN gang) against the Red Scorpions,

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. judges are traditionally more strict than Canadian judges in their sentencing. His U.S. sentence was likely three to six times what his sentence would have been in Canada for the same offence.

<sup>27</sup> A police agent in Canada differs from a police informant in that a police agent can be directed by police and must testify in open court, whereas an informant is protected by privilege.

Independent Soldiers, and Hells Angels. ““This murder changed the gang landscape in British Columbia,” said Chief Superintendent Dan Malo of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (Bolan, 2012c).

Within days, on October 27, police arrested Mike Shirazi, Christopher Iser, Billy Tran, Jason McBride, Jodh Manj, Anton Ali-Moffat, and Thanh Nguyen, who were meeting in Kensington Park. Police seized two loaded assault rifles and a pistol from a hidden compartment in a car (Bolan, 2012b). Two days later, Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU) officers stopped Chris Reddy and Derek Stephens and found a loaded handgun in a hidden compartment (McCluskie, 2011). Also that month, Philip Ley, a Dhak associate, was shot in Richmond and survived his injuries (Bolan, 2013c).

In November, Nelson Guerrero (33) was driving his three-year-old son home when he was shot several times in the car, while his son was in a car seat. This was a targeted shooting and Guerrero had a criminal history in both Canada and the U.S. for money laundering (Wintonyk, 2010).

On February 18, 2011, well-known gang member Milad Nournia (26) was shot and killed as he exited a Subway restaurant in downtown Vancouver. He failed to access the loaded pistol he had down the front of pants to defend himself when the gunman appeared (Smirnova, 2011).

In June, Surrey RCMP attended to a report of shots fired in a home and found Balwinder Uppal, the apparent victim of a gang homicide (Bolan, 2011b). Later that month, on June 24, Chris Reddy (24) was shot and killed at 3:40 p.m. in Surrey (CTV News, 2011). At the time of his death, Reddy had been charged with possession of a loaded firearm that CFSEU had located in a hidden compartment in a car on October 29, 2010. Reddy was a close associate of gang member Jesse Margison, who was present when Reddy was shot but ran away when Reddy was hit.

Less than a month later, on July 6, Margison lost another close associate when Christopher Krake (24) was found shot and killed on a trail in Coquitlam (McFee, 2011). Six days later, Vahid Mahanian (35) was found shot and killed on Cypress Mountain. Mahanian was seriously injured from being shot in the Dover Park shootout and went through over fifteen surgeries, only to die in further gang violence (Hall, 2011).

Another pivotal shooting happened on August 14, 2010. In retaliation for the murder of Gurmit Dhak, the Dhak-Duhre and UN gangs staged a brazen daylight shooting in the resort

town of Kelowna, BC, by opening fire on a vehicle filled with various gang members. When the shooting ended, one of the three infamous Bacon brothers was dead, and within a short period of time, those responsible were either incarcerated or murdered. Red Scorpion Jonathan Bacon (30) was killed, and in the car with him were Hells Angel Larry Amero, who was shot in the hand; Independent Soldier James Riach, who was not harmed; and Leah Hadden Watts, who was shot and became a quadriplegic (Bolan & Law, 2012). Jason McBride, Jujhar Khun-Khun, and Michael Jones have since all been arrested and charged with the murder.

Within twenty-four hours of this shooting in Kelowna, a man was shot outside the Mirage Nightclub in Surrey (CBC News, 2011). Despite early media reports that this incident was not related to the events in Kelowna, the victim was a close associate of the Dhak brothers. This retaliation for the murder of Bacon and the attempt on a Hells Angels' life would come fast and consistently.

In September 2011, Jujhar Khun-Khun was shot multiple times as he picked up Sukh Dhak from his girlfriend's place in Surrey, and survived. On October 2, William Woo, a Duhre associate, was found shot and killed on Cypress Mountain. On October 22, three men were shot in a car in Surrey: Stephen Leone died, and a fifteen-year-old boy and Manny Hairan, a notorious gangster, survived.

In November, UN gang member Axel Curtis (29) was shot and killed as he walked his dog by Vancouver City Hall (Bolan, 2011a). In December, Jenny Vu (38) was shot and killed in her SUV as her three-year-old sat in the back seat (Mui, 2011). Vu was not known to police, and it was believed her husband may have been the intended target.

In 2012, the year began with multiple attacks on the Dhak-Duhre group in the span of a week. On January 16, Thomas Gisby had an attempt on his life in the popular ski resort of Whistler, when his trailer was packed with explosives that failed to ignite. The same day, Sal Sahbaz (37), a high-level UN gang member and right-hand man to Barzan Tilli-Cholli and Clay Rouche, was shot and killed in Sinaloa, Mexico (Bolan, 2012d). The next day, Sandip Duhre was killed in the Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel restaurant by Rabih Alkalil and Dean Wiwchar (Bolan, 2013c). Two days later, on January 19, Sean Beaver of the Dhak-Duhre group was shot and killed in Surrey (Bolan, 2012d).

On April 28, in a shooting that crippled the supply of cocaine to the Dhak-Duhre group, Tomas Gisby (47) was shot and killed in Puerto Vallarta (Bolan, 2012d). In a prior April incident

unrelated to the Dhak-Duhre side of the conflict, Asian gang member Justine Po (36), who had been involved in the murder of Lotus gang boss Raymond Chan, was shot and killed. He was the second person involved in Chan's death to be murdered. Po had pleaded guilty to being an accessory after the fact and had served his jail time (A. Campbell, 2012).

On May 2, long-time and feared gangster Ranjit Cheema (43) was shot and killed outside his home within three months of being released from a California prison (Pole & Clancy, 2012). The same month, another Dhak-Duhre group associate, Bin Toor (35), was shot and killed in Port Moody (Bolan, 2012d).

On June 25, another long-time gangster, and founder of the Independent Soldiers, Randy Naicker was shot and killed in Port Moody after leaving a Starbucks (Bulman, 2012). In the final chapter of the Dhak-Duhre group's conflict with the Red Scorpions, Hells Angels, and Independent Soldiers. Thomas Mantel and Suk Dahk were shot and killed as they exited the Executive Inn Hotel in Burnaby on November 26, 2012.

## Chapter Conclusion

As I conclude this article, stakeholders must face the harsh reality that violence and gangs in Vancouver are not new, nor are they a product of this new generation. They have been a part of the city's history for almost as long as the city has existed. In this article, I demonstrated that from 1909 to 2012, gangs were consistently violent: there were murders, there were shootings, and there were gang fights. Innocent bystanders were shot, maimed, injured, and killed. Policymakers can't blame the new generation, media, police, video games, or rap music. The violence was there in the past, possibly even more so than today; there were running gun battles on the streets and gangsters shooting shotguns over the heads of Sky Train commuters. The nostalgic view of gangs in BC as being less violent simply is not the case. This recognition of our violent history with gangs in BC is important because as the community of stakeholders seeks to reduce gang violence, we must face the truth that it has always been part of our social fabric. This research about the history of gangs in BC situates us well for the analysis of how BC gangs are currently constructed and the rational choices members make to join gangs, as opposed to BC's historical gangs. In addition, this research also illustrates the value of the field observations and interviews for comparative analysis.

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