

# Chapter 1

Fresh from the gang wars in Kingston, Robeson David had seen his share of violence. Using public outrage over a massive tax increase as a ruse, armed gangs of men battled in the streets—raping, looting, burning and shooting with a callous casualness that caused ordinary citizens to create refugee camps in police stations. More than 500 people were murdered in less than two weeks. David, an officer in the Jamaican Defense Force’s SWAT unit, led his men into the worst of the fighting. “It was more like war than police work,” he said, his seriousness and Jamaican accent making him sound distinguished. “But desperate crimes call for desperate measures.” He wasn’t joking.

Despite his experiences on the front lines, even David had to admit his assignment for the morning of March 28, 2001, caused him some anxiety. He was told that he and his men would have to capture and arrest the kingpin of the Canadian Hells Angels. “This isn’t about a bunch of boys with cricket bats anymore,” he said. “This is the Hells Angels, professional killers—we didn’t want to mess with them.” Such was the reputation of the world’s best-known motorcycle gang that an assault rifle-toting SWAT officer would rather face open gang warfare on the mean streets of Kingston than arrest one Angel at a luxury hotel.

The Ritz-Carlton Rose Hall, located just outside of Montego Bay, is a hell of a place. The 5,000-acre beachfront spa and golf club is easily the best hotel on the island. Nestled between verdant hillsides and the turquoise waters of the Caribbean, the beautifully appointed and tastefully decorated Ritz is the only Jamaican resort to earn AAA's coveted five-diamond rating.

Standing out amid all the luxury was a short man from Canada. Dressed garishly, even among the sea of tourists eager to party on the laid-back islands, he didn't present an impressive figure. At 5-feet 4-inches, his stout body and short limbs gave him an almost primitive appearance and his shoulder-length hair indicated that his profession probably didn't take him into an office every day. His face and hands, badly burned in a motorcycle accident 18 years earlier, did little to soften the edges of this hard-looking man. "Yeah, he was scarred up a bit, but that's not why he was funny-looking," said Shaun Plank, a hotel employee. "He had tiny, sunken-in eyes and a great big mouth. It made him look nasty—you don't play with a man who looks like that."

But Walter Stadnick was there to play. He had no business, official or otherwise, other than to celebrate his 22nd anniversary with his common-law wife, Kathi Anderson. Disappointed that the Ritz was booked, he spent the first part of his vacation at the Wyndham Rose Hall just down the beach.

The Wyndham is a nice place, too. It's not the Ritz, but at \$395 a night for a decent room, it's out of reach for most hard-working Canadians. A former sugar plantation surrounded by 18 holes on an impeccable golf course, it mainly attracts well-heeled businessmen who like golf and women who'd like to meet them. Stadnick stood out there, too.

About 1,800 miles to the north, Steve Pacey wasn't sipping margaritas and checking out passing bikinis. If Stadnick looked out of place at a luxury hotel, Pacey stood out even more among the other cops in the Hamilton police force, even when he was with the men and women of the Ontario Provincial Police's Biker Enforcement Unit. At 6-feet 2-inches and 265 pounds, he was an imposing presence. With his shaved head, wild goatee, diamond stud earring and arms wrapped in tattoos, the man dressed in denim and black leather

looked more like a prisoner than a colleague when he was with other cops. But he wasn't their enemy; he was their secret weapon. He went where the bikers went and, except for the drugs and violence, he did what the bikers did. To a newbie, he looked like another biker. To the bikers, he was close enough that they got sloppy around him after a few too many cold ones. Pacey knew more about Hamilton's bikers than anyone else. And he knew that, although most cops associate Hamilton with the traditional Italian Mafia, it was the bikers who called the Steel City home who really ran things in Canada, and it was Stadnick who called the shots for many of the bikers. "There are traditional organized crime members in this city who are very active," he said in 2001. "But in terms of sheer volume, Walter's influence spreads way beyond Hamilton."

At this point, it was pretty clear to everyone that Stadnick was not exactly Ned Flanders. Despite the fact that there exists no record of Stadnick ever holding a job, he lived pretty high on the hog. Unlike the more commonplace breed of *nouveaux riches* who expose themselves to scrutiny by buying an ostentatious mansion, Stadnick played it cool. He bought a small and comfortable house near the ridge of the 300-foot hill they call "the mountain" in Hamilton. Assessed for insurance purposes for an atrociously low \$156,000, Stadnick's Cloverhill Road residence was an opulent, if not entirely tasteful, monument to the biker lifestyle.

From the street, the only indication that this wasn't an ordinary house was the oversized Canadian flag and the mailbox painted in the bright red and white of the Hells Angels. A few steps out back revealed that work had begun on an in-ground pool. Overlooking it was a recently finished second-floor balcony. A peek in the first floor windows would reveal a sumptuous glass, black marble and gold plate motif worth well more than the estimated value of the entire house. Climb up to the second floor and you'd see an office with a PC, scanner, fax and—what every legitimate businessman needs—a paper shredder. Next door was a bathroom featuring a new whirlpool with a wall-mounted TV. Beyond that was the red-and-white master bedroom with an expensive four-poster bed and a his-and-hers closet filled with custom-fitted Armani suits and enough women's shoes to

make Imelda Marcos envious. Parked out front on most days were a late-model Chrysler luxury car, a Blazer SUV and, perhaps most revealing, a brand-new Jaguar with Quebec plates. The beloved Harleys lived in the garage. Stadnick's attempt to blend in didn't fool the cops. As one Hamilton officer mused aloud: "How can you have a guy like Stadnick—who's never had a job in his life—living in a gorgeous little house, with a place in Quebec, a place in Winnipeg—traveling all over the world wearing Armani suits?"

While the logical answer is crime, the legal answer is more complex. Or at least more elusive. When asked what his client did for a living, Stadnick's high-priced lawyer Stephan Frankel said: "I don't know, I really don't know." After a long, uncomfortable silence, he said: "It wasn't something that would generally come up; it wasn't really something that I needed to know . . . I don't know if it's strange necessarily—Walter is a really private person." Too private, apparently, to tell his lawyer what he does for a living.

Though his lawyer was oblivious, the police weren't. Although he was opaque in his business dealings, Stadnick wore his Hells Angels colours proudly, and always seemed to be at least on the periphery of trouble. A paid informant embedded close to the Hells Angels elite Nomads Chapter told his Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) handlers that Stadnick was not only deeply involved in the lucrative Southern Ontario drug trade, but that he was also making strategic alliances with biker gangs in Ontario and Western Canada in an effort to win them over from the Hells Angels' rivals, the Outlaws. Although cops in urban centers like Hamilton may view drug dealing as an unavoidable part of urban life—throw a Hells Angel in jail and someone else will take his place—the rumblings of a potential gang war were particularly worrisome. At least 157 people were murdered in the Hells Angels–Rock Machine conflict in Quebec and, when the Hells Angels rose from the battle victorious, they turned their homicidal attention to the government, killing two prison guards and threatening the lives of every guard, cop, prosecutor and judge in the province. Quebec was teetering on the edge of a Colombia-style government–gangster stalemate. "No, we don't need that here in Ontario," said another Hamilton cop.

\* \* \*

Farther north in Montreal it was bitterly cold, one of those days that makes you wonder if winter will ever end. At 4:00 a.m., RCMP Sergeant Tom O'Neill arrived at the headquarters of the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) with armloads of coffee and doughnuts. He wasn't complaining about the cold or the early start or the long day he knew he had ahead of him—if anything, he was eager to get started. As NCO of Operation Printemps (Springtime) 2001, it was his job to coordinate a joint police task force consisting of 2,000 officers poised to pounce on 142 bikers.

Of them, two stood out in particular. Stadnick and Donald "Pup" Stockford were friends who grew up on the rough-and-tumble streets of Hamilton and, despite starting with no French skills and a pronounced size disadvantage, somehow managed to join the traditionally francophone Canadian arm of the Hells Angels; Stockford became president and Stadnick's right-hand man. At the top of the Canadian Hells Angels are the Nomads, an elite chapter of the Hells Angels founded, sources say, by Stadnick himself.

Stadnick and Stockford, along with such Montreal-based luminaries as Maurice "Mom" Boucher and David "Wolf" Carroll were among the Nomads management team who controlled not only the other Hells Angels, but associated gangs as well. A secret RCMP report read: "They'll have about a dozen members and will control all of Quebec as their territory. They'll put pressure on clubs that aren't doing a good job selling drugs." "Pressure" in Hells Angels' terms usually means violence. According to police, Stadnick's primary mandate was to recruit established biker gangs from Ontario and Western Canada into the Hells Angels family by any means necessary.

O'Neill knew that if the task force could put Stadnick and Stockford behind bars for a long time, they stood a very good chance of stopping or at least slowing down the gang's rapid and vicious western expansion.

In densely populated areas, and Ontario is no exception, the sex and drug trades are controlled by a number of organized crime groups. In approximate order of influence, they include the Italian and Irish

mafias at the top, the biker gangs, Asian gangs, Jamaican gangs, and at the bottom the independent operators and other bottom-feeders. All of them live in a sort of uneasy tolerance of one another, with only the occasional head kicked in to maintain order. That hierarchy, as the authorities in Quebec found out, gets blown away when the Hells Angels arrive. Like a cunning retailer intent on eliminating the competition, the Hells Angels use their name and reputation, combined with smart marketing like cut-rate prices, free samples and other incentives to establish themselves as the dominant, if not only, dog in the yard. Unlike the Wal-Mart of the world, though, the Hells Angels reserve the right to kill whoever stands in their way. Competition becomes fierce; rival biker gangs often increase their activity in an attempt to show the Hells Angels they are worthy of membership or that they are powerful enough to remain independent. The Hells Angels can patch them in (give them membership), keep them as vassals or try to eliminate them. No matter which happens, the level of street crime and violence escalates.

Before the RCMP, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) and individual police forces in Quebec started rounding up bikers in unprecedented numbers, O'Neill wanted to take down Stadnick and Stockford. On March 25, he set up a conference call with Pacey and a crew of eager young Hamilton police officers, telling them for the first time what the RCMP knew about the Hells Angels and particularly Stadnick and Stockford. The excitement was palpable. The Hamilton cops had been trying to bring down Stadnick for years, but the most they'd been able to nail him with were traffic tickets. "I could hear a lull," O'Neill said. "They'd obviously been trying to get him for years."

After O'Neill finished, one of the excited Hamilton cops asked: "You say there are murder charges—is that first degree or second?"

"First degree," O'Neill said with some satisfaction. Then he went on to read them the details of all 13 murder-one counts against Stadnick.

Another long silence. O'Neill wondered how his team in Hamilton was taking the news, until one of them couldn't help it any longer and shouted: "Oh man, we love you guys, you're the best!"

Stockford was easy. Ancaster is considered by many to be the nicest, certainly the most bucolic, of Hamilton's suburbs. Up on the mountain

and far away from the smoke-belching factories of the city's North and East Ends, Ancaster is quiet, relaxed and safely removed from the squalor and poverty of inner-city Hamilton. When you see a police car up here you figure some kids got hold of some beer or something equally innocent. On the morning of March 26, however, a heavily armed SWAT team, complete with body armor and assault rifles, descended upon the Stockford residence. Taking no chances, the cops called to Stockford from a truck-mounted loudspeaker, informing him that they had a warrant for his arrest and a warrant to search his home. Almost immediately, Stockford came out of the house with his hands on the back of his head. Shivering in just jeans and a T-shirt, he was immediately whisked into a police car and taken to Hamilton for questioning. Inside, the cops found a treasure trove of evidence—everything from laminated index cards with the names, addresses and phone numbers of Nomads members, prospects and hangarounds to minutes of gang meetings to a tax return for Nomads Quebec Inc., and even a list of the bikers' favorite restaurants in Montreal. The police were surprised by how much incriminating material they carted away. For all his skill as an organizer, Stockford made a pretty lousy gangster.

Stadnick proved more difficult. Cloverhill Road is two blocks long and surrounded on two sides by a 90-degree turn in the forested cliff that separates Upper Hamilton from Lower Hamilton. It is about as isolated as you can get in a major city. That facade of calm was shattered on the morning of March 26 when eager police came racing down the street. Suddenly, they stopped in front of Stadnick's unassuming red brick house. There seemed to be some confusion. "Nothing happened for a few minutes," said one eyewitness. "Then a news van—with all the dishes on top—arrived and it all started going down." The police started blaring orders at Stadnick's house. Other than the light rustling of neighbors stirring and the white noise of police radios, there was silence. Again they pleaded for Stadnick to come out without violence. Nothing. Suddenly six large officers in full body armor came running out of a truck with what looked to one witness like "a log with handles." Two hits and the door was down. Two officers with their backs to the house each threw something into the opening where the door had been. Immediately there was a sound like twin thunderclaps and the inside of

the house lit up “like it was daylight inside.” Still nothing moved. One of the men who had thrown in a percussion grenade shouted “GO! GO! GO!” while windmilling his left arm. Armored men with assault rifles and shotguns stormed the house. Despite the fact that 24 hours of surveillance had shown no movement in or around the house, the police seemed surprised to find nobody at home.

Perhaps disappointed that their quarry had eluded them, they tore the place apart. After the raid, Stadnick’s common-law wife, Kathi Anderson, complained that the house had suffered extensive damage from the grenades and that, even years later, the police were holding on to her computer and her “printer, monitor, keyboard, mouse, scanner and CDs and laptop.” “They took my fax machine, my telephone, every VHS tape I owned, pictures right off the wall, dozens of photo albums . . .” and more. Complaining that the police had shown perhaps more zeal than efficiency, Anderson went on to say, “They also smashed the front and side doors in (although they are within 8 to 10 feet of each other) and left my home unwatched and open for five days.” She also pointed out that in the Quebec arrests, police knocked on the front door.

Stadnick proved more discreet than his partner Stockford just up the road in Ancaster. The police found little in Stadnick’s house that had any value in a courtroom aside from photos and a Valentine’s card from a 10-year-old niece that asked “Uncle Wally” if he was “still in charge of the Hells Angels.”

Pacey wasn’t pleased. He called O’Neill in Montreal. “We haven’t seen him around,” he said. “Do you guys have any intelligence that he’s away?”

O’Neill didn’t know. He called RCMP intelligence and asked them to run a check on exit points. He was in luck. A few hours later, the phone rang. Stadnick and Anderson had flown from Toronto’s Pearson Airport to Montego Bay in Jamaica. The cops even knew what hotel they were staying in.

It took the RCMP’s Jamaica liaison officer, Richard Sauvé, six hours to drive from his office in Kingston to the Wyndham just outside Montego Bay. O’Neill’s luck held. Sauvé spotted Stadnick in minutes. But then, there weren’t too many longhaired, 5-foot 4-inch vacationers

covered in tattoos and burn scars. “I saw him—he’s sitting by the pool,” Sauv  told O’Neill. “He’s with his girlfriend.”

O’Neill told Sauv  to sit tight and keep an eye on the suspect. With Stadnick in Jamaica, the arrest became an international operation. O’Neill was wise enough to make sure all his paperwork was in order before he made his move.

On the morning of March 28, the same day the Quebec arrests went down, Stadnick and Anderson moved from the Wyndham to the Ritz. The papers at the time, especially the vulgar Montreal tabloids, claimed that the couple had heard about the first few Quebec arrests by telephone or e-mail and were on the run, but Anderson says that they had dropped by the Ritz—the hotel they originally tried to book—the night before and asked if any rooms were available. When one was, they switched.

After settling in at the Ritz, the couple decided to relax by the pool. Stadnick knew instinctively from the sound of boots on pavement and the gasps of the vacationers that something was going down. When he looked up, he was staring at the hole in the end of an assault rifle. There were many of them, in fact, and they were all pointed at him and his wife. He said nothing. “Mr. Walter Stadnick?” asked a tall man with a prominently decorated uniform, even though it was clear he knew whom he was talking to. Walter nodded.

Sauv  stepped forward from behind the SWAT team and identified himself. “Mr. Stadnick, you are under arrest for 13 counts of murder, three counts of attempted murder, one count of conspiracy to commit murder, two counts of narcotics trafficking and two counts of attempting to smuggle narcotics.” Stadnick went peacefully.

After a night in a tiny Montego Bay cell Anderson described as a “hell hole,” Stadnick was transported to Jamaica’s National Remand Centre in Kingston. Surrounded by razor wire and a 24-hour armed guard and obliged to use a communal toilet bucket, Stadnick waited patiently for his time in court. On April 2, he was led into Kingston’s Half-Way-Tree Courthouse, where he confidently told resident magistrate Martin Gayle that he had no idea why the charges were being leveled against him and that he would readily waive his right to an extradition process so he could fight them. Granted.

The paperwork wouldn't be completed until April 10. When O'Neill and a partner from the Montreal Police arrived in Kingston, they were shocked at the atrocious conditions at the Remand Centre. Describing the scene as "a bit like [the 1978 prison movie] *Midnight Express*," O'Neill thought he'd find Stadnick desperate to get back to the relatively posh conditions of a Canadian jail. He was surprised by what he found. Sitting on the floor, chatting and laughing with some friends, Stadnick made O'Neill wait until he was finished his sentence before acknowledging him. Unruffled, O'Neill decided to play with Stadnick a bit. "So, Walter, how'd you like to stay here for a couple more weeks?" he asked. "It can be arranged."

Stadnick looked him straight in the eye and chuckled derisively. "Couple more weeks? I'd be running this place." Hoots of ominous laughter surrounded O'Neill and his partner.

Later, O'Neill admitted that he thought that the only white prisoner—and a short and funny-looking one at that—would have a tough time surviving in a Jamaican jail. He couldn't have been more wrong. "I thought they'd be frying him up," he said. "But he made some friends in there and left real cocky." As the two Canadian cops, aided by a phalanx of Jamaican guards with submachine guns, escorted the diminutive biker leader out of his cell, they were chilled by what they heard. Hoots, hollers, whistles and applause came from what seemed like every cell. "Yo, Walter!" they yelled. "We're with you, man!" Stadnick loved it.