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BY
**JUSTIN
BEDDALL**

THE

Over the last 16 years, a West Van cop, Doug Bruce, grew obsessed with a cold case **murder**. Last year the hitman pleaded guilty. Case closed, right? Wrong.



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY CROW

AT AROUND 9:30 A.M. on the morning of May 9, 1990, Ray Ginnetti's common-law wife of 10 years, Barbara, went off to meet a friend, leaving him alone in their Caulfield Plateau home in West Vancouver. Ginnetti had woken early for a swim and then ridden his poolside exercise bike. Later, he planned to climb into his pearl-coloured Cadillac and stop by his former lottery ticket sales office above a plumbing supply store on Yukon Street.

At around 10 a.m., as he was finishing his workout, a blue and grey GMC pickup truck stopped in the 4,100-block of Almond Court in West Vancouver, just below the Upper Levels Highway. One of the men, described by a neighbour as tall and casually dressed, got out. As the pickup drove off, the stranger walked up the rise towards Ginnetti's house,

destined for a permanent place among the cardboard boxes inside WVPD's cold case room.

IN 1994, DOUG BRUCE, by now promoted to corporal detective, was assigned to the Ginnetti file. It was an opportunity to investigate a case that had been gawing at him for four years. "We don't get a lot of contract murders in West Van," he points out. As he went about his duties, he often found himself pondering the hit.

In September, 1994, he got a break: a call from Los Angeles. The LAPD had arrested a man who, they said, had information about a murder in British Columbia involving a lottery executive. Bruce and Det. Larry Catlin flew to LA and met with the informant in a hotel room in Marina Del Ray. "That witness gave us the name of Jose Raul Perez-Valdez," says Bruce. He also provided them with the name of an inmate at Nevada State Prison in Carson City who knew Perez-Valdez. "Cases like this, it can take years and years, but eventually somebody slips up, somebody says something, somebody is pissed off with somebody else and points a finger—and that's exactly what happened."

On June 9, 1995, five years after Ginnetti's death, West Vancouver police laid a first-degree murder charge against Perez-Valdez. But it wasn't going to be easy to get their hands on him: he was serving 10 years at Lompac, a high-security federal prison in Los Angeles, for kidnapping and possession of cocaine.

When Perez-Valdez got his first whiff of freedom, in late 2003, it didn't last long. On Christmas Eve, a pair of plainclothes WVPD detectives pulled up in front of LAX airport in a U.S. Marshall ghost car in a cavalcade of six vehicles. Inside one van was the 39-year-old Cuban national who had allegedly shot Ginnetti.

Officers Tim Kravjanski and Rick Catlin escorted him on an Alaska Airlines flight to Vancouver. Christmas was coming early for the officers in the department's Criminal Investigation Division—and also for Catlin's father, Larry, who had flown to California with Doug Bruce nearly a decade earlier to interview the informant.

"He was transported in shackles in his coveralls," Kravjanski recalled. "We basically had an armed escort of eight personnel and myself and Det. Catlin. We walked him through the security checkpoint and traded shackles inside." For the Vancouver-bound flight, the officers arranged for three seats in the back of the plane. "We were the first on," Kravjanski recalled. "He was in his orange. We got some interesting looks."

At Vancouver International Airport, the officers escorted Perez-Valdez into a marked WVPD paddy wagon. Kravjanski arrived late for Christmas Eve dinner at his in-laws' home; his prisoner spent Christmas awaiting his first court appearance in B.C.

The WVPD's first in-depth interview with Perez-Valdez, conducted by Bruce and Sgt. Marv Pelke, lasted four straight days. "He revealed a lot of information that assisted us," says Bruce. "This is a complex file because it was a contract killing and there is suspicion of underworld connections and traditional organized crime involved."

The man sitting across from Bruce in the interrogation room had been born and raised in Cuba. He'd had some education but worked mostly in the sugar cane fields as a youngster. As a teenager in the early 1980s, after a fight with his father, purportedly a major in Fidel Castro's military, he fled to Nicaragua. There, he took up arms as a freedom fighter. "He certainly received

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Q. I would like to know if I need to lose weight in order to have cosmetic surgery i.e. tummy tuck.

—Natalie Wissmath

A. It is not a good idea to have cosmetic surgery if you are grossly overweight. Firstly, this increases your anesthetic risk and secondly, the cosmetic result may not be satisfactory if you subsequently lose weight. It is preferred that an individual be at a weight which they can maintain rather than an "ideal weight".

Regular exercise is important prior to cosmetic procedures. This will allow the individual to get back to exercising rapidly and will improve the final cosmetic result. It is important to be aware that liposuction of the abdomen is typically associated with a significant amount of skin contraction. A tummy tuck produces scarring and for the majority of individuals we think a superior cosmetic result is achieved with liposuction alone.

Q. Retin-A and Glyquin were both prescribed for me to use twice daily. Improvement was remarkable. After 5 years I switched to daily RoC cream with Retinol and like the results. You state that Retinol is of no use. Please explain. Should I go back to Retin-A? Thank you.

—Lois Abrams

A. As we indicated in our previous answer, retinol (the alcohol form of Vitamin A) is much less effective when applied to the skin than tretinoin or retinoic acid (the acid form). With our current state of knowledge, it is preferable to use the acid than the alcohol in order to get significant clinical improvement. The cream base in which the active ingredient is applied to the skin can often produce a satisfying result alone and we suspect that is the main reason that you are getting improvement with your retinol containing cream.

—Jean Carruthers, MD, FRCS C

—Alastair Carruthers, FRCP C

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ing on his 25-foot sailboat in the Strait of Georgia, throttling his motorcycle over open highway in the Fraser Valley, laying in bed at night. "I can't say I haven't lost sleep over this. This one's been 16 years now; I've been directly involved for the past 12 years. I guess you could say I'm obsessed."

Now an inspector in charge of the department's Criminal Investigation Division, Bruce has lost count of the people he's talked to about Ginnetti. He's travelled to Louisiana, Texas, California and Nevada to build the case. "I like to see things done properly," he says. "If there's a lead we can follow up, it will be."

His determination is partly fuelled by the compassion he feels toward the Ginnetti family, especially Ray's mother, with whom he developed a personal relationship and stayed in close contact until she died last year. (She's buried alongside her husband and son at Burnaby's Ocean View Cemetery.) "I spoke to her on a fairly regular basis until her death. She was a sweet woman, very family-oriented. She loved her sons very much."

He also keeps in contact with Ray's

brothers, Bobby and Rick, whom he visited recently to return the lever-action .22 Winchester that had been propped up in the corner of his office with an evidence tag attached to the barrel. The rifle, taken from the Ginnetti crime scene in 1990, was no longer required for the case.

"I'm confident in my mind as to who was involved and the reasons for the murder," says Bruce. "In my mind it has been solved."

Last summer, he and members of his investigation team submitted a report to Crown Counsel identifying more suspects and recommending charges against them. Recently, in a sign he views as promising, he was asked to re-submit the report.

Why was Ginnetti murdered? Did he steal from the mob? Did he cross the wrong wise-guy? Bruce shrugs. "I can't comment." Is Ginnetti's wife Barbara, who married very soon after the murder, a suspect? Bruce, pokerfaced, repeats, "I can't comment."

"I will say there's three others involved who I feel we have enough evidence to charge and possibly convict. When you have the triggerman point the finger

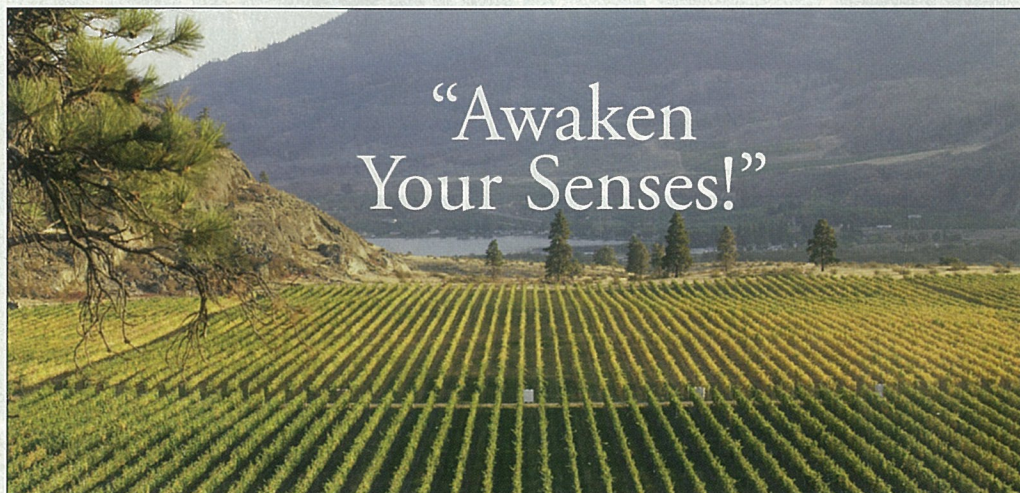
at the people who hired him, and you have wiretap information and other witnesses corroborating what he said, and Crown Counsel fails to act upon that. . . ." His voice tails off.

Why would prosecutors drag their feet? If Bruce has any theories, he's not willing to express them. "Whether Crown feels there's sufficient evidence to charge, that's a decision they make. I'm going to be pretty disappointed if they don't proceed. I've been doing this for 31 years and I see the judicial system continually getting harder to deal with. It's extremely frustrating."

A contract has been put out on Perez-Valdez; his identity and whereabouts are kept confidential and he's frequently moved among penal facilities.

Hanging on the wall of Doug Bruce's second-storey office at police headquarters on Marine Drive in West Van is a framed photo of a sailboat silhouetted against an orange-and-pink sunset, a present from his daughter. The caption reads: "Success is a journey, not a destination."

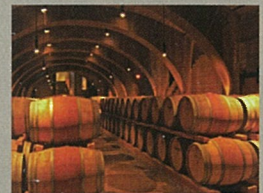
He has eight years left until mandatory retirement. ♣



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