Preface

I might start sleeping with that gun under my pillow again. And not some police-issue peashooter. This time, I’m going to snuggle up beside a nice fat pump-action. Had a few of those pointed at me over the years by criminals, so maybe it’s my turn to return the favour. You’ve been warned.

Hey, I’m kidding, of course. For goodness’ sake, I’m nearly seventy years old. But not everyone was chuffed to be mentioned in my true-crime memoir *The Second Father*. The first call I received upon its publication was hardly one of congratulation.

‘I should have killed you, wog, when I had the chance!’ a voice from the past wheezed down the line.

Oh boy, did that bring back some memories. I’d never
been a fan of answering the home phone since the Fitzgerald days. Good to see that some things never change. Retirement was getting kind of boring anyway. Okay, given the memoir’s subject matter of criminals, bent politicians and crooked cops, I wasn’t expecting back slaps, but for a bambino who arrived in Australia unable to understand or write English, and later a police cadet chastised for not being able to speak the language properly, I thought being a published author all these years later was quite an achievement.

I suppose, if anything, I am a persistent bastard. The death threats kept coming for a while. Some subtle. Some not so subtle. Ah, well. At least my enemies did me the good service to read the book. Are they really going to kill a balding old Sicilian for telling the truth? They had their chance when we were all younger and much better looking. And they blew it.

I’m a dinosaur now. I understand that. But I wouldn’t want anyone to go through what I went through. I worked as a police officer in the most corrupt period in Queensland’s history, through the sixties, seventies and eighties, so I tangled with my fair share of shifty characters on both sides of the law, people without scruples or conscience. I pissed off a lot of people because I was honest and wouldn’t take a bribe. The pressure to yield to the bad apples in the force was exhausting and relentless. Lucky, then, that I was also stubborn. I had to be. In my day, the coppers and the politicians were sometimes far scarier than the spivs. You with me?

Judging by the response to The Second Father, interest in the Fitzgerald Inquiry into corruption in the Queensland
Preface

Police and the larger than life characters it unearthed seems to be insatiable. Or maybe it’s due to the *Underbelly* phenomenon on television and people’s fascination with the dark and greedy side of human nature. I tangled with nearly all of the main players from Fitzgerald – the Terry Lewises, the Jack Herberts, the Gerry Bellinos, the Tony Murphys – and a good deal more who weren’t mentioned. I arrested some of them. Some of them belted me. Some I belted back. Some I wished I’d hit back but never got the chance to.

Through it all, there was constant criticism levelled at me by Italians for betraying our community – from the Valley in Brisbane to the cane-cutting communities in the Far North and everywhere in between – and sadly this has never really gone away. People used to turn their backs on Mamma and Papa at the shops. Zio (uncle) Charlie and Zia (aunty) Francesca had similar troubles. Papa always told me growing up not to bring shame – ‘vergogna’ – on the family. It was his greatest fear. By being an honest cop, I had unwittingly done just that, although to my parents’ credit they went to great lengths to show they were never ashamed of me. They told me I had to see things through, to never give up. ‘You must keep fighting, Domenico,’ Mamma said. ‘You don’t leave till you are the last man standing.’

So, you see, at the end of the eighties, Fitzgerald for me came with deep bruises – physical ones and emotional ones. I didn’t read about it in some book. I lived and breathed it. And while I thought I’d prised loose most of my memories in unburdening myself for *The Second Father*, a curious thing
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happened on the promotional tour around Australia. After interviews with journalists and during discussions at book festivals, other long-forgotten or ignored mental fragments from those days started jumping out of my subconscious, waking me in the middle of the night, giving me nightmares. Faces from the grave came back to haunt me. I’d stirred the proverbial mental pot and the contents would not settle.

Other times, I’d be having a quiet drink on the porch, trying to enjoy my retirement, and some incident from the past would flicker to life in my mind, fuzzy around the edges at first before cracking open with amazing clarity. I used to joke to my wife, Cheryl, that the arrival of these memories was kind of like dropping an egg on the floor: spectacular and messy, and bloody hard to clean up.

Where had these memories been hiding all these years? Not all of them had to do with Fitzgerald or the famous Southport SP betting case, which, courtesy of Herbert’s treachery, dragged my name and the reputations of some fine senior officers through the mud. No, these were memories from my days on the beat in Fortitude Valley and other places in Queensland. Some memories were thoroughly unpleasant, soaked in blood, while others, believe it or not, made me laugh. Horror and humour make wonderful bedfellows when you’re in the thick of it. I spent thirty-five years as a police officer learning to bury my memories, not wallow in them. The hole I’d dug was very deep and very dark.

Most police officers who have been in the game for any length of time would understand what I mean. Soldiers back
from a war zone would understand. To survive the work, you learn quickly to sweep away the day’s events, place a ‘do not disturb’ sign at the entrance and vow never to enter that protected area again.

I once attended a road accident where a motorcyclist had fallen off his high-powered bike and bounced for a hundred metres down Kingsford Smith Drive at Hamilton before ploughing through a chain-wire fence. Dredging up that decades-old memory still makes my stomach churn. He’d broken just about every bone in his body. When I went to pick him up, he slipped from my grip like some kind of floppy rag doll. His corpse hit the bitumen with a thud. I remember someone started humming ‘I Like Aeroplane Jelly’ to lighten the mood. And you know what? It helped. It helped just enough to get me through it. Don’t judge me. Don’t judge those cops around me. We weren’t being disrespectful to that poor bloke. We were just coping the best way we could.

Policing is not like other jobs. How else do you manage when you’ve seen adults and children killed in accidents, cut up, stabbed, shot to pieces, burnt or murdered? How do you put all that aside when you have a wife and children at home who need their papa when he walks in the door after work? Coupled with all this regular police work was my battle against corruption and the nervous tension of having to watch my back against the bad guys, who were more often than not my work colleagues or superiors. Looking back, it’s a bloody miracle I survived as long as I did.

How did I do it? Why did I do it? I remember some days
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being in the foetal position in the shower before work, trembling with anxiety. Cheryl and the kids never knew (or at least I think they never knew) that I was having problems. I’d get myself together, put on my uniform and go out the front door whistling a tune as if nothing was amiss. There weren’t any debriefing sessions or counselling with psychologists in my day. What you end up with all these years later is a life filled with hidden compartments and no-go areas. It’s the price you pay when you sign up to ‘Serve and Protect’.

Well, stupid me. I’ve foolishly crept back and taken another peek into the hole, and what was left of my hair has started falling out again. Some might call it post-traumatic stress disorder. Call it what you like. I’m not one for shrinks or labels. Never have been. It is what it is. The one time I did see a shrink, I think she was the one who had to have counselling sessions afterwards. I just couldn’t open up about what was bothering me. You see, what I’ve learnt from writing The Second Father and now this book is that the truth hurts, although not nearly so much as holding on to the pain. So stuff it, I’m letting it go again. I’m not complaining or having a whinge, either. I’m prouder than ever to have been an honest Queensland Police officer. I still wouldn’t change a thing.

Oh, and one more thing: no more death threats, please, or I might just write another one. You’ve been warned.

Domenico Cacciola
Chapter One

The Valley

To understand a creature like me, you have to understand the Valley. If suburban Fortitude Valley was the beating heart of corruption in Queensland in the dark old days before Fitzgerald, then its arteries were Brunswick, Ann and Wickham streets. This was where I roamed after arriving by boat in Brisbane as a ten-year-old from war-torn Sicily. It’s where I ‘cut my teeth’, as you skippys are wont to say. It’s where I became a man.

The Valley was forever testing me, first in my childhood and teenage years, then off and on as a police officer for decades. The battles were endless: bullies in the school-yard; neighbourhood thugs and racists; the wogs who ran the illegal games; the spivs behind the brothels and the hard
drugs; those clueless communists who met in a tin shed and thought they could eventually run the state; the anti-nuclear tree-huggers and the union and student agitators who didn’t mind a spot of violence and a vicious punch to your kidneys or the back of your head when it suited them; the bent conservative politicians such as Don ‘Shady’ Lane and Big Russ Hinze, who worried about being unmasked for what they really were; the Rat Pack and its rotten to the core police commissioner Frank Bischof and, later, Terry Lewis; and finally the crooked police from Licensing Branch when the bagman Sergeant Jack Herbert ran the show. I tangled with them all in the Valley.

I’ve never been one to back down from a fight. My papa wasn’t into diplomacy. If you got on the wrong side of him, you had an enemy for life. If you did him a good turn, he would repay the kindness a hundred times over. Every year, he would kill and dress two roosters and deliver them with a platter of fruit to the bank manager who’d given him the loan to buy his fruit shop on Brunswick Street. I remember the dead roosters being bled off our back verandah after he had wrung their necks and cut their throats. Many other bank managers had turned him down but Papa wouldn’t give up. There wasn’t much of Papa, but he was solid and tough. He was also mentally strong. I think it’s fair to say that I am a chip off the old block.

When I first started being bullied in the schoolyard, not long off the boat from Calatabiano, I was scared to fight back. I hated Brisbane with its humid weather and frightening
thunderstorms. While my brothers hid under the bed, I pretended I wasn’t afraid of the lightning and the thunder and the golf-ball-sized hail that destroyed Papa’s tiny vegetable and herb garden out the back. What was this strange land? And what the hell were these strange creatures that screeched in the mango trees or banged across the tin roof of our rented house in Fortitude Valley? The trams rattling down Gregory Terrace past the Old Museum were almost as scary as the storms.

I had come from a quiet little village at the base of the volcano Mt Etna, where we ate snails after it rained, and chased and milked goats that ran about the streets. Papa patted me on the head when I finally snapped and belted a kid for calling me a wog and making fun of the smelly sandwiches my brothers and I were eating. Mortadella sausage and cheese didn’t win you too many friends in the playground in those days, I can tell you. The funny thing was that the kid poking fun at us was Chinese. ‘You are a good boy, Domenico,’ Papa said when he found out. I was protecting the Cacciola family honour, and that made him happy.

I sometimes laugh when I see all this anti-bullying stuff in the media. The bullying ended for me when I stuck up for my family and myself. The bullying in the police force, well, that was another matter altogether. Hitting back didn’t work. Diplomacy didn’t work either, nor did burying your head in the sand. Entrenched corruption firmly rooted under a corrupt commissioner and a government that didn’t mind participating or looking the other way required stubbornness
on a massive scale to wrench out, and luckily I had plenty of that too. You with me?

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‘Hey, Uncle Mick, I can take you! I’ve got my black belt. And you’re getting fat!’

My younger brother’s family was over for a barbecue during the Christmas holidays. For as long as I can remember, people have called me ‘Mick’. Nobody in Brisbane could ever pronounce my name, so Domenico became Dominic for a while, and then one day Dominic became Mick. I couldn’t speak English when I first came to Brisbane, and I wasn’t about to correct anybody. I just walked around the place nodding my head. ‘Si, si,’ I’d say with a smile to just about every question.

I looked my nephew up and down. He was tall and strong, in peak physical condition. I was short, overweight and well past my prime. What I had over him in spades, though, was experience. After years in the force, I hadn’t lost the curious habit of assessing the size, weight and strength of people when they entered my personal space, or were figuring on entering my personal space. Even family members. Some habits are impossible to break. Even in retirement, my mind is constantly ticking over, working out where people’s weak points are, just in case I have to arrest them. That bloke has a thick neck. Probably grab him by the throat and squeeze his windpipe rather than go for a headlock. I can tell by the way a man carries himself if he can fight; how far to stand away from him so he doesn’t get in too close and get under my guard. A legacy of arresting criminals.
A legacy of my time in Special Branch when I had to break up protests. A legacy of my childhood growing up in the Valley.

A young man in a Holden Commodore rear-ended my car at the traffic lights not so long ago. I was aged in my mid-sixties. He got out of his car and was yelling and screaming, putting his red, angry face close to mine. ‘You stupid old bastard. Why did you stop so suddenly?’ he shouted. I wasn’t too worried. I was getting my weight centred and preparing to grab him by the throat. I think he thought I was an easy target, a small Italian man with a bit of a belly. Bullies back down when they can see you are not frightened. He’ll never know how close he came to eating the pavement. That’s the Valley coming out in me.

‘What are you waiting for? C’mon, you old fart. Are you scared?’ my nephew taunted.

The whole family was watching now: uncles, aunties, grandparents, nephews and nieces, friends and cousins, my mamma and papa – Sicilians and skippys from the next generation mixing together in a typical multicultural Aussie barbecue. The conversations had stopped. A tension of sorts had replaced the jovial, animated atmosphere of the gathering. Dean Martin’s Christmas album was playing in the background, on one of Papa’s favourite songs.

‘Are you sure you want to do this?’ I said to my nephew. ‘Once we start, there’s no turning back.’

I put my stubby down and started rolling up my sleeves. My nephew followed close behind me, playing up to the rest of the family, shadow-boxing, doing a few karate kicks.
‘I’m gonna kick his arse,’ he boasted to his father.

My brother chuckled kind of nervously. I’d heard that chuckle before, as we’d gone into battle in the schoolyard or outside Papa’s fruit shop when people called us wogs or made jokes about Italy and the war. *How many gears does an Italian tank have? Just one: reverse.* One bloke used to make the sound of a bomb going off. He’d start halfway up Brunswick Street and it would explode outside the fruit shop. *EEEEEEEEEEE- kabooooom.* Mamma paid the family of one kid twenty pounds for dental bills when I knocked out his front teeth. The thing I remember most about Mamma, though, was her inviting a tough kid from the neighbourhood to our house for lunch when she had caught him throwing eggs at our house. ‘Why do you do this?’ she asked the boy as he ate spaghetti she had made for him.

‘My dad hates wogs,’ he said.

‘You are always welcome in this house,’ she told the boy. ‘You tell your father we are nice people.’

That kid would have died for Mamma from that moment on.

The barbecue was on a landing with a step down to the al fresco eating area on the back porch. As I stepped down, I swung around and with one hand grabbed a handful of my nephew’s shoulder-length black hair. Then I twisted it around and around in my fist so it became like a piece of plaited rope. Now, using two hands, I swung him onto the ground just like I was unloading sacks of potatoes with Papa from the ute parked at the Roma Street Markets at four in the morning.
The Valley

when I was a teenager. My nephew screamed, more out of surprise than pain, as he hit the bricks near the table with a thud. Seconds matter in a fight; the first few are the precious ones. Fighting fair has got absolutely nothing to do with it. On the streets, things like that don’t mean shit. You have to be first or you won’t win. Simple. That’s how it worked growing up in the Valley.

‘Give,’ I whispered in his ear.

‘No way,’ he yelled, struggling to get back on his feet. ‘I can still take you.’

Still clutching his hair, I pulled his head back and put my knees in his back. I’ve been a bodyguard to a premier, a prime minister and the pope. I’ve broken up protests and brawls too numerous to mention. I once attended a riot outside an Aussie Rules club, and as I was fighting off some of the revellers my partner told me that I had better ease up on the bloke under my arm. In all the confusion, I had forgotten about the man I’d grabbed in a headlock. He was still resting there peacefully as I was fighting off the crowd. I know how to take down people bigger than me – which is most people. (My father was once told by a factory boss at Golden Circle that Sicilians were nothing short of trouble. He replied, ‘Trouble no, but short yes.’)

Once, when I was vice president of the Italo-Australian Club, a supposed tough guy from Milan turned up in his slip-on Italian shoes and leather jacket and started slagging off Sicilians, calling us all wankers and not real Italians. He said it was a disgrace that someone like me had risen so far in the club. Then he invited me out the back to sort out
our differences, grabbing the gold chain around my neck and snapping it off. I was having an espresso, for crying out loud, reading the newspaper, and suddenly I’m dealing with this! Now, I have a pretty thick skin, and sticks and stones won’t break my bones, but breaking my gold chain was like breaking my heart. We didn’t go out the back. A couple of whacks around the chops was all it took to sort it out then and there.

‘Don’t get up,’ I said to the tough guy. ‘You’re still ahead as long as you don’t get up.’ It was something I often said to crims on the street.

Well, he didn’t listen. Later, as I escorted him out the door as gently as I could, I reminded him that Sicilians were Sicilian first and Italians second, and perhaps he should watch his manners next time. Then I patted him on the back, gave him a few tissues to clean himself up with and went back inside to finish my newspaper. An hour later, he came back in and tapped me on the shoulder. One of his eyes had closed up and his lips were swollen. *Here we go again,* I thought.

‘I heard you were a good fighter,’ he said. ‘I wanted to see if it was true.’

What an idiot! A Sicilian would never be so stupid.

One thing I learnt in the police force is that, once your knees are in someone’s back, the fight goes out of them. Young kids today with drugs dripping out their eyeballs are the exception to this rule, but in general it’s hard to do anything when you can’t breathe. It makes it so much easier to put the cuffs on. I’d done this hundreds of times to spivs and troublemakers. The university students and lecturers hated me when I shadowed...
them at the illegal ‘right to march’ rallies. Then there were the anti-uranium protesters, the union agitators and, of course, the stupid communists who never knew that half the people at their meetings were dogs, giving their secrets to the cops. These were my days in Special Branch. A meeting wasn’t over for five minutes before we knew what they had been talking about. One bloke wanted to set fire to Parliament House. A university lecturer used to throw blood on us. She was totally out of control. They weren’t all harmless.


Satisfied that the lesson was over, I walked back onto the landing area to attend to the snags and steak, which were still sizzling away. I sprinkled some beer from my stubby on the steak as some of the skippys taught me when I first started making friends outside the Italian community. Cheryl started fussing around, trying to pretend that everything was normal. My brother didn’t seem concerned. He would have done the same thing. I remember him with his slicked-back hair chasing some thugs down Brunswick Street, kicking them in the backside with his pointy shoes as they went.

All the Cacciola boys had wanted to wear jeans, like James Dean, but Mamma wouldn’t let us have them. They were what the bodgies wore, she said. Like most parents in that era in conservative Brisbane, Mamma didn’t like the bodgies and their widgie girlfriends because they danced to rock ’n’ roll music and engaged in delinquent behaviour. No son of hers would ever be seen in such disgraceful attire, because people would think the Cacciola boys were criminals. It’s
amazing when you think of it, but back in the day police such as Terry Lewis and Tony Murphy used to stop bodgies and make them take off their black shirts. Commissioner Bischof didn’t want the youth of Brisbane dressing inappropriately. The ‘bodgie squad’, as it was known, would take them to the police station and make them change outfits. They even had white shirts for them to put on. Can you imagine doing that now? Unbelievable.

I bought my first pair of jeans three years ago, after Mamma died. I was sixty-five. Mamma was a serious woman. When Papa was honoured at a Sicilian of the Year function, she wouldn’t eat the food because it wasn’t Sicilian enough. She used to say that it was important to work hard in this life so you could have a good Sicilian funeral.

‘You cheated.’ My nephew picked himself off the ground and straightened out his clothes. He was embarrassed more than he was hurt. ‘What have you proved, Uncle Mick? Hey, you haven’t proven anything.’

‘You know, I got a black belt too,’ I said as I tapped him on the chest with my tongs and gave him a friendly wink. ‘And I didn’t get it from some wanky dojo. I got my black belt on the streets. I got it in the Valley. Okay, everybody. Show’s over. Let’s eat.’
Chapter Two

Who's Who in the Zoo

You can’t imagine the fear when you’re working with people who can ruin your life and maybe even take it away. Think I’m overreacting? Ask any cop who ever got on the wrong side of the Rat Pack and the bagman Sergeant Jack Herbert. You genuinely feared for your life. And if you weren’t fearing for your life, you were fearing for your career. They had spies everywhere. The power of these crooked cops ebbed and flowed in Brisbane for over forty years through the fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties. The corruption system they built and maintained was known as The Joke. As I was to discover, there was nothing funny about The Joke if you were on the wrong side of it.

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So how did a good, honest Sicilian boy like me get tangled up in all this mess? When I graduated from the police depot on Petrie Terrace in 1966, I had not the slightest inkling that corruption was so rampant in Queensland. I’d seen the police chasing the prostitutes and pimps down Brunswick Street outside my papa’s fruit shop. They seemed to be doing a pretty good job at maintaining law and order. I’d been questioned once by a police officer for punching a bully in the nose in a fight outside the shop. The officer treated me fairly and sorted out the matter without charges being laid. He used his common sense. I was impressed. Sure, I’d heard talk about illegal casinos from some of my mates, but what city in the world doesn’t have criminals trying to put one over the cops? I’d never have believed that police here were corrupt. In Sicily maybe. I came from an area notorious for the mafia. But Australia was so squeaky clean, or so my papa said.

Before joining the police force, I’d led a particularly sheltered life. When I wasn’t at school, I was helping Papa at work. I was too exhausted from all the early mornings at the markets lifting heavy crates for anything resembling misadventure. After closing, we’d work into the night getting things ready for the next day. The fruit shop was open 365 days a year, except on a leap year, when it was open 366. Even on my wedding day, Papa worked in the shop for a few hours before rushing to the church.

The eyes of a naive young constable were soon opened to the ways of the world. I might not be the sharpest tool in the shed when it comes to books and education, but what I
did have in spades was street smarts. I could handle myself if someone tried to put one over me physically. It didn’t take long for me to find out who was who in the zoo when it came to policing the Sunshine State.

The corruption I stumbled into had been gathering strength since the fifties. The brothels, starting-price (SP) bookmakers and casinos operating illegally around Brisbane were protected by the Rat Pack, the nickname whispered by honest police officers when talking in hushed tones about Detectives Terry Lewis, Tony Murphy and Glen Hallahan. I heard they collected bribes for the commissioner, Frank Bischof. I couldn’t believe it. Surely not?

In the sixties, the unofficial headquarters for the Rat Pack and Bischof was the National Hotel in Queen Street, where they ate and drank and stuffed bribes in their pockets. Even a royal commission headed by Justice Gibbs into allegations of impropriety at the National failed to unearth anything untoward.

Emboldened by the lack of action, the Rat Pack extended The Joke further and further, reaching into the Valley and beyond until everyone in Queensland seemed to be in on it. The media were in the pockets of the police too; selected journalists were fed stories for the front page when it suited them. Those hacks new to town, from overseas or interstate, soon learnt how the game was played if they sniffed in the wrong corners. If you didn’t like the way things were done in Queensland, you left – sometimes with a helping hand.

Perhaps my time in the police would have been different if I hadn’t been posted to Licensing Branch not long out of
the depot, first as an undercover cop, then as a plain-clothes detective. This dropped me right into the cauldron. As I was about to find out, honest cops didn’t last long in Licensing. For my many faults, I did possess one upstanding family character trait: I was honest. I would never accept a bribe. Never. I would rather be dead than bring shame upon my family.

For a young cop, you can imagine how frightening it was to be called to a shoplifting incident and find the culprit to be the ex-police commissioner. Frank Bischof used to walk into shops in the Valley, take what he liked and walk out. Just like that. He had this little hessian shopping bag and sometimes he would have a dog with him on a leash. He was the picture of the doddering old pensioner, and few would have believed he was the once-feared powerful former police commissioner. People would complain that he let his dogs piss outside their shops, and I heard one story where he took his wheelbarrow down to the local golf course to steal sand out of the bunkers.

Perhaps he’d gone a little loose in the head, but no one was reining him in. If anyone dared approach him about his stealing, he would tell them that he was the ex-police commissioner and if they took it any further they could expect trouble. For the sake of a soft drink or some small items, most shopkeepers didn’t bother. People were scared enough of the police already and knew what happened if you complained.

When I ran into Bischof, he was helping himself to the soft drinks in the fridge of a fish and chip shop run by a Greek family who were friends of the Cacciola family. They knew they could trust me. ‘Hey Mick, we are sick of this old bastard
coming in here day after day and taking whatever he wants,’ the owner told me. I was only just starting to see the extent of the corruption at this point. I told Bischof to put the goods back but he ignored me.

‘Do you know who I am, sonny?’ he said.

I nodded. ‘What you’re doing is not right, sir. If you don’t return those goods at once, I’m going to arrest you.’

‘I’m the ex-police commissioner. I can take what I like,’ he said. ‘And who the hell are you anyway?’

He might have been old but Bischof still towered over me. I looked up at him and said ‘I’m Detective Cacciola from Licensing. I’m not going to warn you again.’

Bischof sighed like it was me with the problem and eventually returned the goods, grumbling to himself. ‘Your career is over, sonny’ was the last thing he said to me, but if he did complain I never heard anything of it. I should have seen the warning signs then. From that day onwards, the writing was on the wall for me.

About a year later, Bischof was charged with the same offence – shoplifting goods to the value of $6.12 – but the charges were dropped before he went to trial.

Bischof was also a mad-keen gambler, and the best part of being a corrupt police commissioner who gambles is that you can keep on betting and betting and betting, and losing and losing and losing, and none of the bookies ever call on you to pay back your debts.

Turns out Terry Lewis’s mum, who was around Frank’s vintage, also liked a flutter and took full advantage of her
son’s influence and power. Or perhaps it was the other way around. Terry’s mum was from the famous Hanlon family, well known in the racing industry. Word was that Bischof took Terry under his wing because of the connection. When I worked in the Valley Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) in the eighties, Mrs Lewis would ring up on Saturday afternoons and demand to be picked up from the races at Eagle Farm or Doomben by police officers. I did it twice and she was always tipsy after an afternoon of drinking. Instead of being grateful, she was dismissive and rude. It was really annoying to be treated like a taxi driver, and we were all complaining about it among ourselves, but who was going to complain on an official level?

One Saturday, I was patrolling the Valley looking for a break-and-enter suspect when I got a call over the two-way that Terry’s mother wanted to be picked up from Eagle Farm. Could I put aside what I was doing and give this priority? I gave the operator a piece of my mind. He replied a short time later that Mrs Lewis would be personally complaining to her son about my rude behaviour. I can’t imagine the same thing happening now. It was annoying but nobody considered it totally outlandish. In some ways, things have changed for the better.

As the seventies were dawning, what should have been a golden era for the Rat Pack turned to disaster. In 1969 the former Brisbane CIB chief Norm Bauer, who had mentored Glen Hallahan when they worked in Mt Isa together, replaced Bischof on a temporary measure. Bauer was hand-picked by
Bischof because he knew how The Joke worked and how to protect it. In those days, the police commissioner recommended to the police minister and the premier who should replace him. A few candidates would be tossed up for consideration, with a strong preference indicated for one. Bischof got Bauer the job, so it was assumed Bauer, himself nearing retirement, would have enough time to groom a replacement with a suitably grubby past.

But Police Minister Max Hodges was having none of it. A carefully orchestrated succession plan was about to be scuttled. Aware of the corruption and determined to stamp it out, Hodges surprised everyone when he headhunted former Commonwealth police commissioner Ray Whitrod for the job. Whitrod was a man of great energy and fervour who was honest to a fault and determined to rid the force of the bad apples. His only failing was that he was a terrible manager of people. From day one, he put everyone offside – the good cops and the bad cops – with his controversial ideas of police officers furthering their education with university degrees and extra study. Whitrod was passionate about reforms and introduced the Police Arts and Science Course, which consisted of seven subjects and an accelerated promotion system for police who passed a number of qualifying courses. Take it from me, his reforms were despised throughout the force. Despite his best intentions, Whitrod was a doomed man from the day he started in the job in 1970. He should never have come to Queensland.

During his tenure, Whitrod worked feverishly to break up the Rat Pack. He was the man who had set up the Australian
Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) while based in Canberra. He was an expert in counter-espionage. Hallahan was caught accepting a bribe. Lewis he exiled to Charleville. Whitrod’s Criminal Intelligence Unit (CIU) charged Murphy with perjury. Herbert was charged with corruption after a joint operation between CIU and the Licensing Branch, then headed by the uncompromising man-mountain Arthur Pitts. In four years before Pitts’s arrival, Licensing Branch had secured just three convictions for SP bookmaking. Pitts had seventeen in his first three months.

But, for all his ideas and boundless energy, Whitrod eventually lost the war. The Rat Pack ground him down. They were the ones who were more patient. Hallahan walked then retired before he could get into any more trouble. Charges against Murphy were dropped when the star witness died, possibly murdered. Herbert was found not guilty of corruption (‘I was guilty,’ he later told Fitzgerald). Pitts was outsmarted by Herbert, who ruined his reputation and career. Pitts ended up a lonely and broken man, working in the lost-property section at headquarters. Then, out of the blue, Terry Lewis was offered the role of assistant commissioner. How could cabinet promote a man known for his corrupt ways over the heads of hundreds of better qualified and senior officers? Whitrod had been backed into a corner and resigned in protest. In a way, Whitrod let all honest cops down by doing this. He abandoned the police who had supported him. He fed them to the sharks. But then, what a toll the job must have taken on him.
Then Terry Lewis went one better and was promoted to commissioner. The shift in momentum was dramatic and quick. Murphy returned from his Whitrod-imposed exile in Longreach to head Whitrod’s baby, the CIU. That was really rubbing salt into the wound. Murphy eventually became the assistant commissioner. The Rat Pack was back big time. I remember thinking, How has this been allowed to happen?

With Lewis in the top job, the Valley was transformed into the Kings Cross of Brisbane. This was a boom time for organised crime. Brunswick, Wickham and Ann streets were the places to go to find illegal gaming joints and brothels, operating right under the noses of the dishonest cops. A decrepit building at the top of Brunswick Street was known as Sin Triangle. Protection money in the millions piled up over the years. This was the day of the Bellino Brothers, Vittorio Conte, Hector Hapeta and Anne-Marie Tilley.

Meanwhile, National Party politicians such as Shady Lane and Russ Hinze, the minister for everything, became bloated on the spoils. In 1981, Hinze, then police minister, told the media, ‘I don’t know of any illegal gambling. If there’s any going on, well then of course I don’t know where it is.’ At the time, Hinze was regularly attending Bubbles Bath-House, the biggest massage parlour in Brisbane, underneath the biggest illegal casino in town, at 142 Wickham Street. I know because I saw it all.

While all this was going on, the wogs in the Valley, the crooked cops and the bent politicians became increasingly angry with yours truly, as I continually refused to play their
game. When I worked in Licensing Branch, I refused the bribes offered to me. First, the corrupt police tried to befriend me. Jack Herbert put his arm around my shoulder and told me to take the $100 that was placed on my desk every Monday morning. Some of the cops said, ‘Don’t be a fool, Mick. Take the money like the rest of us.’ The police officer who used to sit at the desk next to mine reached over one day and took the money for me, as well as pocketing his. ‘I’m paying off my house with your money,’ he said. ‘You’re a fucking idiot, Mick.’ I wanted to smack him around the chops but what would that have achieved?

Then the wogs who paid the cops tried to bribe me. Gerry Bellino, who was said to be making over a million a year from his gaming joints, offered me ten grand to gather evidence against honest cops, to be part of The Joke.

The Joke was constantly evolving and changing depending on who was in power, but here’s how it worked when I was in Licensing. Jack would ask everyone for $10 on Friday before the men went to the pub. The $10 was to place a bet at the races. On the Monday, the $100 was winnings from the race, although, of course, nobody had ever given him $10 to start with. That was what was so funny, apparently. That was the punchline of the joke. Every Monday, it was the same: ‘Take the money, Mick.’

What I always found the most difficult to deal with, though, was how telling the truth made life so much harder for me. As you can appreciate, I just couldn’t get my head around it. Honesty was a magnet that drew trouble and troublemakers to
me on a daily basis. How ridiculous that I was sometimes the odd one out in Licensing because I wouldn’t take a bribe. And the more I told the truth, the more ammunition the liars had against me. In the hands of a psychopath such as Jack Herbert or his masters in the Rat Pack, the truth is easy to manipulate. A few tweaks here and there and suddenly you’re the guilty one, fighting to clear your name. And if you don’t think like the liars, then it’s hard to stay one step ahead of them, because they’re always one step ahead of you.

I read that former police commissioner Jim O’Sullivan, appointed five years after Fitzgerald to continue cleaning up the mess, said that in the bad days it was virtually impossible to take on the corrupt cops. ‘I knew there were problems and significant problems,’ he said. ‘[But] when you know certain people are corrupt who are much senior to you and you’re rearing a young family, you keep your mouth shut if you want to earn a living.’ O’Sullivan at least had a chance to do something about it later in his career. I never got that chance because I just couldn’t keep my mouth shut. I’m an Italian, after all. I drink four or five espressos a day. I love talking. I mean, for goodness’ sake, how can I keep my mouth shut?

In the end, I could only do my job and try to earn a living. Papa always told me the only way to get ahead in this world is to work hard and not complain, so I did what I was good at: arresting criminals who were breaking the law. I tried to keep it simple. Head down, bum up. Isn’t that what you skippys say? It almost does my head in when I think back to those turbulent days before the Fitzgerald Inquiry. The more SP
bookies and prostitutes I arrested for breaking the law, the more trouble I got myself into. These were busts that were never recorded on the log sheet. They never made it to court.

One very prominent SP bookmaker who never saw the inside of a courtroom or even one conviction despite operating for over forty years had several phones in his house, and while undercover I spent a Saturday betting on the races with him – making sure, of course, that I lost. You always lost so they welcomed you back next time. Winning only drew attention to you. But, when I went to do the bust, the inspector wanted me to do it on a Tuesday morning. Do you get where I’m going with this?

When we arrived, the place was empty except for the several phone connections still in the wall. The SP bookie, dressed in a beautiful cream safari suit, was compliant, with a ‘How could you accuse me of such a crime?’ look on his face. He went out the back with the inspector and they chatted like a couple of old mates. Plenty of back-slapping. There were some references to the overzealous little Italian policeman. Back in the unmarked police car, the inspector accused me of wasting his time and having bad information.

This is what I had to deal with. This is what I couldn’t tolerate and why I decided to do my own raids using my own justices of the peace to sign search warrants, rather than going through Jack Herbert. It didn’t do me any favours or win me any medals, I can assure you. In the end, it’s why the crooks and the cops both wanted me dead. You with me? I suppose they all thought they could take me, that they could eventually
find a weakness, that they would wear me down like they did to all the other honest cops in Licensing Branch.

Herbert’s boys used to leave messages on my typewriter at work. ‘Go back to Italy, wog!’ They’d fill out dodgy applications for a transfer to tiny towns in the outback. In them, they’d write that my hobbies were working in the mafia and running pizza parlours. Ha ha. Once, there was a knife sticky-taped to the ceiling dangling above my desk, a sword of Damocles if ever there was one. That one I didn’t find quite so amusing.

I found out who were the people behind all this because the cleaning lady in the office was from the old country and saw everything. I was a plain-clothes officer in a supposedly elite unit, and the only person I could trust was a Sicilian lady with a bouffant hairdo who couldn’t speak English. We’d talk in Sicilian when no one was around. ‘I know who are the ones who leave notes on your desk,’ she’d whisper. She pointed to Herbert’s desk and several others. She died last year. I ran into her children not long after her funeral (coincidentally at a pizza joint in Ashgrove called Godfathers) and they told me that one of the greatest achievements of her life was helping me get one back on the men who were causing me so much trouble. All this trouble because I wouldn’t take a bribe. All this trouble because I was doing my job. It was exhausting but I won in the end.

A series of articles in *The Courier-Mail* newspaper by journalist Phil Dickie detailing the scale of the graft was the beginning of the end for the Rat Pack and Herbert. These
were followed by a *Four Corners* program on the ABC called ‘The Moonlight State’. The government had to act and the Fitzgerald Inquiry was born. Commissioner Lewis was eventually convicted of corruption, stripped of his knighthood and sent to jail for fourteen years. He still proclaims his innocence. When asked if he ever took a cent, he replied no. I had to laugh because it’s true. He never ‘took’ a cent. He ‘received’ plenty, though. Tony Murphy, Glen Hallahan and Jack Herbert are now dead. Mamma would be proud of me; I am the last man standing.

In the seventies, I was part of a sting where we got a Valley criminal called Louie Scognamiglio to offer an honest Criminal Intelligence Unit detective a bribe. Scognamiglio wanted information on my shifts in Licensing and when I would be starting and finishing work. He used to boil with rage when I busted up his games. Louie would always boast that Tony Murphy was one of his friends and that they were going to take care of me when the time was right. It was around this time that one of my dogs gave me the heads up: a standover man from south of the border in Griffith had been sent up north to do the business.

So it had finally come to this. A hit had been ordered. The only thing I couldn’t be sure of was who had sent him. I know this sounds ridiculous, but it could have been Tony Murphy or Jack Herbert just as much as it could have been the Italians such as Scognamiglio or any of the other spivs. They were all in bed together, so to speak.

While Lewis was enjoying the spotlight of the top job after
working so hard to get what he wanted, Murphy was more content to be kingmaker. He told Lewis who to promote and who to get rid of. He operated in the shadows and on the sidelines, and never did any of the dirty work himself. When Murphy’s men came calling, people listened. Cops listened and criminals listened.

My dog went on to tell me, ‘If something happened to you and they find you in the Brisbane River upside down, mate, the police would have a party.’

Paranoid, some might say? Ask former police commissioner Ray Whitrod if he was paranoid. He slept with a gun under his pillow when he tried to root out corruption from the force. Threatening phone calls in the middle of the night. Taxis arriving at his house that he hadn’t ordered. A truck load of gravel dumped in his front lawn. When he eventually left Queensland with his tail between his legs, the removalists mysteriously lost all the important documents from his time as commissioner. They were never found. He took on the Rat Pack and Jack Herbert and came out second best. I didn’t want that to be my fate.

Ask prostitute Shirley Brifman if she was paranoid. She had decided to give evidence against Tony Murphy in his perjury trial. A few weeks out from her appearance in court, she was found dead in her flat. The official line was an accidental overdose, but we all know that’s bullshit. There wasn’t even a coronial inquiry held into her death.

I know who did it. My dog told me Murphy had given her the option: kill yourself or your kids will pay the ultimate
price. Then she was given a lethal cocktail of drugs by Glen Hallahan and told to swallow it. At the time, Hallahan had as much to lose as Murphy if Brifman took the stand. But how could I prove it now anyway? My informant is dead. The cops responsible are dead too. When you back dangerous men into a corner like she did, you leave them no option. I’m getting old and soon I’ll be dead too. Hopefully from natural causes. All I knew back then was that I didn’t have a friend anywhere. I’d been busting games that were protected. These were games that paid the Rat Pack and the commissioner.

The bagman Jack Herbert was usually an unflappable character. He wasn’t prone to fits of rage. I got under his skin twice, good enough for him to lose his temper and clock me: once when I was deep undercover busting up one of Gerry Bellino’s games on the south side; another time when I was a plain-clothes detective in Licensing at the headquarters on Upper Roma Street. Both were great big wind-up smacks across my ear that sent me reeling sideways and had my head ringing like Big fucking Ben. The first time I couldn’t hit Herbert back because I would have blown my cover; the second time because I would have been hitting a ranking officer. No witnesses. It would have been his word against mine. I would have been out on my arse in two seconds. He wasn’t going to get rid of me that easily.

Both times Herbert was pissed off at raids being conducted on protected illegal gaming joints without his approval. These places in the Valley and scattered about the city weren’t glamorous: dark, dingy rooms hidden above commercial buildings
or run-down apartment complexes in seedy backstreets. The card games were baccarat and manila on fold-out tables, and there was the occasional roulette wheel. The beer was warm and the wine sour. Cigarette smoke choked the air. Sometimes, there was a prostitute out the back or downstairs if punters wanted a root. The buildings might have been nothing to look at but they brought in serious money, with corrupt cops skimming profits off the top, anywhere from $20,000 to $40,000 a month for the good ones. It was getting so bad that sometimes the crooked cops in Licensing would stroll into an illegal casino and just sweep all the cash off the tables into their pockets. They’d say to the gamblers, ‘This game is illegal’, but then no one would be charged. The cops would walk out and the gambling would continue. Even when the Fitzgerald Inquiry started in 1987 this was still going on. I know it sounds unbelievable but it’s true.

Although he was never the inspector in charge, hardly anything happened in Licensing Branch without Herbert’s knowledge, and he reacted either violently or with vicious threats when it did. He wasn’t one for shouting or waving his arms about; he was a whisperer. He’d put his thin lips close to your ear so no one else could hear and threaten to put you in cement boots and toss you into the Brisbane River. He whispered this to me more than a few times. He was sneaky. Once, he hid on top of a row of lockers at the station to find out who my informant was because I was busting up too many protected games. He must have been up there for hours. He was patient. He offered my informant double what I was
paying. Another of my informants he ran out of town after threatening to break his legs.

Even when Herbert left the force on medical grounds (he had a few sunspots, which he told everyone was cancer), he still pulled the strings behind the scenes. He still collected protection money from SP bookmakers and brothels. The bagman made sure everyone danced to his tune, and he had the cash to grease the wheels. When he was in the force, he would shout the cops from Licensing on Friday nights at the Cork and Fork pub or the Transcontinental Hotel in George Street. No one had to put their hands in their pockets. I refused to drink with them. These men were poor company. It amused them to surround women and grope them. They thought that was great sport.

When Herbert couldn’t turn me using bribes, he used more subtle tactics: a loaded gun was pulled on me by one of his men and shoved in my face. Then my family was threatened. I was followed home, placed under surveillance, my phone bugged. Two tattooed goons visited my younger brother in the middle of the night. They were going to cut up his family if I didn’t leave the force. There were phone calls with heavy breathing, some to my wife, telling her I was rooting prostitutes and fathering illegitimate children; all kinds of filth.

When that didn’t work, Herbert tried to blackmail me. He’d invited me out to dinner at the Crest Hotel with his wife, Peggy. It was meant to be a peace offering of sorts, a dinner where we were going to sort out our differences. At the table, he introduced me to a young blonde who made a
point of sitting close beside me. Back at work a few days later, he slid a large manila envelope on my desk, which contained a black and white picture of the blonde and myself. ‘I’m going to send this to your wife,’ he said. Herbert always had this funny look on his face. You never knew if he was grinning at you or grimacing. On this occasion, I got the meaning clear enough.

What he didn’t say when I opened the envelope and saw the photo was that the blonde was his daughter. I found that out later from another honest officer, who left Licensing soon after. ‘Wow, that’s a new low, even for Jack,’ the officer said. ‘He must be getting desperate.’ A man who would use his own daughter for blackmail is a man without scruples. Do you know what I’m saying? I told him that he could send the photo if he wanted. I didn’t give a toss. My wife trusted me. She knew what was going on at work.

In the end, Herbert couldn’t figure out how to break me. He couldn’t understand why I wouldn’t back down. At first, he’d thought I was a perfect fit. Newly married, mortgage, kids on the way: the kind of target that experience had taught him was ripe to tempt with easy money. Plus, I was Sicilian, and everyone thought that if you were Sicilian you must be a gangster, or at least wanting to be a gangster. ‘C’mon, Mickey. Stop being silly,’ Herbert would say. He’d put his arm around you and make you feel like he was your best mate. ‘Just take the money.’ I saw him do it to others who might have made terrific police officers. But once you took a kickback, no matter how small, he had you for life. You were a Herbert man.
Some of Herbert’s men used to invite me on fishing trips out to Moreton Bay, which always raised my suspicions. Sometimes, I wonder what would have happened to me if I had gone. Why did they invite me when they didn’t like me? I was always reminded, too, of Herbert’s threats of the cement boots and having me silenced permanently.

So you can see that the list of people who wanted me dead was long and varied – a veritable who’s who in the zoo of crooked cops and criminals in Queensland before Fitzgerald lifted the lid on organised crime in the Sunshine State. There’d been threats before. Just threats. I’d never taken them too seriously. But I was listening now.