

# ICE CREAM BANDITS



by  
**ROBERT SEDLACK**

I didn't set out to create a murder mystery. If I had, I would have set it in a foggy Maritime harbour town or a dusty farmhouse in Saskatchewan, not Coquitlam.

I didn't set out to find a conspiracy. If I had, I would have looked in Los Angeles, or Dallas, or Memphis, not Vancouver.

Three years ago my father telephoned and told me that George, a friend of his from Burnaby, had called with a great story that I, a screenwriter, might find interesting. The story was about a Vancouver policeman living in Coquitlam who murdered his family then took his own life. He had been linked to a scandal that involved several other Vancouver police. These police officers had pulled off some of the biggest bank robberies in Vancouver history. All this took place in the 60s.

Months later, driving back to Los Angeles from Calgary via Vancouver, I went to the library to see if there was anything to George's story. I had found nothing in a Calgary library and I was worried he might have confused his own story with some hard-boiled detective novel he might have read.

It didn't take long to discover that George was dead on. It was all there, in a file folder stuffed with old newspaper articles that smelled like my grandfather's basement. These Vancouver cops had robbed banks. Big banks. Big hauls. And the one cop had killed his family, and it was a big family, a wife and six children.

It was too good to be true. Tragic, yes, but compelling. Even scandal-saturated Americans would find something intriguing about cops robbing banks. And these were Canadians. Canadians weren't supposed

to do really bad things. Certainly not Canadian cops. And certainly not back in the 1960s.

I read and copied every article I could find, and when I got back to Los Angeles, I started thinking. A premise began to emerge. I focused on the detectives who were assigned to catch these bandits. Maybe Harrison Ford could play one of them. Detectives always made good heroes.

The articles named names, so I started calling. My long-distance phone bills grew fat as I consumed endless hours listening to stories, anecdotes and recollections from retired Vancouver cops. They were good storytellers and they chewed on my ear for hours at a time.

After about a month, one thing became really clear. The Vancouver detectives were not as heroic as I had hoped. They were duds. They drank too much. And besides, they never actually caught the robbers. The Edmonton police grabbed one, and the RCMP nabbed the other.

No, it wasn't the detectives who grabbed my attention. It was the bandits, the bank-robbing cops. They had memorable, distinct personalities. They had colorful nicknames: Hogue the Rogue, Noisy, Hardway Harrison. As a group they were called The Terrible Three. One of them read, and understood, Robert Burns' poetry. Another planted petunias and masterminded the robberies. But their story starts with the third, Leonard Hogue, the cop who killed his family.

## **Innocent beginnings**

**T**he year was 1954. Police Chief Walter Mulligan was slowly dragging the Vancouver police department into a slop pit of scandal that would em-

barrass the city and ruin lives. That was just about the time that Leonard Hogue was due to arrive.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Hogue had grown up in poverty. But a tough, working-class upbringing had left a hunger in his gut. Hogue left Winnipeg in 1954 with his wife, Irene, and their first two children, Larry and Noreen. Like Steinbeck's Joad family, the Hogue's drove west seeking pretty white houses and luscious abundance.

As soon as Hogue got his family settled in Vancouver he was out the door looking for work in his wedding suit, the only one he owned. At a construction site he was told there was work but if he went home to change someone else might get hired. So Hogue hung his jacket on a nail, rolled up his sleeves and grabbed a hammer. He was no working-class hero but he was never accused of being lazy.

Hogue eventually decided he wanted to be a police officer. He graduated from training in 1956 as the pistol shot champion. He also emerged with a couple of friendships that would seal his fate.

David Harrison had become a police officer for the same reason as Hogue; it paid well. Harrison had grown up in Vernon. At age 13, he found his father dead, hanging in the garage. At 16, he crashed his car into a bridge in Montana. His mother was in the back seat. She died a few days later.

Scarred for life, he lived wildly and, at age 21, scattered his meagre inheritance recklessly and fast. His last purchase was a black 1954 low-rider Studebaker, in which he roared out of Vernon seeking bright lights, prostitutes and brawls. He arrived in Vancouver with a nose for trouble and a forged high school diploma that he used to gain entry into the police

academy.

John McCluskie graduated from the police academy with Hogue and Harrison. He would be a factor in Hogue's destiny, but it was his brother-in-law, Joe Percival, who would figure most prominently.

Percival graduated from rookie training in the class ahead of Hogue after a stint as a guard at Oakalla prison in Burnaby. He had come over from Scotland with a reputation for being good with his hands, having built tiny ships in bottles. Described as a quiet man, Percival was thin-lipped and unassuming, but according to Harrison, he was the smartest and most cold-blooded guy he'd ever met. As Harrison said, "I ought to know, I been on capers with him. You've never seen anything like it."

Police records describe Hogue's job performance as "satisfactory." He won note for the arrest of a murder suspect on a bus when he was a patrolman. But Hogue eventually was assigned to a position at the city jail.

It was an unwritten policy in the Vancouver police department (one that was harshly criticized years later) that officers suspected of wrong-doing were assigned to work in the city jail so that they could better keep an eye on them. In Hogue's case, they were right to be suspicious.

The size of his family increased every year, reaching six children by the end of 1961. Hogue had dreamed of a castle. He had ended up with a small house described by friends as a shack. The generous wage that had enticed Hogue to become a Vancouver cop was no longer enough.

## Ice Cream Bandits

The beginning of Hogue's life of crime, and many other incidents reported here, were recounted by Harrison years later in conversations taped secretly by undercover RCMP. On patrol late one night in the early 1960s, Hogue and Percival noticed that a Dairy Queen had been left unlocked. They entered and, while looking around, found a small sack of money in the freezer. Instead of turning it in, they kept it for themselves.

They eventually discovered that it was a policy for Dairy Queen franchises to leave the day's receipts in a bucket in the freezers. This was considered safer than having employees transport the cash after dark. But soon this money started disappearing.

The police became frustrated at their fruitless attempts to nab these "ice cream bandits" and eventually recommended to Dairy Queen that they discontinue their freezer policy.

It was Hogue, Harrison said, who had designed and cut the metal piece used to jimmy the door locks at the Dairy Queens. The pickings were easy but they were also slim.

Around the same time, police were investigating a rash of robberies of expensive homes in the Vancouver area, many belonging to people who had notified police they were going on vacation. Although the names of culprits were never made public, at least seven Vancouver police officers were implicated but never charged, or even suspended.

In November 1961, a more serious robbery took place, when 14 guns were stolen from Hunter's Sporting Goods on Kingsway. Harrison said those guns were

subsequently used in all the robberies involving him, Hogue and Percival.

On a rainy night in 1962, the fate of Leonard Hogue took another dramatic turn. According to Harrison, Hogue and Percival came over to his apartment while he was cooking up a 39-cent steak to discuss business. Harrison had grown weary of the risks of being an ice cream bandit and he told them so: “We could take a 40-dollar fall. There’s only one way to make money ...”

And with that, Harrison cocked his hand like a revolver and said, “Put em up.” The Terrible Three were born.

## **Bank jobs**

**P**reparations for the first bank robbery began. It wasn’t difficult for them to borrow a police two-way radio, which would prove useful for creating diversions.

Harrison was chosen as the driver. He was responsible for stealing the cars they would use in the robberies. Hogue’s responsibility was to confirm when the stolen cars were off the police “hot sheet,” information he had access to because of his job at the city jail.

The first robbery, of a Bank of Commerce on Kingsway in Burnaby, took place Christmas Eve, 1962. It went off without a hitch. The bank had just received the receipts from Simpson’s Sears across the street after it’s busiest day of the year. Bank employees were sitting around counting the money when, according to Harrison, Percival and Hogue entered wearing long trenchcoats and ski masks from the Hunter’s Sporting Goods heist. The robbery took about a min-

ute and a half. The bandits netted \$106,000 (about \$600,000 by today's standards), a far cry from the small change they were getting at the Dairy Queens.

## **The good life**

**W**ith his cut from the robbery, Hogue had enough money to begin a life that he and Irene had dreamed about while walking under the bright stars of those cold, winter nights in Winnipeg.

The size of the house Hogue bought and its location in an affluent section of Coquitlam raised a few eyebrows among friends, but he didn't care. He finally had his fairy-tale castle. And the kids didn't have to sleep three to a room. How about that.

In 1963, Harrison joined the Nelson police force, where his tough tactics on the beat soon earned the respect of the passive, small-town force, and of the criminals who had been exploiting them. In November that year, Percival quit the Vancouver force and went into real estate, a good cover for the money Harrison claimed he was making from robberies. Hogue was the only one left on the Vancouver force.

It's not clear why Hogue agreed to continue the crime spree. He had what he wanted and to rob more banks would be risking everything. Perhaps, like Harrison, he had become addicted to the rush of doing a score. As Harrison described: "There was nothing else like it. It was like pure ether."

## **The big heist**

**T**he Bank of Commerce robbery had gone well, but the next two were disasters. On June 22, 1964, Hogue was knocked down by a good-samaritan credit manager in the course of a robbery at Simp-



son-Sears, and dropped a Loomis bag containing \$88,000. On Jan. 15, 1965, under the cover of thick fog, the Bank of Nova Scotia in Dunbar was robbed. The driver panicked – according to Harrison it was McCluskie – and hit the car horn too early after he thought passersby were getting suspicious. The haul was only \$13,000.

Amid rising suspicions that police officers may have been involved in some of the city's bank robberies, the bandits prepared for the final act of their robbery spree. It was going to be big enough that they wouldn't have to rob another bank. Through a source at the Canadian Pacific Railway yards on West Pender, they were made aware of some big money shipments that left the yards periodically. This was old money taken out of circulation by the banks for shipment to Ottawa to be destroyed.

The daylight robbery on Feb. 11, 1965, was smooth and professional. Disguised as a CPR policeman, a mail carrier, a CPR detective and a train engineer, Hogue, Harrison, Percival and McCluskie took all of five minutes to drive away with \$1.2 million (almost \$6 million in 1999 dollars) in three plastic shipping containers.

Harrison was dropped off at his own car, and he sped back to Nelson, singing all the way. He had not see any of the stolen money. He trusted the others. He arrived in Nelson at 3 a.m. still buzzing from the huge score, and adjourned to an all-night gambling club to plat cards.

He was in for the shock of his eventful life when the morning papers began circulating through the club. The robbery was front-page news, but the biggest story, which the other robbers had undoubtedly discovered, was the condition of the money.

Unknown to the bandits, the money had been mutilated for security reasons prior to its delivery to the CPR yards. All the bills had been drilled with three half-inch holes.

According to Harrison, he tried to persuade Percival to get rid of the money. But he refused. It was still legal tender. Percival was good with his hands, and he noticed that whoever had drilled the money had not drilled through the same point every time. He began the laborious task of cutting sections from some bills and patching them on to others with clear adhesive tape.

For a while, it worked. They all began passing the patched money.

But Percival's chance encounter with a smart bartender in Edmonton on April 17, 1965, brought the rollicking ride of the ice-cream bandits to a screeching halt.

Percival had paid for a beer with a patched \$20 bill. He got his change, drank his beer, and ordered another. He pulled another patched twenty and paid for the second beer. The bartender thought it was odd that Percival was paying with a fresh twenty so he took it into a back room and held it up to the light. As the ceiling light danced off the pieces of tape on the twenty-dollar bill, the fates of many people hung in the balance.

Percival and a friend who had been helping him pass the repaired bills were arrested within half an hour, outside the hotel bar.

The next morning, on Easter Sunday, Hogue was busy booking prisoners at the city jail when he got

word of the arrests. Early in the afternoon he was called into Inspector McGregor's office and asked he had called John McCluskie earlier in the day. Hogue answered that he had, to tell McCluskie his brother-in-law, Percival, had been arrested.

Hogue must have been rattled. He had made one call, and the names were being connected: Percival, Hogue McCluskie ...

That night passed uneventfully at the Hogue house, but for a big Easter dinner when Hogue received a couple of phone calls, according to a guest there. The next morning on his way to work, at about 6:30 a.m., Hogue drove the family's second car, a Volkswagen, into a railing on Highway 401 near North Road, an incident later seen by some as a failed suicide attempt.

Hogue suffered only a 2.5-centimetre cut above his right eye. He received six stitches at Royal Columbia Hospital in New Westminster hospital and released. He then called in sick to work. It was about 7:30 a.m.

Nothing is known about Hogue's activities from that point until about seven hours later, at about 2:30 p.m., when an RCMP constable stopped by the Coquitlam house to question him about the accident. The conversation lasted about 10 minutes, but for some reason the details were not pursued at the coroner's inquest. It is not known how Hogue drove home from the hospital - the Volkswagen was a wreck, and the family station wagon was in the shop for repairs.

Nor is it known how he drove back into Vancouver to arrive at a Tilden U-Drive office at about 5:30 p.m., where he rented a 1965 Meteor station wagon. But his next appointment, 30 minutes later, clearly indicates he must have had murder on his mind.

## **The murder weapon**

**W**ithin hours of the discovery of eight bodies in the Hogue home on Wednesday, April 21, CPR police officer Don McLeod (not his real name) came forward to tell police that the .357 magnum found at the crime scene was his gun. He told police he had lent it to Hogue, whom he had known socially for about a year, when Hogue arrived at his house on West 45th in Vancouver around 6 p.m. the previous Monday evening wanting to “try it out” at a shooting range.

In September, three months after the coroner’s inquest, it would be revealed that McLeod had other connections – to Percival, with whom he had been a prison guard at Oakalla in 1955, and with the CPR robbery. In secretly taped testimony, which led to his eventual arrest and conviction for his part in the robbery, Harrison told undercover RCMP officers about a “CPR cop” who had tipped off the gang about the money shipment. Later, in discussing the Hogue murders, he says: “He used a magnum. You know what kills me, you know whose gun he used? The CPR cop’s.”

Linking McLeod with the gang puts a whole new spin on his testimony about the gun, perhaps even invalidates it. Only one thing is known for certain: McLeod’s gun was used to wipe out the Hogue family.

## **Noises in the night**

**T**here were three witnesses to what happened in the Hogue house that night, but two of them were the Hogue’s dog, Cindy, locked out of the house in the backyard, and the family’s hamster. The third,

Reginald Longland, was next door on Harbour Drive visiting his daughter. He fell asleep to the sound of hard rain on the roof of the house.

Sometime after midnight, Longland was awakened by a series of noises that he thought had come from the heating ducts. More noises followed. These sounded like “a car backfiring.” Unimpressed with this interruption, Longland fell back asleep.

## **Scene of the crime**

**O**n Tuesday afternoon, with suspicions raised about why assistant jailer Len Hogue hadn't reported for work, a Vancouver police inspector was sent to the house at 1796 Harbour Drive in Coquitlam. No one answered the front door and, looking through the back door window, he reportedly saw nothing amiss. The next day, however, with Hogue still missing, the inspector returned to the house with the jail's staff sergeant, Bert Mutch. Getting down on their knees, they peered through a basement window into the den. There on the floor they saw five-year-old Darlene Hogue, shot through the back of the head.

They rushed to a neighbour's house and called the RCMP – it was their jurisdiction, it would be their investigation.

Two RCMP officers arrived at the scene. They found no signs of forced entry. They forced open the back door and immediately found the body of eight-year-old Raymond in a bathroom, with a bullet exit wound in the middle of his forehead. In a utility room next to the bathroom they found Cliff, also eight, also with a bullet exit wound in his forehead.

In the dining room the men found a basket of Easter eggs the children had excitedly collected Sunday

morning.

Upstairs in the first bedroom, they found the body of 14-year-old Larry on the top of a bunk bed. He had been shot twice, once through the top of his head, once through the back of his head.

Further down the hall in the master bedroom, they found the body of Irene Hogue, face down on the bed, shot through the back of the head. Len Hogue's body was on the floor, dead from a bullet that entered his left temple and exited his right. The gun was on the floor beside his left hand.

On a small bed in a room across the hall was three-year-old Richard, shot through the back of the head. The room beside Richard's was the girls'. The two beds were slept in but empty.

The men proceeded to the basement and, in the room where the Vancouver police had spotted Darlene's body, they found 12-year-old Noreeen, also shot through the back of the head.

The only survivor inside the house was the Hagues' caged pet hamster, nervously running on the wheel, sending a continuous squeaking through silent rooms.

On June 3, 1965, a coroner's inquest returned a verdict on the deaths of the eight members of the Hogue family. Based upon evidence from the RCMP, Vancouver police and the coroner's office, the six-man jury concluded that Leonard Hogue had, for reasons unknown, murdered his family and taken his own life.

## Nagging doubts

Over the course of my research – the phone calls, the newspaper clippings, the trips to Vancouver, the poring over transcripts of undercover police conversations and coroner’s inquest testimony, the angry hours spent sitting in my car in long lineups at the Peace Arch crossing – through it all there were persistent, intermittent voices saying Hogue didn’t commit the murders.

Most of these voices belonged to Hogue’s extended family. Some were his coworkers at the city jail. And a few were retired cops who had heard “other versions.” At first I dismissed these quiet protests. They just couldn’t accept the fact that Len, swell guy that he was, could have done what he did.

But without much enthusiasm, as the numbers of people protesting his innocence started to grow, I began to consider the possibility that Hogue hadn’t done it.

I turned again to the documents I had obtained from law courts in Vancouver and New Westminster. I re-read the coroner’s inquest with a more critical eye.

There was no doubt about it. Something was wrong. Things didn’t add up. But I refused to take my own word for it. I needed an expert.

The first thing I noticed about Dr. Thomas Noguchi were his eyes. They glowed with excitement and curiosity, not a quality I expected from a man who was supposed to be retired from a lengthy career carving up, measuring and weighing body parts of the dead. But following a five-minute phone conversation, it was precisely this curiosity that led him to a small coffee house in Los Angeles to learn more about these

Vancouver murders that took place many years ago.

The second thing I noticed about Noguchi were his steady, wrinkled hands, hands that had invaded the inner recesses of some of America's most celebrated public figures.

From Marilyn Monroe and Janis Joplin to Robert Kennedy – Noguchi performed all the major autopsies as head of the Los Angeles County coroner's office.

As he sipped a black coffee with no sugar, he whispered that if there was one recurring theme during his years of service, it was this: "There are three groups of people you can never completely trust when the murder of one of their own is involved: politicians, celebrities and policemen."

It was difficult to sit with Noguchi and not ask silly questions about this celebrated corpses. But he would have none of it. He was not there to discuss Robert Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe. He was there to talk about fingerprints, blood evidence and Hogue's autopsy report.

Noguchi began by pointing out the lack of material evidence linking Hogue to the murders. There was plenty of circumstantial evidence and it was fairly persuasive. But all the RCMP really had was eight dead bodies, one gun and ballistically linked ammunition.

It's what they didn't have that bothered Noguchi. The RCMP didn't have fingerprints on the gun, a fact confirmed by them at the coroner's inquest. They also had no fingerprints on the shells that Hogue allegedly loaded into the gun.



The RCMP also presented no evidence of blood on the barrel of the gun or on Hogue's trigger hand. Using a straw and some coffee, Noguchi demonstrated what happens when a bullet fired from a powerful handgun – like a .357 magnum – enters a human skull at close range. He flicked the coffee on to the table and explained that because this gun was used to kill eight people at close range, it should have had blood spray evidence on the barrel and on Hogue's left hand.

Noguchi next turned his attention to the autopsy reports. He pointed out that the skull damage descriptions for seven of the victims were consistent: “the skull was extensively fractured.” And they should have been. The victims were all shot with the same weapon at approximately the same range. But the description of the skull damage suffered by Leonard Hogue was decidedly different – and it shouldn't have been. The autopsy report read: “The entire skull was smashed.”

Noguchi was troubled by the use of the word “smashed.” He explained that bullets fracture a skull, as described in the reports for the seven other victims. A “smashed” skull is one that has received a blow from a blunt instrument, such as a baseball bat, a nightstick or a crowbar. Noguchi theorized that Hogue might have been struck over the head and was then shot through the temple to make it look like he had committed suicide.

Noguchi asked many questions about the robbery gang that Hogue had belonged to and whether any of them might have had a motive. It was a relevant question, he said, because it's a known fact there's not a cop alive who wants to end up in a maximum security prison.

Perhaps Hogue had declared he would turn himself in after Percival's arrest. Or perhaps there had been a dispute among the gang members over what to do with the stolen CPR money. It would certainly explain why there was no sign of forced entry into the house. If the killer or killers were from Hogue's robbery gang, they would not have needed to crash through a window; they would simply have walked up to the front door and knocked.

The fact that Hogue belonged to a robbery gang was something the coroner's inquest jury would never know. Every conceivable effort was made to ensure that the jury would not consider "the rumours" about Hogue that were flying fast and furious in Vancouver at the time.

The men who conducted the inquest defended this silence, explaining they were not looking to further damage Hogue's reputation - an explanation that assumed, of course, that there was any damage left to inflict upon a dead man accused of killing his wife and six children.

## **Mysterious movements**

If Noguchi's discovery of inconsistencies and missing evidence seemed straight out of a Quincy episode, then the events of Hogue's final day seemed better suited to an Agatha Christie mystery.

Any analysis of Hogue's final day must be made with the awareness that he was not the only bank-robbing policeman whose freedom was threatened. From the time that Len Hogue heard that Joe Percival had been arrested, Sunday, April 18, to the time of his death Monday night, he, along with David Harrison and John McCluskie, would have been in a state of

panic. Phone calls would have been made that Sunday night. Plans formulated. Decisions made about what to do with the stolen CPR money. Emotions would have been riding high.

We'll never know what was discussed Sunday night, but what is known of the following day's activity deserves scrutiny.

To many of those familiar with the Hogue case the car accident that Monday morning was a failed suicide attempt. What's not clear is why a man accused of slamming a .357 bullet into his left temple would earlier in the day choose the much less reliable method of angling his car into a railing and then hitting his brakes before impact (leaving eight-foot skid marks).

The possibility remains that someone else forced him off the road, an event that may have gone unnoticed in the early hours on an empty freeway. But it didn't go unnoticed to Hogue. He told Northwest Towing Company driver Al Kerr (who hauled away the wrecked car and later called Hogue at his Coquitlam home to ask him what happened, "I think I was hit by another car."

Constable Gary Day of the RCMP, who was the first officer at the scene, stated in an interview recently that none of the witnesses to the accident saw another car. He could, however, find no apparent reason for the accident. The coroner's inquest never asked the investigating officer, a Constable McLaren, what Hogue said had happened to cause the accident.

Then there's the matter of the gun. If the story Harrison told to undercover police about Don McLeod's link to the robbery gang is accurate, one thing is certain: Hogue did not go to McLeod's house to talk

about shooting ranges, as McLeod testified. A member of their robbery gang had just been arrested, an obvious topic of conversation – that, and what to do with the money.

The RCMP located Hogue's rented station wagon after the murders at Ray's Chevron station about a half a mile from the Hogue house. Nobody attempted to explain why Hogue abandoned his car and walked all that way to his house in the pouring rain before beginning his murderous rampage.

However, the RCMP were able to say that Hogue had driven 113 miles in the short time he had operated the vehicle. They found a blunt instrument, a crowbar, under the front seat. They also found traces of clay in the rear deck area and the strong indication that something heavy had been moved.

## **Where's the money?**

**T**he Vancouver police were convinced that Hogue had moved the stolen CPR money that night. What they didn't know was where it had been moved to.

Hogue owned some property up the Fraser Valley at Hatzic Lake. Initially, police thought of this as an ideal hiding place for the stolen loot, but they dismissed it as being too far away to be consistent with the station wagon's final odometer reading.

On a recent trip to Vancouver I retraced Hogue's known movements that night from where the Tilden office used to be, to where Don McLeod used to live, to 1793 Harbour Drive, to the Biltmore Hotel (where Hogue and McLeod met briefly again that evening), to Hatzic Lake, and finally, to where Ray's Chevron used to be. The total mileage for the journey was 113.

The Vancouver police were so convinced that Hogue had moved the money they made numerous public appeals to help recover it. It wasn't until two months later that Percival, out on bail and having fled to Scotland, directed the police by phone to a garage in Victoria, where the money was finally located. The garage was rented after the murders, so if Hogue had possession of the money on the night he died then someone else, someone known to Percival, had contact with Hogue and the money on the night of the murders.

If a dispute between Hogue and the other members of the robbery gang erupted it makes sense that the conflict involved the source of their undoing: the stolen money. And if Hogue was planning to turn himself and the money in, then getting rid of him would only solve half the problem. Irene probably knew as much as he did by the time the skies opened up that Monday night. And then there were the children ...

## **The clincher**

**F**or the people who knew Hogue, there remained one compelling piece that didn't fit his profile as a deranged killer. And it had nothing to do with a robbery gang, lack of fingerprints and blood evidence, a smashed skull, a mysterious car crash, a suspicious witness who loaned the murder weapon, a puzzling 113 miles on a rented car abandoned so far from home, or the fact that Len was a swell guy who'd never slaughter his family. It was much simpler than that.

The killer was left-handed. Hogue was right-handed.

It's one thing for people to say that Len Hogue was right-handed. It's quite another to see it. Irene's two

sisters, Willeen Price, who lives in White Rock, and Georgina Hollingsworth, now living in Alberta, have always maintained Len's innocence. Georgina provided home movies of the Hogue family that show various family activities. There is footage of Len Hogue throwing a snowball and shaving with his right hand. The movies do not prove that Len never fired a gun with his left hand but they do establish firmly that he was right-handed.

Perhaps the most compelling witness to the mood of those close to Hogue shortly after the murders was Fran Hobson, who worked as a nurse at the Vancouver city jail.

Almost 34 years later, Hobson still struggles to put her finger on what was wrong in the city jail after the murders. It wasn't just grief over the loss of their popular jailer. It was an ominous mood of silence that descended upon the staff, an unspoken sense that you weren't to discuss it.

To Hobson, and many others who knew Hogue, April 19, 1965, remains a flashpoint in their lives. But there was one person who seemed more affected by the murders than anyone else at the city jail: her boss, Staff Sergeant Burt Mutch.

Hobson remembers that Mutch was never the same again. He knew Hogue, he was one of the two Vancouver police officers who discovered the bodies, and he was privy to details of the investigations by the RCMP and Vancouver police when they descended upon the city jail.

In the weeks that followed the murders, Hobson noticed him often, standing alone, lost in his own thoughts.

On one occasion she finally decided to say something to him. Mutch was standing in the medical room, shoulders slumped, with his back to her.

“He couldn’t have done it, Sgt. Mutch,” she said. “He couldn’t have killed those children.”

Without turning, in a low, trembling voice, Mutch replied, “It wasn’t him. It was the wrong hand.” As if realizing he’d said something he shouldn’t, he took a deep breath, turned without looking and walked out the door. The subject was never brought up again.

## **Last words**

**D**efinitive proof of Len Hogue’s guilt or innocence of murder may never be found, but a clue lies two metres underground in a small graveyard in Coquitlam. It is there that his skull rests, fractured by a bullet only or smashed by a blunt instrument. If the weapon was the crowbar found in his station wagon, perhaps there are traces of rust in his skull. Only a forensic examination could say for sure.

I’m not sure I’d want to be standing at the cemetery when the digger was ripping up the dirt to get at the casket. I might feel like a grave robber. But I’m pretty sure if Hogue didn’t pull the trigger he’d welcome the dirt, and even the wrinkled, invasive hands of a determined Thomas Noguchi.

It would be nice to think that such a gruesome procedure could solve the mystery, and that Hogue’s family and friends could have their load lightened a bit, knowing that Len was a hell of a bank robber, but not a murderer.

**Leonard Hogue** died in April, 1965.

**David Harrison** was sentenced to 15 years for the CPR robbery and 12 years for the Bank of Commerce robbery. As a former police officer he was offered, but refused, protective custody for his prison term. Within three months other inmates were requesting protective custody from him. He was paroled in June 1970 and died in 1995 of natural causes.

**Joe Percival**, after being released on bail the day of the Hogue funerals, escaped to Scotland. He received a \$60,000 reward from an insurance company for telling the Vancouver police where the stolen CPR money was hidden, but later returned it after he was nabbed by Scottish police and brought back to Canada for trial. The judge dropped an armed robbery charge for lack of evidence but he was convicted for possession of stolen money and sentence to four year. He is still alive.

**John McCluskie**, Percival's brother-in-law, was suspended from the Vancouver police force shortly after the Hogue murders. He was never charged in connection with the robberies, and is now deceased.

**Don McLeod** (an alias) lost his job as a CPR policemen shortly after the Hogue murders. He was never charged in connection with any events in this story. His whereabouts at this time are not known.

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