

Wah Mee

By Todd Matthews

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CHAPTER ONE

"What's happened has happened. Most people don't talk about it anymore. It goes away. In time, the scars fade."

-- A Chinatown resident commenting on the killings at the Wah Mee Club

If you want to know the whereabouts of the worst mass murder in the history of Seattle, listen for the frantic squawks of exotic birds from the pet store popular with the area's children. Look for the attractive Chinese bakery. You'll have to pass the family-owned butcher-and-market-a store known for issuing one of the largest numbers of Lotto tickets in the state of Washington. Look for the pagoda-shaped payphones. Walk along South King Street in Seattle's Chinatown and make a right onto Maynard Alley South. Keep an eye out for the orange, fish-shaped windsock stretching across the width of the alley. Oddly enough, nestled among these seemingly quaint points of interest is the entrance to the Wah Mee Club -- a historic, Chinatown gambling club, and the site of a brutally horrific piece of Pacific Northwest history.

The Wah Mee Club was once a romantic, classy enclave where patrons -- the bulk of whom consisted of semi-affluent restaurant owners and businessmen and -women in the Chinese community -- danced to music played on a nickelodeon. It was a place where hard-working Chinese Americans spent their off-hours drinking and sharing stories. And it was undoubtedly a place where money changed hands. Lots of money. The Wah Mee was host to some of the highest-stakes gambling that could be found in Seattle and, for that matter, the entire Pacific Northwest. Winners went home with tens of thousands of dollars after a single night of gambling. Beat cops supplemented their income by permitting a tolerance policy that let illegal gambling operate in the city. The exclusive, Chinese-only members of the Wah Mee Club were allowed to preserve an integral part of their culture -- gambling -- all the while profiting police officers on the side.

The Wah Mee thrived -- as did most clubs in Chinatown, and along nearby South Jackson Street. Historian and writer, Paul de Barros, comments, "Imagine a time when Seattle, which now rolls up its streets at 10 o'clock, was full of people walking up and down the

sidewalk after midnight. When you could buy a newspaper at the corner of 14th and Yesler from a man called Neversleep -- at three in the morning. When limousines pulled up to the 908 Club all night, disgorging celebrities and wealthy women wearing diamonds and furs. When 'Cab daddy' stood in front of the Rocking Chair, ready to hail you a cab -- that is, if he knew who you were."

Seattle Times reporter Paula Bock, commenting on Chinatown's South King Street, observed, "[South] King Street, in its prime, must have been a happening kind of place, what with chickens squawking and Cantonese opera screeching....[South] King Street was different. Its buildings squared their shoulders to the street, proud and permanent. Its sidewalks were crowded with cannery workers and waiters and lottery runners come to find luck. [South] King Street was dominated by men back then because immigration laws kept most Chinese women out of this country. Male laughter floated down from the wooden balconies. Male gamblers swelled the taverns with their sweet sake breath....Whatever was happening was happening on [South] King Street."

The more popular bottle clubs in Chinatown were the New Chinatown, Congo Club, Blue Rose, 411 Club, the Ubangi, and the Wah Mee. All were hot spots for dancing, music, gambling, and booze. Many of these clubs dated back to the early-1920s.

Entrepreneur and Asian legend Danny Woo owned the New Chinatown, located less than a block from the Wah Mee, on Sixth Avenue South and South Main Street. The Club attracted and promoted much bootlegging. The outside featured a neon bowl of steaming soup, with two "chopsticks" poking out from the bowl. Frequented by sailors and prostitutes, the New Chinatown was known as a place for the occasional brawl. Downstairs was the restaurant, where the booze was manufactured. Upstairs was a plain concrete-and-brick set-up, where a band would play and patrons would dance. Five bucks bought a bottle of homebrew and an evening of some of the best live music being played in Seattle during the 1930s. Jazz music was indeed a hit at the New Chinatown; even the Club's bouncer, a burly guy named "Big Dave" Henderson, sat down at the piano most nights.

In 1940 the Congo Club opened in Chinatown, at Maynard and Sixth Avenues. The space was divided in two: the first half was a legitimate, well-lit restaurant called the Congo Grill; at the rear, past a swinging door, was the actual Club itself -- complete with a ballroom and a circular bar.

The Blue Rose, located near Chinatown, on Yesler Way and Thirteenth Avenue, was a small, two-room house that doubled as a club. The Club's owner served liquor to his customers from the house's kitchen.

The 411 Club was located on Maynard Avenue, around the corner from the Wah Mee. In the 1930s, it was a hot spot for some of the biggest names in jazz, with a large bandstand where Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong often played.

The Ubangi Club was a black-owned nightclub hosting some of the nation's best jazz performers. The Ubangi -- located on the eastside of the building where the Wah Mee was housed -- was a huge and beautiful cabaret, where Cab Calloway played mainly to a white clientele. The State liquor board occasionally targeted the Ubangi. During raids, the Club's manager, Bruce Rowell, would sneak through the "secret doors" and stairways in the building and exit in the alley near the Wah Mee. "That's how I got away from the Washington State liquor board, three times," Rowell told historian/writer de Barros. "Heh-heh-heh! When they came in, I'd go to the office, see, and say, 'Let me get my overcoat.' Then I'd zip down that little deal, you know, near the floor, and Sheeoop! I'm downstairs in the basement. Next thing I know, I'm coming out, go down to the Mar Hotel, get a room, take a bath, and go to bed! They're all up there lookin' for me and I'm in the shower!"

Another Chinatown club -- formally named the Hong Kong Chinese Society Club -- was located on Seventh Avenue South. Locals aptly nicknamed the Club the "Bucket of Blood" because of its recognition as a rowdy joint, as well as the locale of a grisly murder after a police raid.

In many of these Chinatown clubs -- the New Chinatown, Congo Club, Blue Rose, the 411 Club, the Ubangi, and the Wah Mee -- patrons enjoyed booze, jazz, dancing, Opium dens, prostitutes, casinos, and the daily lottery. And the Tokiwa Hotel, located at Maynard Avenue South and South King Street, was a residential nexus for starving jazz musicians who played the Chinatown clubs. Rent at the Tokiwa Hotel was two dollars a week. Commenting on life in Chinatown during the 1930s, jazzman Marshal Royal recalls, "They were different type of people...in Seattle. You had a lot of fun. They were nice, they were cordial. I'm not just speaking of black people. I'm talking about the Chinese guys that owned the cab companies and things. They were our buddies. Everybody was just in it for a family. Like the Mar boys, big-time tong people out of Fresno, we had a ball. After we finished our job, they

would have a midnight picture at the Atlas Theatre, open all night long. You could go in there and tell the owner what picture you wanted and he'd have it for you two or three days later."

The Chinese Lottery was also popular. Gamblers bet on daily numbers from a lottery headquarter on Maynard Avenue South and took home hefty profits. In some instances, the winnings from a single game were enough for a lucky opportunist to open his own speakeasy.

In its early years, during the late-1920s, the Wah Mee Club was called the Blue Heaven. As its name implied, it was a place for dancing, drinking, gambling, and partying. The Wah Mee Club's roster of members had always been a "who's who" of the Asian community. The late John Okada, a Japanese American writer who wrote the classic novel No-No Boy, frequented the Club. In his novel, Okada writes about a young Japanese American named Ichiro whom, instead of serving during World War II and fighting his own, spends his time waiting out the War in an internment camp. Because Ichiro refuses to join the War and fight for the United States, he is slapped with the label "No-No Boy" and met with derision from employers, friends, and family members. The book brilliantly explores the difficulties of a young Asian American trying to find his place in the United States.

Okada, born in Seattle in 1923, in the Old Merchants Hotel in Pioneer Square, attended Bailey Gatzert Elementary, Broadway High, the University of Washington, and Columbia University. Unlike Ichiro, Okada served in the United States Army during World War II. "John Okada was not No-No Boy," writer Frank Chin observed. "He served in World War II hanging out of an airplane over Japanese-held islands asking their occupants in their own language to give up."

After the War, Okada worked as an assistant at the Business Reference Department of the Seattle Public Library. He later moved with his wife, Dorothy, and children to Detroit to take a job for more money at the Detroit Public Library. What he found in Detroit was discrimination. The neighborhood Christian church where he lived did not allow Japanese Americans in their congregation. His job at the library fell through and Okada found himself working long hours as a technical writer for the Chrysler Missile Operations in Sterling Township, Michigan.

While Ichiro struggles with fictional conflicts throughout the novel, Okada himself faced crises of his own. Okada struggled with obscurity as a writer and believed that the Asian American community had rejected his work. "Perhaps I've been endowed with a larger capacity for normalcy than most people," Okada wrote. "Next to my family, and of somewhat lesser importance, is my personal writing...reduced to an avocation."

In his novel, Okada describes the atmosphere inside gambling clubs throughout Seattle's Chinatown:

Inside the door are the tables and the stacks of silver dollars and...no one is smiling or laughing, for one does not do those things when the twenty has dwindled to a five or the twenty is up to a hundred and the hunger has been whetted into a mild frenzy by greed.

Okada based his novel's key gambling club on the Wah Mee -- a place he frequented during the 1940s. In No-No Boy, the Wah Mee is renamed "Club Oriental" and Okada's description of the Club is based on the Wah Mee:

Halfway down an alley, among the forlorn stairways and innumerable trash cans, was the entrance to the Club Oriental. It was a bottle club, supposedly for members only, but its membership consisted of an ever-growing clientele. Under the guise of a private, licensed club, it opened its door to almost everyone and rang up hefty profits nightly. Up the corridor, flanked on both sides by walls of glass brick, they approached the polished mahogany door. Kenji poked the buzzer and, momentarily, the electric catch buzzed in return. They stepped from the filthy alley and the cool night into the Club Oriental with its soft, dim lights, its long curving bar, its deep carpets, its intimate tables, and its small dance floor.

Okada died of a heart attack in 1971.

Another Wah Mee notable, a pillar in Seattle's Chinese community, was domineering entrepreneur Ruby Chow. Chow was easy to recognize at barely five feet tall with a towering French roll. Writer Chin rather humorously described her trademark hairdo as, "the well-gardened and cultivated creation of hair that rises and rises in the shape of a huge popover over her head. [It] is the largest French roll ever to survive wind and snow, rain and the rest of the weather."

Ruby Chow was both praised and reviled.

In the early-1950s, before opening her restaurant, Chow was a barmaid who drank with the men at the Hong Kong restaurant. She was a street-talker who was never hesitant to cuss out her customers. Most of her "drinking buddies" were Caucasian, and Chow forged a friendship with them that would prove invaluable. She remembered their birthdays and kept their secrets. She toed the line between the Chinese community -- Chow never badmouthed or shunned the Chinese -- and the Caucasian community.

Chow was a tenacious woman born with the name Mar Seung Gum. Her father, Jim Sing Mar, was an immigrant from the Kwangtung village of Hoi Yuen and ran the San Juan Fishing and Canning Dock in the Puget Sound; he was a prominent public figure, protected by his loyal friend and bodyguard, a Filipino named Pio di Cano. Chow's mother had a twin sibling who drowned in a flood at an early age. When her mother died, Ruby Chow assumed the matriarchal role of the family.

Chow opened the first Chinese restaurant outside of the Chinese community -- an area largely labeled African American. Her restaurant was popular with white customers, most of whom were opera fans and knew that Chow was married to Ping Chow, a celebrated opera singer and head cook at her restaurant. As a young man, Bruce Lee worked in the kitchen at Chow's restaurant. Chow became internationally famous, and Chinese Americans all over the world came to know Ruby and Ping Chow as equal a landmark in the Pacific Northwest as Mt. Rainier or the Olympic Peninsula. Writer Chin wrote about Chow's standing in the Seattle community as "remarkable for moving in, being accepted among, and leading a group of Chinese Americans more educated, more literate, and better-spoken than her. She has always moved with eye-popping, blunt-edged ease through all kinds of social situations, because she is Ruby Chow and for no other reason." Front-page newspaper photos often pictured Chow standing outside her restaurant with a dignitary, governor, consul general, or mayor. While other Chinese restaurants relied on back rooms for gambling and illicit favors in order to survive, Chow's restaurant succeeded solely in terms of customers and money.

Some folks in Chinatown believed Chow was "breaking the stronghold" of the Chinese community. After all, she had opened a restaurant outside of the Chinese community, a

restaurant that catered in large part to Caucasians. Some called her the "yellow mouth in town" who blew "sweet and sour hoochie koochie" to Caucasians about Chinese culture.

Once, after a rather flattering article about Chow appeared in the *Seattle Times*, three leaders of three separate Chinatown organizations (Chuck Lee, President of the Seattle Chinese Youth Club; Edmond Lew, President of Lung Kong; and Ming Fong, President of the Kong Chow Association) wrote the Times in protest: "We strongly object to the story. The article was extremely biased, presenting Ruby Chow as a friend of the Chinese community and a good public official....Chow is not a representative of the Chinese community. She is very much disliked and opposed by most of the community. She is usually ignored when she comes to events in [Chinatown] and is so unsure of herself here that she usually comes in the company of two bodyguards. The article passed lightly over the fact that she has been frequently seen during her political career to fall asleep in the middle of County Council meetings....She also has used her political influence to push Seattle's Asian Americans around, and many are frightened to speak out against her. The majority of Chinese family associations pulled out of the Chong Wa Benevolent Association several years ago to protest her involvement in it....Your reporter ignored all of that and presented Ruby Chow as some sort of a benevolent Chinese mother figure. This was a hatchet job in reverse, making Ruby Chow look much better than she ever deserved to look in the public's eyes."

Writer Chin comments, "[Chow had] a vision of the continuity of Chinese culture in the Pacific Northwest that was pure Jack London science fiction, all bunk, and totally believed by gah gah non-yellows....Chow's [tales were] loud and fancy with Chinamans out of the movies and funny papers, as if the Chinese Americans were the most accomplished, the best, the pioneering of the yellows here."

While there was dancing and drinks and women and music and the occasional fistfight in the alley, there was also very intense gambling at the Wah Mee. Around the gaming tables, gamblers sat with grim faces, swapping stories while concerned with the matter at hand: winning and winning big.

The Wah Mee thrived, but problematically. It endured several "rashes" of crackdowns over several decades, usually when new mayors were seeking the seat of incumbents and bringing to the forefront a gambling tolerance policy that had existed in the city of Seattle for nearly a century. The Wah Mee grew cautious of its members and began to lean more

toward patronage that consisted of family associations, tight-knit circles, and select tongs -- a patronage limited essentially to Chinese members who knew the management. Eventually, the Wah Mee Club went "underground."

The Club was last raided in the early-1970s and fell on hard times. Ownership changed hands and renovations were made. In the early-1980s, the Club's space was leased for \$350 a month to Don Mar. Mar rented the space under a sub-lease to the Suey Sing Association. Toward the end of the Club's tenure, it seemed to have restored its character as a high-stakes gambling club -- though, as one patron described it, the Club was "comfortable, but not opulent." Fresh from renovation and free of raids, the Wah Mee Club was one of Seattle's best clubs for high-stakes gambling in the early-1980s. Anywhere from \$1,000 and \$10,000 moved nightly through the Club, and the house collected five percent of each winner's pot. Some patrons spent their entire paychecks in a single night. The Wah Mee Club had never changed location, having always been housed in the lower floor of a four-story brick building -- the site of the 28-room Louisa Hotel -- that covered approximately one-fourth of a block. Paul Woo, a millionaire in real estate and an engineer by training, owned the building. From the outside, the Club was unassuming and unobtrusive. If you didn't know it was there, you wouldn't very likely find the door by accident. Like the majority of the after-hours gambling clubs in Chinatown, security at the Wah Mee was tight. Four rows of glass bricks fronted the Club entrance. Each glass brick was opaque except one -- which served as a peephole for a Club guard to identify a guest and decide whether or not to permit entrance. Admittance was limited strictly to members of the Club and membership consisted mostly of restaurant owners, restaurant workers, affluent members of the Chinese community, and members of the Bing Kung Association. Club members had to be admitted past two steel doors and at least two guards before entering the gaming and bar areas. In addition, the Club's office was equipped with a warning buzzer and a "panic bar" that would set off an alarm. Once inside, the Club's interior was spacious, occupying approximately 6,000-square-feet. The space was divided by a low railing. The north part of the room housed the bar area. The south part of the room served as the gaming area, with four Mah Jongg and Pai Kau tables. During the 30s and 40s, the Wah Mee was open to people of all races. In 1940 Fay Chin and his friend, Danny Woo, were driving across the Ballard Bridge en route to the Ballard Elk's Club to inquire about chartering an Elk's Club in Chinatown. The two men instead decided to get their own charter and Chin ran with the idea. He sold fifty-dollar shares all over Chinatown, assumed the rent, paid a fee to the city, and established his own charter. During the 1940s Chinese

entered the Club through an entrance on South King Street; Caucasians and other races entered the Club in the alley. At the time, gambling was highly visible. A red sign with the Club's name in neon once hung outside the alley-side entrance. But the space on South King Street was converted into a bakery and the Club later became accessible only from the alley.

In the eyes of some Chinatown residents, the Wah Mee Club of the early-1980s was like a B-grade cocktail lounge. It was both respectable and somewhat seedy. Even the name of the Club (in Chinese, "Wah Mee" means "beautiful China") evoked romance and classiness. Yet it was also viewed at times with derision, some describing the place as "cheap" and "lowlife."

Ruby Chow and John Okada were early members of the Club. In the early-1980s, the Club's clientele had changed, though it still consisted of prominent, wealthy members of the Asian community. There was John Loui, a one-time restaurant owner who had recently sold the Golden Crown restaurant -- a Seattle landmark with a drag-queen bar on its lower level. Loui was looking to dump his money into a lucrative import/export business. And there was Moo Min Mar and his wife, Jean, who owned the Kwangtung Country restaurant in Redmond. They were a wealthy couple, philanthropists who were planning to build a school in their native Chinese village. Chinn Lee Law owned a repair garage in Chinatown and was a regular fixture at the Wah Mee, even working sometimes as a dealer and security guard. Dewey Mar was famous for having brought Chinese films to Seattle's Chinatown, and he operated the only such theater in the entire city. All were members of the Wah Mee and all had enormous pull and respect in the Chinese community.

The Wah Mee Club is officially dead. Its entrance doors have been padlocked and tagged with graffiti. The half-wall of opaque, glass blocks that front the entrance are covered in a thick layer of dirt and grime. A large chunk of the Club's facade has been gouged, presumably from one of the many delivery trucks that park in the alley having accidentally backed into the front of the Club. Residents of Seattle's Chinatown (formally known as the International District) pass the Club without caution or notice. I recently mailed a postcard to the Wah Mee Club, only to have it returned with a stamp reading "return to writer - address unknown."

Despite its designation as the location of Washington State's worst mass murder, the Wah Mee Club is essentially invisible, non-existent, deceased. Police officers, clandestinely enforcing a gambling tolerance policy, kept the Wah Mee Club alive for years. When the Club officially died, it was at the hands of three young men who left thirteen dead bodies on the floor, and one man to tell the tale. The Wah Mee Club may no longer exist, but what happened at the Club is a brutally horrific piece of Pacific Northwest history.

CHAPTER TWO

*"For gambling against the house, whether it be with cards or dice or beans or dominoes,
requires only a stout heart and a hunger for the impossible."*

-- John Okada

Seattle's Chinatown is rooted in history. Simply walking along South King Street, as I have on many occasions, one cannot look east or west without seeing a building or a shop or a tenement rich in history. The husks of old speakeasies and popular Prohibition gambling clubs line South King Street and South Jackson Street. The New Chinatown has been turned into a Korean karaoke bar, but the outside of the building still features a neon bowl of steaming soup, with two "chopsticks" poking out from the bowl.

In addition to the old speakeasies and gambling clubs, there are the many tenements, trading companies, and laundromats dating back to the early nineteenth-century. Many of the area's buildings, once symbols of strength and perseverance, are now covered in grime, and sit vacant. In February 1997, the roof of the 85-year-old Kokusai Theater on Maynard Avenue collapsed. The Hong Kong Restaurant and Hotel, a Chinatown fixture from the 1940s through the mid-1980s, with its aged yet beautiful vertical neon marquee, sits empty. As Times writer Bock explained, "[South] King Street may be the soul of old Chinatown, but its buildings are mostly empty. Of [South] King Street's ten residential buildings, five have no residents." Many Chinatown residents credit the "emptiness" of Seattle's Chinatown to events spanning the last half-century: The internment of 7,000 Japanese Americans during World War II (few returned to the neighborhood); the construction of a stretch of Interstate-5 that cut through Chinatown during the 1960s; construction of the Kingdome in the 1970s (which resulted in traffic and parking nightmares); a downtown arson in the 1970s that sparked strict fire codes (closing down seventeen of forty-five Chinatown hotels); and the completion of Interstate-90 in 1993 ("sealing off" the south end of Chinatown).

According to a 1990 census, Seattle's Chinatown has a population of less than 2,000. The median age of a Chinatown resident is fifty-six years old. The median household income is less than \$11,000, and more than half of Chinatown's residents are living below the poverty

level. Ninety-three percent of Chinatown's residents rent apartments at an average monthly rate of \$278. Yet, in an area encompassing less than one-quarter square mile, there are more than 350 businesses.

The Kong Yick buildings sit anchored to the southeast. They are the staples of South King Street. In 1910 the Kong Yick Investment Company, comprised of Chinese throughout the Pacific Northwest, collected shares to construct two brick buildings that housed several Chinese-owned importers/exporters and labor contractors -- including Wa Chong Company, Quong Tuck Company, Yuen Long Company, and Yick Fung Company. The buildings also housed the King Fur Cafe and the Gee How Oak Tin Family Association (the largest Chinese family Association in Washington state). The Kong Yick buildings represented the heart of Seattle's Chinatown. In the early-1900s, a construction "boom" followed; bulky brick buildings were constructed for use as hotels and family association headquarters. Cannery labor contractor and one-time consul general, Goon Dip, built the Milwaukee Hotel in 1911. The Eastern Hotel was also erected in 1911. And the Bing Kung tong constructed its building across the street from the Kong Yick buildings in 1916. The Tai Tung restaurant was founded in 1933 by P. J. Chin and Quan Lee, and remains the oldest Chinese restaurant in Chinatown. In the restaurant's early days, alcohol was not served because Quan felt drunks slowed down the nightly turnover (sometimes as many as 1,700 servings per day). The restaurant presently is filled with paneled booths and a crowded front counter with a smiling gold-plated Buddha at the far end. Tai Tung -- which means "all equal" in Chinese -- is a popular hangout for off-duty cops and tourists; the elderly Chinese men sit at the counter, sipping coffee with half-and-half and sugar. The Bush Hotel looms above South Jackson Street, boasting the words "Modern" and "Fireproof" in large black letters on the building's side. The Bush Hotel dates back to 1915, and was built to serve passengers arriving by rail. In the early-1970s the building was redeveloped into offices for social service agencies, and low-income housing. In 1998 renovations were completed on the Bush Hotel, which included a rooftop greenhouse and a mural by artist John Woo. The N.P. Hotel -- which stands for Northern Pacific Hotel -- was built in 1914 and served as an early residential and commercial cornerstone of the thriving pre-World War II Japantown. The Interim Community Development Association renovated the hotel into low-income housing in 1994, and Seattle's oldest Japanese restaurant -- Maneki -- is located on the street level. The Tsue Chong Noodle Company, which was founded in 1917 by Louie Gar Hip, has been operated by four generations of the Hip family, producing nearly two-dozen different types of Chinese noodles and fortune cookies, and serving many of Chinatown's popular restaurants.

One of Chinatown's most beautiful buildings is the extravagantly decorated China Gate Restaurant. Originally built in 1924 as a Chinese opera house by restaurateur Charlie Louie, the building was converted to the Chinese Garden in 1929 -- a popular speakeasy featuring African American jazz musicians.

Seattle's Chinatown is much like other North American Chinatowns: Filled with history and often depicted as another world in popular movies and books. Writer Eric Liu, in his book The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker, comments on North American Chinatowns, writing, "Chinatown...is above all an experience. Firecrackers sputtering like cheap ammunition. The buzz of an alien tongue on every corner. Red-and-gold lanterns, swinging wild neon lettering. Gangsters in black sedans. Roasted birds hanging by their necks behind grimy windows. The waft of vented grease and burnt incense and garbage. The sound of the cook hacking up phlegm as he stir-fries your order. The bent clanging of cymbals, the beating of drums. The undulations, wild and alive, of a great festival dragon....Chinatown is not so much a place as it is a metaphor -- an ideograph -- for all the exotic mystery of the Orient. We don't simply visit Chinatown; we believe in it, as surely we believe in the ghetto or the suburb. We imbue its every peculiarity with meaning and moral import."

A tug-of-war exists between what Chinatown is and isn't. As writer and activist, Peter Kwong, would describe, Chinatown is a nasty and brutish world where immigrants are exploited and forced to work long hours in hot kitchens, and sleep in stifling tenements. Writer Min Zhou describes Chinatown as a new model for Americanization -- an "enclave economy" fueled by Chinese entrepreneurs and workers who haven't fallen into the decadence of the dominant culture. "The difficulty," Liu argues, "is not that the truth lies somewhere in between. It is that the truth lies everywhere in between. There are more Chinatowns than we can identify. Gangster Chinatown, Dim Sum Chinatown, Bootstraps Chinatown, Welfare Chinatown, Hipster Chinatown, Oldster Chinatown, Chinese Chinatown, pan-Asian Chinatown, Chinatown the ghetto, Chinatown the gateway. There are now suburban Chinatowns...places built of free choice, not necessity. There is a Chinatown for every perspective."

Seattle's Chinatown is all of these -- nasty and brutish -- a gateway and a ghetto -- exotic and nearby -- both historical and stoic while facing contemporary issues like crime and depopulation. And for one young man living in Chinatown during the late-1970s and early-

1980s, Chinatown represented one thing in particular: an opportunity to exploit. That young man was Kwan Fai Mak, a well known youth in Seattle's Chinese community in the early-1980s. Mak worked off and on in several of the Chinatown restaurants. He held various jobs in Seattle and, further north, in Whatcom County. Sometimes he worked as a dealer at a couple of Chinatown's after-hours gambling clubs. He also took a job at a steelyard in Seattle, doing what he described as "hard labor." In 1982 he was working as a dealer and gambling on the side, making as much as one hundred dollars a night. Mak was a young man who had moved with his family from the Kwangtung Province in Mainland China in 1975, at the age of fifteen. In China, he and his family had lived in squalor, in a cramped apartment building with a staggering number of tenants.

When Mak arrived in Seattle, he entered the eighth grade at Sharples Junior High School. He spoke very little English, but was eager to learn the language. He lived with his parents and siblings in their South Seattle home and, later, attended nearby Cleveland High School. Though he had trouble in high school, eventually dropping out, he earned his General Equivalency Degree at a nearby college.

Mak was also street-smart. He went by the name "Willie" and spent a lot of time with friends with extensive criminal records. Mak was a member of the Hop Sing tong, one of the most revered and influential tongs on the West Coast. He had joined the tong because he believed they were involved in illegal activities, something that appealed to him. In 1981 he and a friend robbed a Seattle grocery store of a couple thousand dollars. Yet, despite the robbery, he was deep in debt. In the early part of January 1983, Mak had racked up a several thousand-dollar debt with one of the gambling clubs where he had worked. He was good for it, though. He was known in the tight-knit Chinese community. Mak was a regular fixture at the Imperial Lanes bowling alley/video arcade in South Seattle, where he could be seen hanging out with his friends. He was also a regular at many of the restaurants in Chinatown, where he frequently ate dinner with both peers and seniors in the Chinatown community. He was easy to find and not the type to skip out on his debts.

But in a matter of weeks, his debt of a few thousand dollars quickly grew into a debt of more than ten thousand dollars. By early-February Mak had incurred a debt estimated at nearly thirty thousand dollars. Mak was clearly unaware of a simple gambling fact: the house never really gambles; instead, it takes advantage of some well-known and clear

mathematical principles of chance. The house cannot go broke and gamblers can never beat the house.

With each new gambling loss and each new debt incurred, Mak's situation worsened. He grew irritated and bitter. He often complained to his friends about his losses and, when his temper flared, he entertained the idea of robbing one of the gambling clubs.

The idea of robbing a gambling club quickly turned into a plan. In mid-January 1983 Mak began recruiting friends to join him in his plan. All of his prospective accomplices shared the same characteristics. They were young, Chinese, acquaintances of Mak's, and members of tongs. Mak held most of his meetings at a Denny's restaurant in South Seattle. It was there that he shared with his prospective accomplices his plan for a heist so large that he would evenly split the loot with the others and still have enough money for himself to erase his debts. The heist would be foolproof. They would rob the most lucrative gambling club in Chinatown to insure the maximum possible loot. The heist would be quick and detailed, with explicit instructions that Mak would be the leader and his accomplices would follow his orders. And there would be no witnesses. Whoever agreed to join Mak would follow his instructions to the tee. "If [the victims] resist me, I, Willie, will kill them," Mak told his prospective accomplices. "If the people with me, robbing these people, won't shoot them, I'll shoot them all."

In order to see his plan to fruition, Mak would have to be selective about which gambling club he robbed. He would have to rob one that carried the promise of patrons with large amounts of cash in hand and a house bank that rivaled no other. He would have to pick a club that was known for high-stakes gambling; a club that had tens of thousands of dollars on the table on any given night, at any given time.

Mak singled out the Wah Mee Club. Of the two games played at the Wah Mee -- Pai Kau and Mah Jongg -- Pai Kau was by far the Club's big game. The house bank was around \$100,000 and, when the house was banker, the betting limit at the Club was \$1,000. But when an individual was banker, no limit prevailed. As much as \$50,000 was on the table at any given time.

Mak also singled out the Club because of its clientele. The Wah Mee was an exclusive, members-only venue attracting some of the Chinese community's wealthiest and most

prominent members. Affluent restaurant owners would sometimes, after closing on a profitable Friday or Saturday evening, retire to the Wah Mee with tens of thousands of dollars cash in hand.

Mak also singled out the Club because of its history. The Wah Mee was one of the oldest clubs in Chinatown, lasting for more than a half-century. "The Wah Mee Club was famous in Seattle," writer Chin commented. "You don't speak with any real authority about Seattle of the 30's, 40's, or 50's, if you can't say when you first stepped into the electric, smoky -- Wah Mee."

Willie Mak approached at least a half-dozen of his peers, trying to get accomplices for his planned heist-and-killing. He met separately with Wai Chung Tam and Sze Ming Ng at a Denny's restaurant in South Seattle. In his meetings, Mak continued to voice his frustration about his gambling losses and dwelled on the subject of robbery and murder in an effort to get out of the red. Another young man, Steve Chin, was also a witness to Mak's many discussions. Yin Yen Lau, a twenty-year-old cook, was approached by Mak, but the young man replied, "I have my own business. I don't need that kind of money."

Mak eventually found an ally in a young man with an extensive criminal record; a high school dropout with a parole history and several criminal incidents involving guns. His name was Benjamin Ng and he was a thin, young, twenty-year-old. He was barely five-feet-two, and weighed just over 100 pounds, with boyish features and large eyes. But he was also a thug. Ng frequented several gambling clubs in the area and was known to carry a gun while cruising the streets of Chinatown in his Corvette. He was a troublemaker in high school, causing one teacher to comment that he "had some serious growing up to do."

Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak had many similarities. Their parents were from the Kwangtung Province of Mainland China. They later moved to Hong Kong and, in 1975, both families relocated to the United States. Ng and Mak also attended Cleveland High School in Seattle. Both worked for short periods of time as cooks at Chin's Palace restaurant and lived in the restaurant owner's home. People who knew the young men said they gambled and worked as dealers at a different club. They were regular fixtures in Seattle's Chinatown, both interested in playing video games at the Imperial Lanes in South Seattle and watching movies at the Kokusai Theater. And, like Mak, Ng had a reputation for being short-tempered

and violent. His temper was so uncontrollable and erratic at times that, once, he shot dead a neighborhood dog because it was barking too loud.

Benjamin Ng was an ideal accomplice for Willie Mak's plan. He had an extensive criminal record dating back to 1980. As a juvenile, Ng was arrested on at least two occasions for incidents involving handguns. In December 1978 Ng was picked up along with two youths who had robbed an eleven-year-old boy of twenty-five dollars. Ng was not arrested for the incident because he was considered a "follower" in that situation.

On March 15, 1980, Benjamin Ng and two companions were arrested for stealing merchandise from the Southcenter Mall. A security guard at the Mall searched Ng's car and found a pellet pistol. Ng was sentenced to two days behind bars and six months' probation. But Benjamin Ng was a model probationer. In addition to his punishment for the 1980 incident, Ng was ordered to complete fifty hours of community service and did so by volunteering at the Chinese Community Center. His probation officer, pleased with Ng's initiative, debated letting him off probation early.

In 1981 Benjamin Ng shot at four young men in retaliation after being attacked in the Rainier Valley. Ng injured all four men and fled the scene. Two days later, Ng turned himself in and, two months later, records show that charges were dropped on grounds that he acted in self-defense.

By all accounts, Benjamin Ng's family was hard-working and law-abiding. Benjamin, the youngest of five children, was an exception. His early arrests as a juvenile disturbed his parents. After the December 1978 incident in which Ng was arrested for shoplifting, his parents refused to take him home from juvenile detention. They were trying to teach him a lesson.

Mak approached Bon Chin, another young man in the Chinatown community, shortly after Ng was recruited. Mak asked Chin to join him and Ng, and help rob the Wah Mee Club. Mak believed the three men could walk away from the heist with \$60,000. But Chin refused to join because he didn't need the money and he feared that he was too well known in Chinatown.

As Mak's debts plagued him, he continued to search for a third accomplice. And as his search continued, he was losing time and opening himself to exposure. The more people Mak tried to enlist, the more he was exposing his plan, and increased rumors around Chinatown of what he had in mind.

Mak finally found his needed accomplice in a young Chinese man named Wai Chiu Ng. Ng preferred to be called "Tony" and, though he shared a last name with Benjamin, he was unrelated to him. Mak's luring Tony Ng was near miraculous. Ng was twenty-five years old -- the eldest of the three -- and had no prior criminal record. He was rather small for his age, standing 5' 7" and weighing no more than 120 pounds. He was born in Hong Kong, where he lived with his mother, father, two brothers, sister, and grandmother, in a cramped apartment. In 1960, when Ng was six years old, his father left Hong Kong and moved to America, to find work as a cook in Baltimore. Ten years later, the senior Ng was joined in Baltimore by the rest of his family.

When Tony Ng arrived in Baltimore, he knew very little English. He was the only Chinese-speaking student at his school. But he was a bright kid, eager to learn, and quickly began studying English. After spending two years in Baltimore, the Ng family moved to Seattle. Ng lived with his parents in South Seattle and earned \$150 per week working occasionally for his father, who owned the China Kitchen restaurant in Lynnwood, Washington. Ng was a quiet young man who had a girlfriend and stayed out of trouble. Like the other young men in Seattle's Chinese community, he frequented the Imperial Lanes and occasionally gambled. Like Mak and Benjamin Ng, Tony Ng had also attended Cleveland High School, where he was a member of that school's soccer team. Ng graduated from Cleveland High School in 1975. After high school, Ng attended South Seattle Community College. He had an interest in cars, and spent two years enrolled in a vocational auto mechanics school. He later worked for seven months at Riach Oldsmobile, on Seventh & Pine, near downtown. Ng frequently made trips to Hong Kong to visit friends. While Willie Mak had a temper and Benjamin Ng had a criminal record, Tony Ng was a shy, soft-spoken young man with few (if any) enemies. He was a loner, not belonging to any tong. "Not too many people knew Tony in the community," commented a Chinatown restaurant owner. "He didn't come to Chinatown as often as Ben and Willie did."

Tony Ng agreed to rob the Wah Mee Club with Benjamin and Willie for money. Tony owed Mak \$1,000 and joining the robbery would clear his debt. Ng was not interested in killing

the members of the Wah Mee Club. In fact, he didn't even know murder was part of the plan. Mak told him that the three men would simply rob the Club. Ng wasn't enthused about robbing the victims for profit. Unlike Mak and Benjamin Ng had been, Tony shunned violence and crime. Ng owed Mak money; working part-time for his father's restaurant wasn't going to allow him to pay off his debts anytime soon.

As Mak's plan approached fulfillment, Tony Ng became wary. The Wah Mee was huge, a landmark among Chinatown gambling clubs. It had dozens of members, all of whom had serious pull in the Chinese community. They were going to rob the Club on a weekend night, around midnight, during the Chinese New Year, when after-hours gambling would surely be in full throttle; the Wah Mee would be packed with people. Also, Ng's father had a history of gambling at the Wah Mee and the thought of robbing his own father made the young man uncomfortable. Furthermore, vice cops spent a lot of time at the Wah Mee, not to make arrests but to receive monetary kickbacks in exchange for allowing the Club to operate. What if Ng entered the Club with his accomplices and the place was crawling with cops?

As the logistics were straightened out and the plan came closer to being realized, Tony Ng changed his mind. He didn't want to join Mak and Benjamin Ng. Less than twenty-four hours before the killings, Ng borrowed \$1,000 from his girlfriend and took the money to Mak. He wanted out and hinted that he was going to let the police know what Mak had in mind for the Wah Mee Club. The two men went to the Mak residence and met in an adjacent storage shed. Ng offered the money to Mak, but it was refused. Mak pulled a gun from the back of his belt and fired a bullet at the floor, barely missing Ng's feet. "You know too much already," Mak said, "You got to go. If you tell the police, I'll kill you. If you back out now, I'll shoot you, your family, your girlfriend, and burn down your parents' restaurant. Now go home. I'll pick you up later. If you're not home, I'm going to kill you."

CHAPTER THREE

"If you cleaned this city up, we'd all have to go on welfare 'cause none of us could live on our salary."

-- A standard joke within the Seattle Police Department

"Seattle historically has viewed its vice transgressions with a certain avid disinterest."

-- Jim Faber

"A Seattle visitor asks a policeman where he can get a drink -- 'See that building on the corner?' says the man in blue. 'That's the Methodist church. It's probably one of the few places in town you can't get a drink.'"

-- Johnny Reddin

"Confusing prudence with intolerance, vice with artistic expression, these measures slowed the cultural progress of [Seattle]."

-- Paul de Barros

Willie Mak's plan had its advantages.

If he and his accomplices could stroll into the Wah Mee Club, rob -- and then kill -- its occupants, the three men would surely walk away wealthy. \$60,000 split three ways....not unreasonable to expect, Mak considered. The house bank often reached \$100,000, and there would be anywhere from \$10,000 to \$50,000 on the Club's members combined. And they would rob the Club late Saturday night -- prime gambling hours -- when the restaurant owners would come to the tables with their week's earnings. The three men could divide as much as \$200,000 among them -- a fortune for three young men, used to toiling long hours at low-wage jobs.

Another advantage for Mak was that gambling club robberies often remained unreported: why report a robbery when it would only lead to scrutiny by the local press and, in turn, law enforcement? Around the time Mak was planning to rob the Wah Mee, someone walked into

another illegal gambling club, placed a bet and, before the gambling started, pulled out a gun and said, "I win." Without a word, the house paid the man. Reporting the robbery of a gambling club always carried the threat of closing the club altogether. Even if Mak's plan misfired, the entire incident might pass without consequence.

Mak and the others would also strike the Wah Mee during the Chinese New Year -- a time when businesses shut down and citizens celebrated. Club members would be caught off-guard; festive and generous, they would come to the Club to spend lots of money and celebrate the New Year. Furthermore, a gambling club across the alley from the Wah Mee -- operated by the Hop Sing tong -- was to close down for construction during the week the heist would occur. Patrons of the Hop Sing club would simply cross the alley and spend their money at the Wah Mee, essentially raising the amount of money that would change hands at the Club.

But Mak's most significant advantage, ironically, was the Wah Mee Club's infamous history of vice affiliation. Gambling tolerance policies and police corruption kept the Wah Mee Club open for years. A lot of beat cops spent a lot of time at the Wah Mee. No one asked any questions. The cops picked up their kickbacks in exchange for letting the Wah Mee, and other gambling clubs, operate in Chinatown. Seattle writer Clark Humphrey comments, "The [tolerance] policy...meant cops looked the other way at (or were paid off by) hookers and drug dealers."

Writer and historian de Barros comments, "Early on the town had developed a culture of legalized corruption that tolerated vice in exchange for official payoffs....The tolerance policy, while in itself a victimless crime that had allowed people to have a good time, also supported a system in which police officers -- much like organized criminals -- demanded protection money even from owners who had nothing to hide. Those who didn't 'pay to stay,' as the policy came to be called, were simply hounded out of business."

The arrival of Prohibition in Washington State in 1916 only meant more money for corrupt cops and city officials. As de Barros writes, "Bootleg liquor became simply another profit center -- albeit a broader-based one -- for the mayor and police chief to add to the casinos, whorehouses, and Opium dens they already tolerated...stimulating the nightclub business enormously." No resource was ignored for smuggling booze into Washington. The *Seattle Times* reported, "Booze arrived in Washington in gas tanks of cars, by horse and wagon and

airplanes. The illegal stuff was ferried in by ship, dinghies, dories, speedboats, and even by canoe....Since liquor was still an illegal business, to flourish it had to be subsidized by either organized crime or City Hall. In Seattle, there was no 'mob.' The boys in blue were on the take."

When a reporter for *McClure's* magazine arrived in Seattle during the 1930s, he commented, "The city seems to have been transformed almost magically into one great gambling hell."

Sociologist William J. Chambliss, of George Washington University, spent nearly a decade documenting vice corruption in Seattle, commenting, "[Prohibition] created ideal conditions for the emergence of national crime networks. The demand for alcohol was far greater than the U.S. government's willingness to expend the money and energy necessary to stamp it out. There was, nonetheless, a sufficient zealotry to enforce the laws to make it necessary for those who would distribute and sell the 'evil rum' to create criminal enterprises. As a result, different criminal groups specialized in, and monopolized, the smuggling of alcohol from different countries....Prohibition was the impetus for the emergence of organized efforts to provide illegal commodities, namely alcohol, and such associated illegal services as gambling, prostitution, and high interest loans."

And there were no limits to the types of people involved in anti-Prohibition causes. In 1931 the Chinese Gardens speakeasy was busted; Seattle's sergeant of detectives was found working in the speakeasy's hat check room. Also during the Prohibition era, Police Lieutenant Roy Olmstead was caught unloading Canadian booze from a motorboat in a Seattle suburb. He was expelled from the force and, later, busted again when cops discovered his wife was broadcasting cryptic messages to smugglers through her radio program -- "Aunt Vivian's Bedtime Stories for Youngsters."

As de Barros writes, "By the early part of the century, corruption was so deeply imbedded in local politics that candidates often ran for office on the 'wide open' platform, arguing that Seattle's vice industry generated income and a healthy economy for its more prudent citizenry. Figures such as Police Chief Charles Wappenstein and Mayor Hiram Gill reaped fortunes from the payoffs they received from whorehouses, Opium dens, casinos and later -- when liquor was outlawed, too -- speakeasies."

Seattle's history reveals continued vacillation between severe vice crackdowns and relative tolerance. Particularly illustrative are the platforms of the city's past mayors, many of whom -- to please voters -- changed their stances toward tolerance of bottle clubs and gambling joints. Opportunist Hiram Gill was first elected mayor when he supported a "wide-open" ticket; then the city's attitude changed, and he was re-elected after changing his stance and cracking down on after-hours clubs.

Between 1918 and 1930 an activist named Bertha Landes began a campaign to shut down one bottle club in particular -- the Butler Hotel. She worked to outlaw "taxi dances" -- where men paid money to dance with the club's women -- because such dances attracted the "wrong kind of girl." She received the support of a local judge and, together, they passed the Landes Ordinance, which outlawed taxi dances and required regular dance halls to hire police persons as chaperones. The Butler Hotel persevered -- despite the occasional citation every two months -- partly because the club's operator, John Savage, was able to woo the press into treating the Butler Hotel's activities as harmless fun.

In 1971 King County Prosecutor Christopher Bayley cut his teeth by blowing the lid on police corruption dating back to the 1950s. Bayley handed down an indictment that charged nineteen public officials of profiting from lotteries, prostitution, bribery, extortion, blackmail, and coin-operated gambling devices. He charged police officers with allowing a gambling tolerance policy to exist and, in turn, claimed officers collected as much as \$1,000 per month from operators of illegal gambling clubs. He claimed that public officials accepted covert campaign contributions from operators of gambling clubs and other illegal activities in exchange for allowing said activities to operate in the city. Furthermore, Bayley charged that those officers and public officials involved in vice corruption and tolerance policies issued liquor licenses by way of extortion; licenses were, essentially, bought and sold like shares of stock.

Bayley didn't get far with his indictment. Many of the charges were later dismissed and/or the defendants were acquitted. But some officers did resign from the force as a result of Bayley's efforts. Bayley was satisfied, nonetheless, confident that his indictment established that some police were paid to not enforce the law.

Bayley's indictment immediately followed a report compiled by the Investigative Task Force (ITF). The ITF consisted of members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and

was headed up by retired Chief of Police of the Oakland Police Department, E. M. Toothman. Toothman asked for the assistance of ten members of the Seattle Police Department. In late-1967 the ITF investigated the Seattle Police Department and released separate reports based on its findings.

One report was prepared for the public and released to the media. It claimed only minimal payoffs were offered to a few "bad cops." Simply put, the public was told not to worry.

The second report was highly confidential and available only to select members of the Seattle Police Department. This report revealed that there was an extensive payoff system that involved several divisions of the police department -- to include the entire vice division -- and was coordinated by the Assistant Chief of Police, M. E. "Buzz" Cook.

In a letter addressed to Mayor Wes Uhlman and dated September 14, 1970, Toothman briefly synopsized the ITF's findings and included a copy of its report. Toothman wrote, "The information accumulated by the Investigative Task Force indicated that payoffs and the acceptance of bribes and gratuities among certain members of the Seattle Police Department was a practice that had existed for many years." According to the report, a scandal was certain unless the police decided to take action. The way the police department power was organized, too much power was in the hands of Assistant Chief Cook. The ITF's report concluded that the Vice Squad had control over gambling activities -- both licensed cardrooms and private (often covert) gambling clubs (like the Wah Mee) that operated in Seattle. The Vice Squad set a "fee" and the illegal club paid said fee in order to operate without incident. Fees were typically collected on a monthly basis. The fee was then divvied up among members of the Vice Squad and command personnel. It is estimated that the Vice Squad collected as much as \$70,000 per year.

Patrol Division officers were involved as well. An officer in, say, the Chinatown area collected money from the operator of a particular gambling club (and, in some instances, from individual gamblers). The officer kept his share -- which was sometimes as much as \$600 per month -- and then passed the rest along to his sergeant. The sergeant collected his share -- typically the same amount as the officer collected, maybe a little more -- and then passed the balance to his superior, who received anywhere from \$700 to \$900 per month. In some instances, a single gambling club might have to pay fees to both the Vice Squad and the Patrol Division.

So, illegal gambling clubs were paying fees to patrol officers and members of the Vice Squad to operate in Seattle. Considering that some of the clubs (like the Wah Mee) were pulling in as much as \$10,000 nightly, the fees to cops were small; both law enforcement and club operators should have been satisfied.

Some club owners, though, were not.

The ITF was assembled because one club operator complained to the FBI, the media, and the Chief of Police. The Mayor appointed a committee that investigated the matter. But the committee was a whitewash. It consisted of local businessmen once involved with some of the operations they were now being asked to investigate. The committee interviewed twenty-five tavern owners and twenty-five police officers. Both parties denied any knowledge of any wrongdoing. The committee established a post office box and invited people to anonymously submit letters detailing police or government corruption. The committee reported that they received "very little" mail and, lacking evidence of corruption, encouraged an International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) investigation.

The IACP spent six months investigating the Seattle Police Department and concluded with a rather critical report. In December 1968 the Police Department was re-organized and Chief F. C. Ramon retired less than a year later. A short time later, a Federal Grand Jury was called and Assistant Chief M. E. Cook was indicted for perjury. Witnesses at Assistant Chief Cook's trial testified that they knew of a payoff system that had existed for more than three decades.

When the ITF investigated the Seattle Police Department, one of its recommendations was that those persons under investigation submit to polygraph tests. Seattle Chief of Police Charles Gain issued a General Order requiring that all officers upon request submit to a polygraph test. Chief Gain's insistence merely re-emphasized the law, as police officers are not exempt from being subjected to polygraph examination, as written in RCW 49.44.120 of the State of Washington. The investigated officers resented the mandatory polygraph tests so, in response, the Seattle Police Officers Guild obtained a temporary restraining order that barred the Chief of Police from enforcing officers to participate in these tests.

Before the ITF could complete its investigation, fourteen members of the police department ended their service with the department. When the ITF did finish its investigation, it

presented statements (both written and tape recorded) from witnesses, victims, and suspects, proving that former/active members of the Seattle Police Department and Washington State Liquor Control Board Retail Inspectors had received bribes. The ITF's report recommended that, instead of centralizing power in the hands of Assistant Chief Cook, four separate (and equal) divisions be established. Officers who would report directly to the Chief of Police would head each of these four divisions. The ITF also suggested that Assistant Chief Cook should either resign or be demoted. The ITF then told the media (and, ultimately, the public) that payoffs within the force were minimal, yet simultaneously recommended the Seattle Police Department be re-organized to avoid scandal.

Around the same time the ITF was doing its investigation into police corruption, and the subject began receiving further attention from the Seattle media and prosecutors, Professor Chambliss was conducting his own investigation. Chambliss spent five years -- beginning in the fall of 1962 -- investigating police corruption in Seattle and wrote a book about his findings. The book, On The Take, details how illegal activities, such as bribes through gambling clubs, not only profited cops and politicians, but helped the local economy as well. When Chambliss began work on the book, something he describes as a "study of organized crime," he was told that he had picked the wrong city. "Seattle, I was informed, was blessed not only by a ring of natural beauty and unspoiled wilderness," Chambliss wrote, "it was blessed also by clean government, sturdy law enforcement, and a paucity of organized crime."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Chambliss had been in Seattle less than two days when a cab driver told him, "You can get anything you want in Seattle if you've got the bread." Chambliss reported that gambling, bookmaking, stud-poker games, prostitution, drugs, pornographic literature and devices, high-interest loans, stolen property, and bingo parlors were "available on practically every street corner" in Seattle. He counted at least ten whorehouses, one of which was frequented by a high-ranking police officer who knew the Madam personally and made sure that cops left the place alone.

Chambliss also found clandestine gambling clubs -- lots of clandestine gambling clubs. "Another part of the night scene," he commented, "were the high-stakes poker games that began around midnight. A few dollars of illegal gambling money across a table is one thing, but when fifty to a hundred thousand dollars changes hands every night, players and managers become more discreet." Popular gambling clubs in the 1960s included the New

Caledonia Bridge Club on Union Street and the 611 Club on Park Avenue. Between 1956 and 1970 each of the eleven bingo parlors in Seattle grossed over \$300,000 per year. The owner of one bingo parlor netted \$240,000 a year after expenses -- including payoffs to police and politicians.

These gambling clubs also served as havens for other illegal activities, such as the distribution of drugs, the handling of stolen merchandise, the acquisition of illegal liquor, and the arranging of high-interest loans. And "seedy" Mafia types or society's degenerates did not carry out all of these activities. Rather, Seattle's political- and business-elite oversaw them. "The group that I found managing and profiting from organized crime in Seattle was like crime networks everywhere," Chambliss observed, "in that it was composed of some of the city's and state's leading citizens. Working for, and with, this group of respectable community members was a staff to coordinate activities of prostitution, card games, lottery, bookmaking, pinball machines, the sale and distribution of drugs, usury, pornography, and even systematic robbery and burglary....There were over a thousand people in Seattle who profited directly from the[se] rackets...."

Businessmen visiting Seattle knew it featured many gambling halls and speakeasies. Doing away with these activities would essentially kill a good chunk of tourist revenue; conventions, conferences, and business retreats would, instead, be held in another city that had a reputation for tolerance of illegal operations such as gambling and speakeasies.

Seattle may have been known for its timber mills and Boeing factories, but its truly profitable industry was racketeering. "The total profits of...various illegal businesses exceeded a hundred million dollars a year in Seattle," Chambliss noted, "and this placed gambling, narcotics, fraud, usury, and organized theft among the state's two or three largest industries."

On The Take is thorough, personal, engaging, and informative. I discuss it here at length only because it chronicles the history of Seattle's vice corruption like no other book in print. Chambliss learned first-hand about organized crime networks in Seattle. He learned of enormous drug transactions and rings of professional thieves. He discovered an existence of cooperation between union officials and state politicians to sell large quantities of stolen liquor to the state liquor board. "For six months," Chambliss wrote, commenting on a period in his five-year stay in Seattle, "I went to [Vito's] Cafe....It was indeed interesting to see,

week after week, gathered at one table and talking low enough not to be heard by anyone else: the assistant chief of police, an assistant prosecuting attorney, an undersheriff, and an attorney from a firm of lawyers that specialized in criminal law." These men were known by insiders as the "Local Mafia."

Chambliss heard countless stories of police payoffs and corrupt politicians who profited from various rackets in Seattle. He was even approached, on several occasions, by prostitutes planted by members of Seattle's crime networks -- all in the effort of hoping to nab and discredit Chambliss.

"Among those wanting illegal goods and services to be available are important and powerful sectors of every local community," Chambliss wrote. "Professional people want to gamble, consume drugs, engage in prostitutes, and invest in profitable enterprises. Hotels and restaurants do not want a 'clean city' or conventions will go elsewhere. Business and professional people do not want gambling stamped out, they want it controlled....The police are thus embedded in a morass of contradictions. They are supposed to enforce the laws that are unenforceable and that many powerful interests do not want enforced. What they want is not enforcement, but control. In essence, they want the police to manage the illegal enterprises so that people who do not want to participate in them will not know they are present and those who do want to can find them relatively easily."

The fact that the city ordinances and state laws were written in such a way to promote vice corruption didn't help matters either. The laws and ordinances were created in such a way that it was impossible for a club not to violate at least one or more of these rules. Now, technically, gambling was allowed in Seattle -- but only on wagers of no more than one dollar. Gamblers weren't enticed by such low wagers, so gambling clubs couldn't legally survive. If you were the manager of a gambling club, though, and systematically paid off the cop who patrolled your area, you could be assured that law enforcement would leave you alone and wagers could jump from one dollar to thousands of dollars.

Cops were savvy to such an arrangement, and Chambliss described how new cops were introduced to corruption and payoffs by veteran officers: "A new police officer is taken out on the First Avenue patrol. After a couple of nights his partner goes into a place that has gambling or into a cabaret that operates on the edge of legality and comes out with a bottle of whiskey and ten dollars. The new patrolman is informed that 'from time to time these

guys give us something -- here you take the whiskey; I've got plenty at home.' If the young recruit accepts it, then it builds from there up to regular payoffs, depending of course on the beat and how important his job. If he refuses the 'gratuity,' then the senior patrolman will tell the sergeant that 'Joe ain't gonna play; we're gonna have trouble with him.' The next day Joe receives a notice that he has been transferred to a patrol car that works out of Wallingford, the North End, or Georgetown, middle-class neighborhoods where the vices are not so prevalent."

Similar ordinances applied to gambling clubs were applied to cabarets in Seattle. These ordinances required that every cabaret have a restaurant attached. The restaurant, according to the ordinance, had to constitute at least 75 percent of the total floor space of the cabaret and restaurant combined. Furthermore, the ordinance required that any entertainer at the cabaret be at least twenty-five feet from the nearest customer during her act. For a one-hundred-square-foot cabaret, an attached three-hundred-square-foot restaurant was required. In addition, more space had to be allotted so as not to violate the twenty-five foot buffer zone between the entertainer and the patron. Simply put, the cabaret had to be enormous. And the restaurants at cabarets never made money; they were simply there to meet the ordinance requirement. Cabaret patrons went downtown to drink booze and look at women, not to eat dinner.

As Chambliss quickly learned and, subsequently, wrote, "In effect, such ordinances gave the police and the prosecuting attorney complete discretion to choose who should operate gambling rooms, cabarets, and restaurants. This discretion was used to force payoffs to the police....[The ordinances] produce...a neat mechanism by which the police, politicians, and other law enforcement agencies can shake down the owners and operators of nightclubs." Moreover, business licenses were "dealt" to those proprietors willing to cooperate with Seattle's rampantly corrupt licensing division. Chambliss explains, "To operate a tavern, a cabaret, a cardroom, a taxicab, or even a tow-truck company, it was necessary to have a license issued by the city's licensing division. These licenses were no less than a piece of very valuable property."

Seattle's network of corruption was not limited to cops and politicians. Firemen from the city cooperated with crime interests by inspecting and harassing businesses that refused to cooperate with payoff arrangements. A sheriff appointed to the state parole board manipulated prison terms for members of this network of corruption -- and even doled out

harsher sentences to persons whom had a history of non-cooperation with said network. The network even branched out nationally. As Chambliss reported, "When Seattle's crime network was in full swing, on the fifteenth of every month an official of the state House of Representatives flew from Seattle to San Francisco carrying a satchel full of one-hundred-dollar bills. This was 'laundered money,' from gambling profits. The amount in the satchel varied each month depending on how much the Seattle bookmakers, gamblers, and narcotics dealers owed investors in other parts of the United States. It also depended on how much Seattle's people wanted to either launder through banks into secret accounts or invest in enterprises in other parts of the country."

A city with a reputation for vice tolerance meant more money would be spent in that city by outsiders -- money spent on booze, gambling, whores, and drugs. "There are good reasons in the legitimate business community for a crime network," Chambliss noted. "Many of the city's legal businesses thrive or decline to the extent that goods and services provided by a crime network are available. One such industry is tourism. Hotels, restaurants, and taverns profit and thrive on vice....Men who come to conventions are attracted to cities where gambling, prostitution, pornography, and various other 'pleasures' are readily available."

As one of Chambliss' subjects explained, "[E]verybody [knows] that a decent city that is growing has to have whores, has to have accessible liquor, prohibition or not, has to have a place where a guy can go and shoot craps, either for penny ante or high stakes, has to have a place where a guy can go and play cards. There's no reason putting somebody in jail for it, because it is what all good, righteous Christians do."

All of these vice transgressions would eventually lead to profits for cops, mayors, and leading city officials. Between 1956 and 1970 illegal business was controlled by a King County prosecutor, a Seattle city council president, an assistant chief of police, city police captains, the King County sheriff, the King County jail chief, undersheriffs, a Seattle police major, and an official of the Teamsters Union. Chambliss observed, "[O]rganized crime really consists of a coalition of politicians, law-enforcement people, businessmen, union leaders, and (in some ways least important of all) racketeers. Who dominates the coalition varies from city to city and from time to time."

Crime networks in Seattle represented big business and, historically, when those networks were threatened, things got nasty. In the late-1960s a rather unfortunate photograph was

published on the front page of the *Seattle P-I*. Pinball czar and crook Ben Cichy was photographed entering the home of King County Prosecutor Charles O. Carroll. It seems the two men met every month to discuss "business." Cichy and Carroll claimed they shared an interest in classical music and met to discuss this interest. No one believed this, of course, and the exposure of such a relationship between two key public figures supposedly at opposite ends of the legal spectrum posed a threat to the crime network. In May 1969 Cichy's body was found floating in front of his lakeside estate. One person close to the situation reported that Cichy was an "excellent swimmer" and told Chambliss, "When Ben Cichy was killed they sent someone out from downtown to burglarize his place. Three black dudes went out and tore up the floor looking for where he kept the monthly payoff money hidden. They left twenty thousand dollars worth of jewelry just sitting on the table. They were obviously not burglars, but people sent out from downtown. They terrorized Cichy's wife to death."

Another informant told Chambliss, "Murder is the easiest crime of all to get away with. There are one hundred and one ways to commit murder that are guaranteed to let you get away with it."

During the 1960s Seattle's crime network faced some real threats. The first were journalists savvy to corruption and eager to earn the reputation as the journalist who opened the lid on the illegal activities of major public figures.

What they found, instead, was indifference.

When the *Seattle P-I* ran the front-page photograph of crook Cichy leaving the King County Prosecutor's home, the editors were met with derision. The same citizens who had sat on the mayor's blue-ribbon council to look into allegations of police corruption criticized the *P-I*, accusing the paper of engaging in "yellow journalism." Prosecutor Carroll threatened a lawsuit. The newspaper's editor resigned shortly after the incident.

Around the same time, a group of young, ambitious journalists started a local magazine with financial help from a major Seattle broadcaster. The magazine, *Seattle*, was attempting to make an impact on the Pacific Northwest and tackled huge stories, one of which was vice corruption. An early issue contained an article by Chambliss, a feature article on the tolerance policy, and a front-page editorial calling for Prosecutor Carroll's resignation.

Instead of succeeding as an investigative magazine, advertisers cancelled their contracts, newsstands refused to sell the magazine, the broadcasting company which financed the magazine pressured the editor, revenues declined, Prosecutor Carroll threatened suit, the business community attacked the magazine, and the magazine eventually folded.

Journalists were beating a dead horse. Everyone *knew* Seattle was corrupt. The grand ambitions of journalists "exposing" vice corruption in the city were moot: citizens already knew Seattle cops and politicians were on the take. As Chambliss noted, "[T]he only real threat to an association of illegal businessmen comes from competitive forces amassing sufficient power to overthrow them, not from public exposure."

Chambliss was right. Yet, when the network was finally brought down, it was not at the hands of "competitive forces amassing sufficient power" but, rather, by one of their own. Tony Gustin was a respected police officer who spent more than twenty years on the force -- mostly in bureaus uninvolved in the payoff system. He was a clean cop, respected and untouched. While other cops took part in payoffs from the tolerance policy, Gustin went about his own business.

When the state attorney general began a war against the crime network, Gustin (along with three other clean cops) was appointed to head up one of four bureaus that would investigate police corruption. Gustin started out by transferring officers whom he believed were part of the payoff system. He replaced them with cops much like himself, interested in cracking down on gambling and prostitution. Gustin was also smart, and when he began to receive threats, he allied himself with a handful of journalists -- a move that made it difficult for Gustin to be ousted because, as the attorney general noted and the journalists reported, he was only doing his job.

Gustin sensed he was merely scratching the surface and might eventually have to pursue suspected politicians and policemen. One bingo club in particular he knew was frequented by many top officers and elected officials. He knew some records there could be traced to these top officials -- cancelled checks, receipts. He thus obtained a warrant. Shortly before the raid, Gustin intentionally leaked word of the plan to a member of the payoff system. Gustin -- along with thirty-five police officers, an assistant from the attorney general's office, and a reporter -- then raided the bingo club. Of course, no crime-network members were at the club (in fact, there were only a few senior citizens playing ten-cent bingo) but

that didn't matter to Gustin. He was after the records, which would eventually lead to arrests.

The system was cracked, and members were scrambling. Prosecutors, businessmen, and city council members were screaming at the police chief to get things under control. Gustin, along with his posse, met with the police chief. Gustin briefed him on his findings, all of which were nothing new to the chief. He was well aware of corruption; he was an integral part of the corruption. "What do you want from me?" the Chief pleaded.

One officer accompanying Gustin replied, "What we're saying is that you are either a thief, a liar, or a fool. And I think you know which one of them you are."

Gustin said, "I want you out." While many of the others on Gustin's team leaned toward a thorough cleansing of the city's corruption, Gustin knew better. The cleaning-up would simply be a publicity ploy and, if the chief were still in power, things would eventually return to normal.

The chief retired.

The attorney general convened a federal grand jury and indictments were handed down to the former county prosecutor, the former chief of police, two former assistant chiefs of police, the president of the city council, the county sheriff, the head of the county jail, and a former sheriff (to list only a few).

Gustin had cracked the system, but ultimately he did not defeat it. In the end, many of those indicted were found not guilty or their cases were dropped. The acting Police Chief, Buzz Cook, served a total of six months. One of his assistants served a one-year county jail sentence. A former sheriff was given a three-year suspended sentence. A racketeer/tavern owner served two years in federal prison.

Shortly before the Wah Mee killings, Seattle Police Chief Patrick Fitzsimons denied allegations made by a defense attorney in a separate case, wherein Fitzsimons was accused of tolerating gambling in Chinatown. Fitzsimons argued that most of the clubs were private and the people who went into them were well known. "Most of them have double-doors with

buzzer arrangements," Fitzsimons said. "They station a person at the doors to screen out persons they don't know."

A history of police raids on gambling clubs in Chinatown did exist, though such raids were sporadic and often marred by legal controversy. FBI raids on two Chinatown gambling clubs in 1976 occurred without notifying the Seattle Police Department in advance. In a separate incident three years earlier, Seattle police raided the Heng Association Club and netted seventy-six arrests. But then-Mayor Wes Uhlman publicly apologized a few days later because he believed the people arrested had been treated as "second-class citizens."

In New York City, many owners of gambling clubs worked directly with the police department when raids occurred -- a practice endemic to many United States Chinatowns. Writer and activist Peter Kwong comments, "Many are convinced that the police have been paid off. According to a persistent rumor, 'inside' cops inform the gambling establishments about plans for raids, so that the owners can be prepared. In fact, there are Chinese reputed to be 'professional prisoners,' i.e., those paid to stay behind when a police raid is anticipated. They are booked, locked up overnight, and released the next day after being admonished by the judge. Two different Chinatown reporters interviewed these prisoners and estimated that they were paid between fifty and one hundred dollars per night. And the police could take credit for 'enforcing' the law."

Similar instances took place in Seattle during the 1940s. Al Hilbert, the assistant manager at the late Basin Street Club on South Jackson Street ordered all his bartenders to be fingerprinted at the police station so that little time was wasted downtown during these "raids." The Seattle Times reported, "It's an old, old story for many of the prisoners. They stand around for a few minutes in the booking office until their regular bondsmen post necessary bail. Then they are freed....Almost without exception -- it is always the same group of men who are defendants. They trot in and out of the jail and in and out of Judge Knott's court with surprising regularity.... The addresses at which they operate are usually typed on the complaints." Cops in Seattle regularly staged raids -- informing the club ahead of time so managers could select a designated arrestee to be taken down to the station. These raids misled the public into believing the cops were "cracking down" on illegal clubs in Seattle. In fact they were not.

Seattle writer Jim Faber learned first-hand about the tolerance policy blanketing the city. Faber penned a series of articles for the *Seattle P-I* -- a Hearst newspaper. His series, formally titled "Seattle After Dark," was a first-person account of betting in illegal gambling clubs in the wee hours of the morning. "It was a dandy assignment for a reporter," Faber remarked. "It included playing my favorite game -- poker -- on company time and on Hearst money, with no need to produce receipts for the expenditures." On the eve of receiving tips of where "the big money was being laid down," Faber's series was abruptly pulled from the newspaper. Later, over a drink with then-Mayor Alan Pomeroy, Faber learned exactly why his series was killed.

"That series of yours was beginning to get annoying," Mayor Pomeroy told the writer. "So I called your boss."

"You called Bernie [the *P-I* editor]?" Faber asked, surprised.

"No, not Bernie. I called Charlie [the *P-I*'s publisher]. I said, 'Charlie, you want to get this town closed down so tight you can't get a bet down?'"

As it turned out, the *P-I*'s publisher was one of the city's most enthusiastic gamblers. Faber's series was pulled.

Seattle, then, had a long history of corruption. Willie Mak knew this first-hand, by working and spending leisure time in gambling clubs in Chinatown. Because of this first-hand knowledge, Mak grew confident in his plan. Even if the plan backfired, there was the possibility of the entire incident going unreported. Not only would reporting the incident expose the Wah Mee Club to scrutiny and a possible closure, it would again lead to investigations into police corruption and gambling tolerance allegations. The gambling club would shut down, cops would lose a lucrative source of supplemental income, and the Seattle Police Department would be saddled with a publicity problem.

With each passing day moving closer toward the date of the robbery and mass-murder, Mak grew more street-smart, more confident.

The gamblers were operating illegally.

The city was infested with corrupt cops.

Public officials were receiving kickbacks.

Mak's plan was simply a small part of a larger, more corrupt system.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Amid burning incense the three men performed obeisance and spoke their vow. 'We three, Liu Pie, Kuan Yu, and Chang Fei, though of separate birth, now bind ourselves in brotherhood -- We could not help our separate births, but on the self-same day we mean to die. Shining imperial Heaven, fruitful Queen Earth, witness our determination, and may god and man jointly scourge whichever of us fails his duty or forgets his obligation.'"

-- Lo Kuan-chung

The day before the heist, Willie Mak went shopping for a restaurant. He and a friend, Stanley Yuen Tse, drove to Lyndon, Washington, north of Seattle in Whatcom County. The young men eyed the restaurant but decided that it was too expensive.

Restaurant-shopping was not new for Mak. He and Tse had been considering a restaurant purchase for quite some time. But any prospective plans to purchase always fell through. One restaurant was filled with old equipment. Another restaurant was too small, and the owner wanted cash.

Later that evening, Willie Mak went to the Gim Lun Association gambling club and lost about \$2,000. Broke and in debt, he then borrowed five-hundred dollars from Hong Chan, a cook at the Hong Kong restaurant.

Later that evening, at around 10:00 p.m., Mak met Tony Ng and they went to the Wah Mee Club to gamble.

Both men started with one-dollar and two-dollar bets that quickly grew to four hundred dollars bets. They lost horribly, but whether they even cared about their losses is doubtful. They had bigger plans.

The next morning, at around 6:00 a.m., they met Benjamin Ng at a diner in South Seattle. They briefly discussed the robbery before leaving the restaurant just before 7:00 a.m.

The following night, Saturday, February 18, 1983, the three young men met in the parking lot of the Kingdome. They swapped cars with Mak's nephew and returned to Mak's residence. In the basement of the Mak residence, there was a pool table littered with guns, nylon cords, and a duffel bag. They met briefly before disembarking.

Benjamin Ng met a friend at a video arcade in the University District. He complained of a sore throat and returned to his parents' home in South Seattle, where he took some medication. He then drove his car to Chinatown, where he ate dinner with Tony Ng and an unidentified friend at the Tai Tung restaurant on South King Street. The three young men shared a booth, ate dinner together, and showed no signs of any abnormal behavior.

After dinner, Benjamin Ng, Willie Mak, and Tony Ng met briefly at the closed-for-construction Hop Sing gambling club -- just across the alley from the Wah Mee. Mak had been given a key to the club, despite the fact he had only been a member of the Hop Sing tong for less than two weeks. The three men went their separate ways and, later that evening, Mak met Tony Ng outside the Wah Mee. Both men were concealing weapons. They rang the buzzer and a security guard positioned inside the office immediately recognized the two young men.

The guard buzzed them inside.

Willie Mak and Tony Ng loitered around the Club for awhile, watching a Sonics game on the television. There was idle chatter among the patrons, the occasional laugh, and the sound of Mah Jongg tiles clicking like teeth. Tony Ng scanned the menu. He was clearly nervous. He sat down and ordered some tea. An old man offered Ng a bite of his food and they chatted a bit. There were only seven or eight people in the Club, most of who were gathered around the gaming tables. Others were tending the bar and another man was working as a guard inside the office. Mak and Ng had made it to the Club before midnight, just as they had planned, but Benjamin Ng was nowhere to be found. Mak grew angrier, seething over his accomplice's absence.

Shortly after midnight, Benjamin Ng crossed South King Street and entered Maynard Alley South. He was carrying a brown paper bag filled with a handful of pre-cut nylon cords. Ng was buzzed inside the Club and the three men got to work.

"Hands up!" Benjamin Ng yelled. The guard inside the office was held at gunpoint, so that he could identify arriving guests and admit them into the Club. Tony Ng was instructed to check the backroom. The patrons were ordered to the floor at gunpoint. The nylon cords were removed and used to hog-tie the victims. As more guests filtered into the Club, they found their friends and fellow gamblers lying on the floor. The arriving guests were ordered to the floor and hog-tied with the others. Restaurants were closing and Club members were retiring to the Wah Mee for drinks and gambling. In less than ten minutes, the number of patrons at the Club doubled.

Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng began emptying the victims' pockets. "You guys want money?" a victim told the robbers. "Take it from John Loui." Loui was one of the wealthiest victims, the manager in charge of finances and hiring at the Wah Mee Club.

"Shut up!" Mak replied, in Chinese. "You are not allowed to say anything!"

The victims didn't believe they were going to die. They thought the incident was nothing more than a robbery and the fact they had been tied up individually only helped further this belief. With the victims tied, the three men could successfully rob the Club and flee the scene without anyone following in pursuit. Or so the victims thought.

Satisfied with their lootings, Mak told Tony Ng to wait in the area between the two security doors. Ng followed Mak's instructions, carrying a bag containing more than \$6,000 in cash. While Ng waited, Mak and Benjamin Ng opened fire on the Club. One by one they killed each victim, shooting up to three bullets into the head-and-neck areas of their victims. The guard in the office was shot twice. Mak stood at the top of a small set of steps that led from the bar to the gaming area, firing at the victims. More than thirty shots were fired on fourteen victims, all of the bullets making contact with the victims. The floor of the Club quickly filled with blood.

"Is that all the bullets?" one of the killers asked.

Indeed, there were no more bullets.

Satisfied that the victims were dead, Mak and Benjamin Ng met Tony Ng near the entrance.

The club reeked of alcohol, cigarette smoke, and carnage. Music poured out of a stereo, filling the room with eerie noise. The three men, fleeing the scene in a borrowed red Opal belonging to Mak's nephew, drove to the Mercer Island floating bridge. They threw the guns over the side of the bridge -- a nearly flawless disposal, except that one of the weapons didn't clear the bridge's guardrail and, instead, skidded across the shoulder of the road. They parked the car on the side of the road. Mak got out of the car and scoured the shoulder of the road, before finding the weapon and properly dropping it into Lake Washington.

CHAPTER FIVE

After the killings, Benjamin Ng returned to the home of Kennis Izumi, his girlfriend, who lived with her parents. Ng had been staying there for about two-and-a-half months. When Ng arrived, at 1:10 a.m., two of Izumi's girlfriends were at the house. Ng's hair was wet and Izumi suspected that Ng had been with another woman. Ng lit a fire in the fireplace. Izumi's friends left and Izumi went to bed. Ng stayed up until the early hours of the morning, watching the movie "The Heist" on television, before finally retiring to bed as well. Ng lay in bed with his girlfriend. He stared at the ceiling for a while before finally falling asleep. Later that morning, police came to Izumi's house searching for Benjamin Ng. Police had initially searched for Ng at the residence of his brother, Stephen Ng. Stephen informed the police that Benjamin was living with his girlfriend at her parents' home. Police rang the doorbell and Izumi's mother, Connie, answered. She told the officers that Ng was asleep with her daughter. Police Lt. Robert Holter entered the house, opened the bedroom door where the young couple was sleeping, and grabbed Izumi by the wrist. He threw her into the hallway and proceeded to pin Ng onto the bed. Ng gave no resistance and, in fact, was sound asleep when apprehended.

Benjamin Ng was taken into custody.

Willie Mak and Tony Ng left the Wah Mee Club and went to a bowling alley to establish an alibi. Both were spotted at the Imperial Lanes in the early hours of the same morning. Ironically, Tony Ng's father was also at the Imperial Lanes bowling with some friends. "A lot of people got killed in Chinatown," the senior Ng told his son. Though Mak was pleased with results at the Club and was confident his plan succeeded, he was still irate Benjamin Ng had arrived late to the Wah Mee. An unidentified source reported that Mak and his friends later left the bowling alley and returned to Chinatown to watch police remove bodies from the Club. That same morning, Mak accompanied a friend, Andy Wong, to the home of Moo and Jean Mar, the husband-wife couple killed at the Club.

"Do you know who did this?" Wong asked Mak, en route to the Mar residence.

"The Chinese-Vietnamese from Los Angeles," Mak replied.

Wong was a friend of the Mar family, and went to their residence to notify the family of the killings. Mak remained in the car while Wong went inside and gave them the bad news.

While Mak spent the early-morning hours at the Imperial Lanes and with Andy Wong, police spent their time at Mak's residence. Detective Dan Melton, along with several other police detectives, arrived at Mak's residence at 4:30 a.m. Mak's father and brother let the detectives into the house and Mak's room was looked over before it was decided a search warrant would be necessary.

Mak made a phone call to his house at 7:20 a.m. and learned that the police were looking for him. He then called Detective Melton. "I hear you are looking for me and my friend," Mak told the detective. He agreed to get a ride home and, when he arrived at his residence, he turned himself over to the police.

Something had gone horribly wrong for Mak: How could the police know to look for him? What could have possibly happened? Mak soon learned that even after the victims were hog-tied, shot, and left for dead, one person managed to survive.

One person who knew Mak well.

WAI YOK CHIN was a retired cook in his sixties. Chin shared a low-rent apartment several blocks from the Club with his female companion Rose. Rose, fifty-four years old, had recently divorced. She enjoyed living in Seattle's Chinatown. Her daughters, however, who did not live in Chinatown, wanted Rose to stay with them. "She's living there as a convenience," Chin's landlord, Sam Horishige, said at the time. "The daughters want her to live with them, but what can you do? She likes to hang around here."

Chin was an intensely private man who rarely ventured conversation with his neighbors. "[Chin was] very quiet," said Horishige, adding, "The Chinese people are very secretive."

When Chin would see his landlord, he would offer a cordial hello and little else. Chin's neighbors knew very little about him. One neighbor described Chin as a small man who

suffered from some sort of illness. He was extremely independent, never having joined any of Chinatown's four tongs.

Chin moved to the United States at the age of sixteen, to escape the fighting after Japan had invaded China. He joined his father in Seattle. He joined the United States Navy in 1942 and served as a steward's mate and officer's cook. He was discharged in 1946, and continued to work as a cook, a salesman, and a gaming dealer. After he left the service, he went to an English-language school near Seattle University. One of Chin's classmates, Jack Woo, reported that Chin worked for a while at a restaurant in Bremerton and may have possibly worked at the shipyards there. "Everybody [liked] him," said Woo. "Everybody saw him quite frequently in Chinatown." Whether Chin ever married or had any children is unclear.

Chin was an excellent Pai Kau dealer, leaving many Wah Mee patrons in awe over how quickly he was able to calculate the house's winnings. "That guy [was] the best," said one person who had seen Chin work as a dealer. "He [was] so fast. He [knew] how much to take out of the winner's pot for the house. That kind of math [came] out of his head instantly."

He went to work at the Wah Mee when the Club reopened in 1982. John Loui, who handled the money at the Club, knew that Chin was an excellent dealer and hadn't been working. He knew Chin could use the money and he offered the old man a job. Chin worked at the Wah Mee one or two hours a night, four nights a week.

Chin's interest in gambling also got him into some trouble. In 1976 Chin was charged in Federal court with illegal gambling. U.S. District Court documents indicate that Chin pleaded guilty to a charge of failing to keep records for a gaming establishment. Under a plea-bargaining arrangement, Chin was fined and given a suspended three-month prison sentence.

That Chin survived the worst mass murder in Seattle history is a miracle of no small measure. Chin was a weak, frail, aged man; the second eldest of all the victims left for dead at the Club. He was in poor health and moved at a slow pace along the streets of Chinatown. "The funny thing about the killings," commented one of Chin's friends, "was that [he] was the one who survived. He was the weakest of the bunch."

When Chin was ordered to the floor, it was Tony Ng who bent over to hog-tie the old man. "No need to tie so tight," he told Ng. Chin had never before that night met the young man. Earlier that evening, when Ng had entered the Club, Chin had offered him a bite of his food. Later, when he was being tied, Chin told the stranger, "I'm an old man." Apparently grateful for the food, Ng sympathized and complied. Chin wasn't frightened, nor did he plea for mercy. He had lived a full life, having served in World War II and earning commendations for his service. "If you die, you die," Chin would later comment, describing the situation. "That's all. They already tie you up. What else can you do?"

But the old man *could* do something else. He knew he would be shot and, when the three men opened fire, he wriggled beneath one of the gaming tables. When the bullets slammed into his neck, they came at such an oblique angle that they did not cause fatal wounds. Instead, he was knocked unconscious.

Chin regained consciousness after hearing someone pounding on one of Club's entrance doors and ringing the buzzer. Because Ng had not tied his victim tightly, Chin could free himself. It took him two or three minutes to stagger from the lower floor of the Club and manage the two steps that led toward the entrance. Near the entrance, he grew dizzy and rested on an adjacent stool. He looked at the victims scattered about the lower level. John Loui still lived, breathing heavily, lying face down in his own blood. Sitting on the stool, Chin leaned on one of the entrance doors and, much to his surprise, the heavy doors opened. He pushed past them and staggered outside the Club, the doors locking behind him. Chin lay in the alley, bleeding from bullet wounds in his neck and jaw, the bullets having exited through his throat. The night air was cold and damp. When he stepped from the Club and into the garbage-strewn alley, three men were waiting for him. One of the men, George Ong, a cook from Federal Way, had been pounding on the door and ringing the buzzer, trying to get inside and not knowing what had happened. Another man with Ong was an employee at the Tai Tung restaurant.

Seeing Chin bleeding profusely from the throat, one of the men asked, "Who did it? A black guy? A Vietnamese guy?"

"Ng and Mak," Chin replied, "That's all I can tell. The door locked already. Call ambulance." Seattle Police Officers David Ziskin and John Wolph were the first to arrive at the scene. Ong met Officer Ziskin at the top of the alley. Ong was assisting the bleeding victim away from

the Club. Chin was bleeding heavily from his mouth and throat and Ziskin helped to seat the old man in the passenger seat of his cruiser. A few moments later, medics arrived and Officer Carmen rode with Chin to Harborview Medical Center. In the rear of the ambulance, Officer Carmen tactfully interviewed the victim. But Chin's injuries were severe. He could only answer "yes" or "no," and even those answers were barely decipherable because of his thick accent. Furthermore, when the bullets had struck Chin, the old man's dentures were forced from his mouth and onto the floor of the Club.

"Have you ever seen any of these people before?" Carmen asked the old man, trying to get an ID on the suspects.

"Yes," Chin replied.

"Could you recognize them again?"

"Yes."

Chin arrived at Harborview and was listed in critical condition. The lone survivor of the worst mass murder in Seattle history, Chin was placed under heavy police guard and underwent surgery.

Chin had pointed to the entrance of the Club, and Officer Ziskin followed what he described as a "trail of blood" down the alley toward the Wah Mee. The officer noticed that a small trail of blood was leading out from beneath the entrance doors. The carpeted mat was freshly stained with Chin's blood and, when Ziskin tried the doors, he found they were tightly locked. He retreated to his car to get a Halligen Tool -- a sort of crowbar -- and returned to the entrance to try and break into the Club. Officer Ziskin pried open the first security door, then another, and followed Officers Wolph and Schlecht into the Club and its ensuing carnage.

The officers entered the Club with their shotguns drawn. To the right were bodies lying face down in an expansive puddle of blood. To the left and around the corner, in the office, a body slumped in an upholstered chair. At the Club's posh bar, the officers noticed that two of the stools had been overturned and the television blared. One officer checked the restrooms, the basement, closets -- the entire Club.

The suspects were gone.

Chinatown was abuzz with activity. The alley was cordoned off and a crowd of more than five dozen loitered around South King Street to watch the commotion. Police Chief Fitzsimons arrived, along with the Department's top detectives. Commenting on the scene, Fitzsimons, a veteran New York City cop, remarked, "[I've never] seen anything like this, even in New York." Sergeant Cameron supervised the investigation, with at least a half-dozen veteran detectives accompanying him.

Inside the Club, twelve of the victims were arranged in a semi-circle around the gaming tables. The guard, Gim Wong, was found dead in the office, slumped in a chair. The officers and detectives moved around the room's main gaming area, checking bodies for pulses. All the victims were lying face down, dead from gunshot wounds to the head. One victim was hog-tied so tightly that his hands had turned purple. The bodies of Moo Min Mar and his wife, Jean, were discovered with towels covering their heads. The towels were marked with stripling -- gun powder residue -- which indicated that the victims had been shot point-blank execution-style from a distance of less than three feet.

"There was so much blood," commented a Police Homicide Investigator. "We were all afraid of falling in it. It was that thick." A colleague confronted another officer, arriving at the scene moments later. Outside the Club's entrance, his colleague, without describing the carnage inside, simply said, "You don't want to go in there."

Checking for pulses, the authorities discovered that John Loui was still alive. He, too, was rushed to Harborview and underwent surgery in a room next to Chin. Attempts were futile and Loui later died during surgery.

Detectives, police officers, and medics worked around the room, sloshing through the thick blood that covered the cement floor. Some tied plastic bags around their ankles, to keep their shoes and pant-cuffs dry of blood. With each body they overturned, they found the spent slugs that had killed each of the victims.

The bodies were removed from the Club, with the ligatures still in place, and were driven to the Medical Examiners' office. With a positive ID on Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak, police

officers arrested the two suspects. But the investigation was hardly finished. Chin had reported that there were three men who had opened fire on the Wah Mee. He had named Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng, but was unable to identify the third man. And a waiter, who spotted Benjamin Ng eating at a restaurant shortly before the murders at the Club, reported that someone other than Mak was dining with Ng.

A suspect was still at large, and police established a Chinese-language telephone-answering service. The recorded message stated simply: "Your friends were killed. Help us catch the persons responsible."

CHAPTER SIX

"Police captain Arthur Powers had launched a drive to clean up the rotten core of corruption that was turning New York's Chinatown into an empire of vice and violence -- only to find himself in a labyrinth of criminal power that led halfway around the world. He had plunged into an affair with Carol Cone, a beautiful, ravenously ambitious TV newswoman capable of destroying both his marriage and his career to get all she wanted. He had gone too far to turn back -- and just maybe too far to come out alive. Powers was all by himself when he went after the untouchable kingpin of the Chinese Mafia, in a one-on-one war that moved from the streets of Hong Kong to the jungles of Thailand to the gambling dens of New York's Chinatown -- with one cop's badge and a hundred million dollars of heroin at stake."
-- jacket blurb for the pulp crime novel Year of the Dragon by Robert Daley

The killings at the Club sparked a media frenzy that the city of Seattle had never seen before. The incident was quickly labeled "The Chinatown Massacre" by the mainstream presses -- a soundbyte that stuck with Washington State residents. *Time* magazine called the victims of the Club the "Unlucky Thirteen." Reporters described Chinatown as a "shadowy world of Seattle's tongs." Stories ran with accompanying photos depicting a gaming table with money, Mah Jongg tiles, and handguns. Reporters described Chinatown as filled with "young hoodlums and old men who convene in secrecy behind locked doors to gamble among themselves." And the reporters assigned to cover the story were heard to say that they were unsure they would return to Chinatown to eat. One reporter writing for the Asian-American newspaper *The International Examiner* relayed a story about a Caucasian reporter from another newspaper who thought he "might be served by a Chinese waiter who was a hoodlum in disguise." The same reporter for the *Examiner* reported that yet another mainstream-newspaper reporter "discussed the trepidation he experienced when he sat at Denny's restaurant -- now famous as the site of the robbery discussions preceding the Wah Mee -- eating breakfast, turned and saw a group of Asian kids in dark jackets in the restaurant with him."

Even newspaper descriptions of the Wah Mee differed. The diagrams of the Club's layout as printed in the *Seattle Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* were so distinctly different

from one another (and from the actual Club) one could have suspected that two mass slayings had occurred at two separate clubs on the same night.

And mainstream newspapers covering the slayings at the Club ran accompanying stories about "More youths doing more prison time" and "Lonely frustrated youths [finding homes] in the tong[s]." Seattle writer Rebecca Boren detailed divergent cultural perspectives on the tragedy, writing, "[T]wo strikingly different images of [Chinatown] emerge. First -- and this has gotten the most media play -- there's the tightly knit community, almost a closed society, where police are helpless, fraternal associations may embrace secret societies, and gangs run amok on the streets and behind the locked doors of high-stakes gambling clubs. In contrast, there's a neighborhood much like other city neighborhoods, except perhaps for its stronger cultural identity and high proportion of non-English speaking residents, where clubs and family associations grew up during the years when immigrants needed to unite and help one another, where gambling is the local equivalent of a Saturday-night poker game, and where tourists can safely wander at will."

Ron Chew, a reporter for *The Examiner*, commenting on the mainstream reporters, observed, "They asked people in storefronts about the murders. Often these people couldn't speak English well. [The reporters would say] they were being secretive."

In essence, the city's mainstream, Caucasian media quickly dismissed Chinatown's history of hardworking immigrants building lives for themselves and their families. Chinatown residents were instead slapped with a description that made most readers think that Chinatown was filled with gangs, violent tongs, illegal gambling, and thugs. *Examiner* reporter Chew argued that Willie Mak had helped to reinforce the aforementioned stereotypes. Chew wrote, "The tragedy conveniently labeled 'The Chinatown Massacre' was more accurately a tragedy of the Chinese community. Now we are left to build and revitalize the same community Willie Mak had calculated to destroy. It won't be easy."

References to the massacre surfaced seemingly everywhere. Seattle painter Charles Krafft displayed his "Disasterware" series at the Kirkland Arts Center; one item on exhibit included renderings of the Wah Mee Massacre on cups and plates. Local stand-up comedians Michael Larson and Gene Openshaw released [The Seattle Joke Book](#) several months later -- which included jokes about the massacre. Even Seattle rock band Queensryche released a song called "Empire Builder" with lyrics referring to the mass slaying.

Along with the stereotypes came the conspiracy theories. A theory quickly surfaced in the mainstream media: The massacre resulted from a tong rivalry. The theory was easy to dismiss, considering that the mainstream presses had turned the massacre into a fiasco. The *Seattle Times* ran a front-page photo of a card table littered with Mah Jongg tiles and a handgun -- a photo that was clearly the result of creative imaginations. Later, during Benjamin Ng's trial, the *Seattle P-I* put its inept journalistic prowess on display and ran a front-page photo of the hog-tied bodies, lying on the floor, blood leaking from their heads, shortly after the murders.

Even if the mainstream media had wanted to fairly investigate a connection between the killings and a tong rivalry, it simply could not because it had so firmly established itself as being a "tabloid" media; even any half-effort of investigation into such a rivalry would have been perceived as a joke. In essence, the media couldn't be taken seriously because the media wasn't taking what had happened seriously.

But the "tong war theory" floated around for months. Victor Yee, the English secretary for the Hop Sing tong in 1983 (the tong that Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng joined shortly before the murders), commented, "Tongs were set up in this country a hundred years ago to protect Chinese. A tong member is loyal to his tong and his fellow members are committed to keeping peace and harmony in the community." Indeed, tongs in the late-1970s and early-1980s weren't embattled in turf wars and struggles over gambling territories, as described in pop-culture books and movies. In the 1920s and 1950s, some of the bloodiest tong wars on the West Coast were fought in Seattle's Chinatown. In 1922 three Hop Sing tong members were killed. In 1959 a severed head was discovered in a Chinatown alley -- the result of a tong war.

But that was decades ago. In 1983 tongs were simply struggling to eke out an existence. For example, at the time of the killings, the Hip Sing tong consisted of 25 members who paid a monthly due of \$5 per person. "Hip Sing in Seattle is a thing of the past," said Joe Locke, once a national leader of the Hip Sing tong. Locke, 71 years old in 1983, told a reporter, "Those still alive are all my age."

Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng joined the Hop Sing tong shortly before the killings. In the late-1970s and early-1980s, the Hop Sing tong had earned a reputation as being a tough tong.

"They have always been known as kind of the bullies," commented Locke, then-national leader of the Hip Sing tong. The Hop Sing's gambling club was located across the alley from the Wah Mee. Mak, whom, along with Benjamin Ng, had only recently joined the Hop Sing tong, had a key to the club -- despite the fact it was closed for construction. Using the key, the three men convened moments before and moments after the killings at the Wah Mee.

Closing down a gambling club during the Chinese New Year is the equivalent of, say, a Sears department store keeping its doors closed the day after Thanksgiving. Chinatown denizens believed that Willie Mak, as a new member of the Hop Sing tong, felt he had to prove himself. As a result, many believed, he presented his plan of robbery and killings to the leaders of his tong -- a plan he had envisioned since 1980. Closing the Hop Sing gambling club -- which was open to both Hop Sing and non-Hop Sing members -- would encourage gamblers to patronize the Wah Mee. More gamblers at the Wah Mee meant more money at the Wah Mee. In fact, no Wah Mee victims were Hop Sing members; many were members of the Bing Kung Association -- a rival tong that bankrolled the Wah Mee. Hop Sing members were suspicious, some thought, and this explained their absence from the Wah Mee.

So Chinatown was quickly labeled "dangerous" and filled with "hoodlums." Tourists stayed away, replaced by reporters and curiosity-seekers scanning the alley for Wai Chin's dried bloodstains.

The stereotypes were an echo of what Chinese immigrants overcame some 130 years prior.

The Chinese first came to America in the 1850s, fleeing famine in Southern China -- mostly around the city of Canton in Kwangtung Province -- to seek fortunes in the Gold Rush. When the Gold Rush ended, builders of the Northern Pacific Railroad hired Chinese to help build tracks out of Northern California and into Seattle. Railroad builder Charles Crocker hired an overwhelming number of Chinese men who were, in turn, given the somewhat degrading name "Crocker's Pets." Chinese immigrants were a pivotal part of the development of the West Coast in the mid-nineteenth century. Chinese planted the first grapes in the Napa Valley and started the California shrimping industry. They drained the marshes of the Sacramento Delta and the Bing cherry was actually named after a Chinese farmworker named Ah Bing. Chinese bachelors worked tirelessly, finding work and long hours at stores, hotels, hand-laundries, and canneries.

But the attitudes of white Pacific Northwesterners toward the Chinese changed several times between their arrival in the 1850s and the turn of the century.

When the Chinese first arrived, it was by way of the wealthy railroad builders who hired them as cheap labor. The Chinese laborers were collectively referred to as "John," and there was no one else who worked harder than John. For the railroad builders, the Chinese were a Godsend. They worked twelve hours a day eating no more than a handful of rice and earning pennies a day. The Chinese were brave, working with the explosives that would blast the land and clear the way for railroad tracks; many of the non-Chinese were wary of this job.

The Chinese worked tirelessly for a minimal wage and did not complain. What more could a wealthy railroad magnate ask for?

But when the railroad was finished and jobs grew scarce, the Chinese were suddenly reviled. The construction boom was over and jobs were scarce. The Chinese scooped the few jobs available up because they worked for a wage that was less than that of white men. And if the Chinese were to stay, their cheap labor would permanently depress wages. The unemployed white men wanted the Chinese out. "Go home, John," they cried. "Go, John!"

The anti-Chinese movement was born, and a vicious movement it was. Anti-Chinese campaigners made racist and hyperbolic claims. They cited that since a tariff protected businessmen against the competition of cheap Chinese, an immigration ban should protect laborers against cheap Oriental competition. So Congress curtailed the entry of Asiatics.

The anti-Chinese movement was not satisfied. The movement wanted the Chinese who were already here to go home. A labor-oriented paper, *The Seattle Call*, referred to the Chinese as "the two-bit conscience of the scurvy opium fiend...the treacherous almond-eyed sons of Confucius -- chattering, roundmouthed lepers -- yellow rascals who have infested our Western country."

The anti-Chinese movement, also known in some circles as "the better element" and spanning the Western states from California to Oregon to Washington to Wyoming, were in substantial agreement that the Chinese must go. Radical members of the movement wanted

to load the Chinese into boxcars and ship them back to China. The more "conservative" members wanted to "talk the Chinese into going home."

This rhetoric of hate and racism was followed shortly thereafter by violence. In Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, unemployed miners raided a Chinese campsite. The miners killed eleven people and burned down their shacks. The anti-Chinese movement referred to it as the "the successful action." Four days later, five white men and a group of Indians converged on a Chinese mining campsite twenty miles east of Seattle. They raided thirty-five Chinese hop-pickers during the night, shooting randomly, killing three, driving the rest away, and burning the campsite. Later that same week, Chinese working in the Coal Creek and Black Diamond coalmines were terrorized.

Support for the Chinese was scarce. After the Wyoming Massacre and the following incidents of violence, a small group of lawyers, ministers, and public officials lashed out against the anti-Chinese movement. The Methodist Episcopal Ministers' Association called the anti-Chinese movement "cruel, brutal, un-American, and un-Christian." Others quoted the Bill of Rights, American treaties with the Chinese government, and criticized the movement's mistreatment of the Chinese.

Such arguments were generally ignored, however. The anti-Chinese activists felt those who supported the Chinese were only in cahoots with the "Interests" -- the wealthy railroad- and land-companies.

Enter Dan Cronin, a particularly vituperative anti-Chinese crusader. A shrewd propagandist from Eureka, California, Cronin arrived in the Pacific Northwest and spent most of his time in Tacoma, where he organized the Knights of Labor -- a labor sub-group of the anti-Chinese movement. While enlisting members of the Knights of Labor, Cronin also formed the Committee of Nine, which worked to expel the Chinese, divide the wealth, and attack capitalists.

Cronin organized a meeting called the Congress of Sinophobes (or, "The Anti-Chinese Congress") at Yesler Hall in Seattle on September 28, 1885. A president was appointed, along with officers, and several resolutions were made. They agreed that the Chinese had arrived illegally; had thirty days to leave; and that they would not be "[held] responsible for any acts of violence which may arise from the non-compliance of these resolutions." The

Chinese, then, had approximately thirty days to uproot themselves and return home. Many did, but many did not. Those who stayed didn't do so in a show of protest; rather, they stayed because they either had valuable investments in the Western states or they simply could not afford to buy passage back to China.

Thirty days came and went. The Committee of Nine and its supporters took action on November 3, 1885, raiding the Tacoma Chinese community during the early morning. They ordered the Chinese to pack their things and escorted them to railroad boxcars. The Chinese were then taken to Portland, Oregon.

At around the same time, in Seattle, a compromise was forged between the Knights of Labor, the Chinese, and members of the Seattle business community. The Chinese agreed to leave but claimed they needed more time.

While the anti-Chinese movement clearly opposed Chinese in the Pacific Northwest, the Opera House Party represented support of sorts for the Chinese. On November 5, 1885, a meeting between the two parties was held at the Marion Street Opera House in Seattle. Nearly 1,000 people gathered to hear arguments pro- and anti-Chinese.

The Methodist Episcopal Ministers' Association, while opposing the anti-Chinese movement, did not support Chinese settlement. Rather, the ministers supported non-violence toward the Chinese. The Opera House Party and the anti-Chinese movement agreed that the Chinese should go; the Opera House Party just wanted to make sure there was no violence. Another supporter of non-violence toward the Chinese was Judge Thomas Burke. At the November 5th meeting in Seattle, Judge Burke spoke out against the anti-Chinese movement:

"False stories have been put into circulation inciting hostility against the Chinese. -- We are all agreed that the time has come when a new treaty should be made with China restricting Chinese immigration to this country. But by the lawless action of irresponsible persons from outside, the people of this city are called upon to decide whether this shall be brought about in a lawful and orderly manner or by defiantly trampling on the laws, treaties, and Constitution of our country."

In January 1886 a law forbidding Chinese to own real property was passed. Three other laws that would prohibit Chinese from obtaining public or private employment were blocked thanks in part to former Seattle mayor, Orange Jacobs, who called the laws unconstitutional.

The next month, another meeting between pro- and anti-Chinese supporters convened. A fiery, freethinking, leftist widow named Mary Kenworthy rather baldly spoke out against the anti-Chinese movement, calling it a "dog-salmon aristocracy." She was a member of the Opera House Party and agreed with the party's view of the anti-Chinese movement and its affiliates. Members of the Opera House Party believed the anti-Chinese movement was a gang of toughs trying to foment a revolution.

At the same meeting, the Committee of Nine was replaced by the Committee of Fifteen. This new committee made two decisions. The first was to investigate whether the Chinese were violating city regulations concerning the number of persons per cubic foot of air in residences (the regulations had been slated with the Chinese in mind, knowing that many of the Chinese lived in cramped shanties in the city). The second decision was to boycott all employers who hired Chinese.

The next day, the anti-Chinese movement took action. They inspected the Chinese residences, found them in violation of the aforementioned regulations, and ordered them to board the Queen of the Pacific, which was headed for San Francisco. More than 350 Chinese were hustled down to the dock, where many boarded the ship. But there was a problem. The Queen of the Pacific's captain wanted seven dollars for each Chinese person he transported. The anti-Chinese supporters raised more than \$600 on the spot, but that was hardly enough. To further complicate things, a Chinese merchant had appeared before Judge Greene and complained that his countrymen were being unlawfully detained aboard the ship. The Queen of the Pacific's captain was ordered to appear in court the following morning.

The Chinese were detained in a warehouse in the interim.

In court the following morning, Judge Greene told the Chinese that they would be protected if they decided to stay. But hostility was high and, understandably, the Chinese didn't want to stay. One hundred and eighty-five Chinese boarded the Queen of the Pacific (the boat could hold no more) and headed for San Francisco. The remaining Chinese were ordered

back to their homes. En route to their homes, escorted by the Home Guard, a riot broke out and there was gunfire. Five men were wounded and one person was killed -- all of whom were anti-Chinese. The riot dispersed, and the Chinese were escorted to their homes. A few days later, members of the 14th Infantry arrived in Seattle to insure that there would be no more violence. Less than a week later, the remaining Chinese boarded the Elder and left Seattle.

Chinese would not return to Seattle for at least another six years. A Japanese steamship line wanted to start regular service to the West Coast. Wounds were still fresh from the anti-Chinese movement, so the Japanese had decided to use San Diego as their West Coast port. Still, Seattle sought the lucrative opportunity of becoming America's pivotal West Coast port to the Orient. A local railroad magnate's representative was sent to Tokyo and managed to persuade the Japanese steamship line to change its mind.

Seattle's dream of becoming a gateway to the Orient came true. On August 31, 1896, the Miiki Maru of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha Line steamed into Elliott Bay. Tens of thousands of Seattleites -- many of whom had earlier forced the Chinese out of their city -- welcomed the ship and its lucrative cargo with open arms. The ship represented an economic boost and a link to the wealth of the Far East. The Japanese settled in Seattle and, shortly thereafter, the Chinese returned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Willie Mak's plan had once seemed foolproof; now it seemed a farce. The whole plot had unraveled, and so Mak and Benjamin Ng sat in custody. When the three men left the Club, Mak and Benjamin Ng assumed they had killed all the victims. As it turned out, many of the victims were alive, but unconscious, for nearly twenty minutes. John Loui didn't die until he reached Harborview Medical Center and, of course, Wai Chin was still alive and undergoing a surgery that would prove life saving.

And the ironies surrounding the killings were many. On February 19, 1942 -- forty-one years to the day of the Wah Mee slayings -- President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order that sent Japanese Americans to internment camps; the mass slayings at a Chinese gambling club occurred on an anniversary of the Japanese Doomsday.

Moreover, Chin's relationship with his killers proved ironic. Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng were acquaintances of Chin. Chin had provided gambling jobs for both young men and the three often dined together before gambling started for the night at the Wah Mee Club; Chin had even hired the two to work as security persons at another Chinatown gambling club. Chin, moreover, knew Benjamin Ng's father.

The killings occurred on the sixth day of the Chinese New Year. It was the year of the pig -- the last of the twelve-year/twelve-animal cycle -- and, quite possibly to the young men who entered the Club, the senior, prominent, wealthy Chinese citizens they had slaughtered very well represented pigs. In rural Chinese villages, it is a tradition to slaughter a pig and, later, the residents of the village would wipe the blood on their faces and hands. Later, a tree is planted to represent starting anew. What Mak and Ng did at the Club was symbolic of the events surrounding the Chinese New Year. They killed the old members of the community, the "pigs" who represented the eldest and last of the Chinese Americans in Chinatown, and started anew with young blood -- planting their own "tree" so to speak. And they walked away from the incident with blood on their hands.

The slayings at the Club rivaled no other in Seattle history. Indeed, the Wah Mee carnage is comparable to that of other American mass murders. In 1929 seven members of the George "Bugs" Moran gang were lined up against a garage wall in Chicago and gunned down by members of Al Capone's gang. This event went down in history as the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre." On August 1, 1966, Charles J. Whitman killed his wife and mother before perching himself inside a tower at the University of Texas and killing twelve others. Prior to the Wah Mee killings, Washington state's worst case of mass murder occurred on March 28, 1934, when six victims were stabbed, bludgeoned, and shot to death in what was known as the "Bremerton Mass Murders."

The morning following the massacre was busy. Twelve bodies were carried out of the Club and loaded into coroner vans. Autopsies began a few hours later. The King County Medical Examiner's office worked seventeen-hour shifts trying to identify the victims as quickly as possible. According to the Medical Examiner's report, all of the victims died of head wounds. Three were shot once, nine were shot twice, and another was shot three times. Throughout the morning and into the afternoon, family members of the deceased filed in and out of the Medical Examiner's office to positively identify the victims. Later that day, the victims' identities were released to the media.

The victims included:

John Loui, 48, the former restaurant owner who had aspirations of opening a lucrative import/export business in Chinatown.

Moo Min Mar, 52, and his wife, Jean, 47, the philanthropic couple who were raising money to build a new school in their native Chinese village. A daughter and two sons survived them.

Chong L. Chin, in his late-fifties when he died, was a Legionnaire and member of Cathay Post 186. He once worked as a cook at The Chopsticks restaurant in Edmonds and Joe's Cafe in Burien. His wife and children survived him.

Henning Chin, 52, was employed as the doorman at the Wah Mee Club and lived nearby in Canton Alley. He was a handyman, carpenter, and plumber who helped with part of the construction of the Chong Wah Benevolent Association shortly before World War II. His wife and children survived him.

Lung Wing Chin, 60, was a former cook and avid fisherman, who was survived by a brother in New York and a wife and son in Hong Kong.

Hung Fat Gee, 51, was once employed at the Gallery Garden Restaurant in Pioneer Square. He was described by a spokesman of the restaurant as being "a happy guy, well-liked, who liked to gamble in his free time."

Chinn Lee Law, 51, owned an auto repair garage in Chinatown. He grew up in Indonesia, moved to China and Hong Kong, and emigrated to the United States. Prior to his death, he had married a woman in Hong Kong and was planning to bring her to Seattle. A sister in Hong Kong survived him.

Dewey Mar, 68, the revered and respected projectionist at the Kokusai Theatre who was the first to bring Chinese movies to Chinatown. Mar was a prominent figure in the Chinese community, having served as president of the Mar Society, and as a member of the Senior Citizens Club and Alliance of Chinese Association. He was survived by his wife, three sons, and daughter.

George Mar, also in his fifties, was chief chef at Far East Restaurant in North Seattle. He was not married but left behind a sister.

Jack Mar, in his sixties, was a retired postal worker who had lived in California before moving to Seattle. He traveled frequently between Hong Kong and Seattle, visiting his wife in China whom he planned to eventually bring to the United States.

Wing Wong, 59, worked all his life as a cook, and was a relative fixture at Sun Ya restaurant. An army sergeant during World War II, he was decorated for his service in Europe. A wife and two children survived him.

Gim Lun Wong, 54, was an employee at the Ming Tree Restaurant and worked part-time at the Wah Mee Club. The manager of the Ming Tree restaurant, Betty Mar, said, "He was a good worker and was always laughing. He loved to tease and loved to joke. He really enjoyed life. Gambling was part of his life. It was no secret that was what he did in his off-hours."

The mass killings at the Wah Mee were the fourth recorded instance of homicide linked to gambling clubs in Chinatown. On June 1, 1981, two Cannery Workers Union Local 37 officials were killed in the labor organization's Pioneer Square headquarters. Police and prosecutors said the killings involved gang members from two Filipino gambling clubs in the International District. Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes were killed in that incident because it was reported that they had interfered with gambling operations controlled by a Filipino gang known as "Tulisan." The Tulisan gang allegedly controlled gambling at Alaska canneries and provided security at two Filipino gambling clubs in Chinatown -- the "514" and "609" clubs on South King Street.

On April 9, 1977, two people were gunned down outside the China Gate restaurant in full view of the restaurant's patrons. Police believed that the victims were executed because of disputes over control of gambling activities.

And in March of that same year, an eighty-seven year old man was gunned down in a Chinatown store used for gambling. He died the next day.

The slayings were also the latest in a rash of violent incidents in Chinatowns across the United States. On December 23, 1982, masked gunmen burst into a restaurant in New York City's Chinatown and fired randomly into the crowd. The restaurant was rumored to be a hangout for "Chinese gangsters." Three people were killed and eight others were injured in the incident. Earlier, in 1977, three men entered the Golden Dragon restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown and opened fire on approximately seventy-five late-night diners. Five people were killed and eleven others were injured in that incident.

The tragedy at the Wah Mee Club cast an unfortunate light on a few contemporary local public figures. While both city and police officials pleaded for help in finding the third suspect and bringing closure to the investigation, many Chinatown residents believed that the events that transpired at the Wah Mee Club could have been prevented by these same officials.

Mayor Charles Royer adamantly denied any tolerance policy -- sort of. "We will not tolerate gambling," Mayor Royer said, "Nor will we harass people by trying to find gambling under every rug." Was Mayor Royer waffling? Maybe, but his rhetoric was nothing new. Seattle had a history of mayors who denied gambling tolerance policies in order to secure their place in

office and deflect pressures from local law enforcement, businessmen, and public officials who benefited financially from illegal gambling activities.

The day after the killings, Mayor Royer and Police Chief Patrick Fitzsimons held a meeting to address the community's concerns and seek help in capturing the third suspect. "This is the first and highest priority in the city," Mayor Royer said. "We are asking for your help in doing this. We can't bring justice in the city if we are not allowed to understand." In that meeting, Chief Fitzsimons admitted that police had been unable to infiltrate an illegal game in many years because gamblers knew even the Chinese officers on the force. "We are trying to find out who may have been with those two men in Chinatown," Fitzsimons told his audience, "particularly on that evening. We also need your assistance in finding out more about the operation of the Club, particularly those who may have used the Club regularly or who had worked there."

Fitzsimons accepted the role of Seattle's police chief in 1979, after a decade that saw eight police chiefs come and go. "Several of those chiefs," *Times* reporter Dave Birkland commented, "were more or less 'caretakers' during an investigation into departmental corruption during the 1970s." If there was one thing that Fitzsimons had, it was staying power -- perhaps the result of arriving in Seattle after working as a police officer in New York City. The average tenure for a police chief in a major U.S. city is less than five years. Fitzsimons would serve as Seattle Police Chief for nearly two decades, something he would later accredit to "always paying attention to details -- an important aspect of...running a police department."

The meeting between Chief Fitzsimons and members of Chinatown was an odd event indeed. The police chief was asking for information about the "operation" of one of the oldest gambling clubs in Seattle, a club well known for operating under a tolerance policy enforced by local law enforcement. And as the story continued to break, scores of Chinatown residents came out of the woodwork to report that the Wah Mee Club was well-known by police officers and private citizens alike.

Two days later the *Times* reported that many Chinatown residents believed city officials tolerated gambling. Restaurant owner and civic leader, Omar Tahir, stated, "Everybody knows there's gambling in the streets of Chinatown. Now we got thirteen people dead because of a police tolerance policy."

One regular of the Wah Mee Club commented, "Only the Chinese were allowed into the gambling area out front. And cops. A lot of beat cops spent a lot of time in there. I never asked about it."

And yet officers denied knowing that the Wah Mee Club was back in operation. Major Dean Olson, head of the Seattle Police Department's vice and narcotics unit, commented, "The Club was obviously set up for high-stakes gambling, but we did not know that before the shootings. We had no information it was even open."

Police officers reported that gambling was the least of their concerns in the Chinese community. The three major crimes at the time were burglary, shoplifting, and meter looting. "There's not a lot of serious crime," said police officer Bill Waid, commenting on his patrol beat that covered Chinatown. "There's not much for police to do down here except try to keep the winos from killing each other in Hing Hay Park."

And Chief Fitzsimons reminded the public that, after he was appointed police chief, he placed two members of his command staff with reputations of being hard on gambling (one of whom was Vern Thomas, a police major who had stepped down earlier because a gambling raid had allegedly been called off) in the most sensitive positions affecting vice control.

But a veteran street cop, who asked not to be identified, claimed that he and other officers were discouraged from any aggressive investigation of Chinatown gambling. "My own experience was that it was a great place to go and eat, but I was never told to do anything, one way or the other. Earlier administrations created a taste that it was hands-off, and the current administration has done nothing to change it."

Police admitted that the differences in language and culture made it difficult for them to penetrate the Asian communities. They were frustrated with the little cooperation they received from the close-knit Chinese community.

A distinct yet blurred line divides illegal gambling as a part of Chinese culture from what the larger American society views as criminal. Gambling fostered much growth in Chinatowns along the West Coast (its three largest locales being Seattle, San Francisco, and Vancouver,

B.C.), with the earliest recorded instances dating back to their arrival in the mid-nineteenth century. In a *Seattle P-I* interview, a Chinatown resident stated, "Gambling is a way of life here. Kids play Mah Jongg like white kids play Monopoly. There are dozens of places where you can play. A lot of old ladies do it. It's like passing the time, something to do. A lot of people who live here ain't got enough money, so they gamble."

A former manager at the Wah Mee commented, "After working behind a stove for eight hours, we need a place for relaxation, to socialize and release tension. You can only talk so long and then maybe you play a little pinochle."

Gary Flinn, a police department public information officer, stated at the time, "There are certain behaviors -- gambling is one of them -- accepted by the community. Accepted with a religious fervor."

Ruby Chow, the famous restaurant owner and member of the Club in its early years, commented, "The Chinese community here has no other recreation. They have no movies and they can't understand the television. If they sit and play Mah Jongg, that is their only recreation. A lot of them can't afford to go hunting or fishing. I think they are entitled to their privacy and their own recreation after working the whole day."

In an interview in Ron Chew's book, Reflections of Seattle's Chinese Americans: The First 100 Years, the late Henry Kay Lock comments on the early years of Seattle's Chinatown during the Depression: "Chinatown at that time was really a busy, bustling place with all the gambling houses open. There were four houses: Mei Jew, Wah Mee and two owned by Hop Sing down on Second Avenue. There were lots of lottery joints. The police were mostly paid off. I remember Charlie Louie used to be the payoff man. He took care of the gambling joints and paid them off. The gambling business supported quite a few people."

Several days after the killings, a police spokesman commented on the criticism that local police were receiving in regards to gambling tolerance allegations. "You have to wonder -- what would have been the political repercussions if we had busted the Wah Mee before this happened," the spokesman pondered, contradicting a statement made earlier that police officers didn't even know the Wah Mee was operating; how could they have busted the Club if they didn't even know the Club existed? "There'd probably been a hell of an outrage. The

same people who are now saying there's a gambling policy would probably have said we were harassing the community."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tony Ng left the Imperial Lanes bowling alley on the morning after the killings and seemingly dropped off the face of the earth. He spent the following morning at his parents' residence in Seward Park before disappearing with more than \$6,000 in cash on Monday, February 21, 1983, leaving his silver Datsun 280Z parked in the driveway.

He left police officers baffled.

Police searched Ng's locker at the Imperial Lanes and found only his bowling ball. "We can't even find that he ever had a traffic violation," Lieutenant Robert Holter commented. "He was a hard-working young man, with a social life and girlfriends and came from a real nice family that seemed to have a prospering business." Many leads pointed to San Francisco, Vancouver, B.C., Calgary, and Hong Kong.

Lieutenant Holter was an asset to the Wah Mee Task Force -- a special unit established specifically for investigating the crimes and, more importantly, tracking down Tony Ng. Holter was in Homicide and was known for carrying a Smith & Wesson beneath his jacket at all times. He was also a creative Lieutenant, beating whom he referred to as "slugs and pukes" at their own game. One Halloween, Holter knocked on the door of a drug dealer; dressed as a ghost, Holter was concealing a sawed-off shotgun under his sheet. He had arrived to serve a warrant. "Taking 'em by surprise," Holter later remarked. "That's normal police work. So they don't have time to flush narcotics down the toilet." He chased after all types of riff-raff, including a fetishist who knocked down young female pedestrians and ran off with their high-heeled shoes. Colleagues described Holter as a "policeman's policeman" -- a streetwise cop in the Mickey Spillane mold. As head of the Wah Mee Task Force, Holter was leading twenty detectives in the investigation of the Wah Mee murders and, more importantly, the search and capture of Tony Ng.

A search of Willie Mak's and Benjamin Ng's residences netted a combined total of \$15,000 in cash, along with ten firearms, much ammunition, surgical gloves, a duffel bag, and a jacket. At Mak's residence, police recovered a red gym bag containing over \$5,000 and handguns

taken from two of the victims. Searching Benjamin Ng's room, police recovered \$1,347 in cash in a straw basket, a loaded, snub-nosed .38 caliber revolver, and a pair of black gloves from on top of the dresser. Under the bed, they found an M-1 rifle and a partial box of spent .38 casings. In the closet, officers recovered four bundles of cash totaling slightly over nine thousand dollars.

Mak agreed to meet detectives at his residence, and then was driven to police headquarters for questioning. When asked where he had been during the killings at the Wah Mee, he said that he was bowling at the Imperial Lanes. When told that there was a survivor who had positively identified him, Mak confessed to the killings. "I did all the shooting," Mak told Seattle police sergeant Ron Sanford, adding, "There was no third man."

While being interrogated by Sergeant Sanford, Mak asserted, "You don't understand how tough it is out there. I can't get a job -- and when I look for a job and I am with a white man, he always gets the job." Before the sergeant could finish his interrogation, Mak asked, "Realistically, what is the worst thing that will happen to me and what is the best?" Mak was trying to work a deal.

"The worst would be the death penalty," the sergeant replied. "The best would be released without being charged."

"If you can't promise me anything," Mak said, "I think I better have an attorney."

While the media was stereotyping the Chinese community as "violent" and "shadowy," and while Police Chief Fitzsimons was busy deflecting tolerance allegations, the family members of the deceased were trying to establish some closure to the tragedy. Doug Wheeler, a former counselor with the Seattle Police Department, was asked to console the victims' family members. Wheeler was a respected counselor who later offered assistance to relatives of the Goldmarks -- a Seattle family of four brutally murdered on Christmas Eve 1985. "When a crime like this happens," commented Linda Barker, Executive Director of Washington Victim Witness Services, "the immediate victims are the survivors."

Funeral services were held several days after the killings and, as one newspaper referred to the scene, the streets of Chinatown were filled with a "parade of black suits." At many of the services, wine was spilled on the graves. This Chinese tradition reflects regard for the wine

of life spilled; small papers containing biographies of the dead were also burned, freeing the spirit of the deceased. Many of the dead were buried at Lakeview Cemetery, a historic site where various Seattle pioneers and celebrities are buried.

At Wing Wong's funeral, his sons read from a speech they had prepared earlier. "Our dad -- gardener, soldier, cook, teacher, and father -- it seems like only yesterday you held our hands and we walked together in Chinatown. We felt so proud. It's ironic that such a tragedy occurred. Dad, we'll always remember."

The Reverend Gillespie, a Presbyterian minister, said, "Prayers should be offered not only for the dead, but we must also pray for the confused minds of those who have caused so much sorrow for all of us."

After the services, Chinatown was quiet, yet packed with mourners. A bakery owner in the area commented, "It is a tradition that after a funeral the survivors, the family, invite everyone to a restaurant. They get together and talk. I have seen many today."

The killings had seemingly affected every person in the city. For days, different people coped differently with what had happened, and journalists were quick to report.

A Wah Mee Club regular, Ging Jon "Richard" Lee, commented on how lucky he was to not have been one of the victims. Lee, a slight man with horn-rimmed glasses, owned a suburban Seattle restaurant and gambled at the Wah Mee once or twice a week. He planned to gamble on the fateful evening, but he was late closing his restaurant. By the time he did arrive, at about 1:45 a.m., he was unaware of what had happened. When he turned down the alley toward the Club, he saw police officers and knew something was wrong. "I almost went in," Lee told a reporter, "but my better sense told me not to. I am so damned lucky. I could have been there. That's pretty frightening. I think I'm quitting gambling."

Those in the area at the time of the killings recounted their experiences. The man who lived in the apartment directly above the Club reported that he heard nothing that night. "There is only a wood floor between me and [the Club]," the man reported. "My French poodle wakes up if he hears a firecracker a half-block away and he didn't make a sound all night."

Others visited the Wah Mee Club to sate their curiosities. Strangers began removing items from the Club. Someone stole a plaque that read "RING BELL" from outside the Club entrance. Another individual stole the button that patrons pressed to activate the bell and await the guard's furtive stare from inside the office. Some would rattle the entrance doors, chained and padlocked by homicide detectives, and search the area outside the Club for Wai Chin's bloodstains. And they would peer through the single clear brick and eye the interior of the office. The office remained lit twenty-four hours a day, and one could clearly see a calendar hanging on one of the office walls.

While members of the Chinese community coped with their losses, attorneys for the defense and the prosecution began preparing cases for two of Seattle's most high-profile trials ever.

CHAPTER NINE

"According to public record, two weeks before the massacre, about the time Ben Ng turned twenty, he sat talking with a tong leader. Someone at the table listened as the leader offered to get Ng a special gift -- a bullet-proof vest -- as a rite of passage from adolescence. Ng shook his head. He didn't need protection. 'I shoot people,' Ng replied. 'People don't shoot me.'

-- Don Duncan, Seattle Times reporter

"[He's] a nice kid."

-- Defense attorney David Wohl describing his client, Benjamin Ng

Wearing gray coveralls while handcuffed and looking sheepishly tired, Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng appeared before King County Superior Court Judge Gerard Shellan on Friday, February 25, 1983. The young men pled not guilty to all thirteen counts of aggravated first-degree murder and one count of first-degree assault in the shooting of Wai Chin. As Deputy Prosecuting Attorney William Downing read the charges and the names of the victims, Benjamin Ng looked slightly down. Both men remained quiet and appeared emotionless throughout the proceeding, which lasted less than twenty minutes. Prosecutor Downing requested that the men be held in the King County Jail without bail; attorneys for Mak and Ng didn't object to the request, but reserved their right for a bail hearing later.

Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng were soon being investigated for three separate unsolved murders. On October 12, 1981, burglars took a safe containing an estimated \$9,000 from Chin's Palace restaurant in Blaine, Washington -- the restaurant where Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng were working as cooks. Ten days later, a seventy-one year old man named Franklin E. Leach was shot and killed while taking his morning four-mile walk along the shores of Lake Washington. Police received information that the safe was being disposed of in the Lake when Leach happened by. Leach was shot and killed to prevent him from disclosing what he had seen. Within days of the restaurant burglary, Ng and Mak had returned to Seattle. Police tried to question the two young men, but they remained elusive.

"[W]hen we went to talk to them," Police Chief Hinchey said, "they were gone. We never could find them; they just disappeared."

Mak and Ng were also suspects in two other unsolved murders. On July 16, 1982, Chan Lai Kuen Lau, 45, and her mother, Lau King Chung, 71, were killed at their home in the Beacon Hill section of Seattle. Both Lau and her mother were wealthy restaurant owners. They were hog-tied and shot execution-style. The police investigated a possible link between the Beacon Hill killings and Ng and Mak, primarily because the manner in which the mother and daughter were killed resembled that of the victims at the Wah Mee. Also, Ron Chinn, the manager of the burglarized Blaine restaurant, was the son of Chan Lai Kuen Lau, and the grandson of Lau King Chung. In court papers filed in July 1983, witness Bon Chin, who had been approached by Mak to participate in the Wah Mee killings, commented on the Beacon Hill killings: "[Benjamin] said, '[Let me] kill them with a big gun.' Willie said, 'No. It makes too big a noise; use the small one,' and he handed over his small gun."

When Wai Chin identified Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng as the killers at the Wah Mee Club, the authorities were already familiar with the young men. Police had been investigating Mak and Ng in connection with the Beacon Hill killings and, so, the young men were apprehended just hours after the Wah Mee killings.

Benjamin Ng's attorney, thirty-seven year-old John Henry Browne, had already achieved local notoriety. His roster of famous clients included Ted Bundy (convicted of killing two Florida State University sorority sisters and a twelve year-old girl, Bundy was the primary suspect at the time in seven killings in the Pacific Northwest during the 1970s), Cynthia Marler (charged in a murder-for-hire case), Tony Dictado (charged with directing the shooting of two officials of an Alaska cannery worker's union), Duke Ferguson (a Seattle Seahawk charged with rape), Claudia Thacker (a Kitsap County woman who was acquitted of second-degree murder in 1981, four years and two trials after she fatally shot her husband in the back; she claimed she was defending herself and her child), and Jerry Huntley (a Lynnwood police officer charged with assault for beating an Everett police officer; Huntley claimed self-defense and was acquitted in 1982). Browne would later go on to defend Tomeko Marcus (a nineteen-year-old sentenced in 1988 to twenty-three years in prison for killing his stepmother, Paula Marcus, who was a community leader and former investigator for the state Human Rights Commission), Greg Nagel (charged in 1993 with first-degree murder for fatally shooting a topless dancer in front of several witnesses),

Tyrone Rodgers (former Husky and Seahawk football player charged but acquitted of assault in 1994 in connection with scuffle with a repo man), Kenneth Westmark (convicted of killing his two young sons in 1994 by strapping them into their car seats and starting the family car while the garage door remained closed; Westmark tried to kill himself in the same tragedy and suffered brain damage), and Darrell Cloud (a former Juanita High School student convicted of first-degree murder in 1995 for killing a Seattle middle school teacher who had sexually abused him for years).

Browne was flamboyant, impeccably dressed, arrogant, and articulate. He was a tall, thin man -- 6-foot-6, 200 pounds -- with brown hair and a thick mustache. He had a barbed-wire tattoo on his right forearm, drove a motorcycle on the weekends, and meditated regularly. He had graduated from Northwestern University in Illinois, holding both law and master's degrees. Browne was born in Tennessee, the youngest of two children. His father once worked as a nuclear engineer for the Atomic Energy Commission before retiring in Palo Alto, California, after serving as a vice president at Bechtel Corporation. After high school, Browne enrolled at the University of Denver, where he studied philosophy, played guitar in a rock group, and protested the Vietnam War in the late-1960s. An epiphanic moment for Browne occurred in the late-1960s when he was arrested for writing a bad check. The charge was dropped after police discovered that the check bounced because Browne had moved his account to a different bank by the time the check was cashed. His fianc -- e, the daughter of a wealthy East Coast family, bailed him out, but not until he had spent seventeen hours with men whom had been in jail for a week and still didn't have a lawyer. He decided right then he would be a criminal defense attorney. Browne broke off the engagement, quit the band (which was on the verge of a record contract) and enrolled in American University Law School in Washington, D.C. In 1972 Browne was hired as an assistant attorney general for Washington under then-Attorney General Slade Gorton. Posing as an inmate, Browne spent a couple of days in the maximum-security wing at the prison in Shelton, Washington, and rewrote rules on punishment within the institutions. He joined the King County Public Defender's Office in 1975 and soon became chief trial attorney. In the late-1970s Browne opened a private practice in downtown Seattle.

Browne was one of Seattle's best defense attorneys and, because his clients were often the subjects of high-profile trials, he was rumored to have taken cases on contingency.

Browne had his critics. He received hate mail and his office remained locked, for security, during business hours. A stranger once approached Browne and called him "the most hated man in the state." A state Supreme Court justice once commented that Browne "needed to be spanked." Browne once wore a white three-piece suit to court. After the judge ruled on a motion, he turned to Browne and said, "Now, I would like two fudge sundaes and a cream soda, please."

Rebecca Roe, a Seattle attorney who faced Browne in court, commented, "He [personalized] everything. He regularly [made] vicious personal attacks on other attorneys. He [is] the single most unpleasant attorney to deal with in King County."

Many thought Browne took high-profile cases simply to get publicity. "In the beginning of my practice," Browne admitted to a reporter before the Wah Mee trials, "publicity was very helpful. But I don't need the publicity now. I'd rather do something else than try some of these cases. But I'm a defense attorney and I take our system very seriously. People take their freedom for granted. They don't teach civics anymore. They don't realize how delicate the system is. It is a simple equation: The more power you give to government, the less power you give to individuals."

"He never seems to doubt the righteousness of his case," remarked Dan Satterberg, chief of staff for the King County Prosecutor's Office. "His hard-nosed style seems based on his unshakable belief, real or conjured, that his clients are always innocent or deserving of a break. Other attorneys will allow themselves to have a casual aside with a prosecutor that he thinks his case is weak or his client is lying. But you won't get any of that from John."

Browne was a colorful character in the courtroom. He once represented a man charged with custodial interference for taking his son and moving out of the area, although his ex-wife had been awarded custody during their divorce. Browne made the woman's behavior the defense. When he began his closing argument, Browne didn't even rise from his chair. "Ladies and gentlemen," he told the jury, "would you leave your dog with that woman for the weekend?" The jury acquitted.

In another case he defended a doctor named Jim Stansfield, charged with killing his wife and a neighbor. The trial was memorable for several reasons: a Hamlet-reciting medical examiner, and a key prosecution witness with such a long criminal record that Browne rolled

his rap sheet from one end of the courtroom to the other. Charges were dismissed on the last day of trial.

Browne would spend much of the 1980s drinking and taking drugs. He lived in a waterfront home, drove fancy cars, and made headlines. He married and divorced three times. Later, in a 1998 interview with the *Times*, Browne reflected on his wild and crazy days. He was in counseling in 1986 when he was asked, "What do you want?"

"It was a great question," Browne said in the interview. "I didn't know." Shortly thereafter, he went to Death Valley to attend an intensive 10-day self-awareness seminar conducted by Dr. Richard Moss. He stayed in sweat lodges, taking long speaking and eating fasts and spending hours on his hands and knees scrubbing floors. He began to read the poetry of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the Sufi spiritual masters of the Thirteenth Century.

Browne was against the death penalty -- not uncommon for a criminal defense attorney. He was also a fine attorney. He reveled in his role as a defense attorney, despite the fact that such attorneys are held in such low regard. While defending Bundy in the early-1980s, a Seattle detective allegedly tried to get Browne to leak information about his client. "He was trying to get me to help him with nailing Ted!" Browne told a reporter. "When we do that, the system doesn't work! Then our Constitution is for everyone but Ted Bundy or whoever the next unpopular person may be. [The courthouse is] a 'Temple of Justice' not a 'Temple of Political Correctness.'" No other profession suited Browne more than the courtroom. "I like people. I like juries," Browne added. "I like to be in court."

The prosecution consisted of William Downing and Robert Lasnik. Both attorneys held law degrees from the University of Washington and went to work for the prosecutor's office as interns on the same day.

Lasnik was a thirty-two year old from Staten Island, New York. He held degrees in psychology, journalism, and counseling psychology, as well as law. In the summer of 1977 he went to work as an intern at the prosecutor's office and worked his way up to an assistant to Prosecuting Attorney Norm Maleng. Lasnik spent a lot of time in policy work, lobbying in the Legislature, particularly on child sexual abuse bills and a sentencing reform act. The trial of Benjamin Ng was his first murder case.

Downing was a thirty-four year old who graduated in 1978 with a law degree from the University of Washington. He was skilled in criminal trials, having gained a conviction against Scott Carl Smith on three murder charges in the 1980 Barn Door Tavern shootings. Later, he successfully convicted John Alan Robinson -- a man who killed his estranged wife's divorce lawyer, Thomas Neville, in an office lobby downtown.

Downing was an effective prosecutor, with boyish features, wavy dark hair, and a mustache. He was overwhelmingly respected in the legal community by judges, fellow prosecutors, and opposing defense attorneys. "There's no doubt about it," commented defense attorney Mark Mestel, who would later face Downing and Lasnik during Tony Ng's trial. "Downing is good." Downing was respected because, in less than six years, he had handled fourteen of Seattle's most notorious murder cases. In addition to the trials for the Barn Door Tavern murders and convicted killer Thomas Neville, Downing prosecuted the killers involved in the fatal shooting of two brothers in a Factoria parking lot. After the Wah Mee trials, Downing went on to prosecute one man responsible for the strangulation and mutilation deaths of Colleen Gill and her daughter, Kathryn, in their Windermere home. He would also prosecute David Rice, charged with murdering Charles A. Goldmark, his wife, and their two children in their Madrona home.

Judge Frank D. Howard, who would preside over the Wah Mee trials, commented, "Downing's an extremely competent trial lawyer. You're happy to have a prosecutor like Downing in your court. It makes the judge's job easier."

Downing's style in the courtroom was both unique and admired. "What makes him effective as a prosecutor is his reasonableness," commented Carole Grayson, editor of the Washington State Bar News and a defense attorney who faced Downing during a trial of two men convicted of murdering a woman in a West Seattle motel. "It makes it nice to do a trial with him, but it hurts the defense."

Downing's congeniality extended not only to colleagues but even, at times, to defendants. He was known to talk baseball and motorcycles with accused killers during courtroom breaks. During the Robinson trial, many attorneys were emotional about the case because a fellow lawyer had been gunned down in an office lobby. At Robinson's arraignment, Downing walked up to the accused killer and shook his hand. "It sort of startled Robinson," recalled defense attorney George Finkle.

"I have always tried to be friends with the defendant," Downing observed. "It helps when you get them on the stand. When you turn on them on the stand, it has interesting effects in front of the jury. If I am doing my job right, they will show their true colors to the jury. Most of the time, they are not even aware that their true colors should be hidden."

But Downing didn't befriend defendants only so he could "turn on them" when they took the stand. "Bill understands that it is not a black-and-white world out there," said Gordon Jones, a former prosecutor with Downing. "He understands that just because he is trying to put somebody away for the rest of their life, that that person is not evil personified."

Downing's unique style came from his unique work background. He hadn't always had his sights on law school. During the 1960s and 1970s, Downing worked as a tugboat deckhand, dump truck driver, and commercial fisherman. He grew up in Kinderhook, New York, south of Albany. His father died when Downing was six; his mother died ten years later. Downing entered college in the 1960s in hopes of avoiding the draft during the Vietnam War. He was one of the first sixty men admitted to the previously all-female Vassar College. But Downing was restless, and wanted to see the world. He had always had a wanderlust ambition. His brother, Rick, recalled that once during a Little League baseball game, the coach pulled young William off second base because he had turned around to stare at a passing freight train.

After Vassar, Downing declared himself a "Conscientious Objector" to the war and avoided the draft. He spent nearly a year fulfilling community-service duty in a New York State mental hospital as an orderly. He grew shoulder-length hair and, in his off-time, raced dirt bikes with his brother. When his community-service duty was finished, Downing hit the road, living in his van. "My religion [had] as much to do with Kerouac and John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie as any of the accepted religions," Downing commented. Between 1972 and 1975, Downing worked as a tugboat deckhand in New Orleans and a commercial fisherman in Bellingham, Washington. In 1975 Downing was looking for "something real." After working hard-labor jobs, he wanted to work with his mind instead of his back. He chose law school and, initially, considered becoming a public defender. But he later decided to become a prosecutor. "An idealistic prosecutor," he commented, "could accomplish more than an idealistic public defender."

Benjamin Ng's defense attorney, John Henry Browne, commented, "I think that Bill is much more of a human being than a lawyer, and that's a compliment. That makes him a good trial lawyer."

As teams for the defense and prosecution prepared their cases, all eyes were on Wai Chin. He was the tragedy's lone survivor and key witness, and his health was flagging. Prosecutors feared Chin would die of complications stemming from his injuries. Prosecutor Lasnik submitted separate affidavits provided by Dr. Larry Duckert and Dr. Robert Badger, physicians at Harborview Medical Center, who confirmed that Chin's health was precipitous. Lasnik requested that Chin's testimony be videotaped in case Chin died. He also feared that Chin might be assassinated, as he was the key witness and a suspect still remained at large. Judge Frank D. Howard delayed signing an order allowing the videotaping of Chin's testimony until more information was submitted.

Chin remained hospitalized at Harborview Medical Center for nearly one month. His condition vacillated between serious and critical, so his health concerned prosecutors. They believed successful prosecution of the killers hinged on Chin's potential testimony. On March 2, 1983, Chin's blood pressure dropped, his condition deteriorated, and he required vigorous resuscitation. Several doctors suspected Chin might have been poisoned but they later deemed their patient's lapse routine. One of Chin's doctors, Larry Badger, reported that Chin was "at risk to develop future complications such as infection, pulmonary embolus or pneumonia, any of which have life-threatening potential." A good chunk of a bullet was still lodged in Chin's neck in two places.

From his hospital bed and under heavy police protection, Chin provided details that helped the prosecutor's office compile an affidavit that explained in detail the killings at the Club. Chin was unable to speak and, instead, communicated by nodding and providing handwritten notes.

On March 12, 1983, Dr. Duckert reported that Chin was "doing very well" and believed that he would be released next week. Chin may have survived the mass slaying by wriggling under one of the gaming tables before being shot. Authorities close to the case reported that the gunmen fired at an oblique angle due to Chin's position beneath the table. As a result, his wounds were non-fatal. Dr. Duckert confirmed that the bullets that wounded Chin did enter at an oblique angle on the left side of his neck. But Dr. Duckert also confessed he

was not a ballistics expert and could not determine how Chin's manner of crouching affected the angle of the injury.

Chin was released from Harborview Medical Center on March 18, 1983. Shortly after his release, and then in May, Chin provided videotaped and tape-recorded statements to prosecutors and police. He was also placed in a secure residence somewhere in the Seattle area. "We don't want anyone to find him," Major Dale Douglass reported. "We don't want to take any chances." In fact, security was so tight that Chin didn't even know the phone number where he was residing. Guards didn't allow him to return to Chinatown, a place he had lived for more than forty years.

The Seattle Police Department stopped at nothing to protect Chin. To do so, the Department spent \$338,000 in salaries, overtime, and benefits, \$12,000 for security devices at the apartment, and nearly \$8,000 for apartment and vehicle rentals. Chin lived with his companion, Rose, and they spent their daily life watching television, cooking, doing the laundry, and playing cards with a sergeant and twelve detectives. The security team grew fond of Chin, affectionately referring to him as "Mr. C," and taking him and Rose on trips to Camano Island State Park, Mount Rainier, Point Defiance Zoo, Northwest Trek, Deception Pass, Leavenworth, Ste. Michelle Winery, and Longacres race track. Despite their frequent trips to various points of interest, bodyguards kept a watchful eye on the couple. There were never fewer than six guards with the starwitness and his companion. At one point, officers suspected that neighbors living in the same apartment building knew the importance of the surreptitious couple; one tenant asked an officer to give a vase filled with fresh flowers to Rose. After the trials, Rose would reminisce fondly on the attention she and Chin received from the bodyguards. "I [felt] like Mrs. Reagan," she told a reporter. "I [liked] this bodyguard business."

On April 22, 1983, while sitting in his jail cell, Mak wrote a letter addressed to the "Public." He believed that he was going to receive the death penalty for what had happened at the Wah Mee, and he wanted to come clean and share his story. In his letter, he described how he was ordered by the leaders of the Hop Sing tong to enter the Wah Mee Club and rough up a leader of the Bing Kung Association. He left the Club before any shooting began and, later, "didn't have any idea why the peoples [sic] was killed." Mak also wrote, "[I] am willing to wake up the public with my life" so that they could learn that Seattle police are paid off by the tongs to protect gambling and prostitution, and that various restaurant owners are

involved in drug dealing and diamond smuggling from overseas. "The tongs been fighting each other [sic] over years," Mak wrote. "The tongs are involved with lots of illegal activity." Mak gave the letter to Janell Whitaker, the sister of Mak's former girlfriend, with explicit instructions not to share the letter with anyone until after he died. Along with his "Dear Public" letter, Mak wrote a separate, private letter to Whitaker, indicating that he didn't deserve "the penalty." He ended the letter by writing, "I hope I could see you again. If I don't, you take care of yourself and Justin. I love you both. Thank you for being my friend. I be [sic] praying for you. Love always, Willie."

Benjamin Ng's trial, originally scheduled to begin on August 1, 1983, was postponed for one week because defense attorneys requested that Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak be tried separately. Prosecutor Downing stated, "Each of the two defendants now wants to point the finger of blame at the other." Ng claimed that Mak was the leader of the group, and ordered the killings. Mak claimed that Ng lost control and opened fire on the Club.

The defendants' trials were ultimately held separately.

Benjamin Ng's trial was held first. The prosecutors would seek the death penalty. Defense attorney Browne unsuccessfully tried to get two juries seated for the trial -- one to determine the verdict and one to determine the punishment if Ng were convicted. Three months prior to jury selection, Browne enlisted the help of a twenty-nine-year-old assistant attorney named David Wohl. Wohl had been leasing space from Browne. When court-appointed help was offered to Browne, Wohl joined the high-profile attorney. Wohl's expertise was in appellate work, and many of his peers thought him too "green" for such a media-heavy trial. Wohl was known to have had frequent difficulty articulating his arguments. Wohl earned his law degree from Emory University in Atlanta. He had been an attorney for the Washington Appellate Defender Association before beginning his practice as a criminal defense lawyer.

Browne supported his partner, commenting, "He's an excellent complement to the legal team."

Jury selection began on August 8, 1983, and the *Seattle P-I* described the event as a "Death Penalty Quiz." Benjamin Ng was brought into the courtroom, wearing a clean white shirt, plaid sweater vest, and brown corduroy pants. His hair was neatly groomed and he

remained quiet and unemotional during the questioning. Ng's girlfriend, Kennis Izumi, was also present for jury selection, along with his sister, Bessie Ng. Defense attorney Browne explained, "I am looking for somebody who is intelligent, sensitive, who has both a brain and feelings. Somebody who will listen."

Jurors were given a hint of the gory details and photographs that would comprise a large part of the trial. "You are going to see photographs that are just horrible, that are a nightmare," Defense attorney Browne said. "I can't overstate how gruesome they are going to be."

Judge Howard had announced earlier that jurors morally opposed to the death penalty and those who favored it would be excluded without exception. Prosecutor Lasnik asked the potential jurors if they could "look the defendant in the eye" and tell him he had been sentenced to death.

A jury was finally selected. It consisted of, among others, three Boeing employees, a babysitter, a former bakery manager, an employee of the state Department of Social and Health Services, an IRS agent, a small-business owner, a housewife, and an employee of Rainier Brewing Company. The jury consisted of nine men and three women.

In his opening remarks, Prosecutor Downing stated that Ng, Mak, and Tony Ng all participated in a premeditated robbery and committed the murders to cover up the robbery. He also stated the victims were hog-tied and, after thirty-two shots were fired, the three defendants left the Club to divide the proceeds from an evening they thought had gone according to plan. Downing said the three defendants did not realize that Chin, still alive, would slip free of his bonds and struggle through the doors of the Wah Mee Club, where he would be met by an individual who was waiting to enter the Club. Downing stated that Chin told the individual, "Robbery. Killing inside. Call police and ambulance."

One week into Ng's trial, a hearing took place to determine whether guns and money belonging to Ng should be admitted into evidence. Lieutenant Holter, who was the first to enter Ng's room and arrest the young man, testified that he found three live rounds of ammunition and a gold money clip in the pocket of a black, nylon jacket that Ng wanted to wear downtown. Detective Billy Baughman testified that he read Ng his Miranda Rights, twice, before they arrived at the police department. Detective Baughman also testified that

Ng stated he didn't shoot anyone and that his money was a sum he earned working as a dealer at the Hop Sing's club. Moreover, Detective Baughman testified that Ng, when asked why anyone would want to accuse him of the murders if he wasn't responsible, stated he "was well-known and had a lot of enemies in Chinatown."

Several police officers testified they saw guns and money in Ng's bedroom, and left a uniformed officer outside the bedroom while a search warrant was sought.

Kennis Izumi and her parents, George and Connie, also took the stand during the day's hearings. The three described how police entered the home and arrested Ng. Kennis Izumi, a stunningly beautiful Asian woman with long dark hair, told the court, "Mom woke me up, she came in and woke me up and said police were there to arrest Benjamin. I started to get out of bed. By the time I was getting out, they were already coming in. He didn't get out of bed. They were explaining to him that he murdered thirteen people." Izumi also testified that she made two false statements to police in an effort to be "overprotective."

On August 17, 1983, Defense attorney Browne told the jury that there was no evidence that Benjamin Ng was guilty of aggravated premeditated murder. "Let me tell you right now," Browne told the jury, "Benjamin was there. That's not going to be disputed in this case. There is no question that Benjamin tied up the people. But Benjamin did not shoot that night. There is not a speck of blood on any article of his clothing [and t]here were thirteen people shot at close range."

Prosecutor Downing brought several police officers to the stand to describe the carnage at the Club. The jury was shown a series of photographs of the interior of the Wah Mee. Three of the photos depicted the victims face down on the floor, blood pumping from their heads. The jurors spent ten minutes studying the photographs. The courtroom was completely silent.

The following day in court, survivor Wai Chin took the stand. He was brought into the courtroom under heavy police guard. Four plainclothes policemen stationed themselves around the courtroom and two King County jail guards stood near Ng. Chin was dressed in a tan jacket, blue pants, and a brown plaid shirt. His gray hair was streaked with white and his dark eyes were bright. His face was slightly freckled; his neck was marked with a long scar. His jaw, which still had bullet fragments lodged in it, was numb; yet, he spoke quickly,

his accent slight, as he testified in court for four hours. Many of the victims' relatives filled an entire row in the courtroom, weeping silently as they listened to Chin's description of what happened at the Club. "I had exactly two-hundred dollars in my wallet," Chin told the court. He also stated that Dewey Mar, one of the victims, said, "You guys want money? Take it from John Loui." Loui managed the finances at the Wah Mee Club. Chin waited, face down on the floor, for the three robbers to leave. As he turned his head to see why the robbers had yet to leave the Club, Chin testified he saw all three men put on gloves and remove guns.

"I turn my head up," Chin testified. "I watch because I wonder why they don't leave. I saw the guns pointing. Bap-bap-bap, like a firecracker, and I saw the fire come out of the guns." Chin pointed his finger like a gun, trying to describe what had happened. "Bullets were flying all out. I get a bullet in the jaw and one in neck and blood was coming out of my mouth. I heard, 'Is that all the bullets?' Then I passed out."

Chin identified Ng, who listened quietly to the victim's testimony. "I saw Mr. Ng stand over here and say, 'Everybody hands up' and I see he has a gun." Chin used a pointer to show on a giant floor plan precisely where he lay on the Club's floor. "The third guy was down here, he also had a gun. I was lay [sic] down here. Some people lay down beside me and some lay up here. They come down and lay all over." Chin testified that Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng robbed and hog-tied the victims while Willie Mak stood on the upper level of the Club and "acted like the leader."

Defense attorney Browne asked Chin about his prior conviction for gambling. Chin said he was put on probation for three years. Browne tried to paint a seedy picture of the Wah Mee -- a picture of gamblers with guns.

"Isn't it a fact that people at the Wah Mee were armed with weapons?" Browne asked.

"I don't know about that," Chin replied.

"Do you know why they had guns?"

"I think they had permits, gun permits. I think they protect themselves." Chin glanced briefly at the jury.

Browne tried to prove Benjamin Ng did not fire his weapon. He listed the victims and asked Chin if he knew who shot which victims.

"Do you know who shot you?" Browne asked.

"No."

"Are you confused about the events?"

"No," Chin replied, looking straight at Browne.

The next day in court, many of Benjamin Ng's acquaintances testified. The defense witnesses that had been subpoenaed complained about being forced to appear in court. They argued they had no direct involvement in the case and had been swept up in a "fishing expedition."

Yen Yin Lau, a twenty-two year old cook in a Mount Vernon Chinese restaurant, stated that Mak had talked about robbing, tying, and killing victims in a Chinatown gambling club. Mak said he would shoot the victims with a .22 caliber gun because "it doesn't make that much noise." Lau, who was working with Mak and Ng in a restaurant in Whatcom County, testified that he heard the two suspects discuss a heist-and-killing as early as 1981. But Lau never took the young men seriously. "I don't think they do that kind of thing for that amount of money," Lau said. "Willie was doing most of the talking. Ng don't talk that much." Lau had known Ng since his days in junior high school. The two young men were acquaintances, known to join Mak in target practices in Lau's garage, firing at targets with .22 caliber Rugers -- the same weapon from which twenty-six of the thirty shots were fired in the Club. Kwan Fung Mak, Willie Mak's brother, also testified. Defense attorney Browne asked Mak why he pled guilty to destroying evidence in the Wah Mee case. Mak and his nephew, Sonny Chung Kwan, had been charged with washing down a 1979 Opal that was believed to have been the vehicle Willie Mak borrowed on the night of the killings. The two young men were charged with washing the car to get rid of any fingerprints. The two young men pleaded guilty in May and were given five-day jail sentences on the condition they testify at the forthcoming trials.

"Did you plead guilty?" Defense attorney Browne asked.

"I think that case over," Mak replied. "I don't want to talk about that. I not guilty."

"Did you plead guilty?"

Mak grew agitated, finally barking out, "It too hard to explain. That case over. We didn't clean the fingerprints. We just washed the car. I had a job. I don't want to go to court too many times."

"Didn't you plead guilty?" Browne wasn't letting the matter rest.

"I didn't do it. Guilty or not, is no difference, you know. I not feel guilty. My statement say I did it, but I didn't."

The following day in court was devoted entirely to recounting the way the victims died at the Club. Dr. Donald Reay, the Chief King County Medical Examiner, and Dr. Harry Bonnell, Dr. Reay's assistant, described the fatal wounds and, again, graphic photos were circulated. Prosecutor Lasnik asked how each victim died.

"A penetrating bullet to the head," the doctors replied. "The injury was not survivable." The doctors opened packages containing nylon cords, bullets, and bullet fragments. Because so many bullets were fired, the bullets that remained intact were marked with the victims' initials when they were removed from the bodies.

Browne again tried to prove that Ng did not fire his gun. He asked the doctors if they could determine which directions the bullets had been fired based on the entrance wounds. Mak was standing on the upper level of the Club when gunfire exploded, and Browne was hoping to prove that the bullets had entered the victims at a sharper angle, considering Mak had been positioned higher than Benjamin and Tony. But Dr. Bonnell was unable to confirm this. "To try and determine with a head wound the direction of the shot is very hard," he said.

Dr. Larry Duckert, Wai Chin's doctor, also took the stand, and described the extent of Chin's injuries and the operations he performed. Chin still had bullet fragments in his neck, the doctor testified, and removing them would be too risky. When asked if Chin's wounds would have been fatal if he had not been able to free himself and struggle out of the Club, Dr. Duckert said, "[Chin would have] bled to death or literally drowned in his own blood."

During the course of the trial, a juror received a startling telephone call at home. The juror's daughter answered the telephone and was asked if her mother was "going to hang the gook." The next day in court, the juror reported the telephone call to Judge Howard. The juror was questioned in closed chambers, in witness of the defense and prosecuting attorneys. After soliciting questions from both the defense and the prosecution, Judge Howard questioned the entire jury panel about the incident, asking specifically if any jurors were prejudiced by what the caller had said. Judge Howard concluded that no one was prejudiced and the trial proceeded.

On Monday, August 23, 1983, Kennis Izumi testified for the defense. Izumi walked into the courtroom wearing a violet cardigan sweater, a violet blouse tied with a bow at the neck, blue slacks, and blue pumps. She was stoic and assured in her testimony, seeming much older than her nineteen years. She reported that Ng left her home on the night of the killings, carrying more than one weapon. "He had two guns on," Izumi said, "one tucked down inside his pants and the other in a holster. When I went to kiss him goodbye, I saw them. I asked him why one wasn't enough."

Ng did not answer her question.

When asked about the large sum of money found in the bedroom she shared with Ng, Izumi commented that Ng often had a lot of cash with him because he worked as a dealer in the Hop Sing tong. Prosecutor Lasnik brought up the fact that Izumi had made false statements to the police shortly after Benjamin's arrest.

"How does it feel to lie to a police lieutenant?" Lasnik asked.

"Not very good."

"You were not bashful to lie to a police officer, were you?"

"No," Izumi replied quietly.

"How did it feel to lie to Detective Lowman?"

"Not very good." Izumi said she lied to police because she feared Ng was in trouble.

"Do you know how much trouble he's in now?" Lasnik asked.

"Yes."

"Is there anything you wouldn't do to try and get him out of that trouble?"

The young woman replied, "I don't know."

Benjamin Ng's trial went to the jury on Wednesday, August 24, 1983. Benjamin Ng entered the courtroom wearing the same clothes he wore on the first day of his trial. Judge Howard instructed the jurors that it was not necessary for Benjamin Ng to have shot anyone in the Wah Mee in order to be convicted of aggravated first-degree murder. It was the jury's responsibility to find beyond a reasonable doubt that Ng, or his accomplices, intended to cause the deaths of the thirteen people killed and that the act was premeditated in order to convict him.

The courtroom was packed. More than a dozen of the victims' relatives were present, along with most of the detectives who had investigated the mass murder. Ng's mother, sister, and girlfriend were also present.

Prosecutor Lasnik, in his closing arguments, quoted from Hamlet. "Murder, tho' it hath no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ," the prosecutor said. "Who speaks today for the thirteen dead? Wai Chin speaks by most miraculous organ. Who will hear the voices of the thirteen dead? You, the jury."

Several of the victims' relatives applauded.

Prosecutor Downing held up the brown paper bag that police had recovered; the bag was filled with more than ten thousand dollars. "These are the green and white pieces of paper that the defendant valued more than the lives of fourteen people in the Wah Mee that night," commented Downing. "This is what the crime is all about. He wanted to get this money and he wanted to keep that money." Downing said the murders were premeditated

because the three young men wore no masks -- an indication that they intended to kill the witnesses.

Defense attorney Browne, in his closing statements, once again stressed that Benjamin Ng did not fire his gun. "People keep saying it does not matter whether Benjamin pulled the trigger or not," Browne told the court. "But it does. The reason is, if Ben didn't shoot, he sure as heck didn't premeditate and premeditation is the issue. Science doesn't lie. Science tells us only two guns were fired. That ropes were used doesn't mean premeditated murder, it means premeditated robbery."

Less than two hours later, after being given more than 200 exhibits to examine, the jury returned with their verdict. Benjamin Ng was convicted of thirteen counts of aggravated murder and one count of first-degree assault.

"All right. All right," whispered Bonita Chin, the daughter of Henning Chin, a victim killed at the Club.

When the verdict was read, Ng's sister, Bessie, tried to comfort Ng but jail guards blocked her. Outside the courtroom, she wept and was comforted by Kennis Izumi. "You son of a bitch," Izumi yelled at one reporter. Turning to other reporters, she added, "I hate you all!" Defense attorney Browne held his arm around Ng's brother, Steve, and tried to comfort the young man.

Ng was taken back to his jail cell on the tenth floor of the King County courthouse. He awaited the sentencing phase.

Before the jury deliberated over sentencing, Browne argued that Ng had been abused as a child -- an incident that may have been a factor in Ng's criminal behavior. Ng's mother, Shun Ng, described how a woman struck her son over the head with a stick after he called her a bad name. Ng was five years old at the time. "The lady hit Benjie," Ng's mother said, shuddering and crying. "He cried, then she turned around and saw him bleeding from the head." Ng was hospitalized for one day and one night. The doctors wanted Ng to stay longer, but Ng's mother had too many children. When Ng began bleeding shortly after returning home, he was rushed to the hospital.

Benjamin looked down at his lap while his mother testified. Several jurors and the court reporter cried throughout her testimony. Browne compared Ng's head injury to a "broken arm in the brain." He also presented testimonies from a psychiatrist, a neurologist, and a psychologist -- all of which were in support of Browne's argument.

Later that evening, after two hours and forty-five minutes of deliberation, the jury returned to the courtroom to announce that they were unable to agree on the death penalty. Instead, they sentenced Benjamin Ng to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Ng sat expressionless, gazing at the court clerk as she read the verdict. Seven uniformed guards surrounded the court.

Both defense attorneys and prosecutors seemed to respect the jury's decision, and neither voiced any disappointment in the outcome.

Prosecutor Lasnik commented, "It is very difficult for twelve persons to decide a person is to die. We have proved our case. This calls for them to make a personal decision."

Prosecutor Downing said, "This is tremendous punishment."

The defense was pleased with the verdict. Defense attorney Wohl sighed audibly with relief when the verdict was read. Browne told reporters that he was "pleased." Both attorneys hugged Ng before he was escorted back to jail.

The jury was escorted out of the courtroom by plainclothes police officers. "Damn it, leave us alone. We've had enough," shouted juror Donna Harvey, addressing a photographer.

"I don't think you will get [any information] from any of the jurors," said juror Norman Abrahamson. "We have decided that all you'll get is what you got in the courtroom."

Reactions from relatives and friends of the victims varied. "Death should be the sentence," said Jean Mar's sister, Jeannie Robertson. "It's been like living with a nightmare."

Marcheta Chin, the widow of Henning Chin, appeared content with the verdict. Referring to the jury's decision to imprison Ng for the rest of his life, rather than sentence him to death, she told reporters, "It's got to be one way or the other."

On the streets of Chinatown, activity was lulled. "This is not Chinatown on a Thursday night," said Frank Morris, a community service officer in the area, shortly after the jury announced the sentencing. The streets were nearly empty of people and cars.

A member of Chinatown's Emergency Services commented, "We all know the family members of the victims and have taken care of them, so it's hard now to talk."

Another man told a reporter, "Most of the people in Chinatown I talked to said that if he didn't get the death penalty it would be a bad thing for the community. There was a high interest in this case in Hong Kong. A lot of reporters from Hong Kong were over here. If this guy gets away with killing thirteen people, then all the crooks in Hong Kong will be over here. They'll flood the place. This country has the worst kind of criminal record. You can shoot the president and get away with it."

Moses Kay, who was retired from the Seattle Police Department and was a well-known figure in the Chinese community, said, "[People in Chinatown] are really mad. They wanted to see him hang by the neck until he was dead. Thirteen people is a lot of people to kill."

A man who thought Ng should have been sentenced to death said, "It's the only way to make Chinatown better. Then we can stop these [killings]."

And another man commented, "The people killed them in cold blood -- so cruel."

Benjamin Ng was tried, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison for killing thirteen people at the Wah Mee Club. He was transferred to a state prison. Attorneys for Willie Mak's upcoming trial were preparing their cases. By the time Mak's trial would begin, the Seattle Police Department had spent more than \$500,000 investigating the murders at the Wah Mee Club.

And while one trial was finished, and another was about to begin, Tony Ng remained at-large.

CHAPTER TEN

"He learned some things about murder early on. He learned that men killed with less provocation than women. Men killed because they were drunk, stoned, and pissed off. Men killed for money. Men killed because other men made them feel like sissies. Men killed to impress other men. Men killed so they could talk about it. Men killed because they were weak and lazy. Murder sated their lust of the moment and narrowed down their options to a comprehensible few."

-- James Ellroy

"The common motive behind many crimes that appear senseless is kicks -- the thrill of doing the forbidden. There is excitement in thinking about crime, bragging about crime, executing the crime, making the getaway, and celebrating the triumph. Even if the offender is caught, there is excitement in dealing with the police, in trying to beat the rap, in receiving notoriety, and, if it gets that far, in the trial proceedings."

-- Dr. Stanton E. Samenow

"What separates Willie Mak from the others is the same thing that distinguishes him from all other murderers -- the premeditation of this crime, the total absence of fundamental values. There's nothing here to lessen moral culpability."

-- United States District Court Judge William Dwyer

Shortly after news of the Wah Mee Massacre hit the streets, reporters were quick to characterize the three young men with soundbyte stereotypes. Mak was the planner. He was the greedy one who didn't think twice about robbing the Club and bringing Tony Ng down with him. Benjamin Ng was the "crazy" one. He had a history of violent behavior and was allegedly connected to several execution-style killings that occurred shortly before the incident at the Wah Mee. Ng was known to carry a gun. He drove a Corvette. He was street smart. Tony Ng was the one who threw everyone for a loop. He was the eldest of the three, with no criminal record. He worked legal, legitimate jobs as an auto mechanic, and as a cook at his father's restaurant. He attended community college, off and on, after graduating

from high school. He was a shy, timid, young man. His association with these two thugs was a curiosity.

Superficially, the three men seemed to commit the crimes at the Wah Mee simply for money. More, much more, underlay this tragedy: gambling, Asian youth, police corruption, and life in a contemporary American Chinatown. The three young men not only assaulted the victims at the Wah Mee; they assaulted the Chinese community when Mak wrote his letter about Chinatown tongs and corruption. As Ron Chew, a reporter for the *International Examiner*, wrote, "The story wasn't what the justice system did to Willie Mak. The story was what Willie Mak did to Chinatown. Willie Mak dragged Chinatown into court with him as an uncharged co-defendant."

The mass murders at the Wah Mee, like many similar cases, were the result of more than just money and greed. Indeed, examining the Wah Mee murders helps illustrate essential differences between two schools of belief about responsibility for violent crime. One school of belief places a majority of the blame on the criminal's environment (e.g., home life, working conditions, education). Immersion in an adverse environment weakens restraint, pushes some to crime. Some argue that, to understand why Willie Mak devised, conspired, and executed such a plan, one has to understand Mak's world. One must look at the world through Mak's eyes -- see what it was like to be a young immigrant walking the streets of Chinatown in the early-1980s.

Yet, others argue that the individual establishes himself as a criminal at an early age: stealing a candy bar at the age of ten only leads to burglary as a teenager and, still worse, more criminal behavior as an adult. Supporters of this argument claim the criminal must accept responsibility for his actions, rather than blame his environment. In many instances, they argue, the criminal's siblings have been raised in an identical environment yet do not turn toward a life of crime.

Understanding Mak's world is not to say that one agrees with what Mak and his accomplices did at the Wah Mee. Nor should one believe that Mak and his accomplices are representative of Asian youth culture during the early-1980s. Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng are indeed different from their contemporaries. They in no way represent Chinese American youth -- the same way Charles Manson and Ted Bundy don't represent mainstream America. How these three men decided to carry out the execution-style killings, versus, say, three

other young men, will forever remain a mystery. What happened was horrific. It was also complex, the net result of the social struggles of a few young people in Chinatown.

New York-based theorist and academic Peter Kwong, in his book The New Chinatown, addresses the social/political/economic dynamics of North American Chinatowns. Kwong's book offers the reader a candid view of the inner-workings of Chinatown -- specifically within the past fifty years. The book describes living/working conditions of Chinatown, and illuminates what life for Mak and his accomplices was truly like.

Kwong's The New Chinatown dispels myths surrounding Chinese Americans -- myths both good and bad -- and explains dynamics of evolving Chinatowns across North America. Its candor distinguishes Kwong's study. He addresses and describes everything -- gambling to Opium wars to sweatshops to tong battles.

A major focus of Kwong's book is the growth of Chinatowns from 1965 to the present. He describes how the Immigration Act of 1965 led to explosive growth in Chinese immigration to the United States. This, in turn, led to an economic boom during the 1970s -- specifically in the Chinese garment and restaurant industries. "Imported capital," Kwong writes, "invested in the United States, took advantage of immigrant labor in Chinatown and reaped high profits. These profits attracted even more investments. More investments created more jobs, encouraging more immigration. This, in turn, brought more profits. This cycle generated the economic boom in Chinatown of the 1970s."

Preceding the Immigration Act of 1965 was the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. This followed Chinese exclusion, which lasted from 1882-1943. The McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 admitted some 30,000 Chinese, giving them immigrant status. This was a start, but the Immigration Act of 1965 was monumental. Between 1960 and 1985, the population of Chinese in America increased by more than 300% -- a jump from 236,084 in 1960 to 1,079,400 in 1985.

The families of Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng arrived in the United States during the mid-1970s -- a result of the Immigration Act of 1965. They were part of that population boom which led to economic growth in Chinatowns across the United States. And like the majority of Chinese immigrants during that period, the young mens' families arrived seeking economic betterment, political stability, social justice, and equality.

What they found, though, often was radically different.

"In fact," Kwong writes, "most [immigrants] end[ed] up having to work for others, own[ing] no property and suffer[ing] exploitation and discrimination." Benjamin Ng's parents worked long hours -- his father a cook, his mother a seamstress. Tony Ng's father was the first in his family to arrive in the United States -- living in Maryland and working at a Chinese restaurant. The rest of the Ng family followed. Eventually, though, Tony Ng's family succeeded; after his family moved to Seattle, his father opened his own restaurant in a Seattle suburb.

Despite -- or, possibly because of -- an economic boom in United States Chinatowns, classes of Chinese American immigrants began to emerge. Kwong describes these classes as "Uptown Chinese" and "Downtown Chinese."

"Those who arrive[d] with professional skills," Kwong writes, "are better able to integrate into the American society and do not settle in Chinatowns. They are the Uptown Chinese. Since most citizens of Chinese descent were traditionally of humble origin, mainly from the rural areas of Southern China, their relatives are likely to have similar backgrounds. Immigrants in this category tend to settle in Chinatowns with their sponsoring relatives. They comprise the Downtown Chinese."

Within the Downtown Chinese, there is yet another class separation: millionaires vs. non-millionaires. Kwong describes Chinatown millionaires as either individuals who have been in the United States since the 1960s or wealthy Hong Kong immigrants who had money before they came.

Chinatown millionaires were the Danny Woos and the John Louis and the Ruby Chows of Seattle. They were building owners, restaurateurs, and politicians with major pull in the Chinese community and -- to some extent -- "mainstream" Caucasian society. They were the people Chinese immigrants turned toward for work or a place to live. They owned the restaurants and apartment buildings, and they had a very palpable influence on the family associations in Chinatown. "Members who owned shops and restaurants," Kwong observes, "commanded respect because other members depended on them for jobs. Those who received favors became followers, forming patron/client relationships. Clients depended on

the patron for help in securing jobs, mediating personal conflicts, and providing protection." These millionaires were sometimes referred to as "kiu lings" -- or big shots.

The Chinatown non-millionaires were the families of Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng. Theirs was a world of working ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week, and earning about \$9,000 per year. Theirs was a world of working for tips-only at Chinatown restaurants, with no benefits or health care. Complaining about working conditions only meant trouble for the plaintiff. Chinese businesspeople and their supporters often rationalized away poor working conditions in Chinatown through two arguments: 1) American labor standards were not applicable to Chinatown because of intense competition between and low profit margins for Chinese businesses; 2) Chinese have a strong sense of ethnic solidarity and do not mind hard work if it is for other Chinese. Moreover, Kwong observes, "To deter workers from organizing or being too active, owners have an effective weapon -- the blacklist. Troublemakers are fired and are unable to find another job in Chinatown."

The behavior of Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng must be seen as interwoven with the larger social fabric of a larger Chinatown. Each arrived from Mainland China's Kwangtung Province -- a rural area with a poor educational system. They arrived in the United States unprepared for American schools. They knew little English and, like many, had to start from scratch. They were thrown into American schools, where they struggled from the outset. Kwong writes, "Newly arrived immigrant youngsters are more likely to have problems in school. When the volume of immigration is high, the schools lack resources to keep up with it. Chinatown schools in the 1960s and 1970s experienced this problem." Even as juveniles, young immigrants faced long hours of study and work. Commonly, a student would attend American school in the morning and afternoon, then attend traditional Chinese school in the early evening. Some even held part-time jobs throughout the school year. Kwong cites language problems, a heavy outside workload, family problems, and lack of financial support as reasons for high truancy- and attrition-rates among Chinese American youths at the time. "Conditions in the bustling environment in Chinatown are not conducive to youth development. There are few gyms available, few places for young people to socialize, and few places to go for advice. The school system is overcrowded; furthermore, there are too few bilingual teachers and counselors in Chinatown. These conditions provide fertile soil for youth gangs. Gang members, recruited by adults, are paid to guard gambling houses, to carry out extortion threats, to intimidate local residents, and to serve as runners in the drug traffic."

Kwong's description of juvenile scholastic struggles is not applicable to all young Chinese American immigrants during the early-1980s. Indeed, just consider the three young accomplices: Benjamin Ng dropped out of high school, but Willie Mak earned his GED, and Tony Ng even pursued a community college education. Yet, all three men were employed at gambling clubs. Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng were known to carry firearms. And all three had a history of illegally gambling in Chinatown.

In some instances, Kwong comments, young Chinese Americans turn to the tongs for a sense of place, as was the case with Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng. "Tongs allow recruitment of new members without regard to kinship or place of origin," Kwong writes. "With an unlimited constituency, tongs are able to undertake many different activities. They -- adapt to modern conditions." The most powerful tongs were those that had operated in New York City since the 1950s. There were the Continentals, Black Eagles, Flying Dragons, and the Ghost Shadows. These tongs served many roles in New York City's Chinatown, including protection of gambling clubs, extortion, territorial control, and drug trafficking. "It is cheaper to pay a few hundred dollars a month than to have one's storefront window broken or to worry about the safety of one's family," Kwong writes. "Clearly the tongs are a serious problem, yet the community is 'kept silent,' and is powerless to stop them. Only when the public is fully aware of the facts will pressure be put on government authorities to act against the tongs. To block public exposure under the pretext of opposing stereotypes plays into the hands of the tongs."

In New York City, as well as many Chinatowns across the United States, an uneasy partnership links tongs, residents, and police. If a storeowner is to complain about being extorted by a particular tong, that owner must be certain that they will receive backing from the law enforcement. Yet, the tong that the storeowner complains about may in fact control operations of a gambling club that is profiting select law enforcement officers by allowing the club to operate under a tolerance policy. If the police crack down on the tong, it shoots itself in the foot; if the police force doesn't crack down on the tong, the store's owner suffers the repercussions.

The tongs' power is immense. In 1985 a group of New York City investors bought a restaurant that was part of a particular tong's "territory." The tong pressured the investors and restaurant owners to break their contract because said investors were not part of the

tong. Comparably powerful tongs exist in Chinatowns across the United States, including Seattle. "[T]he problem with the tongs," Kwong argues, "is not limited to the crimes they commit; they impose a class structure on the community as well, buttressing the power of employers." Kwong argues that youth crime among Asian immigrants results not from inept schooling and American culture but from the tongs' power. "Some people claim that crime is simply a youth problem," Kwong writes. "They complain about the quality of today's youth, blaming the schools and the corrupting influence of American culture. They even try to give sociological excuses, seeing the problem as the result of the generation gap or the failure of hardworking parents to spend enough time with their children. Yet this problem is not simply one of juvenile delinquency brought on by parental neglect or bad schooling. When jobless fourteen-year-olds have guns, apartments, spending money, and defense lawyers for protection, they obviously have the backing of powerful adults. The youth problem is the creation of the tongs."

Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng had each worked low-wage jobs in Seattle. When they did make money, it was usually working at illegal gambling clubs. Perhaps they felt there was no place for them in a "mainstream" Caucasian society. Their English skills were poor and they had little education. Shortly after his arrest, Mak had described to a sergeant the discrimination he faced when looking for a job outside of Chinatown.

"Although some Chinese insist that they prefer living in Chinatown because they feel more comfortable among other Chinese," Kwong argues, "this sentiment merely reflects that discrimination and lack of jobs elsewhere make them feel uncomfortable and bound to the Chinese community. In fact, the preference to live in Chinatown is hardly cultural. Chinatown, after all, has always been a ghetto plagued by poverty, crowded housing, unsanitary conditions, and crime, and deficient American legal protection and the rule of law."

Kwong is critical of arguments that the Chinese have a "different" work ethic. "The Chinatown political and economic establishment -- [claim] that American labor standards [are] not applicable to Chinatown because of the intense competition and low profit margins in Chinese business. They also [claim] that Chinese have a strong sense of ethnic solidarity and do not mind hard work if it is for the Chinese. [B]laming the Chinese for lack of initiative is a common tactic used by officials to shrug off responsibility for conditions in Chinatown. It confirms the image of Chinese as timid and afraid of challenging authorities.

Investors leave their operations in the hands of strict Chinese managers who disregard American laws and labor regulations. Jobs within such ethnic enclaves are by definition low-wage and exploitative; they are a far cry from benevolent mutual-aid systems. What is worse, once immigrants are lured to Chinatown for jobs, they limit their chances to interact with American society and to learn English, which is essential for their economic mobility." Robbing the Wah Mee, killing the witnesses, and walking away from the heist with tens-of-thousands of dollars was a "way out" of Chinatown for the three young men. No more long hours in hot kitchens. No more discrimination when looking for work outside of Chinatown. They would be wealthy as the result of a "perfect" crime.

Unfortunately, Seattle's mainstream newspapers of the time failed to appreciate the cultural differences inherent in the Wah Mee case (some newspapers even misspelled Mah Jongg). Reporters were suddenly asked to write about tongs -- and they seemingly referred to pulp crime novels and violent movies for "accurate" descriptions.

Allowing for unprejudiced, yet unsentimental, interpretation of criminal violence -- such as that at the Wah Mee -- is Dr. Stanton E. Samenow's book Inside The Criminal Mind. Samenow, a clinical psychologist who also co-authored the three-volume study The Criminal Personality, strongly argues crime is caused by criminals, not environments or living conditions or social status. He cites the following as "myths" about criminals and crime: Criminals don't know right from wrong; criminals are the hapless victims of oppressive social conditions; crime is contagious; crimes of passion are cases of temporary insanity; people turn criminal because they were rejected by society; watching violent television programs evokes violent behavior in children. Dr. Samenow argues that the criminal, not the environment, is responsible for criminal activities. Samenow states, "Criminals cause crime -- not bad neighborhoods, inadequate parents, television, schools, drugs, or unemployment. Crime resides within the minds of human beings and is not caused by social conditions."

When Samenow introduced these ideas in the late 1970s, he was perceived by some as a dewy-eyed, liberal reformer and by others a hard-line reactionary. Nevertheless, President Reagan appointed Samenow to his Task Force on Victims of Crime. Inside The Criminal Mind was published shortly after that.

Samenow is neither liberal nor reactionary. He simply champions personal, not societal, responsibility for crime. "Since the late nineteenth century," writes Samenow, "there has

been a prevalent opinion that society is more to blame for crime than the criminal. Sociologists assert that the inner city youngster responds with rage to a society that has excluded him from the mainstream and made the American dream beyond his reach." Blaming the criminal rather than society is not novel, but many clinical psychologists disavow the idea.

The criminal mind still baffles psychologists. Why do some individuals murder and steal while others pursue benevolent interests? Theories abound. Psychologists William Healy and Augusta Bronner blamed juvenile crime on "deeply emotionally felt discomfort [stemming from a lack of] satisfying emotional relationships in [the] family circle." A 1939 U.S. Housing Authority report asserted, "Substandard housing is the direct cause of delinquency and crime, and its elimination would result in a crimeless world." In 1953 sociologist Frederic Wertham called comic books "primers for crime." Sociologist David Loth asserted that intense suburban pressure for status propel individuals into a life of crime. Sociologist Ira Goldenberg placed the blame on "inappropriate, malfunctioning, and otherwise non-actualizing social institutions." And still other sociologists have asserted that there would be fewer criminals if laws were changed and certain offenses decriminalized (i.e., prostitution and gambling). Criminologist Louise Shelley stated that crime is the result of "an understandable reaction to -- rapid social changes." Psychologist Karl Menninger concluded that punishment is both futile and, by nature, criminal itself. Menninger argued that the punishment itself may gratify the criminal and inadvertently encourage criminal activity.

Thus, scores of psychologists and sociologists believe that individuals turn to crime because of negative societal influences -- on television, in movies, comics, magazines, books, and because of poverty, educational deficiencies, and the like. Samenow attacks these theories. He argues the criminal is in fact rational, calculating, and deliberate. Samenow writes, "Too long have the social sciences promulgated the view that a human organism comes into the world like a lump of clay to be shaped by external forces. This view renders us all victims! What it does accomplish is to make explanation of behavior relatively easy. If any of us had taken a criminal path, something could be found in our past to explain why we turned out as we did. If your child has problems, you will be faulted for your child-rearing practices, whatever they were. If you were strict, you will be told that your child has been affected by your harshness. If you were permissive, you will be accused of being too indulgent. If you were relatively democratic, you might be considered wishy-washy or even indifferent. Worst

of all, you might be tagged as inconsistent, something that we are all guilty of to an extent."

The criminal blames society for his criminal actions simply because scores of psychologists and sociologists do. When the criminal is indeed apprehended, Samenow asserts, he points the finger of blame at society. "[The criminal] relate[s] a tale of horrors about their early lives. They seize upon any hardships in their lives, real or made up, to justify their acts against society. By portraying themselves as victims, they seek sympathy and hope to absolve themselves of culpability."

The criminal, reinforced by social theorists' rationalizations for crime, often develop distinctively self-justifying logic. In 1930 psychologist Alfred Adler noted, "With criminals, it is different: they have a private logic, a private intelligence. They are suffering from a wrong outlook upon the world, a wrong estimate of their own importance and the importance of other people."

Samenow supports Adler, even suggesting that criminals view people as "pawns." The criminal has a self-centered view of the world. The criminal has an inflated self-image. He believes that he is entitled to whatever he wants. He is constantly sizing up his opportunities to exploit people and situations. "[T]he criminal believes that he is entitled to whatever he desires, and he will pursue it ruthlessly. Many of the criminal's fantasies range beyond what is feasible, but once he comes up with an idea that seems plausible, he nourishes it until he is positive that he can enact it without a hitch. Wherever the criminal is, he visualizes people and property as opportunities for conquest. Criminals crave power for its own sake, and they will do anything to acquire it. Insatiable in their thirst for power and unprincipled in their exercise of it, they care very little whom they injure or destroy. In crime after crime, he asserts who he is -- a singularly special and powerful person with whom the world must reckon."

The criminal's self-important and -centered image of himself affects not only strangers. The criminal often views family members and friends as exploitable. Samenow writes, "As a child, the criminal has contempt not only for his parents' advice and authority but for the way they live, no matter what their social and economic circumstances. To him, their lives are plodding, dull, and barren. If his parents are poor, he scorns their lack of success. He does not fathom how toiling at a job can consume the bulk of his parents' working hours,

especially when they have to work on someone else's terms. He cannot comprehend placing obligations ahead of convenience or pleasure. To him, having a good time is what life is all about. Work and other duties have nothing to do with having a good time."

Reading Samenow's descriptions of criminal psychology is like reading a case study on Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng. Mak's detailed planning and Ng's violent temper are explained through Samenow's research and results.

Mak indeed blamed society. When Mak was apprehended, he first tried to negotiate a deal with the interrogating sergeant. When that failed, he told the sergeant that he faced discrimination when looking for work outside of Chinatown. When Mak was in jail, awaiting his trial, he wrote a letter to the "Public" claiming he was ordered by the Hop Sing tong to rob the Wah Mee. He said he left the Club before any shooting began. He accused restaurant owners of dealing drugs and smuggling diamonds. Mak was a victim of sparring tongs, he pleaded, and Chinatown was filled with criminals. In essence, Mak blamed his environment. Moreover, Mak and Benjamin Ng blamed each other -- hence the separate trials.

Mak was an intelligent criminal. He had planned the heist for several years. He was also self-important, clearly the leader of the massacre. When he was recruiting accomplices, he told them, "If [the victims] resist me, I, Willie, will kill them. If the people with me, robbing these people, won't shoot them, I'll shoot them all." The patrons at the Wah Mee represented nothing more than a means to an end. They were influential, wealthy, prominent members of the Chinese community. They worked hard to earn respect within the community -- as restaurateurs, philanthropists, and small business owners. Mak simply knew how to plan a heist and fire a gun; that was enough to earn his own prominent position in the community -- as a thug and criminal; someone not to be messed with.

Given the cultural complexities of the Wah Mee murders, both Kwong's and Samenow's theories explain its occurrence. While Samenow insists that the individual is responsible for criminal behavior, one cannot ignore the Chinatown environment that Kwong describes.

More importantly, one cannot deny that the Chinatown environment indeed had an impact on the young men's criminal behavior. They had been employed at illegal gambling clubs. The city was infested with corrupt cops who received payoffs from the gambling clubs. The two men were simply part of a larger, more corrupt system.

A "marriage" of theories must be considered. After all, Chinatown does not "breed" criminals, just as parents don't "breed" criminals. Not everyone employed in Chinatown works in illegal gambling clubs, nor do they come into contact with police "bagmen." Many run Asian newspapers, grocery stores, museums, and information centers. Their environment does not tolerate crime.

Samenow sums this differing -- yet shared -- environment well, describing how one of his clients turned into a criminal while his siblings remained "straight." His client claimed that he had been raised in an impoverished home. Samenow concludes, "It is interesting to note that in the same 'impoverished home' lived two sisters and one brother -- none of whom had been in trouble."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"You look at this generation of jook sing boys and jook sing girls. They have no respect for elder people."

-- Louis Chu

"[Willie] Mak has a proud look, lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, and a heart that devised wicked imaginations."

-- Prosecuting Attorney Robert Lasnik

Benjamin Ng's family was scorned.

Some Chinese Americans blamed Ng's parents for the young man's behavior. The people with whom Ng's father carpooled became scared of the senior Ng. He had spent the past seven years as a cook in Seattle. Prior to arriving in the United States, he worked as a barber in Hong Kong. "For forty years I have been a hard worker," Yu Lau Ng, Benjamin's father, commented. "I never did anything bad to people. I have never hurt anybody in my whole life." Because of the attention surrounding his son, he was forced to quit his job and remain unemployed.

Benjamin's mom, Shun Ng, remained at her job, despite harassment by her co-workers. If both Ng's parents had quit their jobs, they would have gone broke. "My poor wife," said Ng's father. "She works in a garment factory. All workers jeer at her and scold her. The Chinese people blame us. Our son's crime has nothing to do with the family. But for the sake of an income, his mom has to work."

On August 27, 1983, less than a week after Ng's trial ended, Benjamin's eldest brother, Keong Ng, entered the office of the *Seattle Chinese Post* and asked to speak with Assunta Ng, the paper's publisher. Assunta Ng (no relation to Benjamin's family) was handed a draft copy of an apology that had been written by Benjamin's father. The family wanted to purchase advertising space in the newspaper and apologize to the Chinese community.

"It's just normal for parents to love their children," a portion of the advertisement read. "When children grow up, they will be away from their parents and independent in society. Parents are busy with their own lives and cannot control their children. We feel painful about [Benjamin] Ng's criminal behavior."

The *Seattle Chinese Post*, published in separate English and Chinese editions, ran the apology exclusively in the Chinese edition. In addition to the advertisement, Benjamin's father agreed to a telephone interview with the newspaper. The senior Ng told the reporter, "I don't have face to see anyone. Before the trial, Benjamin insisted that he did not kill anybody and told the family not to worry. Now, with all the evidence, no matter whether he shot anybody or not, he is still involved in acts against heaven."

On March 30, 1983, charges of aggravated first-degree murder were filed against Tony Ng, who was formally named as the third suspect in the murders. Ng became a suspect in the killings because he was an associate of Mak and Benjamin Ng and he had been missing since the killings. Prosecutor Downing said, "Wai Chin has told police that on the night before the killings he saw the third man involved in the Wah Mee Club in the company of [Willie] Mak. Other witnesses have placed Wai Chiu 'Tony' Ng with Mak on that night [of the shootings]. Tony Ng is a friend of Mak and Benjamin Ng and was seen in the company of these two during the week of February twelfth through the nineteenth."

Tony Ng's family had also been labeled outcasts. Business at his father's restaurant declined. The senior Ng, who regularly visited Chinatown, now rarely showed his face in the area. "After work, I go home, sleep, get up, and come back to work," Tony Ng's father told a reporter. "I have lost face." Though charges were filed, Tony Ng was still at-large. Authorities believed that Ng had fled to San Francisco or Vancouver, B.C. Police pursued a tip that Ng had been spotted in Victoria, B.C., but found nothing. In a March 30, 1983, interview, Tony Ng's father stated, "[Tony Ng] is an adult. I don't know where he is. I haven't seen him since before the killings."

And while Ng remained at large, Willie Mak went to trial.

The prosecution team remained the same during Mak's trial. William Downing and Robert Lasnik, having successfully convicted Benjamin Ng earlier, were familiar with the events surrounding the killings, so new prosecuting attorneys were not needed.

Mak's defense consisted of two relatively young criminal attorneys who worked for the Associated Counsel for the Accused (ACA). The ACA's director, Roy Howsen, was confident in choosing the two attorneys in their late-twenties. "[They] make a good team," Howsen told the media.

One member of the defense team was a rail-thin, tall man named Donald Madsen. Madsen attended Pacific Lutheran University before getting a degree in economics from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. He received his law degree from the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento. Madsen smoked a trademark, corncob pipe and was known more for his awareness and cross-examination skills in the courtroom. For as long as he could remember, he had always wanted to be a lawyer.

The Mak defense team's other member was twenty-eight year old Jim Robinson. Robinson was a meticulous legal researcher. "Robinson is going to spend longer in the law library," Howsen told reporters, "to research everything to its logical conclusion and then some." Robinson graduated with a degree in political science from Utah State University. He earned his law degree at the University of Washington Law School.

Though Mak's defense team was strong and able, his defense itself was rife with problems. "[N]ot one [witness] has wanted to come in to testify for Mr. Mak," said defense attorney Madsen. "We've had to subpoena everyone." Those subpoenaed were not afraid of Mak but, rather, they did not want to be identified as supporters of the defendant. And they cringed at being called "defense witnesses," because that only cemented the perception that they were coming forth to help Mak. Madsen told reporters, "It's only accurate to portray them as persons who might have knowledge about certain things in Chinatown which we want to bring forth."

Jury selection lasted for more than two weeks. The prosecution would seek the death penalty against Mak and, as with Ng's trial, jury selection was scrupulous. That Ng's trial had been held and heavily reported on made it difficult to find jurors unaware of the Wah Mee tragedy. Moreover, it was difficult to find individuals unbiased about the young men involved. Defense attorney Madsen asked numerous questions of prospective jurors: *Given the fact that Ben Ng was found guilty, would you infer that Mr. Mak is also guilty of this? Do you feel someone ought to pay for this crime with their life? Based on what you heard, do*

you believe the motive was robbery? Have you reached a conclusion or do you feel that Mr. Mak was present that night? Do you believe the intent was to kill the people? Did you hear about a planning session ahead of time?

One prospective juror was excused because of her strict religious beliefs and, because of those beliefs, an inability to impose the death penalty. The court asked the prospective juror, "If we get to the penalty phase, one of the penalties that will be considered is death. How would you best describe your feelings about the death penalty?"

"I'm a Christian," the prospective juror replied, "and as I've studied the life of Christ -- I have come to the conclusion that I could not push the button myself, I'm sure."

"If you sat as a juror and went back to the jury room, and you were convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that the State had proven death was the proper sentence under the facts and under the law, could you answer yes to that question?"

"No."

The prospective juror was then excused.

While would-be jurors were grilled, Mak sat between his attorneys and observed the proceedings. Dressed in brown slacks, a camel V-necked sweater, and a cream-colored shirt, Mak's eyes remained on the prospective jurors. Occasionally, he would glance around the room but, for the most part, he watched the proceedings impassively.

The trials for Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak had to be held separately because, as Prosecutor Downing had told reporters, the young men were blaming one another for the killings. As a result, Mak's defense differed greatly from that of Ng's. Mak's attorneys would argue that the young man left the Club before the killings began. They would cite a July 11, 1983, statement filed with the court, wherein Mak stated, "I left the Wah Mee Club prior to anyone being shot. I left because Ben Ng was acting strangely and appeared to have abandoned the plan which we made prior to entering the Club. I was concerned that he might shoot someone, but I did not interfere because I was frightened that he would turn on me and shoot me. I left the Club and heard what appeared to be gunshots." They would argue that

Mak may be guilty of robbery, because he took two guns from the victims, but he definitely left the Wah Mee before the massacre began.

Jury selection lasted for six days and, when final decisions were made, the jury consisted of six men and six women -- nine Caucasians, one African American, one Puerto Rican, and one Hawaiian.

Opening statements were presented on September 20, 1983. Willie Mak, wearing a blue shirt and gray slacks, sat with his head resting in his hand and exhibited no signs of emotion as he listened to the opening statements. Prosecutor Downing told the jury that Mak considered murder a necessity in the robbery plan to insure no witnesses would live. "A necessary and central part of Willie Mak's plan was to eliminate all witnesses to this crime of robbery," Downing said. "Shoot them with small-caliber weapons, he told his friends, because it makes less noise. Willie Mak was a schemer. Willie Mak was a planner. For at least a couple of years, he was working on a plan that would result in him having a tidy sum of money and a minimum chance of apprehension."

Defense attorneys argued that Benjamin Ng was the leader of the heist, stating that Ng was the first robber to pull a gun in the Club. They suggested that Mak was caught up in affairs of warring tongs in Chinatown. According to the defense, Mak went to the Wah Mee on the night of the massacre to "rough up one of the highest people in the Bing Kung tong."

According to the defense, Mak was ordered to do so in retaliation for an earlier incident between the Hop Sing tong (of which Mak was a member) and the Bing Kung tong. The defense claimed that, several weeks earlier, Roy Chu, a Vietnamese member of the Bing Kung tong beat the president of the Hop Sing tong. It was known that Bing Kung tong-members gambled at the Wah Mee and Mak was sent there to get even; afterward, Mak would receive a monetary pay-off. Mak enlisted the help of Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng. "Robbery was not the motive," defense attorney Robinson told the jury. "Mak left almost as much money and jewelry at the scene as was taken out. Mr. Mak was contacted by Kong Mar and Roy Chu [of the Hop Sing tong]."

Defense attorneys also argued that, even if Mak was at the scene of the crime when the killings took place, as the prosecution was arguing, Mak would not have killed anyone because crimes in illegal gambling clubs are not reported. "Mak's understanding is that a

crime of this nature isn't reported," said Robinson. "If nobody had been killed, there never would have been a report." Instead, the defense argued, the killings were at the hands of Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng. "Ng shot one," Robinson said, "and it's likely he shot them all. Mak knew [Benjamin] Ng reacted violently to stress," Robinson told the jury, "because he had watched him shoot and kill a Seattle man, Franklin Leach, in October 1981." The defense claimed that, in that incident, Mak, Ng, and another man, were disposing of a safe when Leach happened upon them. "Without consultation," Robinson said, "Benjamin shot the man twice and killed him."

Finally, on September 23, 1983, Wai Chin took the stand for the second time in the Wah Mee trials. Chin looked Mak straight in the eye and told the jury that Mak was one of the three killers. "They start shooting," Chin testified, "All three of them. I see blood coming out of my mouth. I put my head down. When I wake up, I hear, 'Is that all the bullets?' It is either Ng or Mak, not the third man, because he had a low-key voice."

In an effort to humanize this witness who had seemingly returned from the dead, Prosecutor Lasnik asked Chin about his time in the Navy, where he worked as a cook.

"Are you a good cook?" Lasnik asked.

"No, not really," Chin replied.

"But good enough for the officers," Lasnik finished, smiling. The two men shared a laugh.

The defense tried to discredit Chin, by citing specifics of his testimony in Ng's trial that they believed were conflicting. Defense attorney Robinson, with transcripts of Chin's previous statements in hand, cross-examined the witness. He asked why Chin had stated Mak held a "long-barrel gun with a small hole" but, during Ng's trial, Chin had said Ng was holding that weapon.

"I saw the guns," the witness replied. "They both had long barrels."

"How many of those people shot?" Robinson asked.

"All three," Chin replied.

"Last time, you said two shot."

"Last time, I saw at least two guns shot."

The defense had been arguing all along that Mak left the Club before the killings took place. If only two guns had been fired, there was the possibility that Mak was not a gunman.

"Are you testifying without any doubt three people shot?" asked Robinson.

"Yes," replied Chin.

"No question?"

"No question."

The defense had tried to rattle the key witness, but Chin's story remained consistent. The defense was foiled.

The following week was an important one in Mak's trial. It would see Mak take the stand and endure cross-examination by the prosecution. It would also see many of Mak's friends testify against their peer. On September 27, 1983, three of Mak's friends took the stand. One testified that Mak had lost between \$20,000 and \$30,000 gambling shortly before the killings at the Wah Mee Club. Another friend testified that Mak thought of robbing a Chinatown gambling club only after he had lost badly after each stint of gambling.

The following day, Mak took the stand.

Mak told the court that he went to the Wah Mee Club on the orders of the Hop Sing tong. He was to rough up George Mar, one of the leaders of the Bing Kung tong. Mak believed that, in doing so, he would receive the respect of the Hop Sing tong, which he had joined only two weeks before. "[I] wanted to get ahead -- make them trust me," Mak told the court. He told the court that he went to the Wah Mee with a .357-caliber magnum revolver, which he would only use in a "life and death situation." He said Benjamin Ng went with him to identify George Mar. When the two men arrived at the Club, Mar took a swing at Mak first. "He tried

to hit me first," Mak told the court. "I punch him right then." Mak then took Mar to the back room and beat him, thrashing the older man. Then, according to Mak, Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng tied the victims, something that Mak had not planned. Benjamin Ng grew "kind of pale," Mak said, and had a "scary" expression. Mak was worried about what Ng might do to the people at the Wah Mee. Ng had the same "scary expression" as when he shot and killed Franklin Leach on the shores of Lake Washington. It was the same expression Mak had seen when Ng shot a barking dog five times, killing the animal. "I was feeling a little bit scared. The way Ben was acting. He was acting strange. Not normal." Concerned, Mak told the court, he left the Club prior to the carnage, having fired no shots. As he was leaving, he heard "snapping" sounds, but didn't know anyone had been killed until later that morning. He left the Club and returned to the Hop Sing tong, where he was rewarded.

"Did you go to the Wah Mee that night to inflict pain?" asked Prosecutor Downing.

"It was an order," Mak replied.

"You were doing what you had gone there to do -- cause pain?" Downing asked.

"I was go [sic] there to do what I was told," Mak replied.

But Jackie Wong testified that the Vietnamese man who had struck the Hop Sing tong-member was drunk at the time. Wong said the incident occurred at the Gim Lun Club, and the Vietnamese called Chu a "four-eyed bastard" and hit him on the head "a couple of times." The others at the Club were going to beat up the Vietnamese man, but Wong interfered. "I knew the kid," Wong told the court. "To me he's all right. I didn't want him to get into any trouble. I told those old men, 'Don't hit him.'" Wong took the Vietnamese man outside and told him to go home and sober up. The incident, as far as Wong was concerned, had been quelled.

Mak countered almost every aspect of the witness testimony for the prosecution.

Whereas Wai Chung Tam had testified that Mak had lost thousands of dollars in the weeks prior to the killings, Mak claimed that he was not financially broke at the time, and told the court that he had deposited \$2,700 into a Chinatown bank the week of the robbery.

Whereas Sergeant Joe Sanford testified that Mak said, "I did all the shooting," during questioning, Mak accused Sanford of saying that if Mak didn't cooperate in the investigation, he would obtain a search warrant and "tear down [my] house."

"Did you ever at any time make a statement or indicate in any fashion that you did all the shootings at the Wah Mee Club?" Defense attorney Robinson asked his client.

"No," Mak replied.

Mak told the court that, late in 1982, he was invited to join the Hop Sing tong. "I had a lot of things going through my mind," he said. Working as a cook was getting him nowhere, and he was making little money. Mak had learned at a young age that tongs were a "bunch of hoodlums" and he described joining the tong as "the fast way to get ahead." Mak paid about twenty dollars in dues and pledged loyalty to the Hop Sing tong.

Mak's "Dear Public" letter was presented to the jury. Janell Whitaker, whom Mak had initially given the letter, read the entire piece to the court. Prosecutors claimed that Mak wrote the letter to shift blame from himself to other members of the Chinese community.

"Weren't you trying to beat this charge?" Downing asked Mak.

"No," Mak replied. He said he wrote the letter because he feared for his life.

"You're writing anything you can in order to try and save yourself in this matter, aren't you?" Downing queried.

"No," Mak replied. "I just want to tell the truth. I want the public to know what exactly happened that night."

Many members of the Chinese community took the stand to testify that they did not know of these activities of prostitution, drugs, and diamond smuggling that Mak had purported in his letter.

One key witness was Don Chin, a businessman with a degree from the University of Washington, who explained that tongs were organized around the turn of the century, and

provided assistance to members of the Chinese community. Chin said he didn't know anything about tong rivalries. "These sort of things, I'm not acquainted with," Chin told the court. "All I know is hearsay, and I don't want to repeat hearsay." Defense attorney Robinson prodded at Chin, trying to learn more about the tongs' shadowy dealings. Perturbed, Chin replied, "I'm not a member of a tong. I don't know why you're asking me questions about things I don't know too much about."

Bob Santos, the executive director of the International District Improvement Association, testified that he was aware of gambling games operated by Filipino and Chinese clubs, but he was also aware of a bingo game run by "six elderly women" he had seen near a church. The day before closing arguments, Wai Chin was brought to the witness stand again. The prosecutors brought back the star witness to cement the defense's argument that Mak had left the Club before the robberies and killings took place. Chin once again told the court that Mak shouted, "Shut up! You're not supposed to talk!" while Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng robbed the victims.

The last witness to take the stand was an acquaintance of Mak's named Steve Chin. Chin testified that George Mar, whom Mak had supposedly been sent to the Wah Mee to beat up in retaliation, was not even a member of the Bing Kung Association.

On October 4, 1983, teams for the defense and prosecution made their closing arguments. Defense attorney Madsen told the jury to consider the possibility that Wai Chin may not have accurately recalled what he saw at the Club. Madsen conceded that Mak may be guilty of first-degree murder, because he was an accomplice to robbery, but if that were the charge, then the death penalty would not be applicable. Mak was not guilty of aggravated first-degree murder, Madsen told the jury, because he did not enter the Wah Mee Club with the intent to kill.

Prosecutor Downing listed by name ten witnesses whose testimony conflicted with Mak's. Downing told the jury, "The case boils down to credibility. You must decide if the defendant is being straight with you, whether he is a confused outsider, nobly exposing a corrupt world, or whether his story is fiction of a desperate and manipulative mind. The defendant was an accomplice with Benjamin Ng and Tony Ng and whoever actually held the gun, whoever actually pulled the trigger that sent the bullet into the brain of Jean Mar, it's irrelevant which one, because the defendant or an accomplice caused the death. How can

Willie Mak seriously sit here and tell you that he was surprised or confused about how Benjamin Ng was acting? That's exactly the reason why he recruited Benjamin Ng. If you're going to need a guy who can shoot and kill people, he's a pretty reliable guy. If you believe his story, shake his hand, give him back the M-1, and send him out the door. There is no place or time for compromise in this case."

Prosecutor Lasnik said the seven deadly sins "fit Willie Mak to a T." Lasnik told the jury, "Mak has a proud look, lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, and a heart that devised wicked imaginations."

The jury deliberated for four hours before being sequestered at a Seattle hotel for the night, unable to decide on a verdict.

The next day, at noon, the jury returned to the court with a verdict. Mak sat with his eyes welling up slightly, his finger trembling beneath his chin, as the verdict was read. Mak was convicted of thirteen counts of aggravated first-degree murder and first-degree assault. He received the same conviction as Ng and, as initially in Ng's case, a possible death sentence loomed.

As Mak was led from the court, he smiled slightly at the row of victims' family members. "He has been smiling at us every day this week," said Marcheta Chinn, Henning Chinn's widow.

The sentencing phase followed, and attorneys for both sides argued whether Mak deserved the death penalty. "Why does Willie Mak deserve a different sentence than Benjamin Ng?" Robinson asked the jury. "He's a human being and the decision to stop his life is extremely major. The only thing absolutely certain about this case is death is irreversible. At the time of the execution, the person who makes the injection, or the person who pulls the trap door, is going to say, 'I'm not killing this man. The jury [is].'"

The defense also brought University of Washington psychology professor Elizabeth Loftus to the stand to testify about memory lapse and recollection. Loftus testified that a violent incident may impair the memory of witnesses and that Chin may have had gaps in his memory that were filled in with outside information he learned later.

Prosecutor Lasnik asked jury members not to base their sentencing on Ng's sentencing. "How can you be asked to base your vote on what another jury did? You must make a personal decision and you must not be intimidated by the defense. You may know much more about Benjamin Ng than that jury did."

The jury was instructed, in part, that, to convict Mak, each of the following elements of the crime of aggravated murder in the first degree must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt: 1) That on or about the 19th day of February, 1983, the defendant or an accomplice caused the death of the individual named; 2) That the defendant acted with the intent to cause the death; 3) That the defendant acted with premeditated intent to cause the death; 4) That the death was a result of the acts of the defendant or his accomplice; 5) That one or more of the following aggravating factors was present 5a) The defendant and his accomplice committed the murder to conceal the commission of a crime or to protect or conceal the identity of any person committing a crime 5b) There was more than one victim and the murders were part of a common scheme or plan of the defendant 5c) The murder was committed in the course of or in furtherance of the crime of robbery; 6) That the acts occurred in King County, Washington.

The jury deliberated for less than two hours before returning with a sentence. Mak would receive the death penalty, they decided, many of the jurors with tears in their eyes. The young man showed little emotion as his sentence was read. He was ushered back to his jail cell. A short time later, Mak's defense attorneys met with him for two hours. Madsen later told the media, "He's doing all right, just like he's done throughout this trial. He's not one to show a lot of emotions."

One juror commented, "The evidence proved that he was very responsible for his actions. Good or bad, he knew what he was doing." Another juror said they came to a decision by taking votes on three separate elements: Mak's age, his role in the incident, and whether he had acted under duress. "On age, our country says when you're twenty-one, you're no longer a minor," said one juror. "Number two, we were confident he was the leader and we felt the evidence proved that. Duress? Nah, that was his way of life."

Relatives of the slain victims began crying when the sentence was read. They hugged Downing and Lasnik. Linda Mar, the daughter of Moo and Jean Mar, said, "It's still not over for us. It's still going to be hard. It doesn't quite help our wounds. How can it? He destroyed

all these lives. Look what he did to Chinatown. I never heard anything like that. Gambling, yes. But prostitution? My God, he made Chinatown look like a horrible place to be."

Marcheta Chin said she was a little more relieved and felt justice had been served.

Mak was headed for Death Row, where he would spend twenty hours a day locked up in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell, while his appeal worked its way to the Supreme Court.

After the trials of Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak, representatives of the King County Prosecutor's office and the Seattle Police Department met to discuss, as Prosecutor Norm Maleng put it, "measures to ensure that large-scale, illegal gambling doesn't recur." But these measures were not without their own suspect set of criteria. First, the police wouldn't prosecute members of aged and timeworn gambling clubs. "We're not concerned about going back into the past," Maleng said. "That is not our focus." His statement made sense. Scores of Chinatown residents had reported that age-old gambling clubs had operated -- and still were operating -- under a tolerance policy enforced by the police department. Why would police officers and prosecutors investigate gambling clubs that may expose their department to corruption and scandal?

At a press conference to announce these measures, Prosecutor Maleng was waxing nostalgic. He said police had "forged new lines of respect" between law enforcement and the Chinese community, penetrating a traditional "veil of secrecy." And the Seattle Police Department made a budget request for a full-time "Asian Community Relations" staff-person who would address some of the social problems, issues, and crime in the Asian community.

Even Police Major Beryl Thompson felt optimistic about the situation, and offered the following statement to Chinatown and its gamblers: "Gambling, per se, is not illegal as long as the house or operator does not take a cut of the action."

It seemed that, even though thirteen people had been killed in an after-hours gambling club believed to have been the home of police payoffs and vice corruption, it was once again business as usual in the city of Seattle.

CHAPTER TWELVE

One rainy October evening, shortly before 8:00 p.m., I found myself outside of the Wah Mee Club, holding an unloaded .22 Ruger and staring at the entrance to the Club.

"That was the type of gun they used," my friend told me. Though I knew the three young men had used small, palm-sized .22 Rugers to kill their victims, I'd never actually had the opportunity to hold such a weapon. I was seated in the passenger seat of a suburban, red mini-van, listening to the rain tap against the metal roof of the van. All seemed still. Although the evening was windy enough to send traffic lights swinging like pendulums, we were parked in an alley, protected from the gales by tall, aged buildings.

The driver of the van was an older, well-dressed man named Windsor Olson. Olson was a retired private investigator, who had snooped around hotels, bottle clubs, and brothels since the late-1940s -- spying on crooks, keeping tabs on unfaithful husbands, and generally tailing what could only be described as a real gift-sampler of sociopaths. "I'll tell you," Olson commented, earlier that evening, "I'll bet I drilled a hole in the wall of every room at the Edgewater Hotel at one time or another, for cameras and listening devices." We were headed south along Interstate-5, toward the city. Thick, smoker's-lung clouds promising more rain shadowed the skyline. Olson, still dapper in his mid-seventies, wore a pressed shirt, dark blazer, and slacks. He had the clean presence of a distinguished gentleman whom I had seen all of Seattle's historical tumors -- twice -- and walked away from them with a sense of mild interest. Corrupt cops and speakeasies and brothels didn't shock Olson; rather, they helped shape Seattle's history -- as had the 1962 World's Fair or early Pioneer Square.

Sitting in the van, outside the Wah Mee, holding the gun and looking at the entrance, now shrouded in shadows, Olson recapped the events of the night of the killings. I'd heard all the details before, but I was surprised by one new piece of information.

"You know," Olson reminisced, "I used to be a member of the Wah Mee."

"Really?"

"Back in the 1940s, my wife and I went to the Wah Mee." And Olson proceeded to tell me what the Wah Mee was like, just after World War II, when the Club was open to all races. It was a hot spot for dancing and drinks. Olson and his wife, Dorie, frequented the Club three nights a week to dance, drink, and socialize.

"I remember," Olson told me, "There was only one set of security doors back then. Once someone buzzed you in, there was a three-foot Buddha on a pedestal just inside the entrance. That Buddha's belly had been rubbed so many times for good luck."

There was, of course, gambling when Olson and his wife frequented the Club. "But that was upstairs," Olson said. "Not out in the open on the lower floor."

"And what about gambling tolerance and police corruption?" I asked.

"Oh, sure, there were bagmen at the Wah Mee," Olson replied. "When I went to the Club, the bagman was a cop named Tommy Smith. He was a drunk. One night, he comes into the Wah Mee, drunk as can be, and sits up at the bar. For some reason or another, he draws his weapon and he's so drunk and clumsy, it flies across the floor of the Club. The whole place is silent. That thing could have gone off and *killed* someone! He was *crazy!*"

We sat in the rained-on van outside the Wah Mee, staring at the Club's facade. I was amazed by our differing impressions of the Club. For myself and countless others, it is the locale of the worst mass murder in Seattle history. For Olson, though, it recalls dancing the night away with his wife. He was then a young, green private investigator at the time, just back from the War, and I imagine him swaggering into the joint with his woman on his arm, a gun tucked away in his holster, and feeling for all the world like he was a larger -- yet clandestine -- part of a city packed with corrupt cops, speakeasies, and whores.

Olson steered the van out of the alley and turned right onto South King Street. I directed him eastbound along South King Street, making a left on Eighth Avenue. I told Olson to stop outside the entrance to the Don Hee Apartments. "See that door," I said, pointing at a plate glass door and, beyond it, a narrow carpeted staircase. "That's the entrance to Wai Chin's apartment building."

"He was the old man who survived the shootings, right?" Olson asked.

"Yep." The apartment building was located adjacent to the Interstate-5 overpass, where the Interstate curves as it weaves through downtown. Only a few blocks from the Wah Mee, I could imagine Chin, older and slow-moving, gently closing the door behind him and shuffling down Eighth Avenue, toward the restaurants and gambling clubs that lined South King Street.

Olson pulled away from the apartment building, and I directed him westbound along South King Street. We rode for a few blocks before stopping outside the Tai Tung restaurant -- just around the corner from the Wah Mee. "That's where Tony Ng and Willie Mak were last spotted before the killings," I said. The restaurant's windows -- tinted brown. The interior -- illuminated by hot lamps in the kitchen and the restaurant's low lighting. A half-dozen older Chinese men sat at the counter, smoking cigarettes and eating a late dinner.

Shortly before leaving Chinatown, Olson drove to a narrow alley adjacent to the Seafirst Bank parking lot. "See that manhole cover?" he asked. I could see, flooded in the glare of the mini-van's headlights, a large, weathered, copper-colored manhole cover exhaling a thin, vertical line of steam. "One day, back in 1959, I got a call to investigate a murder. That was around the time of a very bloody tong war. If you ask the Wing Luke Museum about tong wars during the 1950s, they'll say there was no such thing. But it was a bloody thing here in Chinatown, the Chinese tongs fighting for control. We think of them now as crime families but that's not totally accurate. They were organizations that kept order and maintained the traditions of the Chinese community, which was largely ignored by the mainstream politicians and city administration. Right here, in this alleyway, right where that manhole cover is, was where, one morning during that war, they found the head of a man. Just the head."

"Did you solve the murder? Was the body ever found?"

"Nope."

Olson drove toward Pioneer Square. He wanted to show me more criminal-historical points of interest in Seattle. "I was here when this was a really rough town," he said. "A military

town, a logging town, a town whose tone and tempo were set by sailors and longshoremen. When this was known as one of the most corrupt cities and counties in the nation. But it's always been a city with a soul and -- at least until recently, when it started to take itself a little too seriously sometimes -- a city with a sense of humor." We continued through Pioneer Square, past the circa-1900s stone-and-brick buildings that once housed the city's popular speakeasies and whorehouses. "All of that's still here in the shadows of the bright buildings, behind the new facades of the old buildings."

Olson drove along First Avenue, turning right on Cherry Street. We parked at the foot of Cherry Street -- a steep hill that climbed past the courthouse, police station, and jail, stretching past the Interstate toward the backside of Capitol Hill. Olson pointed at the entrance to a very swank, upscale Middle-Eastern restaurant. "That's where my wife and I got married," he said. "We danced and drank until dawn." Olson explained that the place was once a bottle club, back around the time of his marriage, and one of the more popular drinking joints in the city.

Olson turned the mini-van around and we continued toward Elliott Bay, a block away from First Avenue. He made a right turn down a shadowed alley marked with a few streetlamps that seemed to sizzle in a rain that fell heavily. He steered the van about a quarter of the way down the alley, stopping outside the entrance to a very tall, weathered building that loomed above us. I tried to see its facade entirely, but tall and narrow, seemingly disappearing into rain and low clouds, it seemed to stretch forever.

"This building was once a private bank of sorts," Olson explained. "The Pioneer Safety Vaults. Four-hundred of the sixteen-hundred safety deposit boxes were filled with cash, gold from Alaska, jewels, negotiable bonds, hush money, and various ill-gotten gains and money hidden away from the tax collector -- that sort of thing.

"Well, it was over the three-day holiday for George Washington's birthday in 1954. And it was the evening of the policemen's ball. Downtown was quiet with little traffic and very few cops. A crew of robbers blocked off both ends of the alley with barricades and went in and emptied the place out. It took them six or eight hours. Downtown was so quiet and the men were so confident, one of the robbers sang opera songs at the top of his lungs while cleaning the place out.

"Now, considering where a lot of that money came from, there wasn't a big official effort to dig deeply into the case. The official estimates put the take at between \$100,000 and \$400,000. Other estimates approach one-million dollars. From what I heard, it might have been as high as \$2 million. Supposedly, some years later, after the statute of limitations had run out and he couldn't be prosecuted, some safecracker in Portland admitted to pulling the job. But that could have been just bragging. We'll never know."

Olson and I continued our drive through downtown, heading north along First Avenue. He pointed out an office building on the right. "That used to be a department store where I worked in my late-teens," Olson told me. "Each morning, there was an old Indian woman who sat outside the store's entrance selling baskets. It was my job to shoo her away. Guess who that woman was?"

"Who?"

"Chief Seattle's daughter."

We passed the Showbox Theater, across from the Pike Place Market. "That used to be the Music Box," Olson said. "I remember Sally Rand doing her bubble dance at the Music Box."

Olson began his career as a private investigator in 1958. He was one of only seven P-Is in Seattle. Now, there are nearly 500 in Washington State. "I'd gone straight from Broadway High School in 1944 to the war in the South Pacific," Olson explained. "When I came home, I tried working as a salesman for Greater Mountain Chemical Company, but I wasn't happy. A friend of mine was in insurance and he told me that there might be a lot of work for someone like me, who was good with a camera, doing insurance investigations. And no, I seldom carried a gun. I never have liked guns. I did have one, though. It was a Walther PPK, just like James Bond carried. The guy I bought it from swore it once belonged to Ian Fleming. I don't know about that. And anyway, it was stolen out of my car a lot of years ago."

In 1993 he sold the business to an associate, Scott Hatten, and retired. Along with P-I work, Olson started Bucky's courier service and the first armored-car company in Seattle. "I knew the streets," Olson said.

Olson and I cruised past Pike Place Market. He pointed out the La Salle Hotel -- above the market -- which was one of the biggest brothels during the early-1900s. We drove through Belltown, toward Queen Anne, and parked outside the Seattle Center, near the west entrance of the Key Arena. Olson pulled a weathered, wooden "billy club" from a leather bag between the front seats. He handed the wooden object to me and I examined the item, rolling it in my hands, making mini half-swings, and guessing its weight.

"I found that billy club over there," he said, pointing to a row of rhododendron bushes. "It was the same place where cops found a pool of blood."

Olson found the billy club back in 1969, and it was of particular importance to him because the weapon was used to murder one of his clients. In early-1969, a 58-year-old female restaurateur named Yi Yun Chen Lee approached Olson. Mrs. Lee suspected that her husband was cheating on her. Furthermore, she feared that her husband might steal and exploit her secret recipe for beef tenderloin dishes. "She kept that recipe on her person at all times -- didn't even share it with her husband," Olson explained.

Mrs. Lee was no paranoid nutcase. She was a bright, ambitious woman who owned the Mongolian Steak House at the Seattle Center. As a teenager in her native China, she had joined the revolution against the Manchu Dynasty. She also joined Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang and, during the Sino-Japanese War, served as the only female general on the front lines. After emigrating to the United States, she earned a masters degree in Municipal Administration from the University of Michigan and worked for a number of years in the Washington, D.C., area, where she met her husband, chemist Chin Joe Lee. During the World's Fair, the couple visited Seattle and realized there was an opportunity to make money in the restaurant industry. They stayed and opened the Mongolian Steak House.

"Now, something was bothering her," Olson told me. "She asked me to follow her husband, to find out how he was spending his time. So I followed him. But all I could come up with was how he spent every morning at the Logan Building on Sixth and Union -- at the stock market board."

On the morning of June 29, 1969, at about 2:00 a.m., Mrs. Lee left the Mongolian Steak House with about \$1,000 in receipts. She lived within walking distance of the restaurant, on

Queen Anne hill, but never made it home that morning. Later, a search turned up a pool of blood and a shoe near the rhododendron bushes -- but no body.

"The police talked to me for all of two minutes, about what I might know," Olson explained. "I went to the Center myself and poked around, and that's when I came up with the billy club, near what was apparently the murder scene." A few hours later, at 8:00 a.m., Mrs. Lee's body was found in the bushes off East Interlaken, her skull fractured in two places.

Though the murder was never solved, Olson had his suspicions. He believed it was Mr. Lee who murdered his wife. On the morning of Mrs. Lee's murder, Mr. Lee phoned the police at 3:00 a.m. to report his wife never made it home. Olson suspects that Mr. Lee murdered his wife near the bushes at 2:00 a.m., dumped the body, and returned home an hour later to call the cops and establish an alibi.

Though a reward of \$10,000 was posted for information about the murder, no arrest was ever made. "The purse with the receipts," Olson said, "and, maybe more significantly, the recipe, were never found. I could never shake the feeling that the recipe for that sauce figured into it all somehow."

We left the Seattle Center and weaved along narrow roads that carved across Queen Anne hill. We cruised in the rain, past the Japanese Consulate's mansion, a beautiful, sprawling estate overlooking the city. We passed a tall apartment building garnished with wrought iron railings. Olson told me it was the locale of one of this city's most successful "cat burglars" -- a man who scaled the wrought iron facade during a particularly hot summer, when residents kept their windows and sliding doors open while they were away at work. We drove past the home of one of Seattle's most horrific murders. One night a prowler entered a stranger's home, looking for jewels and money. What he found, instead, was the home's owner -- a single woman who lived alone. He killed the woman with a hatchet, slicing off her head, and scrawling a cryptic message in blood on a bedroom wall. Sadly, Olson told me, the victim's daughter was so distraught over the incident that, a short time later, she committed suicide.

We parked outside an old apartment building where a prostitute was murdered. A resident of the building brought the woman home, murdered her, and then proceeded to dismember the body using a filleting knife. The killer filled plastic trash bags with body parts, loaded the sacks in his car, and proceeded to drive to a dumping site north of Seattle. "He was

stopped," Olson told me, "by a cop who told him he was driving uncontrollably. He was weaving his car all over the road. The thing is, the man's arms and hands were covered in blood, yet the cop let him go." The body was found a short time later. The killer, a postal employee, was arrested at his work.

Finally, we drove to a sloping street near the top of Queen Anne. Olson parked the car outside a beautiful, yet modest, home with a slanted roof and antiquated shingles. "I used to live in that house," Olson told me. From late-1984 through May 1985, Olson shared the neighborhood with an unruly guest: a rooster.

The rooster, which neighbors aptly named "Wild Rooster Cogborne," spent nearly a full year sweeping a dozen or so domestic hens off their nests and into the trees. Furthermore, at 3:00 a.m. every morning, Cogborne would crow from his roost in one of the street's tallest trees. The neighbors grew restless. Police, firefighters -- even the Boy Scouts -- were called to try and quiet the neighborhood. "People tried tranquilizer darts," Olson said. "People tried nets. The favorite bait was chicken feed soaked in vodka because they figured the rooster would be easier to deal with if it was drunk. Others tried poison, but they caught a lot of criticism for trying to kill the bird."

One neighbor ran out of his home one night, shooting at Cogborne with a .22 Caliber rifle.

Cogborne was finally killed, but not before putting up a good fight. The incident had drawn so much attention, an obituary ran in the *Seattle Times*:

"In memory of the great Queen Anne rooster -- Wild Rooster Cogborne. After surviving slingshots, guns, poison darts, tranquilizers, leg-hold traps, Boy Scouts, freezing weather, snow, garbage trucks, nets, and taxis, he limped on mortally wounded, for three weeks before he died of lead poisoning."

Olson and I left Queen Anne. We drove north, to the University Plaza Hotel, where he dropped me off outside the lobby. We sat for several moments, the mini-van idling in the hotel's circular driveway. Our discussion returned to the Wah Mee. He asked me how my book was coming along. I grilled him a bit about his time spent, some fifty years ago, drinking and dancing at the Wah Mee.

"Have you been in the place since?" I asked.

"No," Olson replied. "I wanted to lease the place and turn it into a museum of sorts." Olson wanted to house his mementos and photos documenting this city's history of corruption, vice digressions, speakeasies, and whorehouses. He had tried contacting the building's owner on several occasions, but the owner always hung up on him. "I guess it's too soon to do anything with the space." I wasn't sure I agreed with Olson's plan of turning the Wah Mee into a museum. But, at the same time, I wanted to get inside the Club, to see what the interior was like. I wanted to pass through those security doors and roam around. It seemed admittedly perverse, but I wanted to walk in the footsteps of the Club's patrons. I wanted to stand where John Okada, Frank Chin, and Ruby Chow had stood. I wanted to imagine a room filled with well-dressed men and women, during the 1940s, drinking and dancing and generally having a good time. I wanted to hear the sounds of my footsteps echoing through the vacant space.

I promised Olson I would mail him some newspaper clippings and various photos I had acquired during my research. "If you *do* get a chance to go inside the place," I told Olson, "you have my phone number. Please give me a call."

"I sure will."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On October 4, 1984, RCMP Sergeant Bob Newman knocked on the apartment door of an electronics factory worker living in Calgary, Alberta. The factory worker's name was Jim Wong, a Vietnamese in his early-twenties who shared an apartment with a man named Tri Sieu Tran. Wong was an avid reader, who spent a lot of time at the library across the street, reading books by Asian writers. He had also studied English at Connaunt School in Calgary with a friend. When Sergeant Newman arrived, he was led through the apartment by Tran and into Wong's room. The apartment was furnished with little more than a television set, mattress, and blanket. Cluttered around the apartment was mail from Vancouver B.C., two French dictionaries, and four cases of beer. Wong slept on the mattress and his roommate slept on the floor. The apartment was a low-rent unit in a seven-story building, located at 112 Third Avenue SW. The rent was a mere \$275 per month, and Wong and Tran had been living there for a little over two months.

The roommates hung out at the video arcade sometimes. Tran had a punk hairdo and wore an earring. Wong was the quieter one. A few days before Sergeant Newman arrived, Wong went to his landlord and gave him notice. He would be moving out soon.

When Sergeant Newman arrived, he entered the room and woke the young man. He told him to get dressed. Wong put on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and was taken to an immigration office in Calgary's Chinatown. He was arrested on charges of being in Canada illegally because he allegedly failed to seek a residence permit after living in the country for more than three months. It was at the immigration offices that Wong saw someone he recognized -- Seattle Police Lieutenant Robert Holter. Wong produced some identification, but it was phony. Lieutenant Holter told the young man, "I know who you are. You know who I am. I'm not interested in how you got to Canada. I'm only interested in the investigation of the Wah Mee murders."

Jim Wong didn't need the glasses he regularly wore. Nor did he particularly like his hair cut so short. Jim Wong wasn't even Vietnamese. In fact, Jim Wong wasn't even Jim Wong.

Jim Wong was Tony Ng.

And so it was that Tony Ng's life as a fugitive came to an end. He had been placed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, his picture plastered in post offices across the United States. The Bing Kung tong had offered an \$80,000 reward for anyone who could provide information leading to his arrest. He was considered armed and extremely dangerous, and the search for him was the most intensive manhunt in Pacific Northwest history. Yet, in the end, this "armed and dangerous" fugitive was apprehended while sleeping. He was relieved to tell his story and, in many respects, the young man was glad the entire ordeal was finally over.

At the immigration office in Calgary, Ng and Lieutenant Holter talked for four hours.

"You must be aware from the newspapers that Willie Mak has seriously implicated you in the killings," Holter said.

Tony Ng was well aware. He told the Lieutenant that he had arrived in Canada in February 1983. He described his involvement in the killings at the Club. He admitted that he was in the Club on the night of the slayings and that he tied up several of the victims and stole their money. He told Holter that Mak then ordered him to wait in the area between the two security doors. He heard shots and, later, he joined Mak and Benjamin Ng as they fled the Club. In exchange for joining the men, Ng told Holter, he received \$6,000 and his \$1,000 debt with Mak was cleared. Ng said that he thought the incident would only involve robbery and assault, not murder, and that he had confronted Mak in an effort to call the whole thing off. Ng told Holter, "I would like to say that, if I had known that people were going to be killed or hurt, I would not have gone, and that nothing is worth doing this kind of thing."

Ng was captured after FBI investigators received an undisclosed tip that Ng was in Calgary, Alberta. The FBI contacted the RCMP and asked them to investigate the lead. Wary that they would "tip their hand" to Ng, RCMP asked the FBI and Seattle police to join them in Calgary. The three agencies met on Wednesday morning and, soon thereafter, spotted Ng. But they weren't certain it was Ng. "He didn't appear as in the photographs on our wanted flyer," said Allen Whitaker, a special agent at the Seattle FBI office. "We weren't able to positively identify Ng until near the time he was captured."

With Ng in custody, there was a celebration of sorts back in Seattle. "I am deeply gratified at the excellent work of the FBI, the Seattle police department, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng told the media.

Ng's capture came just hours after the celebration of Kung Chau -- a day the Chinese remember their dead. Buddhists believe that Kung Chau is the only day that the King of Hell allows the spirits of those who died violently to return to earth and seek retribution. And in Chinatown, friends and relatives of the victims were rejoicing. "When news began hitting here," said Henry Lee, an employee at the King Cafe, "people flocked to nearby family association halls. When they watched on television or listened to radios about what happened, they cheered."

"Everybody is feeling better," said Peter Wong, past president of the Bing Kung Association. "Now maybe the case will be finished."

Capturing Tony Ng was one thing. Getting him back to America was an entirely different matter. In order to have Ng extradited back to the United States, prosecutors in Seattle agreed not to pursue the death penalty. Under a treaty with the United States, Canada could refuse to extradite a person if it was believed the person would be executed if extradited. In what appeared to be a compromise in an effort to return Ng to the United States for a trial, prosecutors agreed that Ng's involvement with Mak and Benjamin Ng "differ[ed] significantly from that of his accomplices" and Ng "appear[ed] to be a last-minute recruit." Instead, prosecutors would seek consecutive life sentences.

Jury selection for Tony Ng's trial began on April 1, 1985. The trial began a week later. Tony Ng's defense team consisted of two attorneys -- John Muenster and Mark Mestel. The prosecution team would remain the same, with William Downing and Robert Lasnik seeking murder convictions against the young man. Tony Ng's trial was not followed as closely as Benjamin Ng's and Willie Mak's. Whereas Benjamin Ng's trial was front-page fodder for its duration, Tony Ng's trial was buried in Section C of the two major daily newspapers. There were no celebrated defense attorneys, no stories of warring tongs, and no fingers of blame pointed at one another. Tony Ng's trial was simply that of a young man confessing that he had robbed the victims at the Wah Mee and was relieved that this chapter of his life was coming to a close. It was enough to bore media reporters to tears.

On April 8, 1985, the confession and conversation that Ng had with Holter in Calgary was entered as evidence. The statement was an integral part of Ng's defense, in that his attorneys were arguing that Ng did not kill anyone at the Club. He simply tied the victims, robbed them, and then waited in the hallway between the security doors. When the three men left the Club, the defense argued, Ng had no idea that anyone had been killed. The defense also argued that Ng was a follower in the robbery, and only participated because Mak had threatened to kill him if he didn't cooperate. Defense attorney Mestel told the court, "Tony basically was like a robot. He followed orders. He took what they gave him."

The following day, Wai Chin took the stand for the last time in all three trials. After the two previous trials, Chin had returned to a somewhat normal life free of bodyguards and police protection. When he heard that Tony Ng had been captured, Chin said he didn't want to discuss its significance and commented, "I want to forget this thing." The police didn't see any need to reinstate their 24-hour protection of Chin -- there was no need, considering all the culprits had been apprehended. Instead, Chin lived quietly with his companion, Rose, and the media left him alone.

Chin's testimony remained the same. Chin had stated that at least two men had fired their weapons, but Chin had admitted that his severe wounds and the demands of his tormentors prevented him from seeing everything. It was enough of a hole for the defense to try to prove that Chin did not see Tony Ng kill anyone.

Defense attorney Mestel asked the witness, "You can't tell who was standing in what position when the guns went off?"

"No, I can't remember."

"Can you tell us which gun goes off first from what position?"

"No," Chin replied. He said he heard either Mak or Benjamin Ng say, "Is that all the bullets?"

Chin was certain that it wasn't Tony Ng who asked the question, nor was Chin in a position to see if all three men were in the Club when the question was asked.

"So," Mestel continued, "You couldn't see whether Tony was there or whether he was gone?"

"No," Chin replied.

The following day in court, Tony Ng took the stand. Ng recalled how Mak had fired a bullet at the floor, barely missing Ng's feet, when Ng said he wanted out of the plan. He said that Mak threatened to kill him if he didn't participate in the robbery. Tony Ng testified that Mak stated he would shoot him, his family and his girlfriend, and burn down his family's restaurant if Ng refused to join. Ng said that he tried to get out of the robbery by borrowing \$1,000 from his girlfriend in an effort to pay off his debt. But Mak refused the money and continued with his threats against Ng.

"Did you believe him?" Mestel asked his client.

"I did," Ng replied.

Tony Ng's testimony in court conflicted with that of his written statement prepared shortly after his capture. In his statement, Ng said all three robbers "pulled out" their guns after Benjamin Ng came into the club. But in court, Ng testified that he never pulled out his weapon while he was in the Club. These conflicting statements coupled with Chin's testimony that he saw all three men "pointing at us" with guns only helped to discredit Ng's defense.

Throughout his testimony, Ng was soft-spoken and broke out in tears at times. The young man recounted his life as a fugitive living in Calgary, Alberta. He spent four days a week reading Chinese books at the library across the street from his apartment building. He also testified that he survived on money netted from the robbery along with checks that were regularly mailed to him by his mother. That Ng's mother was aiding and abetting a fugitive was not a surprise. Tony Ng's father had told two *Times* reporters, "I haven't seen him since before the killings." Yet, at Benjamin Ng's trial, one witness testified that Willie Mak and Tony Ng were spotted at the Imperial Lanes shortly after the murders and that the senior Ng told the two young men that "a lot of people had been killed in Chinatown." Furthermore, in the same *Times* article, Ng told reporters that he had been bowling at the Imperial Lanes in the hours after the murders, but that neither Tony Ng nor Willie Mak were there.

In defense attorney Muenster's closing arguments, he told the jury, "All evidence shows that, fundamentally, [Tony] is a decent person. The prosecutor seeks to brand him a murderer because he yielded to fear."

Prosecutor Downing urged the jury to believe the survivor's version of what happened: Ng was an equal partner in the criminal team, and Ng was still in the Club when Chin was wounded.

After nearly two weeks of testimony and thirteen hours of deliberation, a jury acquitted Tony Ng of the murders at the Wah Mee Club. However, he was found guilty of robbery and second-degree assault. Commenting on the verdict, juror Diann Fouse told reporters, "We felt he was under duress for being in there in the first place. I believed Ng's testimony. I don't think he lied. That's my gut feeling."

But the verdict confused both the defense and the prosecution.

"I'm somewhat puzzled by the [verdicts] because duress is just as applicable to robbery as it is to murder," said defense attorney Mestel. "If he was there under the compulsion of someone else, he wasn't guilty of robbery either."

Prosecutor Downing said, "My suspicion is that their result has more to do with their sense of justice rather than strict following of the court's instructions. They only go so far as to put the label of robber-times-thirteen on him. I have no quarrel with that whatsoever. It's simply a matter of the way the law works -- that logically, if they got that far, they should have found him guilty of felony murder."

Prosecutor Lasnik commented, "The jurors apparently sought to make a clear distinction between the killers -- Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng -- and Tony Ng, who had no intent to kill, didn't fire a gun, and didn't kill anybody."

Jeannie Robertson, the sister of Jean Mar, said, "I can't believe we attended the same trial. It's an unspeakable insult. It's outrageous. He acted in concert with the two other defendants. If the jury bought that duress garbage, then they should have acquitted him of all charges. It's ludicrous."

Tony Ng's sister, Barbara Mar, left the courtroom in tears. Her husband accompanied her. Later, her husband told reporters, "[Tony's] innocent. He is a good young man. He got in with the wrong people in the wrong place. He's not entitled to that punishment. He [had no] control."

Chinatown's reaction was one of disbelief and exhaustion. They had endured a barrage of media stereotypes during three high-profile trials. "People hope it's over," said Bob Santos, the director of the International District Improvement Association.

Times staff columnist Rick Anderson, who had followed the investigation and trials for more than two years, wrote about Chinatown's reaction:

The sidewalks are almost empty. It is cold, and there is rain in the air. The lights of other restaurants and shops beckon along the street. They would be warm, with people in them. The customers could be interrupted, and queried, and the last reporter could watch their faces fall like all the other faces fell last night and then he could hear them say what the others had already said last night.

He could do that. Or he could do Chinatown a favor.

He could leave. Go back to the office. And put down one last line.

It's over.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"To fail to present important mitigating evidence in the penalty phase -- if there is no risk in doing so -- can be as devastating as a failure to present proof of innocence in the guilt phase."

-- United States District Court Judge William Dwyer

Despite the hope of Rick Anderson and many Chinatown residents that the frenzy surrounding the Wah Mee killings was over, it was not. Indeed, the Wah Mee killings had become international news. Hong Kong newspapers had fervidly covered the trials, as had the major news-wire services that provided articles for newspapers and magazines across the United States.

During Tony Ng's trial, CPG International Film Production Company, Inc., announced that they would begin filming a low-budget movie based on the killings at the Wah Mee Club. According to the script, the movie would start out with three young men -- Key, Danny, and Joe -- robbing, hog-tying, and shooting fourteen people at the Ko Wah Club in Chinatown. All the victims would die, except for "Old Man" Kuan. And Joe would flee to Canada, pursued by a Seattle police detective named Randy Walker, along with a tong member named "Shadow," who was hired by a Chinese American City Council candidate to retrieve a mysterious black book taken from one of the victims. Before Joe is caught, he befriends a Vietnamese prostitute, escapes the attack of two drug dealers, and eventually saves the life of Detective Walker.

The script was silly, and the relatives of those killed at the Wah Mee Club were irate about the idea of such a movie being filmed in their neighborhood. "I think it's disgusting," said one relative. "They can't do that, can they?"

The movie's writer-director, Michael Chu, offered to meet with the Chinese community to explain his project, and told the *International Examiner*, "My intention is to use the film to make a statement to the American public and the Chinese community that crime doesn't pay, that no matter what, if you take the wrong step, you will be stopped."

But Chu's crew received no support from local residents and law enforcement. "We can't legally force them not to come up here and film," said Doug Howard, an industrial relations officer at the Seattle Police Department. "We just won't cooperate with them." When Chu wanted to shoot a night scene with a guy leaving a bar, he was required to hire two police officers, which he was unable to do.

Whether or not the movie was ever produced is uncertain.

Prosecutors William Downing and Robert Lasnik were appointed as King County Superior Court Judges. Ironically enough, their courtrooms were located on the same floor of the King County Courthouse, across the hall from one another. In 1998 Judge Lasnik was shortlisted for a position as a United States District Court Judge.

Defense attorney John Henry Browne continued to represent high-profile clients. His most celebrated case since representing Benjamin Ng was that of counsel for a man accused of setting fire to his family's frozen food warehouse in Chinatown in 1994; battling the blaze, four Seattle firefighters were killed. Browne's client, Martin Pang, fled to South America before being extradited to Seattle for trial. Browne argued that Pang intended to burn down his family's warehouse but never to kill firefighters in the process.

Lieutenant Robert Holter, who had headed up the Wah Mee Task Force and, along with the RCMP, had cornered Tony Ng in Calgary, Alberta, retired in 1984. He moved to Shelton-Mason County, where he and his wife bought a modest home in Grapeview, Washington. He restored cars, fished, taught law-enforcement classes, and served as commissioner of the Grapeview volunteer fire department. But Holter grew restless and, in late-1986, he ran for Shelton-Mason County Sheriff. He won the election, unseating incumbent Sheriff Nat Stairs, who had served as sheriff for nearly three decades. Eight days after Holter became sheriff, Stairs collapsed and died from a heart attack. "It was a rocky way for Nat to finish and me to start," Holter told a reporter. "Even though he had a different perspective, we were good friends."

Holter proved as effective as Sheriff as he had as leader of the Wah Mee Task Force. A veteran reporter for the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* remarked, "Nat Stairs was the nicest guy in the world, but not a good administrator. He didn't seem to really have control of the

department. But Holter impresses us with his experience. He's obviously a well-trained professional."

Less than three years after the Wah Mee murders, gambling in Seattle's Chinatown was on an upsurge. True, police officers reported, gambling had declined in late-1983 and 1984. "People were no longer willing to go down there with large sums of money," commented Captain Pat Lamphere, head of the Seattle Police Department's vice and gambling unit during the mid-1980s. In early-July 1987, police raided the Bing Kung Association -- the same association that largely bankrolled the gambling at the Wah Mee. They seized \$273 dollars cash, a twenty-dollar check, cards, dice, poker chips, and miscellaneous papers. Officers also cited ten men and one woman for being present or participating in illegal gambling. The officers netted very little, but they had raided the association based on leads from complainants. In one complaint, a player said he had lost between \$25,000 and \$50,000 in one week, and reported there were at least six illegal games being played there. Informants also told police that a high-stakes card game known as thirteen-card poker was being played, and that the house was taking a four-percent cut, which made the game illegal. Captain Lamphere reported that gamblers were losing approximately \$500 to \$600 per hand. Other informants were relatives and friends of people who had lost large amounts of money gambling. "[The relatives and friends] didn't want another Wah Mee or another robbery situation," Lamphere commented.

One month prior to the Bing Kung raid, police searched the Ng Family Association where they found seventeen people present. No citations or arrests were made, simply because police were unable to persuade an informant to come forward and testify in court.

In March 1988 police raided the Golden Wheel Club at 670 South Weller Street in Chinatown. Officers had been eyeing the Club for four years, but only acted on a raid after managing to get an undercover officer inside the operation. Police officers entered the Club at 3:00 a.m. and arrested two dealers, seventeen gamblers, and confiscated more than \$18,000 cash. The Golden Wheel Club was similar to the Wah Mee. It was a place for high-stakes gambling, and was financed by a half-dozen wealthy people. Seattle Police Spokesman Don Church reported that it was not uncommon for the winning hand in thirteen-card poker, one of the Club's popular games, to net \$4,000 -- the house claiming as much as ten-percent of the gambler's winnings. The entrance to the Club was monitored by

closed-circuit television cameras. "Wah Mee could have happened again," Church commented.

Two major tongs -- Hop Sing (of which Benjamin Ng was rumored to have been affiliated) and Bing Kung (which bankrolled the Wah Mee) -- were still operating in Seattle's Chinatown. And gambling clubs operated *by* these tongs generated a lot of income *for* these tongs. Seattle police Major Dale Douglass reported, "We've had a lot of discussions with tong leaders about how they might do legitimate fund-raising." But rather than modifying the behaviors of the tongs, Douglass suggested lobbying the State Gambling Commission to legitimize certain forms of gambling in Chinatown. Stopping gambling activities altogether was not an option: after all, Seattle vice had more than a half-century of affiliation *with* and monetary kickbacks *from* illegal gambling in Chinatown.

Obviously, gambling in Chinatown had not changed since the Wah Mee murders. Even a decade after the killings, gambling clubs were still operating in Chinatown. In 1992 Seattle police and FBI agents raided six separate Chinatown gambling clubs. Collectively, eight people were arrested and more than \$12,000 cash was seized. According to Seattle Police Sergeant Mike Nelson, the clubs were very similar to Wah Mee. They were set up like Nevada casinos, only they were entered by alleyways and were heavily guarded. Every night from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., high-stakes gamblers played Pai Kau, Mah Jongg, and other games popular in China and other Asian countries. Gambling pots reportedly reached \$10,000. "Did [these clubs] have the potential for Wah Mee?" Sergeant Nelson asked rhetorically. "Yes, indeed. Anytime I see large sums of money in a place and they don't want the police to see or know about it -- then it's a prime target for robbery or worse."

But something that *did* change was the Seattle Police Department's formation of the Coordinated Criminal Investigation Squad (CCIS). The CCIS was formed as a direct result of the Wah Mee Massacre -- to help work with the Asian community to crack down on gangs, crime, and extortion. The CCIS was met with cooperation from the Asian community. Despite what the *Times* had reported, Chinatown was not filled with "shadowy tongs" and "violent hoodlums." The tragedy at Wah Mee had a lasting effect on the community, and much of the Chinatown community wanted to combat crime and violence. Remarking on the Asian community's enthusiasm for CCIS, Police Chief Fitzsimons commented, "This is a very good indication of the kind of cooperation that the police are getting with the Asian community."

Seattle police Detective Gary Fowler remarked, "[Wah Mee] actually had sort of a positive effect. Community leaders came forward to help us in ways we'd never seen before. Henry Locke (head of one of the Chinatown associations) was less concerned about catching bad guys than helping police get in touch with the community. If we needed to get in touch with a witness or get a phone number or get a translator, he helped. It was a role you couldn't assign anyone to and he continued in that role afterward. Many of these people were shy originally about having a relationship with me or my contemporaries, not because they were doing anything wrong, but because that was how it was in the community."

Seattle City Councilwoman Cheryl Chow remarked, "There have been many positive things people have done [in the community]." Chow, daughter of Ruby Chow (a Wah Mee notable during the 1940s who was also called upon shortly after the murders to help translate conversations and identify victims), added, "The community has concentrated on -- making residents aware of the services that are available to them and on keeping [Chinatown] a place people from all over the city want to visit. The [Chinese] community is beginning to work with institutions that weren't always friendly to our grandparents. Remember, immigrants coming from war-torn countries are used to seeing officials that are corrupt."

In the late-1980s, Seattle was marked by many violent crimes involving gangs. It was actually a national epidemic, with a very visible emergence of Skinheads, Vice Lords, Black Gangster Disciples, Bloods, Crips, and the Japanese Mafia. No later than the mid-1980s, every major West Coast city formed a gang detail to combat gangs. Summer 1987 was particularly rich in Seattle gang violence. In that year, ninety-two members of three separate gangs were arrested for everything from loitering to felony violations involving weapons, narcotics, and auto theft. Gang members were responsible for three killings that year -- two near Garfield High School and one in the Yesler Terrace housing project.

"It's 'West Side Story' with machine guns," commented Seattle Police Detective Tommy Helms. Police began turning up sawed-off shotguns and semi-automatic firearms. Gangs dealing in drugs posed the biggest problems. "There is almost a mathematical correlation between drugs and other crime," observed Helms. "Five-hundred thousand dollars worth of crack cocaine brought in from Los Angeles means seven-million dollars must be begged, borrowed, or stolen by users at the street level."

The more notable instances of gang violence in Seattle involved the Vietnamese. In April 1985 several Vietnamese youths used chains and pool cues to smash a window and countertop in a small family-run pool hall, restaurant, and bookstore in the Rainier Valley. Vietnamese gangs were attempting to extort Vietnamese business owners in South Seattle, but with little success. In the instance of the Rainier Valley merchant, because he refused to pay the \$200 demanded by the hoodlums, none of the other businesses would pay the fee. "If I pay [them]," the man commented, "then others have to [pay them]."

Seattle Police Lieutenant Mike Germann confirmed such, remarking, "Extortion has to be stopped early or not at all. Once it gets started and the cash starts flowing, it's not going to stop." But Vietnamese business owners didn't want to be viewed as the kind who go to the police. "They prefer to handle such problems through the parents of the youths or through community groups," Germann observed. "[But] we encourage them to report those things right away rather than wait and see what happens. We would like to catch the [youths] red-handed instead of after the fact. That makes for a better case."

Small businesses owned by Vietnamese were especially vulnerable to extortion because they were often run by family members, making the wives, sons, daughters, or other relatives possible targets of violence. Less than one month prior to the Rainier Valley incident, Vietnamese-owned restaurants and pharmacies also fell prey to extortion attempts.

In early-June 1987, seven home robberies involving Asian Americans occurred. In one instance, four Asian youths wielding handguns tied and robbed eleven members of a Vietnamese Bellevue family -- a wealthy family that owned a restaurant in Seattle. The youths entered the home through an upstairs bedroom shortly after 3:00 a.m. They cut the phone lines and questioned the family about its money and jewelry. The home was looted. The thieves fled. One family member freed himself. He called the police from a neighbor's telephone.

In another instance, five Vietnamese youths wearing black leather jackets and dark pants entered a Cantonese family's home and proceeded to hog-tie and rob the victims.

The CCIS proved effective during this rash of Vietnamese crimes. In less than three months, charges of first-degree robbery, conspiracy to commit robbery, and first-degree kidnapping

were filed against three young Vietnamese men. Two suspects were being held in California. Another suspect, a fourteen-year-old boy, was held at the King County youth center.

The CCIS was credited for halting extortion attempts on Vietnamese business owners. Two of the youths charged in the Rainier Valley incident were charged with assault; another with threatening the owner after the arrests. The CCIS also began to keep track of young Asian criminals who jumped from city to city, depending on where they had gotten into trouble. "We are aware of activity of those coming from out of State," said Police Lieutenant Roy Gleason. The CCIS also worked hand-in-hand with the International Rescue Committee, and organized a conference in May 1987 to discuss law enforcement and the Southeast Asian community. One-hundred-and-fifteen people attended the conference; half law-enforcement officials and half Southeast Asians.

DESPITE THE PRISON sentences handed to Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng, the three men continued to appear in Seattle newspapers. After each of the trials, attorneys for the accused appealed their clients' cases.

Benjamin Ng's attorneys appealed his case on several merits.

First, Ng's attorneys believed the trial court erred by denying their motion to suppress evidence. They believed that, because a police officer was placed in front of Ng's bedroom door while a warrant was obtained, the police engaged in an unreasonable seizure of the bedroom. They argued that, although the Izumi family allowed the officers in their home and extended an invitation to search the residence, they never received permission from Ng to search Ng's bedroom. At Ng's trial, the court denied Ng's motion that the evidence be suppressed; they countered that securing the bedroom was a reasonable action because it was "minimally intrusive and served to preserve evidence of a recent violent crime." Furthermore, when authorities arrived at the Izumi residence (where Ng was sleeping with Kennis in her bedroom), George Izumi (Kennis's father) offered to allow the police to search his entire home. Major Douglass, who was the lead investigator, testified in court that he declined this invitation in favor of "[a] little more conservative approach to make certain we didn't err in any way." Responding to this aspect of Ng's appeal, the appellate judges decided that the seizure was lawful and that "the police needed only probable cause to impound the bedroom while a warrant was being secured. Because probable cause clearly existed and the warrant was obtained expeditiously, the seizure was reasonable."

Second, Ng argued that the trial court erred by refusing to admit a statement of admission made by Willie Mak. Shortly after Mak was arrested, he told Sergeant Sanford, "I did all the shooting." Later, Mak repudiated the statement. Mak's statement was inculpatory. Ng's attorneys cited ER 805(b)(3) which clearly states, "A statement tending to expose the declarant to criminal liability and offered to exculpate the accused is not admissible unless corroborating circumstances clearly indicate the trustworthiness of the statement." This means Mak's statement could only be admissible if Mak believed the statement to be true and, furthermore, the statement could be corroborated. Mak obviously didn't believe the statement to be true for several reasons. First, he made the statement while trying to cut a deal with Sergeant Sanford. He told the Sergeant, "If I identify the third man, I'm dead." Then he said, "There is no third man, and I did all the shooting." Furthermore, he indicated that he drove a Pontiac on the evening of the killings, when actually he borrowed his nephew's Opal. Mak was cornered at the time, trying to find a way out, and his statements could not be corroborated nor were they trustworthy. The appellate judges concluded, "Because the surrounding circumstances do not clearly indicate the statement's trustworthiness, the trial court did not abuse its discretion in excluding the statement."

Strike two for Benjamin Ng.

Third, Ng appealed on the merit that, because his case was a capital case, it should have been initiated by a grand jury indictment. His attorneys cited the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states, in part, "[n]o person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury." Furthermore, they contended that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment made this provision binding on the states in capital cases.

The appellate judges responded, writing, "Every American court that has confronted this contention has rejected it. Over 100 years ago, the United States Supreme Court held that the grand jury provision of the Fifth Amendment does not apply to state prosecutions." Although the Due Process Clause guarantees a fair trial, it does not require the States to observe the provision for presentment or indictment by a grand jury.

Ng also argued that Judge Howard erred by refusing to sequester the jury. Ng's trial was by far the most publicized of the three. During that trial, Wai Chin's first-hand account was

broadcasted and reprinted in newspapers around the world. For the first time the public could see Benjamin Ng and hear exactly what had happened at the Wah Mee Club. The media hyped the story to an audience hungry to hear it. Because of the publicity surrounding the trial, attorneys for Benjamin Ng appealed on the merit that the jury should have been sequestered to avoid developing biases toward Ng. Ng's attorneys cited CR 6.7, which states, in part, "[t]he jury may be allowed to separate if the court finds that good reason exists to believe that such would not jeopardize a fair trial."

The appellate judges decided that, to demonstrate that a trial court abused its discretion, Ng must show that (a) jurors were exposed to publicity during the trial, or (b) the publicity during the trial was so sensationally prejudicial that mere risk of exposure created a probability of prejudice.

Ng believed that a probability of prejudice was created by (a) a headline in the *P-I* that stated "Chinatown Confession Disclosed"; (b) an article in the *Times* that erroneously summarized the prosecutor's opening statement; and (c) the phone call received by one of the juror's children in which the caller asked, "Are you going to hang the gook?"

The appellate judges decided that, although the *Times* article contained a paragraph that misstated the prosecutor's opening statement, the underlying facts were "true and the article was not sensational." With regard to the confessional *P-I* headline, the appellate judges believed the "headline pertained to Mak's confession and both it, and the article to which it pertained, were factually accurate. In addition, the information that formed the basis of the article was revealed to the press by Ng's counsel after the State's motion to exclude the confession was granted." Finally, the appellate judges supported Judge Howard in his decision that no juror was prejudiced by the racist phone call placed to the juror's residence. The appellate judges concluded by writing, "Ng presents no evidence that any juror saw or heard publicity during trial. [T]he defendant has not shown a probability of prejudice, and the trial court did not abuse its discretion by refusing sequestration."

Finally, Ng contended that the prosecutor denied him due process of law by arguing during his trial that he fired the .22 Ruger and subsequently in Mak's trial that Mak fired the Ruger. Prosecutors Downing and Lasnik argued that Mak was the master planner who recruited Ng to help him carry out his plan. They never argued -- either during Ng's trial or in Mak's trial -- that Mak had fired the Ruger in question. The appellate judges did note one prosecutorial

inconsistency about the weapons; during Ng's trial, the prosecutor argued that the Ruger was Ng's, but during Mak's trial, he argued that Mak purchased the gun. "Even if these arguments are inconsistent," the appellate judges wrote, "the inconsistency has no bearing on the basic issues at trial. Ng was not prejudiced by any arguments the prosecutor made in either case. Therefore, Ng was not denied due process of law."

On December 5, 1985, the appellate circuit of the Supreme Court of Washington denied Ng's appeals and prepared a written summary of their denials. "We find that Ng's arguments on appeal are without merit," the judges wrote, "and we affirm the judgement and sentence."

Benjamin Ng was out of luck.

Tony Ng appealed his sentence, too. While appeals for Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak were lengthy, Ng simply presented three appeal merits.

First, Ng argued that the trial court erred in admitting his confession. Shortly after he was apprehended in Calgary, Alberta, he confessed to Lieutenant Holter that he had hog-tied and robbed the victims at the Club. When this confession was entered as evidence, Ng argued, it violated his rights under the Fifth and Sixth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

The appellate judges disagreed. "Ng concedes that he was advised of his Miranda rights," the judges wrote, "and that he signed a written confession that stated it could later be used against him. Moreover, the record shows that Lieutenant Holter read Ng his Miranda rights in a slow, deliberate manner. Ng indicated he understood his rights and desired to make a statement about his role in the robbery and killings. We conclude that the record contains substantial evidence supporting the trial court's conclusion that Ng's confession was voluntary. We conclude that a harmless error analysis is appropriate."

Second, Ng argued that the jury's verdict convicting him of the robbery charges must be reversed because it is inconsistent with the jury's acquittal on the felony murder charges. After the sentence was handed down, both the defense and prosecution expressed some confusion about the jury's decision. Because the jury found Ng not guilty of murder due to duress, attorneys argued, they should have considered duress when deciding on robbery

charges. In essence, Ng's attorney's argued, duress should have been applicable to both the murder *and* robbery sentences.

The appellate judges wrote, "Ng is correct that the verdicts are inconsistent. Nevertheless, we conclude that considerations of jury lenity, and problems inherent in second-guessing the jury's reasoning as to an acquittal dictate our application of the Dunn rule to this case. As the Supreme Court noted, the Dunn rule establishes 'the unreviewable power of a jury to turn a verdict of not guilty for impermissible reasons.' Consistency between verdicts on the several counts of an indictment or information is unnecessary where a defendant is convicted of one or some counts but acquitted on others. So long as sufficient evidence supports the guilty verdicts, these courts generally uphold such convictions irrespective of their rational incompatibility with the acquittals. We will not reverse on grounds that the guilty verdict is inconsistent with an acquittal on another count. Here, overwhelming evidence supports Ng's convictions for first degree robbery. The jury's acquittal of the felony murder charges is not reversible error."

Finally, Ng argued that the trial court erred in its jury instructions regarding the defense of duress. Ng argued that the court's instructions neither placed the burden of proof on the State with sufficient clarity, nor made the subjective nature of duress adequately clear to the jurors. The court's failure to include duress language in its "to convict" robbery instruction deprived him of a fair trial, particularly because the State's burden to disprove duress was unclear. Furthermore, Ng argued, the court erred by not explicitly informing the jury of the subjective nature of duress.

While the jury deliberated, it asked Judge Johnson whether duress applied to the lesser-included charges. Judge Johnson replied, "Please refer to the instructions. The court cannot provide any additional instructions or explanations." Because Ng believed that the court erred in its instructions of duress, he believed the jury could not justly decide. Because of duress, the jury did not believe Ng was responsible for any deaths at the Club. And, also because of duress, the jury tried to decide if that would make Ng responsible for the robbery. When they referred to their instructions, Ng argued, they were confused. And Judge Johnson merely told them to refer to their instructions. "We conclude that the instructions, read as a whole," the appellate judges wrote, "correctly stated the law, informed the jury as to duress and the State's burden to prove its absence, and allowed the parties to argue their theories of the case."

This was a pivotal argument and, though the appellate judges denied it initially, it was an appeal merit that Tony Ng's attorneys are presently pursuing -- a decade-and-a-half after the fact.

As did Benjamin and Tony Ng's attorneys, Willie Mak's attorneys immediately appealed their client's sentence. Mak's cause for appeal was dire because he was sitting on Death Row. Consequently, his attorneys presented more than five dozen merits for appeal.

A person sentenced to death in Washington State has three separate routes to challenge his or her sentence.

The first route is the Direct Appeal Process, where the sentence is automatically reviewed by the Washington Supreme Court and, if deemed appropriate, appealed to the United States Supreme Court. The second route is a Collateral Challenge through federal courts. It is in this process that a personal-restraint petition is filed in Washington Supreme Court. This petition challenges any aspect of the case, including conduct of trial, sentencing, and effectiveness of counsel. If additional fact-finding is necessary, the case may be sent back to trial court. If deemed appropriate, the appeal is sent to the United States Supreme Court. The third route of appeal is a collateral challenge process through federal court involving a habeas-corpus petition, which raises constitutional grounds to challenge any aspect of the conviction or sentence, is filed in United States District Court. The case is then appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and, if deemed appropriate, the United States Supreme Court.

Mak's most notable appeal merits included the following:

The trial court erred in admitting into evidence weapons recovered from the bedrooms of Ng and Mak, yet these weapons were not used at the Wah Mee Club. His attorneys argued that admitting such evidence was "prejudicial, inflammatory and violated his constitutional right to bear arms in self-defense." But the appellate judges found this argument without merit, as Mak had testified in court that he had conducted illegal firearm sales during other illegal activity. "There was no error," the appellate judges wrote, "evidentiary or constitutional, in admitting the firearms into evidence."

Mak's attorneys also questioned the merits of Chin's testimony. During the guilt phase of Mak's trial, the court refused to allow as evidence expert testimony on eyewitness identification. Chin became unconscious after being struck by the bullets. A defense witness, a doctor with expertise about victims of retrograde amnesia, would have testified that a) a person experiencing gaps in memory or perception fills in such gaps in order to complete the logical picture within his or her mind; b) suggestive questioning immediately following the incident influences the type of information the person uses to fill the gaps; c) post-event information is also used by the person to fill the gaps; d) the subject's confidence in his or her version of the facts increases each time it is recalled and recounted to another.

The appellate judges disagreed with this merit of appeal, and ruled, "The decision of whether or not to admit expert opinion evidence is within the discretion of the trial court, and we will not disturb a discretionary ruling of this court absent a showing of abuse. There was no abuse shown here."

Mak's attorneys also argued that Judge Howard erred by failing, near the verdict phase of his trial, to instruct the jury as to the requirement of jury unanimity. When the jury was given instructions, the final paragraph was inadvertently omitted. Said paragraph read, "Since this is a criminal case, all twelve of you must agree for you to return a verdict. When all of you have so agreed, fill in the proper form of verdict to express your decision. The foreman will sign it and notify the bailiff who will conduct you into court to declare your verdict." Furthermore, the court reporter did not indicate whether Judge Howard had even read that paragraph aloud to the jurors; it definitely wasn't included in the written instructions, and court records fail to indicate that the instructions were given orally. This, however, was not enough to sway the appellate judges. The jury was polled before the verdict was signed and sworn by the foreman. Each juror unanimously concluded that Mak was guilty and, whether the above instructions had been given, was a moot point. The appellate judges wrote, "[W]e have no doubt that in this case all twelve jurors concurred on both the general and special verdicts returned at the conclusion of the guilt phase of the case."

For each argument of appeal that Mak's defense attorneys presented, the appellate judges found them to be hands-down without merit.

Except one.

Mak's attorneys effectively appealed his death sentence. In Washington State, some District Court judges opposed the death penalty. Indeed, in three highly publicized homicide trials following those of the Wah Mee, District Court judges would overturn the death penalty for each killer. Brian Keith Lord, found guilty of raping and murdering a sixteen-year-old Poulsbo girl, had his death sentence overturned by U.S. District Judge Barbara Rothstein. Judge Rothstein ruled prosecutors were unfairly allowed to cross-examine Lord after he made a sworn statement to the jury. In another case, Benjamin Harris, convicted of killing a Tacoma mechanic, saw his conviction and death sentence overturned, and prosecutors chose not to try him again. Harris was eventually released from state custody. Finally, David Lewis Rice, accused of murdering a Seattle attorney and his family on Christmas Eve 1985, received a new trial. Rice used a toy gun to enter the Goldmark residence, then murdered the family of six. Family friends arriving for a holiday celebration found the Goldmarks in an upstairs bedroom of their Madrona home. The two adults were handcuffed, and the boys had sweaters tied tightly around their necks. All four boys had been severely beaten.

Among the nine appellate judges considering Mak's requests for appeal, one judge was of particular interest to Mak and his attorneys. Justice Utter was fundamentally opposed to the death penalty. "As I have indicated elsewhere," Justice Utter wrote in his dissenting summary, "I do not believe that our death penalty statute meets constitutional standards." Justice Utter's concern was that, if the death penalty was going to be handed down to Mak, it also should have been handed down to the Ngs. Justice Utter wrote:

"There would seem to be little that could be said that might convince a jury that one who participated in the killing of thirteen people should have his life spared. And yet, under the bizarre facts of this case, two of the three participants in this crime have been spared the death penalty. One, Tony Ng, because he escaped to Canada, could not be charged with a capital offense and be successfully extradited to the United States. The other participant, who fired most of the shots, did not receive the death penalty. Only one actor in this most brutal of all killings committed within this state, received the death penalty. The appellant here was characterized by the State as the planner, the one who orchestrated the whole event, and on this basis the State argued as one of its two distinct grounds, that he deserved the death penalty when the other participants in this crime did not."

During Mak's trial, his attorneys had tried to enter evidence that he was not the "controller" of the killings at the Club. Others had their hand in what happened and, as Mak had testified, he had only gone to the Wah Mee to "rough up" a leader of a rival tong. Furthermore, Mak testified that Benjamin Ng "lost control" and opened fire on those in the Club. Though Mak's attorneys attempted to present evidence that others participated in the killings, they were unsuccessful. Justice Utter wrote in his dissenting summary:

"The defendant attempted to introduce evidence from which he could argue someone else in fact orchestrated the crime and, in particular, that Benjamin Ng's role, as the one firing most of the shots, was more central than the prosecution had maintained. To fail to allow this evidence before the jury is something I cannot reconcile with either our statutory procedures of constitutional due process. The evidence should have been admitted in at least the penalty phase of the trial under RCW 10.95.060. It also was properly offered in the guilt phase of the trial and admissible under ER 401.

Appellant Mak's offer of proof consisted of the following evidence: 1) a third party planned to control gambling in the International District; 2) the third party contacted Benjamin Ng on the day of the Wah Mee killings; 3) the party was a "banker" for an International District gambling club that had just closed down; 4) an informant told the police that this person directed young gang members; 5) Benjamin Ng's car had been seen at person's restaurant an hour before the crime; and 6) the person offered to sell Benjamin Ng a bulletproof vest a week before the Wah Mee incident.

Without this evidence, the jury was unaware of a possible third party connection, a connection about which appellant Mak claims he was ignorant. Because the evidence, if believed, tended to decrease appellant Mak's guilt, it was relevant under the definition outlined in Renfro and ER 401. Since the -- evidence was relevant, the trial court erred in refusing to receive this evidence during the sentencing phase of trial.

Had the contested evidence been admitted, it could have raised doubts about Mak's alleged autonomy and control in the crime. Because the issue of Mak's control was so central to the death penalty proceedings, the evidence of a third party's involvement in the crime was relevant both to the issue of control and the issue of premeditation. The jury itself should have been allowed to weigh that evidence in determining whether Mak should die while his accomplices live."

Justice Utter, then, feared an imbalanced sentencing. Three men were involved in the same crime, yet received separate sentences -- ranging from death to aggravated robbery. Essentially, Justice Utter was saying, if you are going to impose the death penalty, you should impose it on all the parties involved.

As much as Justice Utter disagreed with his colleagues, majority ruled, and Mak's sentence was not overturned. But it was enough to volley Mak's appeals through the appellate court system for more than a decade. Finally, almost a decade after the killings at the Wah Mee, the case would reach District Court Judge William Dwyer.

It would be the best thing to happen to Willie Mak.

Judge Dwyer was a Pacific Northwest native. He was born in Olympia, Washington, and attended Queen Anne High School and the University of Washington. He spent thirty years as a trial attorney in Seattle. In 1976 he helped to arrange a settlement that would help bring the Mariners baseball team to Seattle. Dwyer, a Democrat, was nominated to fill a vacant federal judgeship in 1986 -- an appointment that sparked a political fight. Washington Senator Slade Gorton, a supporter of Dwyer, persuaded President Reagan to continue with his nomination and Dwyer was appointed United States District Court Judge.

As a Federal Judge, Dwyer presided over some of Washington State's most prominent legal cases. In a 1991 ruling that sparked controversy, he banned most new timber sales in the Northwest, declaring that the U.S. Forest Service hadn't complied with environmental laws requiring protection of the northern spotted owl and other wildlife. And he sparked a reshuffling in King County government when he ruled the makeup of the old Metro Council was unconstitutional.

Sadly, in 1997, Judge Dwyer would announce that he had been diagnosed with early Parkinson's disease and would ask to cut back to part-time senior status. "They tell me that lots of people with this condition continue working for a long time," Judge Dwyer wrote, in a letter to President Clinton. "I've had a phenomenal run of long, good luck, in all aspects of my life, for many years."

Mak's case reached Judge Dwyer in late-1990. Whereas Mak's previous appeals were flooded with merits, Mak's attorneys approached Judge Dwyer with only one merit: He received inadequate defense. In reviewing Mak's case, Judge Dwyer noted:

"A convicted defendant's claim that counsel's assistance was so defective as to require reversal of a conviction or death sentence has two components. First, the defendant must show that counsel's performance was deficient. This requires showing that counsel made errors so serious that counsel was not functioning as the 'counsel' guaranteed the defendant by the Sixth Amendment. Second, the defendant must show that the deficient performance prejudiced the defense. This requires showing that counsel's errors were so serious as to deprive the defendant of a fair trial, a trial whose result is reliable. Unless a defendant makes both showings, it cannot be said that the conviction or death sentence resulted from a breakdown in the adversary process that renders the result unreliable."

Mak argued that, during the sentencing phase of his trial, his attorneys failed to present mitigating evidence that may have dissuaded the jury from choosing the death penalty. During Benjamin Ng's sentencing phase, defense attorney Browne brought Ng's mother to the stand to testify that her son was slapped as a small boy. Browne argued that this lashing resulting in a "broken arm of the brain" and had psychologically adverse affects on his client. The jury was moved sufficiently by Mrs. Ng's tearful testimony to consider it applicable to Ng's sentencing. Ng was thus spared the death penalty.

When Mak's attorneys were preparing for trial, they focused solely on the verdict phase of the trial, and were unprepared for the sentencing phase. Moreover, the sentencing phase commenced only *hours* after the verdict phase. In essence, Mak's attorneys had no *time* to prepare. When Mak's attorneys were asked whether they had any evidence or witnesses to present during the sentencing phase, they brought one eye-witness expert to the stand in hopes of discrediting Wai Chin's testimony. When this was unsuccessful, Mak's defense rested.

Yet, in reality, there was ample mitigating evidence. In his summary, Judge Dwyer noted:
"There was substantial and important mitigating evidence readily available. The testimony of family members and others could have been offered to show that [Mak] was the beloved youngest son of a traditional Chinese family; that he had been a good student and dutiful son in Hong Kong; that after coming to this country he did well in citizenship, and in some

school subjects, for the first few years; that he worked and gave money to the family; that he helped his parents in other ways; that he was kind to other members of the extended family; and that he was a 'favorite uncle' to young nieces and nephews."

Judge Dwyer decided the above after family members provided depositions during the appellate stages of Mak's case. Mak's parents, Yen Sou Mak and Won Hoi Wong, declared during these depositions that Willie Mak was "a good son" who "never presented any disciplinary problems." They also provided the young man's exemplary school certificates and awards.

Mak's father was questioned during his deposition:

Q: You still believe that your son is innocent of these crimes, don't you?

A: I trust my son. I do not think he has done something like this, and he is so (obedient and respectful) to us all these years.

Q: It is your position Kwan Fai always told you the truth?

A: He never lied to me. Everything he told me is the truth.

Mak's nephew testified during his deposition that Mak was a "quiet person" with a "mellow personality." Mak was a "good" family member who had a "very close parent-son relationship."

Mak's sister-in-law testified, "I saw [Mak] all the time. Like, when I first got [to the United States], I did not know how to drive, and he was who took me to work [sic] and took we [sic] back home. A lot of times he took my kids to play. He's a good guy."

Judge Dwyer wrote, "Benjamin Ng, tried earlier by a different jury, was the subject of evidence in mitigation, including the testimony of his mother. [Mak] did not have the benefit of such evidence, although it was available. It is impossible to know with certainty whether the mitigating evidence would have changed the outcome, but it very well might have -- especially since the death penalty could not be imposed if even one juror was not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that it should be. There is thus a reasonable probability that, but

for the deprivation of counsel's effective assistance at the penalty phase, the result would have been different."

Mak's defense attorneys planned to present evidence that the Hop Sing tong's youth leader either "directed or set in motion" the massacre at the Wah Mee -- hoping to present some form of a duress aspect. However, the court ruled this evidence inadmissible. Had Mak's family members been called to testify during the sentencing phase of the trial, they would have conveyed Mak's likeable characteristics to otherwise skeptical jurors.

Were Mak's defense attorneys inept? Judge Dwyer did not believe so, though he did have his reservations about their assignment to this case. Judge Dwyer wrote, "Neither Mr. Madsen nor Mr. Robinson had any capital trial experience at the time. Each had tried only one murder case. Mr. Madsen had been out of law school about four years, and Mr. Robinson just over three years, and both had begun work at ACA (Associated Counsel for the Accused) soon after being admitted to the bar. Their failure to gather and present mitigating evidence was not in any way calculated or purposeful, nor were counsel lacking in devotion to their client's cause. The failure was the result, rather, of a combination of their inexperience, the short time available to them to get ready to prepare for trial after their belated appointment, the cultural and linguistic barriers they failed to surmount, the pressure of events, and their single-minded concentration on the guilt phase."

Judge Dwyer concluded: "[Mak] was deprived of his Sixth Amendment right to the effective assistance of counsel when his trial attorneys failed to present readily available mitigating evidence at his sentencing hearing. The petition is therefore granted as to the sentence of death, and the sentence is vacated."

Mak's life was spared -- and just in time. Five days before his scheduled execution, Judge Dwyer ordered a stay while he reviewed Mak's requests. The judge had concluded that Mak had indeed received inadequate legal defense.

In 1992 Mak was removed from Death Row by Dwyer's directive and given a new sentence -- life in prison without the possibility of parole.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

In preparation for Mak's new sentencing trial, Senior Deputy Prosecutor Tim Bradshaw contacted the evidence office of the county clerk's office, only to learn that the evidence had been destroyed. A clerk had mistakenly assigned all evidence from Mak's and Benjamin Ng's murder cases to that of Tony Ng's. State law grants a holding period of six years after a case's closure before any evidence can be destroyed. Before the evidence is indeed destroyed, attorneys for the defense and prosecution are given notice by the county clerk's office. Tony Ng's case was closed in 1988 and the court disposed of his case's exhibits on June 10, 1994.

The evidence from the worst mass murder in the history of Seattle had been destroyed. Prosecutor Bradshaw said that he never received any notice that the evidence would be destroyed. "The notice wasn't addressed to me," he said, "but to my partner and there are no records to show that it was ever received." Bradshaw was also shocked that the clerk's office handled the disposal of the evidence so casually. "We're talking about a mass murder here."

The physical evidence may have been destroyed, but there were photographs. One afternoon in December, just a few weeks before Christmas, I made a trip down to the Seattle Police Department. The previous month, I had made a Public Disclosure request to view the photographs taken hours after the bodies were discovered. I had never been inside the Wah Mee Club, and I visualized the Club's interior from verbal descriptions, floorplans, and erroneous reportage from the local newspapers. I was far less interested in viewing the bodies and blood than the inside of the place.

A couple weeks later I received notice from the Seattle Police Department. My letter was received and I was invited to schedule an appointment with Judy DeMello -- the Director of Records, Evidence & Identification.

Ms. DeMello met with me in her office on the fourth floor of the Police Department. I removed my coat, sat down, and we briefly discussed the case. A short, older woman, she

had dark curly hair and wore a festive Christmas brooch on the lapel of her blazer. She was a smart woman, feisty even, and excused herself for a moment to chew out a detective who had improperly revoked a liquor license. "You want a lawsuit?" she hollered at the young detective, who stood somewhat embarrassed in the doorway. I sat at the table, feeling a bit uncomfortable for having witnessed the detective being barked at, and was relieved when Ms. DeMello apologized for the interruption and returned to our discussion.

"You have to understand," Ms. DeMello told me, "this case was huge. There was nothing else like it in Seattle. When we began the investigation, we pursued every lead. High School kids, friends, gangs -- you name it." Ms. DeMello had been working for the Seattle Police Department at the time, though she was not one of the detectives on the case. She had a desk job then, and helped compile information investigators were collecting.

As we spoke, I couldn't help but repeatedly glance at a large photo album lying between us on the table. The album was jammed with sheets of photographs -- so many sheets, in fact, that the album's front cover didn't quite close properly. Ms. DeMello occasionally rested her hand on the album, as though it were some sort of Bible, while she spoke about the investigation.

I asked her if she knew whether or not Wai Chin was still alive. Ms. DeMello said that he was not -- he had died of natural causes in May 1993. He had been living in a nursing home and his health had been failing for some time. At the time of his death, King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng commented, "Wai Chin will be remembered for his bravery, honor and courage. Here is a man who had the presence of mind to feign death after being shot. He was then left there to face an almost certain death, but he survived and there is no question his assistance to police and his testimony at trial were instrumental in bringing Mak to justice."

Judge William Downing, one of the prosecutors at the three Wah Mee trials, hoped that Chin would be remembered for more than his part in the Wah Mee case. "I resist the notion that a few minutes of violence define his life," Downing remarked.

Ron Chew, a reporter for the *Examiner* during the Wah Mee trials, commented, "There's a Chinese saying that 'Heaven has eyes.' People [saw] Wai Chin as being that kind of voice of judgement to make sure the criminals would not get away."

I was amazed by how long Chin had survived, considering what he had been through. After all, doctors left bullet fragments in his neck because removing them was too risky and quite possibly carried the promise of complications during surgery. Chin had survived the worst mass murder in Washington State history, spent the next decade-and-a-half with bullet fragments in his neck, and still lived well into his early-seventies.

Ms. DeMello said, "I got your letter requesting to look at the crime-scene photographs. Our attorneys reviewed your request, and so did the attorneys for the three men involved. What we decided to do was invite you down to look at the photographs. If you want a copy of any of the photographs, though, that may be a different situation." She explained that I would have to specify which photos I wanted, my motive for obtaining these photos, and review my request with the attorneys involved with the case.

I explained that I was not interested in obtaining any of the photographs. They aren't exactly the sort of photos you would want to frame and hang in your home; I really had no desire for any keepsakes. I simply wanted a better understanding of what the inside of the Club looked like. "I've never been in there," I explained, "and the building's owner is rather unsympathetic toward curiosity-seekers."

"Why are you interested in the case?" Ms. DeMello asked.

I explained that I had written a newspaper article about Tony Ng's 1997 request for a retrial and, subsequently, the article led to an interest in writing a book about the case.

Our conversation turned to the photo album, and Ms. DeMello opened its cover. "I'll explain to you how this book is laid out. The first portion is crime-scene photographs -- the bodies inside the Club, the alley, portraits of the deceased, et cetera. The latter portion consists of autopsy photos." She thumbed through the album and placed a Post-It note on the pages containing autopsy photos. "Some people are squeamish. I'll flag the pages with autopsy photos and you can proceed at your own peril."

She also removed two large floorplans of the Club. Both were professional renderings used for a court exhibit during the trials. The first rendering outlined where the bodies were located when detectives entered the Club; the other floorplan was simply that of the Club

without bodies. "I can make copies of these for you, if you'd like." I said I would be grateful for copies, so she took the sketches down the hall, leaving me to review the photo album alone in her office.

The photos were small, full-color, and arranged in rows on index print. Each sheet contained about thirty photos -- about five strips, six photos per strip -- that coincided with a set of negatives fitted into a plastic protective sheet stapled to the back of each page. The first strip of photos consisted of mug shots of Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak. I had thus far only seen grainy black-and-white photographs of the young men -- the result of photocopied microfilm and newspaper clippings. These photos were crisp, the color sharp, and what struck me most was how young the two men looked. They were short and skinny -- almost scrawny -- and, as I proceeded further through the album, it was difficult for me to imagine these tiny young men holding up one of the most profitable gambling clubs in Seattle, and leaving behind a carnage like no other.

What also struck me about the photos of Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak were their expressions. They both looked exhausted, disappointed about being caught. They showed no visible signs of remorse. They appeared neither frightened, nor timid. It was as though being hauled down to the police station was a terrible *inconvenience* for them.

The next several strips consisted of interior shots of the Izumi residence -- specifically the room that Benjamin shared with his girlfriend, Kennis Izumi. One shot featured the hallway leading toward their room. A plastic mat ran the length of the hallway, protecting the light carpet, and leading toward the entrance to Benjamin's bedroom. The bedroom itself was a complete wreck. The floor was covered with rumpled clothes, dumbbells, tennis shoes, sleeping bags, jackets, and trash. There was so much junk on the floor that the carpet was barely visible. A simple full mattress lay in the corner of the room, with wrinkled white sheets and a single pillow with a rainbow-stripe print. A simple wooden desk was cluttered with pencils, Kleenex, writing tablets, radio, lamp, a half-dozen oranges, a bottle of Seagram's, and container of Planter's nuts. On the dresser were what appeared to be marijuana, a wad of money, and a couple of handguns. A black-and-white baseball cap hung from a hook on the wall. There were a few photographs of leather jackets, holsters, guns, wads of cash, and a red duffel bag. The guns in the photographs seemed larger than those used at the Wah Mee -- I remembered that the .22 Rugers used to murder the victims were never recovered, the young men having dumped them into Lake Washington. Benjamin's

bedroom appeared so disorderly, the room seemed to have *imploded* shortly before the photos were taken.

The next several pages of photographs were interior shots of the Wah Mee Club shortly after the bodies were discovered. These included several exterior shots of the Club, shrouded in darkness. The photographs had been taken before dawn, literally *hours* after the three men had opened fire in the Club.

A sort epiphany washed over me when I viewed the first few photos of the Club. As I wrote earlier, I had never actually been inside the Wah Mee. I had peered through the single clear brick, into the office where one of the victims had been killed, but had never been able to open the doors and walk inside. Of the first few crime scene photographs in the album, one was of the exterior of the Club -- with both sets of security doors wide open. The Club was suddenly accessible to me, albeit strictly through these photographs. In the narrow area between the set of double doors, there was blood. A few drops, admittedly, but they were large drops that ran from inside the Club and out into the alley, curving away from the entrance. It was clearly the blood of Chin, who had staggered out in search of help.

The interior of the Club was enormous and sprawling. A Chinatown resident had described the Wah Mee as nice but not necessarily opulent. Indeed, there were a few worn couches and the walls were an off-white color and the gaming tables showed some sign of age, but the place was no dump. Chinese lanterns hung from the ceiling. A beautiful, elaborate bar S-curved along the north side of the room. The bar was enormous, accommodating more than a dozen red stools -- two of which had been overturned during the ruckus. On the other side of the bar, against the wall, was a back bar, where food and drinks were prepared. A small black-and-white television sat on the back bar, and I remembered that a *Sonics* game was on the TV when Tony Ng and Willie Mak entered the Club the night of the killings. In the photograph, it appeared that the television was still on -- the detectives having left everything untouched until their investigation was complete.

There were a few photos of the Club's office. A simple, round clock hung above the door to the office. The man in the office had not been tied up like the others and, in what could only be describe as a natural reflex, he had raised an arm to shield his face before shots were fired at his head. He lay slumped over a couple of chairs, his body contorted in such a way that his legs were twisted in one chair and his upper body was twisted in an adjacent chair.

His arm covered his face, but it was very clear that he was dead. Several steel safety deposit boxes littered the floor, emptied of their contents. In another photo, the body having been removed from the office, I could clearly see a chair cushion covered in damp blood.

The Wah Mee Club was, essentially, one large room divided by "upper" and "lower" levels. The upper level -- where the bar, office, and a couple of tables were positioned -- was carpeted in a red-and-black weave pattern. Toward the center of the room, two small steps down to the south, was the lower level. On each side of the steps were beautifully painted black-, yellow-, and red-striped cement poles that subtly distinguished the separate levels of the Club and marked the entrance to the gaming area, where four gaming tables were located. The lower level wasn't carpeted but, rather, cement painted an off-red color. The rest of the bodies were on the lower level, sprawled out in a concentration of blood that covered the floor like a large pond. The bodies were hog-tied -- many so tight, in fact, that the legs of the victims were twisted grotesquely and unnaturally. In one photo, two of the victims were positioned with their heads against one another, seemingly staring into a deep pool of their own blood. One of the victims was still dressed in a green-checked wool coat and hat, which made me guess that he had arrived at the Club only moments before being killed.

Detectives circled the room in the photographs. Some were kneeling over the bodies. Others were standing with their hands on hips, staring at the carnage in disbelief. Police Chief Fitzsimons was in one of the photos.

I continued to flip through the album, studying a strip depicting the red Opal, license plate UHV241, used on the night of the killings. The photos of the car were taken in a low-lit garage overlooking the high-rises downtown. I also viewed photos of the funeral, taken at Lakeview Cemetery on a rainy day. Scores of mourners huddled beneath umbrellas, amid gravestones and an expanse of damp green grass.

The autopsy photographs were candidly gruesome. I could tell that, as the victims were brought in, the body bags were unzipped and a photo was taken. The victims were still fully dressed, their expressions twisted and their faces covered in blood. Their shirtfronts were covered in blood, and each victim was still tied. Later photographs revealed the victims, naked, on the coroner's tables. Where there were bullet holes in the head, the victim's hair had been shaved to expose the wounds.

The last set of photographs was actually supplied by family and friends. They were black-and-white photos of each victim, taken when they were alive. Each photo depicted a smiling, happy, sometimes proud, Chinese American smiling for the camera. It differed strikingly from the other photos, and sadly bookended the entire album.

Ms. DeMello returned with the photocopies. She made a phone call. I flipped back and forth through the album, jotting notes and trying to process what I had seen. I flipped back to the first page, the sheet with the mug shots of Benjamin Ng and Willie Mak. I studied the photos, trying to find something in their eyes that even remotely resembled remorse. I saw nothing like that. I tried to understand how these young men could have left behind such a bloody mess at the Wah Mee Club, yet fearlessly stared at the police camera, with no expression of shame or guilt. I tried to imagine what they were thinking in those photos, and the only thing I could come up with was, "Damn! The perfect crime wasn't so perfect after all."

Ms. DeMello finished her phone call and returned to the table. She flipped through the album herself, pointing out a set of photos that she felt was the most revealing. They weren't photos of bodies or blood. In fact, the photos were taken after the bodies were removed and the bloody floors cleaned. The photos were of mannequins, placed exactly where the bodies were discovered. Each mannequin had dowels sticking out of their heads -- the dowels representing the path of the bullets from barrel-to-victim. I understood why she found these photos most revealing; the dowels were all placed in the mannequins at sharp angles. The guns had been fired directly over the victims, clearly in cold blood, and I had a mental picture of Willie Mak and Benjamin Ng hovering above, pumping bullets into their victims.

"I keep this book locked up in a file cabinet," Ms. DeMello told me, closing the album. "I'm the only one with a key to that cabinet. I cannot risk the chance of these photos disappearing. There was nothing else like this -- nothing so *horrible* -- in Seattle."

We talked a bit more about the case. We were both amazed by the miracle that Chin survived the killings and went onto testify against the three men. I asked, "If Chin had not survived, and all the victims had been killed, do you think the detectives would have solved the case?"

Ms. DeMello had her doubts. "I think we would still be investigating this case today. This case would still be open. It would never have been closed until the murders were solved."

I thanked Ms. DeMello for taking the time to meet with me. She walked me down the hallway, toward the elevators. We shook hands and she wished me luck with my book. I took the elevator down to the first floor, passed through the building's doors, and buttoned my coat against the rain and chill of a December afternoon in Seattle.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"It's [a] pretty ugly thing in my memory bank. Pretty ugly....But what's been done, been done. It's like when you get into [a] car wreck; when it's happening, you block it out. It's like a bad dream."

-- Benjamin Ng, commenting on the Wah Mee Massacre in a January 1992 Seattle Times interview

"A decade of grime has settled on the alleyway. The light fixture that helped late-night patrons find the guarded entrance to the gaming room is reduced to shards of glass and mangled wire. The scuffed brown double doors that opened to opulence are fastened with a corroded chain and padlock."

-- Seattle Times reporter Sally Macdonald commenting on the ten-year anniversary of the Wah Mee Massacre

In February 1988, *Seattle Times* staff reporter Julie Emery went into Seattle's Chinatown searching for the community's reaction to the five-year anniversary of the Wah Mee Massacre. What she found was denial. The *Seattle Chinese Post* would not be publishing a story about the anniversary. "It's not important anymore," said the newspaper's publisher, Assunta Ng. Nor would the *International Examiner* publish any anniversary-related articles, Emery learned. The *Examiner's* editor, Ron Chew, told Emery, "People are [moving] on with their lives."

Contrary to Ng's assertion, the Wah Mee Massacre was very important. Prosecutor Lasnik told Emery, "The [Wah Mee trials] were huge in terms of their importance to the community and the office and ones taking us into uncharted ground. The Mak opinion from the state Supreme Court was extremely important because it answered key questions about juror instructions and what kind of evidence can be placed before a jury in the penalty case."

Prosecutor Downing felt that the intensive police investigation helped to deter copycat crimes similar to the Wah Mee Massacre. "The fact that we've seen nothing in the past five years to rival the boldness and coldness of the crime may, in a small way, reflect the

deterrent effect of the good work done by the Seattle police and the court system in the Wah Mee Case," Downing told Emery.

Prosecutor Maleng concurred, "The three trials gave members of the Chinese and Asian communities the benefit of a front- row seat on how the criminal justice system operates." Seattle police Detective Gary Fowler, a member of the Wah Mee Task force, told Emery, "[Wah Mee] won't ever go away. Every now and then, someone will propose re-opening the Wah Mee as an after-hours club, but the talk dies when the memory returns. The whole idea of the massacre has so permeated the community and so tainted it that no one would ever go there, anyway. It's kind of like it's just full of old ghosts down there."

And one would be hard pressed to think that the Wah Mee Massacre is "not important anymore" to the victims' family members. Linda Mar, daughter of victims Moo Min Mar and his wife, Jean, told Emery that she got a "weird and eerie type of feeling" whenever she ventured near the Club. "At the first of every year," Mar told Emery, "I think, 'next month is February, when everybody got shot to death,' and emotions surface."

If Wah Mee wasn't important anymore, then what *was*? Commerce and tourism were important to Chinatown. Publisher Ng preferred to look at the economic growth that resulted from a determination to pull the community from the low point where Wah Mee left it. Shortly after the murders, business in Chinatown dropped forty-percent. Chinatown, in turn, focused on being a lively commercial center, luring capitalists willing to invest millions in shopping complexes and other ventures. Viet Wah, a large Chinese supermarket, opened in the \$1-million Asian Plaza on South Jackson Street. More than a thousand people turned out for the grand opening. Two other shopping centers cropped up post-Wah-Mee, as well -- namely Jackson Square and Orient Shopping Center. "We're working to bring people back to shop," Ng told Emery.

If Wah Mee isn't important anymore, it's still a very sensitive issue to many members of the Chinese community. In August 1997, a portion of this book was excerpted and published in *The Seattle Scroll*. Tony Ng's attorney had requested a hearing for a retrial, and I wrote a feature article about Ng's request, re-capping the case, and writing about where the Massacre stands now in the city's consciousness. When the newspaper hit the stands, Ron Chew, former reporter/editor for the *Examiner*, and current Director of the Wing Luke Asian Museum, contacted the *Scroll's* editor to complain. *What was this paper doing in*

Chinatown? Why was I writing about this case? What made this story newsworthy? Why, all of a sudden, was the Scroll available in Chinatown? Was it simply because of the Tony Ng story? I am summarizing the conversation here but, as the *Scroll's* editor, Matt Asher, told me, Chew was irate. Asher defended my article, citing that Ng's request for a retrial made the story very newsworthy. Moreover, less than six months after the paper hit the newsstands, Seattle would be marking the fifteen-year anniversary of the Wah Mee Massacre. Finally, Asher pointed out, the *Scroll* had always been available in Seattle's Chinatown.

On October 27, 1997, approximately two months after my article was published, I wrote Chew requesting the opportunity to discuss the Wah Mee case. In all honesty, Chew was the most able of the reporters who covered the Wah Mee trials. As a reporter for the *Examiner* in the 1980s, Chew was able to cut past the stereotypes and hype of the mass-murders and report on the profound effect this event had on Seattle's Chinese American community. In addition to standard reportage, he wrote essays and editorials that gave readers of the *Examiner* a thorough understanding of the crimes. Simply put, while the *Times* and *P-I* were writing articles that resembled Hollywood movie scripts, Chew wrote telling and informative accounts of the Wah Mee Massacre.

In my October 1997 letter to Chew, I explained that I was working on a book about the Wah Mee Massacre. I also stressed that I was not interested in glorifying the crimes at the Club and, rather, was more interested in the history of the Wah Mee Club and, more importantly, its role as part of Seattle's history of gambling clubs, speakeasies, brothels, and vice affiliation. In essence, I was writing more of a "regional history" book than a true-crime "shoot-em-up."

In a terse letter, Chew replied, "I am not interested in participating in your book project on the Wah Mee case. I am offended -- as I'm sure other members of the Chinese American community would be -- by the sensationalistic tone of your manuscript and the glaring inaccuracies and offensive stereotypes. Contrary to your assertion that you are not interested in glorifying or exploiting the killings at the Club, it is apparent that those are very much your motives."

Ironically, Chew's letter was more telling than if he had agreed to sit down to an in-depth, two-hour interview. I can only speculate why Chew refused an interview, but I think it has a

lot to do with the way that Chinatown wanted to be identified. As publisher Ng had told *Times* reporter Emery, the Chinese American community preferred to look at the economic growth of the community. Writing about Wah Mee and bringing attention to the horrible crime meant bad press for Chinatown. What if readers of this book passed the Wing Luke Asian Museum and the multi-million-dollar shopping malls in search of the padlocked entrance to the Wah Mee Club?

As an aside, while working on this book I frequented the Wing Luke Asian Museum for research purposes. I attended the screening of a documentary on Seattle's Chinatown and visited the Museum whenever I needed more information about the history of Seattle's Chinese Americans. Each visit I would sign my name in the guestbook. Three months after I received Chew's scolding letter, I received a rather bland "form" letter from Chew which read, in part:

Dear Mr. Matthews,

Thank you for recently attending a Wing Luke Asian Museum program. We value your participation and hope you enjoyed the event. Since then, we've been mailing you information about other Museum activities to give you a sense of all we do. We're writing you today in the hope that you will join the museum as a member. For as little as \$30 a year, you can help ensure that we continue to offer the kinds of unique programs you have enjoyed.

You may know that we are the only community-based, pan-Asian American institution of its kind in the country. That our sole mission is to create bridges of understanding between Asian Pacific Americans and Americans of other backgrounds through the types of programs you've attended.

Whatever size gift you make, you join a community of people who value your perspectives and participation. Thank you for your consideration.

*Sincerely,
Ron Chew
Director*

Shortly after receiving this letter, I photocopied it (along with his initial, terse letter) and returned them to Chew in the hopes that he could decide whether or not he "valued my perspectives" or found me "offensive" and "stereotyping" of the Chinese American community.

I never heard from Chew.

Chew's initial letter was also telling in that he accused me of being "offensive" and "stereotyping" the Chinese American community. Shortly before my article was published in the *Scroll*, I met with editor Asher at the paper's office in South Seattle. Asher liked the piece, though, at close to ten-thousand words, it was a bit long. We met to edit the article and lay it out on the computer for publication. If there was a reservation Asher had about the piece, it was his feeling that I was too sensitive to the Chinese American community. "You think gambling in Chinatown is OK, don't you?" he asked. "It's OK if the seniors in the community get together to gamble after-hours, right?" Asher wasn't testing my morals. Rather, he felt that the tenor of the article was sympathetic toward Chinese Americans who gambled illegally in Chinatown. Asher had a very valid point. I was more enamored by the Wah Mee Club's beautiful and rich history, which dated back to the early- 1920s. What a thrill it would have been to gamble and drink at the Wah Mee, not because it was illegal but, rather, because it was virtually another world! And later, when I met retired private investigator Windsor Olson and he recounted his stories of drinking and dancing at the Wah Mee with his wife during the late-1940s and early-1950s, I realized that I had grown rather fond of the Club. It wasn't a place where thugs and gangs and hoodlums hung out; rather, the Wah Mee was one of the most fascinating landmarks in Seattle.

The more I considered Asher's question, the more I had to agree that, yes, I was sympathetic toward the Chinese American gamblers in Chinatown. They worked long hours at low-wage jobs. Many didn't speak English and gambling was their only form of recreation. Moreover, cops had tolerated gambling for the past half-century -- a fact that helped reinforce the idea that illegal gambling wasn't so morally corrupt. In fact, the relationship between cops and gambling clubs seemed almost humorous to me -- greedy cops dodging reporters and sneaking into gambling back rooms in order to collect bag money from wealthy club operators.

My confrontation with Chew was one of the best things that could have happened to this book. When I had decided to write a book about the Wah Mee Massacre, shortly after the *Scroll* article was published, I made a very important decision: I wanted to write the most detailed and accurate account of what had happened at the Wah Mee Club on the night of killings. I wanted to delve into the history of the Club, its relationship to other Seattle speakeasies and gambling clubs, its vice affiliation, the impact the crime had on Seattle, accounts of the three trials, the search for Tony Ng, the history of Chinese Americans in Seattle, the appeals processes after the three verdicts, and first-hand accounts from individuals close to the case. I was also aware that Wah Mee was a very sensitive nerve in the Chinese American community. No one had written a book about this case, and there had to have been a very specific reason.

Tony Ng's attorney was still seeking a re-trial for his client. Mak's death sentence had been overturned and, on top of that, he was still seeking a lesser sentence. Benjamin Ng had given up on appeals, but he had given the occasional interview. When I wrote a letter to John R. Muenster, Tony Ng's attorney, requesting an interview, he could not grant me an interview. "Thank you for your letter," Muenster wrote. "Please note that Tony Ng was found not guilty of all of the murder charges in the Wah Mee case. I am not in a position to assist you with your book project because Tony's case is presently in litigation in federal court. We are seeking a federal court order granting Tony a retrial on the robbery charges. Good luck on your project."

I wrote King County Superior Court Judge Robert Lasnik, also in hopes of obtaining an interview. The Honorable Lasnik left me a voice mail message, indicating he was reluctant to talk about the case because of the pending appeals. "As much as I would like to help you," he said, in part, "I simply cannot. Things we've said in the past have popped up in legal briefs and have been used against us. It's hard to believe that we're going on fifteen years now and these cases are still open."

When publisher Ng told *Times* reporter Emery that Wah Mee "[wasn't] important anymore," she couldn't have been any further from the truth. Wah Mee was very important -- the case still openly active -- even more than a decade-and-a-half after the grisly murders.

ONE WINTER EVENING in 1998, I headed down to Chinatown to visit the Wah Mee Club. I had been to Chinatown dozens of times while writing this book, and each instance was

different than the other. One summer day I stood on South King Street and watched the area's patrons and business owners crane their necks to view the Blue Angels tearing across the sky during Seattle's SeaFair Festival. On other occasions I dined at Fortune City and the Sea Garden during busy weekend evenings, when the restaurants and streets were clogged with tourists and locals alike. One rainy evening, I walked down Maynard Alley and saw two homeless men huddled at the entrance of the Club, sleeping in the doorway. Other occasions I would take friends on tours of some of the notable Wah Mee locales -- Wai Chin's apartment building, various historical gambling clubs and speakeasies, Danny Woo Memorial Garden, Maynard Alley, and the Wah Mee Club.

But this particular February evening was different than others: I was visiting Chinatown and, more importantly, the Wah Mee Club on the fifteen-year anniversary of the murders. Wah Mee may not have mattered anymore to some, but to me it had been the most important part of my journalism career. I worked on other articles and pursued other writing interests, but I always returned to the Wah Mee and its compelling story. Each time I stared at the Club's facade, I was reminded of police corruption and wealthy gamblers and a few thugs with wild ambitions and Windsor Olson pushing past the mahogany doors with his wife at 2:00 a.m. for drinks and Wai Chin staggering out of the Club shortly after the murders and the cops who busted into the Club to find the carnage. While others passed the Club without notice, I felt the Club was larger than life; I couldn't help *but* notice the Club.

On February 19, 1998, I purchased a small arrangement of flowers at a florist located next to the Wing Luke Museum. Then I headed down Seventh Avenue, turned right on South King Street, and cut down Maynard Alley. A van was parked in the alley, its driver unloading produce and groceries through the back door of a restaurant. It was still winter, and rather chilly -- especially standing in the shadows of the large buildings that loomed overhead. I stared up at the buildings, spotting a specific window in the building across from the Club. Shortly after the murders, *Times* photographer Matt McVay arrived at the scene only to find the area cordoned off by police officers. An obscure radio tip sent McVay to the scene at 2:30 a.m. -- less than three hours after Willie Mak, Benjamin Ng, and Tony Ng fled the Club. Reporters and passersby were not allowed within 100-yards of the Club. McVay loitered around Chinatown with the other reporters, before slipping into a residential hotel directly across the alley from the Club. He started knocking on doors. "I was met by this real nice old guy," McVay commented, "who let me in. He had been watching [all the commotion] himself. The noise had awaked him." McVay leaned out the apartment window and began

snapping photos of police officers, Medical Examiners, and investigators entering and exiting the Club -- removing bodies and loading them into vans. "It was a real eerie feeling sitting there looking out the window for an hour, watching the body bags come out." McVay's photographs, taken around dawn, were published the same day in the *Times*, and were the first to depict the level of carnage that three young men had left behind at the Wah Mee Club.

I stood in the alley and stared up at the same window from which McVay had snapped his photos. Fifteen years had passed and the hotel had been gutted by the Chin family (who had grown up in Maynard Alley), and was in the process of renovations.

Then I turned and stared at one of the apartment windows directly above the Club's entrance. When McVay snapped his photos of the bodies being carried out of the Club, he had inadvertently included two heads leaning out of a window from an apartment directly across the alley. A man and woman sat with their arms on the brick window ledge, also watching the commotion in the alley. I stared up at the window, and I remembered that the man who lived in the apartment directly above the Club told a reporter that he heard nothing that night. "There is only a wood floor between me and [the Club]," the man explained. "My French poodle wakes up if he hears a firecracker a half-block away and he didn't make a sound all night."

I stood back a moment, staring at the dusty padlocked doors and degenerate condition of the Club's facade. I tried to read the graffiti on the door. I peeked through the single glass block and into the Club's office, where a coat hung on a hook and several hollowed coffee cans with paint brushes sat on a ledge. I ran my finger along what was once the Club's doorbell; now only a small block of wood is bolted in its place. I tried the handle on the large doors, shaking them so the padlocked chain rattled dully. I ran my foot along the mat at the Club's entrance; what was once covered with drops of Wai Chin's blood, the mat was now covered with pigeon shit and, occasionally, broken malt liquor bottles.

I placed the flowers outside the entrance, and stepped back. Looking south down the alley, I noticed the van was gone. Instead there were a dozen small children walking up the alley, laughing and smiling and teasing one another. A man stood outside Liem's Pet Store, smoking a cigarette and eyeing me suspiciously. Perhaps Wah Mee *didn't* matter anymore? After all, many of these kids would probably never know about Wah Mee. Perhaps they were

the sons and daughters of parents who felt that Wah Mee wasn't important enough to tell them about. Perhaps, fifteen or twenty years from now, the incident at Wah Mee would be no more than a blip on Chinatown's history -- if even a blip at all. Chinatown was changing, growing old. In 1990 the average Chinatown resident was fifty-six years old. The elders in the community would die in the next decade-and-a-half, and many of their offspring would opt to live in sprawling suburbs rather than the claustrophobic confines of Chinatown's residential hotels. Some of the buildings would be razed or renovated in the future. The only real catalyst for preserving and teaching Chinatown's history was the Wing Luke Museum, and I would seriously doubt that its Director, Ron Chew, would be including an exhibit on Wah Mee any time in the near future.

As the children came up the alley, they grew louder. They stopped at the pet store, staring in the window, as it has always been popular with the area children. Then they moved along, and as they approached me, their shrill voices and scattered laughter grew even louder. A few of the kids glanced at me, but only briefly. They moved further up the alley, finally turning right onto South King Street -- perhaps never thinking twice about that strange Caucasian standing in a Chinatown alley outside an old decrepit building, during an early-dusk evening in February.

EPILOGUE

On Friday, February 19, 1999, I found myself in Seattle's Chinatown, standing in a narrow, garbage-strewn alley outside the Wah Mee Club -- the site of one of the worst mass murders in the history of Seattle. It was the sixteen-year anniversary of the Wah Mee Massacre, and I was in Maynard Alley, waiting to meet a complete stranger.

In September 1997, shortly after an article I wrote about the Wah Mee Massacre appeared in a Seattle newspaper, I received the following e-mail:

Dear Todd:

I have the doorbell.

Just read with particular interest your article on the Wah Mee massacre. I was attending college in Seattle during 1983 and often visited Chinatown to get mooncakes at the Mon Hei Chinese bakery and watch Chinese movies at the old theatre. I never heard of the Wah Mee Club before the massacre, but the crime's location being in Chinatown was so intriguing that I went down a few days later to check it out as one of the curious which you mentioned in your article.

The "Ring Bell" plaque was still there when I took the doorbell.

I have the doorbell, along with a Seattle P-I article featuring a photo of the doorbell as mementos of my happy-go-lucky college days. Also from that period of time I have a neat copy of the free Seattle weekly newspaper with a front cover editorial article on the Wah Mee that includes amusing stuff regarding Ruby Chow and other icons of Seattle's Chinatown.

The doorbell is encased within a frame and very well preserved. It was used to decorate my dorm room as a trophy of my ventures into Seattle's Chinatown. The doorbell and newspapers are now located in a self-storage warehouse near my condo in Florida. I may

be going to Florida before Chinese New Year, so I am sure that this nostalgic item can be retrieved. I will be happy to turn over this famous piece of Seattle history to you in exchange for a free copy of your upcoming book.

You already know where we can arrange to meet. Wait until I return from Florida and I will allow you to set up a time if you would like to acquire the doorbell.

*Sincerely,
The Last Bell Ringer*

The email did nothing but intrigue me.

Red flags went up with me. I did some research. The e-mailer had used the name "Mei Hua" – the exact opposite pronunciation of "Wah Mee." Furthermore, Mei Hua was a female Chinese name -- translated it meant "beautiful flower." And the e-mail was signed by "The Last Bell Ringer." Moreover, the e-mail address (which I won't disclose here) included "wah mee" in it. Kind of creepy. And why was this person "allowing" me to meet and acquire a piece of Wah Mee history?"

Who the hell was this person, anyway?

I decided to go along with it.

Dear Mei Hua:

A very interesting story. Thank you for writing and filling me in on this detail. I would be interested in seeing -- and possibly acquiring -- the doorbell.

Let me know when you return from Florida and we can arrange a time.

-- Todd

I continued working on the book. Mei Hua and I continued playing "e-mail tag." I played it straight. I kept her up to date on the progress of the book: Interviews with cops, attorneys, and investigators; a bite from a publisher interested in the book. Mei Hua, in turn, told me

she was traveling: visiting many places in China; looking forward to picking up the doorbell from her storage place in Florida. We remained in contact for more than a year.

Then we lost touch.

I e-mailed her a couple times.

Nothing.

No response.

Shortly after the first chapter of my book was published in *Asian Focus*, I received another e-mail from her. It had been nearly a year:

Dear Todd,

I'm back. I just came back from China and stopped in Florida over the holidays. Now I'm in Seattle and I brought the [doorbell] and some local newspaper articles from my warehouse in Florida. I have read all of the chapters on your Wah Mee website and appreciate the tremendous work you have done to tell this legendary story. I can meet you some day next week after Tuesday to hand over the goods. You know where. Afterwards I would like to treat you to lunch at [a] nearby appropriately named dim sum restaurant, so choose a time between 12 and 2.

Sincerely,

The Last Bell Ringer

I received the e-mail in January. I had a reading at the library in February. I invited Mei Hua to attend. She didn't show. The next day, another e-mail; she insisted on meeting me in Maynard Alley -- outside the Wah Mee Club. I ran the e-mails past a couple friends back east -- one who investigated missing persons cases and spent some time working at the Cook County District Attorneys Office. Red flags went up with her, too. She basically told me to be afraid. Be very afraid.

My life was horribly dull. Any possibility of spicing things up was appealing to me. I had nothing to lose. I had no wife, no kids, no real family, very few friends, no mortgage, no car payment -- nada! And, as a friend pointed out to me, if I got into some sort of trouble, at least my book would sell well. I hurriedly e-mailed Mei Hua:

How does this Friday, 19 February 1999, at 12:30 sound to you...? Meet at the Wah Mee....? (on the 16-year anniversary of the murders, no doubt).

Let me know... -- Todd

Less than twenty-four hours later, a reply:

Sounds good to me! Lunch is on me! See you at the Wah Mee!

-- The Last Bell Ringer

I got an e-mail from a friend -- an investigator at the King County Medical Examiner's Office. He was fully versed on Mei Hua's e-mails. We were supposed to meet for dinner and a beer. He wrote:

Let's shoot for next Friday.

That is unless you become part of the history of [Chinatown]. I can see it now.

Headline: "Body of Wah Mee Historian Found Dead in Five Dumpsters along Canton Alley; Identification pending collection of all the parts! Medical Examiner called it the worst case of Suicide he has ever seen!"

Have a happy day Todd! I have a clean tray and sheet waiting for you.

-- Jerry

Friday, 19 February 1999. The sixteen-year anniversary of the Wah Mee murders.

I spent the morning making phone calls. In early-February 1999, an article appeared in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*: "Willie Mak, FBI Wrangle Over Files." The whole thing was a mess. The Prosecutor's Office was trying to re-instate the Death Penalty against Mak (which was overturned in 1991). Mak's attorneys claimed that the FBI was withholding information

from its investigation. United States District Court Judge Coughenour was preparing a judgment summary on the matter. King County Superior Court Judge Inveen was waiting for the District Court's decision; she was to preside over the re-sentencing trial, but things were stalled because of the Willie Mak/FBI haggling. I was supposed to cover the mess for *Asian Focus*.

I started making phone calls. I left a phone message at the Prosecutor's office. I left a phone message with Judge Inveen's clerk. I left a phone message for Judge Coughenour's clerk. Phone rang. It was Judge Inveen's clerk. They were stalled -- waiting for direction from Judge Coughenour. They were given the case back in 1991, but the case was moved to the District Court. "We're in kind of idling mode right now," the clerk told me. Phone call from Judge Coughenour's clerk. No summary judgement has been made. I was told to check back periodically. While on the phone with Coughenour's clerk, the Prosecutor's Office left a message on the answering machine. I didn't have time to call him back. It was late-morning and I was out the door, riding Metro to Chinatown.

I stopped off at a flower shop in Chinatown. Each year, on the anniversary of the murders, I head down to the Club and place flowers outside the padlocked doors. It isn't sappy. It isn't emotional. Many people in Chinatown have forgotten about the murders. Not me. I've never come across a story as layered and compelling as Wah Mee. It has opened many doors for my writing career. It's the least I can do. I paid for the flowers and headed west along South King Street. It was 12:00 noon. I was filled with nervous energy. I saw the Bush Hotel, the NP Hotel, King Street Station, Hong Kong Kitchen -- so much history in only a dozen square blocks. I snuck inside a Chinese grocery store and there I saw it: *The Seattle Times* with a front-page story on the Wah Mee anniversary. A photo of Willie Mak in red prison coveralls, sitting in court. The headline: "Legal Quagmire Lets Wah Mee Killer Dodge Death Penalty." I plopped down my fifty cents and scanned the article. I left the grocery store. I tucked the newspaper in my bag. It was 12:15. I was headed toward the Wah Mee when I heard what sounded, at first, to be gunshots. They were actually firecrackers. Some young boys were huddled beneath a Chinese dragon, dancing to the beat of a drum and scaring spirits from a Herbalist storefront on South King Street. It was, after all, Chinese New Year. I stopped on South King Street, watching the festivities. I had some time to kill.

Ten minutes later, I headed toward the Wah Mee. I passed Tai Tung restaurant -- where Tony Ng and Ben Ng were reportedly spotted eating dinner shortly before the murders --

and saw an article I wrote for *Asian Focus* on a news rack inside the restaurant. Front-page fodder. It was truly bizarre. I turned down Maynard Alley and immediately spotted the Club's facade.

The alley was empty.

I placed the flowers on the mat outside the doors. I stared at the Club's doors -- the padlocks in particular. I recalled a story an investigator once told me: "The padlocks on the doors are the same padlocks that police officers placed there a few days after the murders. No one's been in the place since the murders." I stepped back, standing in the middle of the alley, and replayed the events in my mind. I imagined Wai Chin staggering out of the Club, pushing the doors open and limping up the alley, blood pouring from his throat and staining the mat outside the doors. I remembered a crime-scene photograph I had seen; drops of blood literally leaving a trail from the Club up the alley and onto South King Street. I imagined the three men fleeing the Club in haste, blood on their hands, thousands of dollars in their hands. I looked up at the apartments above and across the alley. I remembered a story that *Seattle Times* photographer Matt McVay once relayed. Hours after the murders, McVay heard a police radio call that there were many people dead in Chinatown. He raced to the scene, only to find that the alley had been cordoned off. Reporters were banned from the scene. McVay was resourceful. He entered an adjacent apartment building, directly across the alley from the Wah Mee, and began knocking on doors. An old man let him inside and McVay, hanging out the apartment window, snapped the first photos of the Wah Mee victims, in body bags, being carried out of the Club. It was an amazing story.

Mei Hua was nowhere in sight. It was 12:30. I snuck into Liem's pet store next door to the Club. I looked at fish and turtle doves and snakes and live chickens. I checked my pager for the time -- 12:35. I left Liem's and walked around the block. I turned down the alley again, headed toward the Wah Mee.

Mei Hua was in the doorway, waiting for me.

"What's your name?" I asked.

Mei Hua was neither Chinese nor female. Rather, Mei Hua was a thirty-something-year-old male dressed in a fleece jacket, jeans, and tennis shoes. A bag hung from his shoulder and he was holding the doorbell to the Wah Mee -- encased in a wooden frame.

"My name's Scott," he said, smiling. He offered his hand and I shook it with reservation. "I was worried," he continued. "I came down this alley about ten minutes earlier, and there was a cop car. I thought you had gotten a police escort." That was impossible. The cops didn't like me. I was writing about the Wah Mee Club and Seattle's "tolerance policy" and corrupt cops. I chuckled slightly at the thought of a police escort.

Scott paused a moment, and we stared at the Club. The doors were covered in a thick grime, the glass blocks filthy and weathered. "I've got something for you," Scott continued. He reached into his bag and pulled out various news clippings from the crime. Then he handed me the doorbell to the Wah Mee. It seemed silly--it was, after all, simply a doorbell -- but it was such an important piece of history. I was overwhelmed. It was neatly encased and in perfect condition. I pressed the button several times. I glanced at the spot on the wall where the doorbell was once housed. I thought of all the people who had pressed the same doorbell: Japanese-American writer John Okada; politician and restaurateur Ruby Chow; the three thugs charged for the massacre -- Tony Ng, Benjamin Ng, and Willie Mak; corrupt cops on the take when Seattle's "tolerance policy" was in full force; the thirteen victims who died at the Club; and Wai Chin -- the sole survivor of the worst massacre in Seattle history. All of these people had pressed the doorbell, requesting entrance into one of Seattle's oldest speakeasies.

It was simply overwhelming to me.

I handed Scott a packet of newspaper articles that I had written recently: an article from *The Washington Free Press*, an article from *The Seattle Scroll*, and several articles from *Asian Focus*. We headed off to lunch at Top Gun restaurant. "That's the appropriately named restaurant," Scott told me, referring to his earlier e-mails. We crossed South King Street. Top Gun. Thirteen people dead at the Wah Mee, and I was going to eat lunch at Top Gun.

We ate dim sum. Scott told me his story. He studied Chinese at the UW in the early-1980s. He had always frequented Chinatown during that time, but never knew of the Wah Mee. When the massacre occurred, he was immediately intrigued. "I had been going down to

Chinatown for so long, but never knew about the Wah Mee. I couldn't believe that this could have happened, and I didn't know about the Wah Mee Club." So he went down to the Club the day after the murders. There was no one around. He removed the doorbell from the Club. "Man, I was the talk of my college dorm. Everyone knew I had the doorbell to the Wah Mee, and they all came by to see it. It was amazing."

We discussed Wah Mee.

He asked me if I thought the Death Penalty would be re-instated against Willie Mak.

I had my doubts.

He said he read my book with much interest. He appreciated the fact that I went beyond the crime itself and delved into the history of the Club and Seattle's "tolerance policy" and the simple fact that, well, I had done my homework. I was flattered.

I asked him if he really traveled between the United States and China. He said he did. He had an apartment in Hong Kong and his parents lived in Florida -- where the doorbell and newsclippings had been in storage. He worked for a company in Hong Kong. He knew Cantonese, and flirted with the waitresses during our lunch. I was amused. "I want you to have the doorbell. No one else quite understands Wah Mee," Scott explained. "My girlfriend thinks I'm crazy because I'm interested in it. My parents don't care about it. But you are really interested in the case and have done all this work. I want you to have it."

We finished lunch and left the restaurant. South King Street was bustling. I held the doorbell in my hand. The news clippings were in my bag. He offered me a ride home. He said he was leaving for China by the end of March and really had no desire to return to Seattle. I thanked him for the doorbell and the news clippings. I had no idea if we would meet up again. We shook hands.

On the answering machine at home were more phone messages. This time, they were all from friends -- not prosecutors or judges or law clerks. Did I see the article in today's *Seattle Times*? Of course I did. But I had a feeling that, after my meeting with "The Last Bell Ringer," I had a much bigger story, one that the *Times* couldn't touch.