

# BEHIND THE CRIMES: HOW TWO UNDERCOVER POLICE WOMEN TOOK DOWN A BIKER GANG

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It's a scene that had all the makings of a dramatic movie or television show: an outlaw motorcycle gang, its illicit clubhouse where drug deals and more went down, a murder, the threat of a turf war, and undercover police working hard to bring the illegal activity to justice without blowing their cover.

This was exactly where now-retired OPP inspector Karen Moffatt found herself in 1987, infiltrating the Para-Dice Riders (PDR) in Burlington, alongside her female partner, both among the first women to be trained for such undercover work in Ontario.

"Not only did she break that glass ceiling for women, but she really set the bar high for officers, especially working in a covert nature," said Stephen Metelsky, a former Halton police sergeant-turned criminology/organized crime professor who recently released a book, aptly named "Undercover," that delves into Moffatt's story and more.

"It really is like casting a movie because an undercover play is one big acting job. The only difference is, you have one shot to do it."

The bikers had established a clubhouse the year prior in the then-rural area of Appleby Line and Dundas Street, said Metelsky. But to get into the clubhouse, the women had to first develop the trust of the gang members in the hopes of receiving an invitation behind their exclusive closed doors.

"We were strategically assigned to some local bars where the organized crime members hung out," said Moffatt, recalling that the establishments were located in Burlington, Oakville and Acton. "We were there mingling and networking, ultimately to build trust and do business with them. We started by identifying the people who were associated with the gangs. It was these con-



Hamilton Spectator file photo

tacts that led us into the Para-Dice Riders clubhouse, once we got to know them."

For this undertaking, dubbed Project Lion, Moffatt went by the name of Karen Wolf, a flight attendant for a European airline who spoke fluent German — a story that lined up with her life before policing.

She and her partner, who can't be named as she still works in a high-profile job, worked hard to fit into the party scene, making sure they blended in seamlessly with the right lingo, demeanour and acid-wash clothing that was popular at the time.

Thanks to their undercover training, they had many unique but crucial skills to complete the project safely, such as how to make it appear they were doing cocaine without actually ingesting any.

## AN INVITATION TO THE BIKER CLUBHOUSE

Moffatt recalls the nervousness she and her partner felt the first time they were invited back to the clubhouse, which doubled as an "after-hours booze can" where people could illegally purchase alcohol and drugs once the bars closed at 1 a.m.

"We didn't know what to expect. The first surprise was the big steel door with a little peephole in it, and a big, burly member of the PDR at the door check-



Karen Moffatt photo

**Top: The Para-Dice Riders were an exclusive closed doors biker gang in the '80s. Above: Now-retired OPP inspector Karen Moffatt, who worked with a female partner in the 1980s to infiltrate the Para Dice Riders.**

ing people," she said, noting she and her partner weren't carrying any weapons to protect themselves, and nobody had cell-phones back then.

"We were also caught off-guard by what appeared to be a radar detector sitting at the top of the door. We figured out later on it was to see if anyone was wired, because if we were, the frequency would be going out to the surveillance team. We definitely had a sigh of relief that we were not wearing a wire that night."

As one may expect, the ladies encountered several other fear-

inducing moments during their tenure undercover, like the time their true identities was almost revealed when Moffatt's partner was recognized by an old classmate at a local bar, who marched right up and asked her, "Are you still a cop?"

"Both of us almost buckled at the knees," said Moffatt. "Luckily the music was loud, and we spoke in close proximity and said, 'It's kind of loud in here. Let's go outside to talk.' We went outside and handed him off to our surveillance team and crime unit to explain to him what was up."

Then there was the time that Sammy, one of the drug dealers associated with the gang, paid an unexpected visit to the apartment they were renting near Plains Road. The women were supposed to be meeting him later that evening to purchase some drugs.

"We were sitting there in sweat pants, doing our notes, when the surveillance team contacted us and said, 'I think Sammy is coming up to the apartment,'" said Moffatt.

"We had one minute's notice to get rid of our police notebooks, so we put them in the oven and sat down on the sofa to watch TV. The next thing we knew, there was a knock at our door."

While Sammy was very cautious and distrustful of people, the scene of two young ladies enjoying the Academy Awards was enough to put him at ease.

"He sat at our dining room table and we did the deal there," said Moffatt, noting the entire thing was captured by a hidden video camera — footage that would be crucial later in court.

## BRUTAL MURDER RAISES QUESTION OF TURF WAR

Towards the end of the project, the ultimate curveball came Project Lion's way when one of PDR's full-patch members was murdered while doing a drug deal. According to Metelsky, his stabbed body was found in the back seat of a burning station

wagon on the side of the QEW in Niagara.

"After the homicide we didn't know what to expect," said Moffatt. "Perhaps there's going to be a turf war. Perhaps there's going to be revenge for his death. What was really going to happen in Halton? It (the murder) was always in the back of my mind."

While there was talk of pulling the women from the project, it was ultimately decided that they should stay to continue gathering evidence, and hopefully information about the murder.

"Two to three days after the death we went back to the clubhouse and bestowed our condolences to the PDR members, because that's what you would normally do," said Moffatt. "In that, we would weave in some questions, like who would have done this to him? How did that happen? For us, it was trying to seek out some more intelligence that perhaps we didn't have."

Fortunately Moffatt and her partner — who knew each other before the undercover job and remain friends to this day — stayed safe and made it to the end of the project: May 26, 1987, the day all suspects were taken down by Halton command. This included arrests of the PDR's president, vice-president, full-patch members and associates of the group, effectively dismantling the hierarchy of the club, said Metelsky.

"By then, we had purchased numerous amounts of illegal alcohol and drugs from multiple members of the PDR, and that's really what we were there to achieve," said Moffatt, noting they later learned that two of the suspects were carrying weapons while doing drug deals with her and her partner.

"We had lots of evidence that could go to prosecution and multiple suspects. I hope the results we were able to get out of this project really assisted in keeping Halton a safer place to live."

For further details on Metelsky's book visit [underworldstories.com](http://underworldstories.com).