

# WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL CRIME AUTHORITY

*Maybe it was who you knew, not what you knew, that  
would help you get ahead in the Force.*

In the early 1980s in Sydney, drug dealing was big—it still is. In 1981, the infamous drug dealer and armed robber, Warren Lanfranchi, was wanted nationally for the attempted murder of a traffic cop in Sydney. When Lanfranchi aimed the shot, the firing pin jammed in the hammer of his revolver, which saved the life of the traffic cop that day. Lanfranchi became a prime target of the New South Wales Police Force.

My partner Schuey and I had information that Lanfranchi sold heroin on behalf of the notorious drug kingpin Neddy Smith to Aborigines who hung out at the Everleigh Hotel. The Everleigh was in the area called The Block in inner-city Redfern.

Warren Lanfranchi was a creature of habit. If he wasn't at The Block tormenting drug addicted Aborigines, he wouldn't be too far away. It was a matter of hitting the place a couple of times to catch him. So, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, Schuey and I bowled through the Everleigh Hotel searching for him. We were the only two white guys in the dump.

The locals did not welcome our arrival. In fact, they were hostile, shouting and mouthing threats under their breath, until the loudest loudmouth in the place accidentally fell from his barstool and landed on his arse. After that it was dead quiet.

Schuey and I searched the pub high and low for Lanfranchi. We didn't find him. Schuey's courage in going into the Everleigh Hotel, and physically controlling its violence-prone Aboriginal patronage, was very unusual for a policeman. I didn't know of many others that would take the action Schuey did that day. Most cops were cowards and usually physically unfit to boot. They only became artificially tough when they were in a group, out and about on the drink. Not Schuey.

It was too bad for Lanfranchi that Schuey and I didn't find him that day. A couple of days later, Warren Lanfranchi fatally confused his wanna-be ambition as a drug lord with his real life capabilities and got involved in a gun fight with a cop named Roger Rogerson in Dangar Lane, Chippendale.

Poor, silly, overly ambitious, overly confident Warren believed in the legend of the Wild West—that he could shoot his way out of trouble.

This Redfern cowboy's fatal flaw was his heroin-induced misjudgement of the situation. Roger Rogerson blasted Warren out of this life, express style, with a couple of .38 rounds to his chest at close range. He died almost instantly. It was alleged in the media at the time by Sally Ann Huckstepp, Lanfranchi's heroin-addicted prostitute girlfriend, that Rogerson was actually protecting his role in a heroin-dealing syndicate that he had with Neddy Smith.

And so began my introduction to the New South Wales Police Force.

Schuey and I were partners between 1981 and 1983, and in 1986.

One of my big cases was the 1984 Milperra bikie massacre case. Drugs and turf ownership caused the war between the Commancheros and the Bandidos bikie gangs that led to that catastrophic shoot-out in Milperra. Delving into the bikie culture not only exposed me to unfettered violence, violence beyond comprehension to most people, but also how to deal with it and, more than anything it underlined to me the power of the drug trade.

It was no surprise to me that in 1986, soon after the formation of the National Crime Authority (NCA), Schuey was seconded to run an investigative group. He told me he wanted me there and so, true to his word, soon after I was working for Schuey at the NCA.

I had always believed that evidence was the only real measure of integrity. But I soon learned that was not always so. Machiavelli would have been right at home at the NCA with the power struggles between the cops from the various forces, each accusing the other of being corrupt.

At the time, Australia was awash with heroin. Thugs had become drug dealers and were multimillionaires as a consequence. It was clear to me that the incidence of police being closely involved with drug dealers was increasing at an alarming rate. I also learnt that the drug trade had important political connections.

We chipped away at the heroin trade in Sydney's inner west. As we did, it became clear we needed to look deeper into the connections between the heroin dealers and members of the various inner-west branches of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

Those were the same branches of the ALP that the MP Peter Baldwin originated from. Where drugs go, all crime follows. On July 16 1980 Baldwin was savagely beaten, reportedly over an internal preselection dispute. I didn't buy that. My gut told me Baldwin had uncovered the activities of the then Mayor of Marrickville George Savvas and his links to the drug trade. No-one was ever charged with the bashing.

George Savvas was the convivial host and publican of the popular Marrickville Hotel. He was a councillor in Marrickville in 1986 and ran a construction business and was a bright rising star of the ALP.

In the NCA investigations into the heroin trade, Savvas was mentioned consistently in covert recordings with crooks and cops. We broke into his home and businesses and fitted listening devices, including one inside a urinal on one of his construction sites. If you ever want the truth just listen to the chat between two friends taking a piss.

All through the Savvas job I was worried that our NCA work would be discredited or sidelined through political interference from higher up in NSW's Labor government. After all, George Savvas was a shining light of Sydney's ALP.

We managed to avoid it by keeping our mouths shut.

I learned a very valuable lesson from my involvement in the Savvas investigation: keep opinions to yourself and let evidence rule something in or out.

I saw many New South Wales Police engaged in heroin importation and distribution at that time. The only aspect that truly shocked me was that the cops from Victoria and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) mainly believed, with a fervour akin to religious fundamentalism, that it was only the New South

Wales cops who were in with the drug dealers.

I never ruled anything in or out until all the evidence was on the table. Instead of reacting to gossip and the constant flow of crap that came from the mouths of Victorian and AFP cops, I kept my mouth shut. Because we were from New South Wales, our team could have easily had our integrity questioned if we had opened our mouths and talked before we had hard evidence. It was easy to discredit an investigation by publicly removing investigators from cases and replacing them with others.

Leaks are a detective's nightmare. We kept our opinions to ourselves, not engaging in loose talk and most definitely not chatting over 15 to 20 beers in a bar full of drunken cops and media hacks.

After a long investigation, in March 1990 George Savvas was sentenced to 25 years in prison for conspiring to import 80 kilograms of heroin. A New South Wales Police taskforce led by the famously hard Detective Brian Harding, brought him down. It was done swiftly and without warning. The speed of the operation was ferocious.

Six years into his sentence, George Savvas escaped. Wearing a wig, fake moustache and beard, and having ditched his prison clothing, Savvas walked out of the visitor's entrance at Goulburn Correctional Centre.

After eight months on the run, he was recaptured and returned to prison and for his trouble copped extra time on top of the drug conviction. Soon after landing back behind bars, and just a day after authorities uncovered a new plot to escape yet again from prison, this time with notorious backpacker killer Ivan Milat, George Savvas hanged himself with a bed sheet in his cell.

My friend Schuey's career ascended spectacularly. He was

promoted to the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police. However, his rise came to an abrupt halt. Mysteriously, and without warning, Schuey was offered a much lower position as an Inspector of Police under Commissioner Peter Ryan's new administration.

At that point Schuey resigned and the police service lost an extremely valuable and experienced policeman. I learnt from that about the politics and internal power plays that were alive in the Force. Maybe it was who you knew, not what you knew, that would help you get ahead in the Force.