

The Ferris Conspiracy

Paul Ferris with
Reg McKay



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Disclaimer

This book tells true stories with actual people. In writing we set out to hide nothing and, by doing so, reveal something of the nature of justice in this country.

Some of these people, mainly current or former officers of Strathclyde Police, are well known for what they are by fellow officers, journalists, lawyers, the people of the housing schemes and of the prisons. Their activities and methods are corroborated by audio tapes, film, witnesses and court records. We decided to tell their story the way it is.

Where necessary the names of certain parties have been altered to protect the guilty. They know who they are - so do we.

*Paul Ferris & Reg McKay
September 2000*

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

Dedicated to the loving memory of the late
Bobby Glover and Jo Hanlon.

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

PROLOGUE

BILLY THE KID'S FRIENDS (27 May 1997, London)

When I saw the guns I thought I was a dead man. Somehow, I'd always known this would be the way. Whenever you were least expecting them and turned your back then they would appear. The car came screeching down the road swerving to form a blockade. Men in uniforms held the guns, police uniforms of skip hats and flak jackets. So what? It was the police I'd most feared for years. They'd tried before and had long memories.

I'd never been an angel - well, maybe years ago when I was a tot. But now I was trying to start afresh. So, I'd slipped back and thought a money scam would do no harm. Those suits all do it, so why shouldn't I? Rising above my station? Straying too far out of my territory? Or was it just that I'd thwarted the police before? A man put down stays down - isn't that the rule? Well, fuck that. I'd come too far, through too much, to lie down for anybody. Besides, they'd never succeeded in putting me down. So, that's it - I'm due and today is the day. Well, it's as good and bad a day as any.

With an innocent friend in the car and no gun I have no choice. I'll have to trust they really are

police and not rogue police. Paul Ferris trusting the police! Who would have thought? Not me. Not Paul Ferris.

Here goes. Do as they say. Hands on the top of my head and slowly get out of the car. Fuck! Everything is in slow motion. The film reel is unwinding. I am being yanked through the car window - lifted out and through like a featherweight kid. Well, I was never that big or heavy and that used to annoy them too - those old-time wannabe gangsters and fat-arsed, corrupt cops. Easy, carefully, and try to ignore the barrels. Steady and slowly. Give them no excuse. I'd cross my fingers but I don't believe in luck.

How the fuck did I get here? Where the hell did this all start?

1.

THE MEAT WAGON (1968 - Blackhill, Glasgow)

I awoke in that state hanging somewhere between dreams and tears. Sitting up, startled and bewildered, unsure of what was wrong but certain something was. The bedroom seemed to be the same, the familiar green and white décor reassuring through the night's darkness. This was my home and my parents were asleep next door, yet still I felt uneasy and fearful. A kid's nightmare, perhaps. I'd had them before, not often but you never forget that feeling - alone, hunted, scared of everything.

I could call out for my parents. 'It was just a nightmare, Paul,' my mother was certain to reassure me. 'There, there, son, everything's hunky-ma-dory. Your Mammy and Daddy are here. Just through the wall.' Just through the wall, of course they were. Nothing to worry about, Paul. Just relax and go back to sleep. As I lay down and snuggled into the warm blankets I heard the noise and was wide awake again.

It was coming from outside and terror forced me to look. Tiptoeing to the window I pulled back the curtain and scanned the wet street below. Parked in front of our house was a large white van. In the

driver's seat I could make out a bulky, black shape, the white of a shirt collar and a lardy, potato-faced profile. He seemed to be bored, looking around and tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, an impatient motorist waiting for traffic lights to change. The back of the van moved from side to side and a howl filled the air. Low and high, sharp and blunt, grunting and squealing. They weren't human noises but stuck pig, snared animal bellows. A second or two of silence followed by another dull metal clump, a shimmy of the wagon and the wailing belted out again. The driver never stirred, rattling his one-handed tattoo on the wheel and pursing his lips in an accompanying whistle.

'Heeeelp. Stop. Pleeeease stop,' came the tinny echo before disintegrating back into inarticulate sobs.

'Shut the fuck up, you, or you'll get worse.'

'Heehaayyeooooouuuuu . . .'

'You asking for a doing, ye wee cunt?'

The van gleamed white and glistened in the Glasgow rain falling gently and steadily. Even in the middle of the night the rain would feel warm. Not cold enough to bring on the miseries but wet enough to make you look forward to your own living-room, the fireside and your family. Weather like this made me feel sad and happy at the same time. That night I just felt sick.

I knew what was going on inside that van. I was five years old after all - not exactly a kid. Besides, you could hardly miss it. Most days they would drive about Blackhill; just cruising and looking during daylight. By dusk the trouble would start. They would park up at the top of the scheme, here in Hogganfield Street, hovering with the engine turning. When a stray appeared staggering up the road they gently

eased the gears into action and moved off slowly, swooping down on the target like a seagull on a mess of fish entrails.

Drawing up alongside the lonesome drunk or a group of bored young guys hanging around a close mouth there were brief, stern words from the driver. The big double doors at the back would burst open and a group of them would spring out grabbing their prey, tossing him into the back of the Meat Wagon before driving off to a quieter nook. The police made no secret of their hit squads - quite the reverse. They paraded their logo on the vehicle, wore their uniforms and carried off screaming, complaining victims oblivious to witnesses.

Through the drizzle I watched the vehicle rock and thump once more before a silent lull invaded the street. Shivers trickled through my body with the cold of the late hour and I crept back to bed to keep warm. Lying awake, tormented shrieks still gnawed at my consciousness. In the back of the van, pleading for mercy, would be one of my friends' older brothers or fathers. This was Blackhill. Everybody knew everybody in Blackhill. It might be a teenager who sometimes let me join in with his street kick-about. It might be an adult who called my Da by his first name. Or one of the cousins from down the road in Germiston or Royston. Whoever it was, they would all feel the same now.

I imagined their faces, thought their names, praying it was none of them while knowing it would be. Futile, but I believed in prayer back then and tried harder. As the mug-shots ran through my mind sleep threatened to return hand-in-hand with the silence. In the distance of the shipyards the muffled boom of the hammer reassured, lulled. Struggling to stay awake, I was losing the fight and with every

family, every litany, my head nodded and I drifted off to sleep.

'Aaayyyyyyeee . . .'

'Keep the wee bastard still till I . . .'

'Hhhaahheeessppooo . . .'

***All that night I begged God to make the police stop.
He didn't listen.***

2.

THE LEPER COLONY **by Reg McKay**

‘You’ve got to be fucking joking, man.’ The speaker was John and not accustomed to swearing or judging others. He surveyed the neighbourhood and blanched. John wasn’t a prude or naive. Like most people he had never been in the area before. You didn’t stray into Blackhill by accident unless you were very careless or absolutely lost. This is the Blackhill of Paul Ferris’s childhood.

Among the notorious schemes of Glasgow, Blackhill was the most of everything. According to the majority of Glaswegians it was the pits and its residents had made it that way. You could live in the most decrepit slum tenement anywhere else and console yourself that at least it wasn’t Blackhill where everything was more – dead babies, violent deaths, unemployment, crime, prisoners, illness, malnutrition. Blackhill was the most deprived small urban area of Glasgow, Europe and probably much farther afield. The only produce the scheme was rich in was police attention and fighting spirit.

Built on a hill to the north of the city centre, Blackhill was sectioned off in a triangle by a motorway, a stinking canal and gasworks. It was distinct, separate and easy to avoid, making it an ideal dumping ground. Many centuries before it had been a leper colony, perched on high ground

overlooking the Clyde and far enough away from the burgeoning towns that would eventually form the city of Glasgow. From the 1930s, the green slopes were built over to house the refugees from the slum clearances of Gorbals, Govan, the Garngad and other crumbling inner city communities. The people moved in, delighted with their inside toilets and the luxury of bedrooms, only to discover that was all they had. Almost immediately, the place disintegrated into the reputation it now carries like a long, deep facial scar.

The houses wavered from the terraced cottage flats at the top end to the grey-fronted tenement flats making up the majority. Strictly speaking, the upper scheme was Provanmill but you had to live locally to know the difference. Provanmill consisted of quiet streets, well-tended gardens and supportive neighbours. That is where Paul Ferris's family lived at 19 Hogganfield Street. But walk to the end of road, near where the police's Meat Wagon would park at night, and the scene changed to urban decay.

Dull-grey, scarred tenements with narrow, dark close mouths. Rusting corrugated iron for windows. Water flowing from houses stripped of the plumbing for the illicit profit of selling the copper and lead to scrap merchants. Burst sewers neglected for weeks spewing their filth all over the road where the kids played. Communal greens overgrown with weeds and rough grass harbouring broken glass, rusted metal, decaying corpses of dead dogs and every inconceivable form of hazard for the legion of youngsters to stumble into.

As the fabric of Blackhill crumbled so its infamy soared as the most vicious place in a city celebrated for its razor gangs, territorial warfare and unremitting violence. The Blackhill Toi was a street army of four hundred desperadoes feared everywhere. A small scheme of Glasgow with a population of only 6,500, Blackhill punched well above its

weight. It was a no man's land where every stranger was clocked, tackled and robbed.

They stole from the goods trains as they trundled on their way, from nearby factories, from other schemes, but rarely from each other. It was a place where everybody shared and often the spoils were illegal. They made food and booze from the rhubarb snaffled from the acres of fields nearby. Dairy produce from the milk-marketing depot was another staple of their diet. When gallons of illicit alcohol disappeared from a Glasgow distillery one Hogmanay every family in Blackhill got their measure. It wasn't whisky, but poison, and the death toll rose to a hundred people from that tiny scheme.

Around the closes of Blackhill children and young adults gathered buzzing cheap glue. The health of women was so bad that Dr Mary Wilson introduced Deprovera, the long-term contraceptive injection, to Blackhill before the drug had been sanctioned in Britain. Diseases long vanished from most of the industrialised world hung on in the scheme taking lives, young and old.

In a city of religious division, Blackhill was primarily Roman Catholic, as were the adjoining territories. A corridor stretching from Blackhill down to Royston towards the city centre, including Germiston, Roystonhill and Sighthill, was known as the Garngad. As you entered the area from the city end a gable wall declared FREE GARNGAD in the style and sentiment of the Irish struggles. In July, Glasgow reverberated with Orange Walks while Garngad had its Hibernian Walk – just as militaristic, just as threatening, only supporting the other side of the divide.

Over the years, Blackhill produced victims of poverty, disease, neglect, addiction and violence. It also produced one or two heroes. The police knew of them as villains but on the streets they were hailed as freedom fighters, men who refused to succumb and succeeded in making a career for themselves in the area's sole economic activity – crime.

Welcome to the Blackhill of Paul Ferris, born on 10 November 1963.

3.

A BOY'S OWN STORY

But, Mammy, it is so Blackhill.' WHACK!

'No, it's not, Paul, it's High Riddrie.'

'But, Mammy, it is . . . ' WHACK!

I was four years old and couldn't understand the problem. On the corporation bus rumbling towards the city centre a kindly old woman had asked me where I lived. My mother wasn't a snob, she loved Blackhill, but other people could have strange reactions to our part of the town. Riddrie existed but High Riddrie was a figment of imagination, a cover against prejudice and, finally, a local joke that meant Blackhill.

This isn't a story of a poor boy gone wrong. I had a splendidly happy, privileged and loving childhood and was pleased I lived in Blackhill. For a start our home was one of the posh houses at the top of the hill. My old man ran a small bus company and we were well off. Like other kids I took it all for granted and couldn't see the difference between my family and those of my friends, the crew from the tenements. I didn't notice that their buildings were falling apart, the closes stank of glue, their middens reeked of rot or that the arses hung out of their trousers

permanently. They were and are good people, my people.

We used to laugh at folk because of eccentricities. Like the Murphy family who kept a horse in the tiny bathroom of their council flat. The poor mule pulled a small cart that the family used to collect scrap metal. That they were barely surviving on their meagre pickings wasn't the issue - a horse in the bog was funny.

Blackhill was an old-time place with a hangover from the traditional tenement life. Musicians and singers would come round the streets trailing their trombones, bagpipes or one-man-band paraphernalia. Traders would knock your door selling all sorts of goodies, though somehow I only remember the tablet so sweet you felt your teeth rotting even as you ate it. One time I smuggled a bundle of my good clothes to the rag and bone man, being dead chuffed with the gaudy bauble received in return till my Ma found out - then it was pelters.

My mother and father were as strict as hell. Hard love, you might call it. Jenny and Willie Ferris were tiny with the hearts of lions. They knew right from wrong and woe betide any child of theirs that crossed the line. They had a mixed marriage, which in Glasgow means my Da was Protestant and my Ma Roman Catholic, not easy in a city where you could get your throat cut for being of the wrong persuasion. It didn't bother them at all, with their first born being called Billy after William of Orange. While my older sisters Janet, Carol and Cath were given fairly noncommittal names, when I arrived on the scene it was time to right the balance. So I was named Paul John Ferris and raised a Catholic. Religion has never bothered me one way or another, though football is a much more serious matter. I left

the Church when I was about nine years old but have never left the Celtic nor ever will.

My folk's values were the values of Blackhill: never tell on anyone, sort out your own problems, if somebody hits you hit them back twice as hard - even if you have to lift a brick. It wasn't just the police's policy of brutality that made them hated in Blackhill - they were the common enemy and quite unnecessary. The police made trouble for everyone while we made trouble for those who deserved it.

Like the Snowdroppers who broke the code against stealing from your own, in this case clothes off the washing lines. Clothes were precious in such a hard up place. Snowdropping was a vicious, low-level crime against your own people. A family called Welsh were regular clothes thieves but moved on to far more sinister activities in later years, as I found out to my cost. When a Snowdropper was caught they were never reported to the police. Their fate was far worse than the state could ever dish out - a good kicking from a bunch of women. No joke, I can tell you.

Life took a dizzy turn for me when my older brother, Billy, left home. As a teenager he went off to Corby, married and settled down. Billy was jailed for a robbery and when he was in prison his wife had been sleeping around. He's such a loving guy the news broke his heart, but he kept the grief locked inside him. A short while after his release he was in a pub when two blokes started goading him about his wife. A fight ensued and knives were drawn. All that pent-up hurt just spilled over and Billy stabbed one guy to death. When he appeared in court he refused to say why there had been a fight and he was sentenced to life for a motiveless murder. It was many years later

before my big brother could share with his family what had really happened.

Shortly after that my father, Willie, was jailed for a short time for not paying his income taxes. While he was in Glasgow's infamous Barlinnie Prison, known as Bar-L, he and a few others planned a robbery. On his release he deliberately got a job driving the bus for nearby Smithycroft School. One day the bus had extra passengers - bank robbers. They used the bus full of schoolkids as a get-away motor while the police frantically combed the streets. A couple of the gang couldn't wait to spend the loot and soon after were seen splashing the cash too vigorously. The police pulled them in and they sang like canaries, shopping all the others. The enterprise cost my father five years in jail.

There was no secret about my Dad's predicament. It wasn't any type of embarrassment, quite the reverse given his inventive ploy. Most families in Blackhill had somebody in jail - in fact we were one of the better-behaved families. My old man had lost his business through the tax problems. Contemplating how to care for his family he chose a local option - robbery. In Blackhill crime was as respectable a life choice as accountancy, banking or law are for middle-class folk.

Overnight there was very little money coming into the house and I'd just lost my father. Aged eight, my life had changed dramatically. It didn't feel that way since Jenny worked at two menial jobs to keep us going and was parent enough for all of us, particularly me and my young sister Maureen. But your Da is your Da and I was a wee boy missing mine.

Around the same time I made the biggest mistake of my life - a schoolyard scrap. All flailing arms and slapping punches, I won over St Philomena school's

bully, Martin Welsh. I knew the Welshes from Blackhill - the ugliest bunch of thugs I've ever met even to this day. It was a bigger than usual tribe with six boys and four lassies. I can recollect next to nothing about the girls, but the Welsh brothers are inscribed forever in my nut. Packie Welsh was younger than me, Martin and Henry a bit older, while George, Tam and John were a lot older. These guys acted as tough as they looked dim. They had a kind of institutional glower to their phizogs with eyes too close together and haircuts looking as if they belonged on somebody else. They always seemed manky. Okay, so did a lot of us, but it didn't matter what the Welshes did they always looked unwashed.

The day after my victory, I heard the call: 'Ho, Ferris, ya wee shite. C'mere.' Before I'd a chance to respond I was being pummelled on all sides by the flying fists and feet of all the Welsh bros.

'Think ye're a wide man, ye wee cunt? We'll show ye wide.' As I cowered and tried to protect my head with both hands, an uppercut flew into my face cracking my nose and splitting my lip. I went down.

'Ye don't fuckin' mess wi' us, ye wee wanker.' My back lay on the gritty tarmac and my vision spun as kicks rained into my ribs, legs, stomach, till finally the tacked sole of one heavy boot stamped once then twice down on my head.

'Serves ye right, ye wee bastard.' And it was over.

It was to happen every single day of my childhood. Some or all of the Welsh crew would come at me and beat me up, from a mild punching and dead-leg to stamping and jumping on my face and stomach. Once I ran away and received a worse doing when they caught up with me. That was the day I decided never to run away from anybody again - ever.

I made a point to keep my mates out of it since the Welshes terrorised the area. These were the people who would order grown up families out their homes so they could strip the rooms of the goodies, sometimes taking over the houses. There was nobody safe from them - young, old, male or female. My mother eventually sussed something was wrong - too many bruises, cuts and torn clothes too often. But she knew better than to interfere.

When the psoriasis arrived it was a different matter. I was covered in red, scaling, itchy blotches that the doctors couldn't understand. There was no history of skin complaints in my family. Years later the medics explained that my psoriasis was purely a psychological reaction to stress - the Welshes' bullying - something I'd never forget and neither would they. I made sure of that.

4.

rites of passage

Psoriasis and hormones don't mix well. By the time I'd moved to St Roch's secondary school in Royston, in the heart of the Garngad, I had a strict policy of letting no one, but no one see any of my body aside from my face and my hands. Though I'd eventually learn how to keep the reptile skin in abeyance, it made my adolescent years more awkward than they needed to be. The Welshes provided me with two traits - psoriasis and an absolute hatred of bullies.

Secondary school was a hoot. I'd float around the huge building allowed to do my own thing but ignored academically. Thing is, I didn't truant more than most kids my age. I'd have an occasional spat with some older hardman, hitting him with an object fast and furious to his shock and my friends' relief or mirth. Being a wee guy, these wide boys couldn't quite believe it when I walloped them. But it was always for a reason and they always started it. Enough trouble followed me without me chasing it.

Unlike most of the other guys in school I didn't get inveigled into the gang warfare bit. It seemed childish and false to me. As for hunting the Proddies - well, that was for the birds. A huge mob of kids from St Roch's would regularly search out the

neighbouring Protestant schools and battles ensued resulting in serious injuries, often in deaths. Every now and then the Hibs Walk would circle a block of flats in Roystonhill rumoured to be occupied entirely by Protestants. They would circle the place playing their flutes and drums for hours on end as the enraged flat dwellers threw down TVs, chairs, buckets of piss. Everybody took it all so seriously. I considered it a laugh and stayed away.

I did steal cars - everybody I knew did. We would drive them past speed cops so they'd give us a chase. We always won and just abandoned the motors. By the time I was 14 I could drive as well as I needed to. Shoplifting was a lark but I was never that good. My first offence was thieving two model cars, Jaguar XJS make. I never got carried away and avoided the heavy metal that dumped many friends in approved school, borstal or whatever they were being called at the time.

By the time I hit 14 or 15 the Welshes' attacks were becoming sporadic but fierce. One time three of them grabbed me in a narrow tenement close and attacked me with hammers. My mate, Eddie Deegan, begged me to run away but I didn't do that any more. So the ugly brothers belted into me and I tried a new tactic - laughing. Every time they smashed the metal down on my skull I laughed louder till eventually they freaked and wandered off. All right, I was a bit smashed about but I would've been anyway. Besides, I'd made the thick shits think.

We hung around neighbouring Riddrie for the talent, as young blades do, drinking, sniffing, swallowing, snorting any substance that came along. Compared with my mates I was downright cautious, but the combination of substances and women made for great impromptu parties. Finally I lost my aching

virginity - though with trousers firmly on. It lasted minutes, if that, which was just as well since the man of the house returned home unexpectedly. We were all scrambling around hiding in wardrobes when Eddie decided to dive out the window. He hadn't looked first and ended up dangling by his throat from some telephone wires 30 feet off the ground.

Another time we'd stolen a case of brandy and taken it to a disused garage. Drunk as skunks, an orgy ensued. I was standing there snogging the face off this lassie while another of my mates was doing the dirty deed with a girl against a wall only two feet away. When the shout of 'Polis' went up I heard nothing and kept on chewing lip. The guy shagging did hear and took to his heels, deserting his partner where she stood. When the police burst in I was still winching my girl while the other leaned against the wall with a dreamy expression on her face, T-shirt tucked under her chin, legs wide apart, her knickers and jeans dangling around one ankle. The police charged me with trespassing then offered their congratulations. Two women at once . . . as if.

That was our style for a couple of years but it was all just growing-up stuff in the style of Blackhill or any scheme in Glasgow. There are plenty of guys who lived the full teenage rampage then went on to university degrees, white-collar jobs and mortgages. There are others who used their adolescence as an apprenticeship for a life of crime. I was a quiet kid who turned away from plenty of opportunities to blow my stack.

At school I was called in to the assistant head's room. On the way there I tried to work out what minor misdemeanour I was in trouble for but shouldn't have wasted my time worrying. Because my birthday fell in November I wasn't being allowed

to leave that summer. No talk of education or qualifications, just of rules. Another eight months hanging around the playground and facing teachers who'd rather be drinking tea and dunking biscuits.

'It's the law, Paul, you must stay on till Christmas - no questions.' He might as well have said waste another six months of my life. I nodded, left the room, walked out of school and kept walking.

'Christmas, that'll be chookies.' I was ready to be a grown-up.

So, no sad story. No certificates and only casual learning, true. But no stint in child prison, no drug addiction, no mindless gang warfare. Just a wee guy with attitude determined to have a go at life.

5.

STAND AND DELIVER

My first serious crime was committed in that twilight zone between leaving school and being old enough to work. In the dead of night along with two good friends from St Roch's - Bernard Gallacher and Jim Kelly - we stripped all the lead from the roof of Collins the publishers in Townhead. It netted us several hundred pounds each - a lot of dosh for kids in the 1970s. I wasn't a great reader or writer at the time so you could say that my first encounter with publishing was entirely profitable.

Another time, a new warehouse had just opened nearby - B&Q, selling everything from nails through to bathroom suites. The developers obviously didn't study their street maps very carefully and left the unit with piss-easy security and a short walking distance from Blackhill. As soon as it opened, the Blackhill mobs were regular after-hours visitors. Most nights young guys staggered down the back streets lugging a bath, a box of fitments, flat-packed furniture. It was so easy they were stealing to order, some-day delivery.

It became a nightly irritation to the local bizzies who needed to nail it on the head. When we turned up at the place these two uniforms jumped us even

before we could do the door in. They took a crowbar off one of my friends, walked over to the store's gleaming glass front door and smashed it. They wanted to get someone for breaking and entering and without the damaged door it would have been a charge of loitering with intent only. When they humped a load of stuff into their squad car wherein we were held captive I protested. For my pains one of the bears skelped me on the side of the head with my own jemmy. The purloined goods were never produced as evidence, ending up in some cop's own home, no doubt.

The first legitimate job was quick in coming. With my father now released from prison things were looking up at home but the money was still tight. Van boy at Waverly Vintners and £180 gross per week would do nicely. My folks were proud of me for holding down a job and bringing in a man's wage. My father's spirit and self-respect had taken a hammering in prison and it was up to me to contribute as best I could. At first, I enjoyed the work, with most of the drivers being utter chancers with a first-class line in patter. Some of the old geezers had a well-practised daily routine doing the absolute minimum of work and hiding out in their favourite watering hole most of the time. Facing a future full of all that drudgery, who was to blame them?

By the age of 16 I'd secured a half-decent job but otherwise carried on as before and carried a knife. As yet the knife was for no greater purpose than to be one of the lads. To be without one would have been like John Wayne without a shooter - half-dressed. You got yourself a chib without plan or purpose of using it. But I knew the rules. Slashing was in and stabbing out. A knife wound could kill accidentally but a slash

merely marked, albeit permanently. Go round sticking people they would assume you were out to end their lives and the rules also said you met fire with fire.

Young guys wore their scars like a symbol of respect, signifying they were up for anything and could be trusted in hard times. There was an urban myth of the young neds in hospital casualty wards of a busy weekend begging the doctors to make the stitches big and clumsy so they could impress their mates. Must have been a story made up by someone from the soft underbelly of town because there was absolutely no need to try to be marked - no need at all.

Late one night, my pal Stewarty and I had bought a Blackhill briefcase - a carrier bag full of booze - and were heading to a house where a party was promised. We'd already had a few drinks - in my case Irn Bru laced with vodka - and were feeling good with life. Aged we were all grown up with cheeks full of pimples and clumsy razor nicks. Out of the shadows stepped Mick Kenna, a local hardman in his thirties and infamous for his viciousness. He claimed us or, more accurately, our bag of booze. When Stewarty resisted, Mick Kenna started to kick seven shades of shit out of him. All over the road rolled Stewarty with Kenna walking after him still stamping and booting though he'd won the fight a long time since.

As I watched I knew I had to do something to save my friend. If I'd gone in against Kenna he would've made mincemeat of us both without breaking sweat. Besides, he was just as likely to start cutting us up if he thought the odds were stacked against him. If I didn't do something he would stick Stewarty just for the hell of it. Reaching for the knife in my pocket, I flicked the blade open and stepped forward slashing