**‘I’ll tell you why I love this city ……….’**

The name is Martinelli. Detective Martinelli. I have been with the Department for over thirty years. I am one of the old hands. I have seen some changes I can tell you.

I work Homicide. I have worked Homicide since I left the beat as a rookie cop. I wouldn’t do anything else. I chose it deliberately. Working Vice or Organised Crime you get leant on. You end up bending and once you start to bend you bend further. Before you know it you have bent so far that you are well up your own backside and enjoying all the shit.

You are no longer a cop. You have become one of Them, not one of Us. In fact you stopped being a real cop the first time you gave way to being leant on.

That is why I work Homicide. Dead bodies don’t lean on you. Dead bodies don’t put pressure on your family just to get to you. Corpses don’t lie to your face. Well, not most of the time.

I hope I’m not boring you. I’m telling you since you asked, since you are the one buying the drinks, since you are the only one bothered enough to listen. More often than not people shy away. There is a short period of politeness then some excuse to move to another table or to move over to the other side of the bar. It doesn’t bother me. I am used to it by now.

I like you. You seem genuinely interested. So I’m about to tell you things that I don’t just tell to any old Joe who happens to plonk themselves on the barstool next to mine. Let’s see: What would interest you? Not the gory details of bodies we get called out to. Not complaints about paperwork and procedures. Not moans about the job not being what it was in the old days. All those are true but, if I read you right, they hold no fascination for you. You are a puzzle person. You like to explore the ins and outs, the rights and wrongs, the complexities of life. I have you down as some kind of philosopher. Am I right? You’re not denying it, so here goes.

Want to know what I think? I think that most of what goes on is down to people adapting or giving in to the way this wonderful city keeps reinventing itself. When I was a start-out cop on the beat, the city was one thing. By the time I got my detective badge the city had become something different and now, all these years later, it is something else again.

I have spent years out there on the front line. I have lived through all the changes day to day. There are others who, for some reason or another, have not been able to keep up. They have fallen by the wayside. Or they have deliberately gone off up some quiet backwater hoping not to be discovered or disturbed.

I’ve noticed that some city people are naturally good at negotiating different kinds of places. They are at home in the serenity of their leafy suburb but are just as comfortable in the hustlebustle of Downtown. They understand the city. They know that it is a place of strife. They know that there are competing groups. They know how to hold their own. Such people are true Metropolitans. They relish the building and rebuilding of the city shape. They live for the diversity of food, culture and people. They automatically tune in to the rhythms of the city. They sashay their way through city life. They can see through it all to hold on to the core of what this city is all about. They can live with permanent change and still love the city. It is like the hymn says: There may be change, there may be decay; it may be everywhere you look - but what abides is the changelessness beneath the surface.

Not everyone can do that. Some can only see the surface. Some can only react to day-to-day changes. They experience the city as a place of friction and conflict. For them there is nothing but low-level dissent. Their personal lives are full of chaos and their public lives are one long litany of civil disorder. They have upheavals. They have turf wars. They have vendettas. For them the city means never being able to relax. They have their troubles. They cause trouble for others. They are trouble.

It is into their tangled lives that cops like me willingly step. We are there to manage it on their behalf. Yes their lives have a degree of disorder. Yes people may feel the need to rebel – but this all needs to happen in a managed way. It is about maintaining a balance. Does that make sense to you?

It isn’t easy. I’m not pretending it is easy. That’s one of the things that interests me about the job and the city. The city keeps changing. The people keep changing. All that has to be managed so that things don’t topple out of balance. That is what the job is all about to me.

One thing that some officers find hard is that the informal rules of the city keep changing. What is OK one day may not be OK the next. That can be hard for those of us charged with maintaining balance. Take graffiti as an example. It is all part of a street culture that wasn’t there a few years ago. Times change, I know that, but I still can’t accept all this street graffiti as art. There is something about the garish colours, the brashness, the spikiness and angularity that jars with me. Don’t get me wrong: I appreciate art. I did a few classes in art before I joined the Department, but this isn’t art.

People say that it reflects the true culture of the city. They say that its repetitions, its zigzag honeycombs and its fluorescences are close to capturing what the city is all about. I can’t see it though. Maybe I am just getting too old. Yes, like the city, it has large sweeps and fine detail. Yes, it has empty gaps and filled in spaces - and yes, for certain, it has a transience. To me that still doesn’t add up to the city. To me it is missing a whole set of things out. I can’t see my city in their graffiti.

To me it is simply a twisted defacement. Nothing is immune. There is even some on the Mission School I used to attend as a kid. It gets everywhere. It covers over the face of the city. It hides what was once visible. It is an enforced veil. It is something that has to be removed, but that then involves another defacement – a scouring away of what is there to expose what was once there. It is like an archaeology. You can scrape the layers off and discover what once was fresh but you can never regain that freshness. Once sprayed over, the city can never be brought back to life in the same way. It can only build up more layers upon layers, burying what it once was under what it is about to become. It can only keep on becoming something different.

I don’t know why I am telling you any of this. It is just the ramblings of a half-drunk old cop. It may interest you: but to be honest there is no way of really telling. At least you haven’t moved away yet. That is something, I suppose.

I love this city. I really do. I love the byways, the alleys. I love the parts that others don’t get to see. Today I was called out to an old hidden away, mostly-forgotten wharf down by the docks. There was a body in the water. It had been there for some time. That was obvious enough. The water was stagnant. There was no flow in or out of the wharf so the body had lain floating where it had been tipped. There were tyre marks up to the water’s edge. Someone had most likely reversed a van and slammed on the brakes, letting the rear door swing open and the body flop into the oily water.

Investigators might get lucky enough to lift any greasy tyre mark that got etched into the rough surface. If they do it will be just grey and white squidges but it may give them a fragment of knowledge to work on. It may just provide the clue that lets them get that first foothold from which to painstakingly recreate events back from the slow floating body to the fast moving crime.

You might think that my days, spent with things like that, must be depressing and bleak but there is always something to balance things out for me. Today, for example, the downside was the reality of the body, the desperation of an unnecessary death but there was also a kind of beauty in the way the surface of that still water had an oily film that rippled and zigzagged as I moved. There were abstract driftings of colours merging. Under a brick bridge, in the semishadow, the patterns were black and white. I stood transfixed for a while, the pattern of light on dark shaping itself, in my imagination, into body parts, pregnancies, jazz dancers. For those few minutes the scene beneath that bridge was capturing the rhythms of the city above.

Thinking about it later it reminded me that I see what I do now as more artistry than science. There are others who want it to be all statistical, all clever analysis, all the latest fancy equipment. Myself I still think it is mostly intuition. I think it is in the blood; just like this city has got itself in my blood.

Maybe that is all too philosophical. Maybe you want to hear more about the practicalities. Well (since you are still with me; since you haven’t moved away) let’s try that tack for a while.

We had a call-out the other day. You may have read about it in the newspaper. It made the TV news. There was a shoot-out in a vacant lot over on the other side of town. I was already interviewing some people about a robbery in the area so I was able to get round the corner to the lot before the cars arrived from the Precinct. I was first on the scene. One dead: Nobody else around. I radioed in and stood guard until the squad car arrived to tape the area off and Crime Scene started processing it.

It was an empty lot out beyond the edge of the city centre: One of those peripheral places that gets abandoned when small factories close. It was overlooked by a single apartment block, itself another half-abandoned place where people were parked and forgotten about. The area was one that I used to patrol at the start of my career. It was a busy place then, full of families and oddballs. The population changed over the years. Some people moved on; some got moved on; some got left behind in this block. I still visit some that I knew in the old days.

Take Mary as an example. She grew up in the neighbourhood. When her parents died she sold the house and moved into the new apartment. There has never been any reason for her to go anywhere else so she has stayed – a leftover from another age. She doesn’t fit in. She doesn’t go out. She has her six cats, and her radio for some music. She refuses to switch on the TV. She says it frightens her. She has little idea of what is going on in the world. I call in every Monday with a small stock of groceries to last her through the week. I make up things about what is happening in the city. I keep everything low-key and gentle. She doesn’t need to know what the streets are really like a few blocks down. After all she is never going to go there.

Then there is TJ. I don’t know his real name. I have never known it. I came across him as a teenager. He is coming up to his fiftieth birthday in a couple of years’ time. That is how long we have known each other. I used to see him around when I was a student. As a new cop I was sent to question him about some petty crime or other. There was nothing to go on so I settled on a deal with him. I could see that he was on the edge of sliding into things that he didn’t need and said he didn’t want. The deal was that I wouldn’t record the visit, there would be no file with his name on, I didn’t even want to know his name and, if he stayed clean and out of trouble, then I would regularly call in at the local park and if he was there I would give him a chance of beating me at chess.

I got a message one time that he had been shot in both legs. He said that he didn’t know the man. The guy just stopped him in the street one day and said ‘This is for your brother’ and pulled a gun. TJ tried to explain that he didn’t have a brother but it made no difference: The guy shot him anyway, close up. We have been playing a game of chess every month. Sometimes he wins, sometimes I win.

He has a neighbour who I have never seen. Now if anyone knows about the changes that have gone on it is him. Apparently he has a complete record of all the comings and goings. He has an old film camera and takes several photos each day. He has an old reel-to-reel recorder and narrates what is going on around the area outside the block. He is going to put it all together sometime, according to TJ. He even has a title; ‘View from my Third Floor Window’.

He started recording the factory workers coming and going, then the demolition of the factories, then the kids playing on the empty lot, then the drug dealers coming and going.

Anyway, back to the dead guy. There he was spread out on his back in the middle of the empty lot. He had been shot twice in the head. Near perfect shots; centre of forehead, clean holes. There were no other signs of wounds; no complicating factors. It looked nice and simple to me as I stood there waiting for the others to arrive. I carefully lifted some identification out of his back pocket. Now we had a name and an address. He was on the system so a couple of officers went off to search his apartment to see what that would tell us. The Medical Officer confirmed the two bullets as cause of death. So, we knew who he was and we knew how he died. All we had to do was to work out who killed him and why.

While the others were doing their stuff I looked up at the apartment block. The windows were mostly blank. There was no sign of life. You might have been forgiven for thinking that it was abandoned. I knew different. I knew that up there were Mary and TJ and, most of all TJ’s ever-recording neighbour. If anyone saw the shooting of my body-in-the-lot it would be him.

Sure enough, when I called to see him he had a recording of himself describing, rather dispassionately, what had happened. He had even taken three photos and was happy to hand over the roll of film since I offered to get it developed for free.

He was three floors up, looking down on the scene, and some distance away so he was a bit hazy on finer detail but he could tell the story in sequence. The young guy arrived first and hung around in the middle of the lot, looking this way and that. He was clearly expecting someone. A car drew up but he couldn’t tell me the make of the car: ‘Dirty, blue, not big’ is as far as he got.

So, as he remembered it, the car drew up at the edge of the lot. Three men got out and lined up opposite the young guy. All three older guys drew guns and shot: three shots – one each. As the first two fired the other stepped slightly back and fired high above the other guys’ heads, off into the rubble in the distance. It was too deliberate to be a mistake. The two meant to kill; the third meant to really miss.

So it wasn’t simple after all. It wasn’t one shooter firing two shots. It was three shooters firing two shots into the head and one shot way over to the side. Why was that? Strange, to say the least. There might be a slim chance of finding the stray bullet amongst the piles of rubble but more likely was finding the three shell cases.

Back at the station I needed to go over it all before getting down to writing up any kind of report. I looked at the evidence spread across my desk. There was the confirmation of death from two exact shots. Two bullets had been retrieved from the brain. Ballistics had them as coming from two different guns – neither on the firearms database. The crime scene officers had picked up two spent cases from where the shooters were standing in line. The evidence was clearly saying that there were only two shots and two shooters not the three that TJ’s neighbour was sure of.

If there were three shots and three shooters then that was something known only to me and the neighbour. I decided to keep it that way for the time being.

I sent the neighbour’s film to be developed and chased the lab until I had the three prints alongside the other evidence. Each picture was clear but the men were too far away to be in much detail. In the first picture you could see the three facing the younger one. In the second shot the younger one was dead on his back and, in the third, the three were half-turned. I looked at the guy on the right, the one who had stepped back and fired wide. There was something about the way he stood, gun held steady in front of him. There was something trained, something deliberate in his stance.

I put the pictures under the magnifier and enlarged it as far as it would go. It was graininess, an abstract pattern of dots and shadows. I was just able to make out three cylinders on the ground near the men’s feet in the second picture. In the third picture, taken as the three men walked away from the body, I could only find two cylinders. Why would someone remove a spent shell case from the scene?

The more I looked over the evidence the more an idea formed. The stance of the third shooter was the one I would hold. It was an army stance, a trained shooter’s stance – it was the stance a cop would have. A bad cop would be aware of the need to remove evidence before Crime Scene Investigators arrived. It was only an idea but it was an idea that made some sense to me.

Two unknown shooters, using two unknown guns, and an unknown car. An unidentified cop standing shoulder to shoulder with them, shooting way off target and pocketing the incriminating case as he left so that the evidence would point determinedly to only two gunmen being there. I left it there. Official version was two unknown shooters, reason unknown: file closed.

In my head there was the different version. I went back over who the cop might be. Who was that height? Who was that shape? Who was off-duty at the time of the shooting? How many of those were out of the city or otherwise accounted for? I went over and over stuff and now I think I know who did it. I can’t prove it yet but I’m not likely to leave it there. It is some puzzle that I will gnaw away at until there is some kind of resolution.

Is this interesting you now? Do you see why I love the job? The puzzles; the disconnects. The need to work things through over and over again until they begin to make some kind of sense. You see why I love this city?

Sure I’ll have another beer but I don’t want to stop the flow. I might not be able to pick it up again. I might only be able to tell it once. Once it is out there, having been said, I may not be able to capture it again in the same way – so let’s press on, if I may …

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I’ll tell you why I love this city was written in relation to to the following works in the Metropolis exhibition:

* Christiane Baumgartner ‘Ladywood’ (2010)
* Christiane Baumgartner ‘Asphalt 1’ (2006)
* Christiane Baumgartner ‘Asphalt 2’ (2006)
* Josef Robakowski ‘View from my window’ (1978-1999)
* Gardar Eide Einarsson ‘Untitled Landscape: Tear Gas Cylinders’ (2012)
* Barry McGee ‘Untitled’ (2011)
* Zhang Enli ‘Apartment 3’ (2008)