A VILLAGE UNDER SIEGE

Neatly dressed in casual clothes, the tall, lean man didn’t have a lot to say as he patiently waited his turn in the barber’s chair that Saturday morning. Saturdays are often a busy time for Tweed barber Reg Coté, a fixture on the village main street for thirty years, and in that regard October 3, 2009, was no different. Longtime customers, mostly middle-aged, stop in for a sixteen-dollar haircut and a chat with whomever is there, including the agreeable Coté, a good talker and listener whose Quebec accent remains strong. There’s no red-and-white striped barber’s pole outside his shop, but there’s a makeshift one inside, and his salon resembles the traditional model: an informal, walk-in business with a single barber’s chair and an L-shaped seating arrangement, where men who know each other can catch up on local developments, good and bad.

But this was no ordinary Saturday morning in Tweed. The usually tranquil village was struggling to make sense of an unusual piece of local news. Two days earlier, under the headline “Public Safety Concern,” provincial police at nearby Madoc had issued an unsettling press release:

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Central Hastings detachment are investigating two break-ins that occurred, in which a
male suspect entered the home while the residents were sleeping. On September 17 and again on September 30, 2009, both in the early hours of the morning, an unknown male entered Tweed residences. During both separate incidents, the suspect struck the female victim, tied her to a chair and took photos of her. The suspect then fled the scene. The OPP want to remind everyone to ensure all doors and windows are secured and to practice personal safety. Please report any suspicious activity to the police immediately by calling 911. OPP officers are following up leads to identify the suspect. If anyone has information about these incidents, they are asked to call the Central Hastings OPP.

Some particulars were missing from the release. Nothing conveyed the fact that the attacks had been sexual in nature, and that after being blindfolded and tied to chairs, both women had had their clothes cut off before nude photo sessions began. Nor that the home invasions had lasted hours, and that they had occurred within a few hundred yards of each other, on adjoining roads on the rural outskirts of town.

A half hour’s drive north of Belleville, Tweed lies roughly midway between Toronto and Ottawa. Once a bustling way station on the Toronto–Montreal rail line, these days Tweed is a laid-back community of about 1,600, with three times that number in the greater area. Yet it is also a fairly worldly place, home to many retirees, and most households have access to the usual modern telecommunications devices. So word of the twin assaults spread quickly.

Already, out-of-town undercover officers had been spotted—faces not familiar in Tweed—in unmarked cars and in at least one instance peering out the windows of someone’s borrowed house. In undercover surveillance, a good rule of thumb is that the smaller the venue, the harder it is to remain unseen. And it hadn’t
taken long for some of Coté’s more astute customers to notice that something unusual was afoot in the Cosy Cove Lane area, a few minutes’ drive from Victoria Street, the main thoroughfare.

So on this Saturday morning, the barbershop conversation consisted of little else but the mystery intruder and what he might do next. “Suddenly there’s people coming into the shop and talking about all this,” Coté recalls. And as he clipped and snipped, Coté was not the only person in the shop paying close attention to the discussion. So too was the tall man with the brush cut waiting to get a quick trim.

The chatter was laced with rebukes for the police. Why hadn’t they put out the full story? And why hadn’t they issued an alert after the first home invasion, on September 17? Why did they wait for the guy to strike again?

It was an issue that would become a sore point in Tweed, although there was a certain logic to the information gaps. Police investigating serious crimes routinely withhold details that can only be known by the perpetrator, such as the caliber of a gun or the quantity of cash stolen in a robbery. In this instance, moreover, investigators were navigating a fine line between warning the public and trying not to trigger panic—and an instant media blizzard—which is what might well have happened if all the bizarre details had become known. As well, an undercover operation was supposed to be under way. What’s more, there had initially been a credibility issue with one of the two women who’d been attacked.

But that’s not how many people in Tweed saw things, at least not at the time, as the talk buzzed in Coté’s barbershop that morning. And as it did, most of his customers very likely had little idea who the tall, well-dressed man might be as he sat there quietly listening. But Coté knew, because he was one of his regulars; he’d been cutting his hair for several months. He was Colonel Russell Williams, forty-six, wing commander of the sprawling
8 Wing/CFB Trenton air base, a 45-minute drive southwest of Tweed, and for several years a resident of the short, winding road named Cosy Cove Lane.

Rich in history and folklore, perched on the edge of Stoco Lake, Tweed feels different from many small Ontario towns, perhaps a bit more sophisticated. A dwindling handful of dairy and cattle farmers still make a living in the hills outside town, and nineteenth-century brick buildings line Victoria Street. Along with its numerous retirees are many others who have exchanged big-city stresses for a smaller paycheck and a more low-key lifestyle. Tweed is the former home of Patrick LeSage, the retired judge who presided over the sensational Paul Bernardo murder trial in 1995. Provincial Liberal cabinet minister Leona Dombrowsky is a lifelong Tweedite too. It’s a place where plenty of people still go to church, patriotism and small-c conservatism run deep, and some of the newer arrivals in town will tell you it can take years before you are accepted by the old guard. Yet Park Place Motel owner and Indian expatriate Neil Patel says that during his four-plus years in mostly white Tweed he has yet to encounter a racial slur. Nor has he once had to call police to deal with unruly guests at his well-run hostelry, tucked on the shoreline beach of Stoco Lake at the entrance to town.

Now, almost overnight, the comforting sense of security had evaporated. No one had the least idea of the identity of the Tweed Creeper, as he became known. But it didn’t look as if he lived very far away. Tweed residents began locking their doors and many started keeping a loaded gun at hand.

“My mom didn’t really want me walking anywhere, and when I walked to the bus stop in the morning, it was dark in the morning back then, so I was always looking over my shoulder, and
I was really scared at night,” says Ruth, a Tweed teenager who would learn months later, to her great horror, that her home had been broken into and robbed of underwear by the same intruder who had attacked the two women. “It was hard to sleep. I was thinking that someone was going to come in my house. I always woke up in the middle of the night, at like two in the morning, because that’s when all this stuff happens.”

Amid the speculation and rumor, the police were working with full reports of the two bizarre attacks, which had occurred on adjacent roads connected by a wooded footpath. The first victim, known as Jane Doe, was a young mother in her early twenties who had been asleep in her recently rented lakeside cottage with her weeks-old baby; her spouse, a truck driver, was away, working up north for Ontario Hydro. In an account that police initially seemed to doubt because it sounded so improbable, she told them the intruder came inside, probably through an unlocked door, and woke her. He then struck her—hard—before blindfolding her, tying her to a chair and taking out his camera for a lengthy nude photo session. When he was finished, he fled into the night. There was no sexual penetration or sexual assault in any usual sense. She never saw the attacker’s face. Her baby was left unharmed, and did not waken.

A report form was filled out, but there was little follow-up at first. The investigating Madoc OPP officers wondered briefly whether the attack—if it had even taken place—might have been the work of the woman’s spouse, but they swiftly discounted that possibility. And the cops’ problem was not merely that their rural and small-town experience had left them unprepared for a strange case like this, which seemed to belong in the pages of a big-city tabloid. It was also that the intruder, whoever he might be, had left behind nothing that could be traced—no items of clothing, no fingerprints and no samples of DNA.
Moreover, fairly or not, the young woman had a reputation for being erratic, and perhaps in this case she was possessed of an overactive imagination. Among the few Tweed residents who heard of the incident, there was the quiet suggestion that she might be suffering from postpartum depression.

Then, thirteen days later, the second attack took place.

A former accountant and telemarketer, and mother of three, 46-year-old Laurie Massicotte lived alone in her lakeside cottage on nearby Cosy Cove Lane. She recounted in an interview what happened.

As she often did, she had fallen asleep under a blanket on her living room couch, watching late night television. And the TV was still on when she woke, finding herself under assault from a man she could not see. The blanket was over her head and he was repeatedly punching her in the head and face. For many long minutes he kept his hands tightly on her throat—she feared she was going to be throttled—and as he did so, he warned her not to resist or to try to look at him.

The intruder had entered her home through an unlocked window at the back of the house, out of sight from the road. He told her that a robbery was under way, that he had accomplices who were in the house and that his job was to control her. With Massicotte’s head still under the blanket, the man reached underneath and blindfolded her with a strip of pillowcase material he had sliced up. A second strip was used to bind her hands behind her back.

What followed was more than three hours of terror. “After he got my blindfold on me, he stood up, obviously, and he barked at me, ‘Are you looking at me?’ And I said, ‘Oh no, God no.’” It was the wise thing to say. “You don’t want to see me,” was his reply. The robbery story was a ruse, and though she didn’t realize it until later, there were no accomplices. Instead, the invader made
her sit on the couch and, with the blindfold still on, he tied her up with a kind of harness he had fashioned from another pillowcase. He then stripped her naked by cutting off her clothes, wielding the blade with great precision. “It didn’t leave a scratch on me,” she said. Then the photo session began. The assailant took dozens of photographs, directing Massicotte as he obtained shots from numerous angles. She could hear the camera clicking.

But before any photos were taken, something curious took place. She told her attacker that her head was throbbing from the blows and that she needed some aspirin. Still in her blindfold, she was led to the bathroom and given two before being returned to the couch. “He was patting my head after he brought me back to the couch. As we were walking, he was rubbing my head softly, and he was apologizing, saying, ‘Sorry for that,’” she recounts. “He was sorry for punching me in the head.”

The intruder made many other conciliatory gestures, constantly reassuring Massicotte that if she cooperated he would not kill her. In a tone she is sure he deliberately kept low so as to disguise his voice, he called her “Laurie” many times, made small talk and said she seemed like “a nice person.” Only fleetingly did he touch her sexually, and when she protested he stopped.

Her worst moment came near the end, after he had ordered her, still naked and in her harness, to strike a particularly obscene pose. He said he was leaving to make sure “the others” had got away but that he would be back in ten minutes to collect his camera gear. She heard the sound of a zipper. “And I thought that’s where the gun was coming from, and he told me no, it was just his camera bag. I thought for sure he had a gun, I started fussing real bad. He told me, ‘No, Laurie, I don’t have a gun,’ and he let me feel the camera strap on my face, to let me know it was only a camera.”

He finally departed at around four-thirty. He had to leave by then, he told her a couple of times, and by coincidence or not,
a couple of doors down from Laurie Massicotte's house lived a man who left home for work each morning at 4:45. Half an hour later she managed to struggle free, calm down somewhat and call 911. Within ten minutes two uniformed officers from the Madoc OPP detachment were at her door, soon followed by plainclothes detectives, a big forensics truck, a canine unit and a phalanx of other police who fanned out and began scouring the woodland that surrounds Cosy Cove Lane.

One thing that particularly puzzled the police who investigated this incident—different police officers were handling the first one—was that her assailant had been so oddly considerate of her, even as he tormented her, as if he was doing something he somehow had to do but wished he didn’t.

A year later, Massicotte remained thoroughly traumatized by what she was put through. “I was terrorized to death. I’m still in shock. I’m lucky that I have my inside protectors and my inside strength,” she says. “I still live it, minute by minute, but I get through it. He let me live, but it went on for three hours.”

Massicotte’s distress that day did not end when the police showed up at her door. Her teenage twin daughters were not living with her, and even as she was being questioned by detectives, they were learning of their mother’s ordeal via a string of lightning-fast text messages being relayed around their Belleville high school, messages that depicted the assault as being even worse than it was. “My daughters found out through texting on the playground, in grade twelve. It trickled down and my daughter is trying to figure out where the heck this all came from. And by the time it got to my daughter, it was saying I had been raped and brutalized, tied up and raped. She was so angry and upset, and she didn’t know if any of it was true.”

Nor was anyone else in Tweed sure what to make of it all. Within days, news of the two home invasions was all over the village, and
the victims’ identities and addresses became widely known as well. And as the details seeped out, the fear level began to soar.

“With the second attack, things just blew up in town,” Coté the barber remembers. “Usually doors were unlocked and now they were all locked. In this small community I would say probably 70 percent of the people have guns, if not more, and I know a lot of guys taught their wives and girlfriends how to shoot because of this, and I know a lot of people who were keeping guns under their beds.”

Some Tweed residents, including reeve Jo-Anne Albert, had heard only a few sketchy details about the first attack. The home invasion targeting Massicotte, however, dispatched a shock wave. “That changed everything. That changed how the people in Tweed live, and we will never go back to how we were—at least I hope we don’t,” says Albert, an affable schoolteacher-turned-politician who has lived in Tweed for close to forty years and probably knows it as well as anyone. “It took away the innocence of a small town, I really believe that.”

Yet even as alarm bells began ringing, a parallel crime wave was under way in Tweed, and this one was largely unseen. Over the previous two years, dozens of peculiar house burglaries had been taking place, almost all in the same Cosy Cove Lane neighborhood where the two women were assaulted. These were not run-of-the-mill break-ins, which usually target cash and valuables that quickly get sold for a fraction of their value. Rather, they were the work of a single-minded sex fetishist whose sole quarry was women’s underwear of all types: panties, bras, girdles, thongs, swimsuits. In a couple of instances, bathrobes and shoes were taken too. Entry to the homes had been gained in a variety of ways, often involving no more than walking through an unlocked door. And where there was forced entry, the most common means of access was a picked lock rather than a smashed window.
or jimmied-open door. In almost every instance, no one was home at the time, indicating that the intruder had done considerable reconnaissance before breaking in.

But almost no one in Tweed knew anything about this. In all, there were forty-five such burglaries in the area over a two-year period, many of them repeat trips to earlier targets (one residence was hit nine times). But almost all went unnoticed, or else they were not reported, possibly in some cases out of embarrassment. Police had been apprised of just one, and there was no mention of stolen underwear. Of course, no one in Tweed could have imagined that a similar wave of break-ins was simultaneously taking place in the Ottawa suburb of Orleans, 125 miles away.

To say that Russ Williams kept a low profile in Tweed, his adopted home for several years, would be an understatement. To call him near invisible would be more accurate, and this was in keeping with virtually every other facet of his nonmilitary life. He was occasionally seen at a convenience store or gas station, but for most of Tweed, Williams simply didn’t exist. He was never spotted in the liquor store or at taverns. He didn’t buy groceries in the big IGA Food Market. He never stopped off to grab a quick sandwich or coffee in the Gateway restaurant or the By the Way Internet café, two hubs of local activity on Victoria Street.

Perhaps most striking of all, he was unknown at the Tim Hortons outlet at the Sulphide Road cutoff on the outskirts of town, which led up to his nearby home on Cosy Cove Lane. Williams was not much of a coffee drinker, usually preferring tea. Nonetheless, his avoidance of Timmy’s seems odd, to say the least. Ubiquitous across the nation, the famed Canadian coffee-and-doughnut chain holds a semi-iconic status in the military; it even has a presence at the Canadian Forces base in
Kandahar, Afghanistan, which Williams had several times visited. As well, the Tim Hortons coffee shop at Sulphide Road served as a meet-and-greet point in Tweed for local residents and busloads of Canadian troops heading to Afghanistan from the big army base in Petawawa, north of Ottawa—the site of their last cup of home-brewed coffee before going off to war. The ritual got started in 2008, the year before Williams assumed command of 8 Wing. Students from St. Carthagh Catholic School gathered to salute the soldiers at Timmy’s, where each was handed a gift card. Then the troops made a second stop at the Legion Hall on the high street, where they were hailed by students from the S.H. Connor and Tweed-Hungerford senior schools.

Given the role the coffee shop played in the community and its links with the military, it might have been expected that the 8 Wing base commander living just up the road would be a regular visitor. But as far as is known, he never stopped by there. “When this all came down, it was a real shocker, because we had no idea he lived up on Cosy Cove,” says a longtime employee. “No idea at all. We’d never heard of the guy until this. When we did, we freaked.”

So if Williams was anxious to avoid the people of Tweed, why would he get his hair cut in the relatively exposed environment of Reg Coté’s small barbershop? There seem to have been two compelling reasons, one being intelligence gathering.

“He would come in here, and he’s far from being a stupid man, so he would get information here,” Coté said later. “It’s easy to get information in a barbershop—ask a question, listen to what everybody has to say. He would always be listening more than talking. So after the second girl [was attacked], of course he’s in here, sitting here waiting for a haircut, hearing all the talk, so he knew right away there was undercover cops.”
Coté recalls Williams as a taciturn customer, always courteous. “I talked to the guy a lot. He didn’t say much at first, but eventually he started talking more. The first time he came in here I figured he’d never come back—he didn’t say much, wouldn’t talk to me. But he always listened. What you hear in a barber’s shop is not always true, but the way I figure it, he thought he was never going to get caught. And so maybe he started doing things more out in the open than before.”

Williams never made any mention of the two home invasions, as far as Coté can recall. “He was way too smart for that.”

In one otherwise casual barbershop conversation that would take on some significance later, Williams did make inquiries about one of his next-door neighbors on Cosy Cove Lane, Larry Jones. “I remember Russell asking me if I knew Larry Jones, and the way he asked me was as if he didn’t know, although by then he’d been coming in here for a long time,” Coté says. “He asked me what’s he like and I said, ‘Well, yeah,’ and we were talking about it. I’ve heard so many things about Larry since I’ve been in Tweed . . .” So, too, had many other people in the village, and not all the gossip about Jones was friendly.

All the talk about police surveillance that October Saturday morning may have given Williams a scare, because three weeks would elapse before there was another of the lingerie raids he had been stealthily committing in Tweed for two years—a relatively long gap in the pattern. But if he had been rattled, his caution didn’t last. His next target, on October 24, was a house on Sulphide Road, just down the road from his Cosy Cove Lane cottage, close to the Tim Hortons. That was to be the last break-in in Williams’s immediate neighborhood; two more Tweed homes would be burgled in the first week of November, but both were off his usual beaten path.

And there was a second explanation for Williams’s regular visits
to Coté’s shop for a quick trim. The obvious alternative to having his hair cut in Tweed would have been to do what other 8 Wing personnel did: stop in at the Trenton air base’s own barbershop, on the south side of the property, a thirty-second walk from Williams’s office at command headquarters. But doing so would have exposed him to the one thing he was anxious to evade, in Tweed, in Trenton and everywhere else: conversation and scrutiny. No less than its civilian counterpart, a military barbershop and its relatively informal atmosphere is an excellent place to catch up with news and rumors, and perhaps ask a polite question or two of the customer in the chair, even if he is the base commander. The barbershop on the base has closed its doors since Williams was there, but when it was open there would usually be three or four people getting a haircut at the same time.

One of the defining characteristics of Williams’s extremely busy seven-month spell as the leader of 8 Wing was his concerted effort to spend as little of his free time as possible on the base, or in the company of other senior officers. He didn’t live there, he was rarely seen in the officers’ mess, and he became more and more reliant for communication on his BlackBerry, which he used to receive and dispatch a steady stream of messages. At the same time, a big part of a wing commander’s duties consists of being in the public eye, especially at busy 8 Wing, where the pace was often hectic. Williams attended plenty of official functions, to have his photo snapped and to speak a few words to a reporter from Contact, the base’s excellent weekly newspaper. But there were many others that he skipped, sending a junior officer to stand in for him instead.

Only after he was arrested did questions begin to surface as to why he had been so aloof, although some people did think it odd at the time. One of those people was retired army lieutenant-general Jack Vance—General Jack as he is known, a greatly
respected figure in Tweed, and a former vice chief of staff of the Canadian Armed Forces. Now seventy-seven, Vance remains sharp of mind, and he knows a thing or two about watching for bad apples within the military: before he became vice chief, he oversaw personnel operations for the entire armed forces for five years. No screening system could have detected Williams’s latent criminal instincts, he believes—not within the armed forces and not in any of the other major public-oriented professions, such as the judiciary, the medical world or the Church. Yet Vance has come to believe that Williams’s day-to-day behavior could have drawn more scrutiny that it did.

“The thing I notice about him is this: Base commander basically means being there all the time. Why on earth would he not live there? There was a house for him. He would finish a very good day’s work in Trenton and jump in his car, or go to this particular bar in Belleville, instead of going to the officers’ mess. It was as if he was shunning his own officers, because he wanted to get away from them. More to the point, psychologically he wasn’t there—he wasn’t committed. And it was kind of a shame his wife wasn’t there too, because there’s a really important job for the wife of a base commander . . . I would have thought that somebody of a more senior rank might have noticed all that.”

In Tweed, by contrast, there was very little for anyone to notice. Williams lived a highly compartmentalized existence, and off-duty in the civilian world he barely registered as a member of the community, a consistent pattern during his entire 23-year career with the military. He had very few close friends, he belonged to no social clubs or volunteer organizations, he never attended church as far as is known, and he had no children. He was a computer whiz, easily able to keep pace with the advances of the information age, but his expertise was largely confined to his professional life—and to his macabre, sex-drenched secret
life. No blogs or chat rooms or social media websites show any sign of him.

In Tweed, moreover, which has long had close ties to the Trenton base, something else cloaked him. Among the handful of Tweedites who were aware of Williams, such as next-door neighbors who would wave or occasionally exchange greetings, his prestigious position as commander of the 8 Wing base lent him a natural aura of mysterious authority—perfect cover for his clandestine night life. This, after all, was someone who had been entrusted with top-secret information, had flown prime ministers and royalty around the world, and dealt regularly with people at the top levels of government. A couple who lived next door to Williams and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Harriman, on Cosy Cove Lane, Monique and Ron Murdoch, knew them a little better than most, occasionally socializing with them and playing cards, and at least once Ron Murdoch went out ice fishing on Stoco Lake with Williams.

But the Murdochs were very much in the minority. The few people in Tweed who did brush shoulders with Williams encountered a courteous, distant figure, invariably calm and polite. He and Harriman, an executive director of the Ottawa-based Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, had purchased the big cottage at 62 Cosy Cove Lane in August 2004, two months after he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and took the helm of the Trenton 8 Wing air base’s 437 (“Husky”) Transport Squadron—the same base he would later command in its entirety after reaching full colonel five years later. They paid $178,000 for the blue-gray frame bungalow on the edge of Stoco Lake, the longtime residence of an elderly couple who could no longer take care of it. It was a second home for Williams and Harriman, their main residence being a handsome house in the eastern Ottawa suburb of Orleans that they had bought brand new.
After Williams was transferred away from 437 Squadron, the cottage on Cosy Cove Lane remained as a weekend getaway spot. Then, with his promotion in July 2009 to full colonel and commander of the 8 Wing base, he was back at work in Trenton and back living in Tweed, an easy 45-minute commute down Highway 37 and then along the busy 401.

The cottage’s commanding view of Stoco Lake was impressive, the building itself less so. A glimpse inside after it had been searched and ripped apart by police following Williams’s arrest showed thin gray paneling on the walls, cheap ceiling tiles and Formica countertops. Furnishings included a battered beige carpet, an ancient wooden crate-turned-table that had once contained dummy bombs, a green-and-white striped couch, an old piano, a heavy ceiling fan and various floor lamps. Down below was an unfinished basement, and in the adjoining garage was the man of the house’s favorite recreational toy: a sixteen-foot Lowe bow rider with a big Evinrude outboard to power it on his many fishing trips. On the sloping back lawn, facing the lake and the boat dock, was a large ornamental wishing well.

Harriman’s name adorned the mailbox along with that of Williams, but over the years she had visited Cosy Cove Lane only intermittently, and to the people of Tweed she was, if possible, an even more remote figure than her husband. Certainly there was no reason to believe either of them was connected even in the slightest to the twin break-ins that had taken place in September. Nor were there any other suspects in sight. And that’s where things stood a few weeks later, when amid the simmering fear and alarm the police investigation took a huge wrong turn.

October 29, 2009, was a Thursday, two days before Halloween, and it was around one-thirty in the afternoon when Larry
Jones’s universe began crashing in around him. He was returning to his Cosy Cove Lane home empty-handed from a partridge hunt, dressed in his customary camouflage gear, his small dog, Wes, by his side. What happened then, he says, “was like the end of the world.” At sixty-five, Jones was a lifelong Tweed resident, a vigorous, talkative figure, and not a universally popular one. Now he was about to become a pariah, shunned by almost everyone he knew.

Jones has lived on Cosy Cove Lane for much of his life. His house was one of twenty-one mostly winterized residences dotted along the road, nestled comfortably on the Stoco Lake shoreline, and it sat immediately next door to the cottage belonging to Williams and Harriman. Jones and his wife, Bonnie, had lived at their place for thirteen years. Retired from his job as a surveyor with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Jones was and is endlessly busy: onetime head of the Stoco Lake ratepayers association; a Legion member; trail warden for the snowmobile club, with authority to dispense fines to scofflaws; occasional manager of the sports arena; local handyman.

Some people in Tweed say unhesitatingly that they don’t much care for Jones. Many years earlier, the police had become involved in some minor domestic trouble at the Jones household, and he was once shot in the hand by an angry neighbor. Ask around Tweed about Jones and you will hear complaints that he has long had a reputation for being overbearing and abrasive.

Yet domestic stability is also a hallmark of Jones’s life. A grandfather, and married to the same woman for more than forty years, Jones has had plenty of disagreements with neighbors, but he has never been arrested and his violations of the law, he says, can be summed up by a single speeding ticket. Along with his wife, treasurer for the Municipality of Centre Hastings, his numerous friends include many police officers.
But there was nothing friendly about the small army of Ontario Provincial Police officers who were waiting for him as he pulled his Jeep up in his driveway that October afternoon. They didn’t tell him right away why they were there. In all, there were twenty or more cops standing around his house, including plainclothes police, two or three to a car. Jones’s first thought was that he had been broken into.

“Oh no, sir, it’s way worse than that,” was the reply. “But we can’t tell you right now.” Jones soon gleaned that they wanted to talk to him about the two home invasions that had occurred nearby a few weeks earlier, one just a few doors down from the Jones home.

This was not Jones’s first encounter with the police in connection with the attacks. A few hours after the September 30 assault, as tracker dogs and armed police scoured the woods, uniformed officers went door to door, canvassing neighbors. Had they heard or noticed anything suspicious overnight? Had any strangers been spotted in the neighborhood recently? And as they made their way along Cosy Cove Lane, Jones saw them knock at number 62, immediately next door to his house. It belonged to Williams, the air force officer who had bought it five years earlier and after some time away was now living there again while he ran the 8 Wing/CFB Trenton air base. Not that he was seen a great deal; he usually did the commute back and forth to Trenton when it was dark, while on weekends he would generally head back to Ottawa to be with Harriman.

Jones recalls that September 30 morning vividly. “They walked on to Russ Williams’s place there, knocked on the door and waited for a few minutes. Then I walked out and met them. One of them went to another neighbor and the young cop stayed here and talked to me and asked me if I’d heard anything that morning or seen anything.
“And he said, ‘Who lives next door there?’ and I said, ‘Russ Williams,’ and he said, ‘Yeah, I see that on the mailbox. Same name as the commander of CFB Trenton.’ And I said, ‘No, that is the Russ Williams of CFB Trenton, that’s him,’ and he said, ‘Oh, really, you’re not kidding. Well then, I guess we don’t have to look at him.’”

The police canvass moved on.

Now, almost a month later, here they were again. A glance at the search warrants the police had brought with them showed Jones just how ominous things were. The warrants stated that the police were seeking, among other things: computer digital storage devices; women’s underwear, including black and purple La Senza brassieres and thong underwear with the logo of a poodle; two baby blankets; pornographic photos and videos; a pair of white shoes; zip ties. The cops crowded into Jones’s house, examining and seizing a wide range of items: a laptop, a DVD reader, a CD reader, USB sticks, memory sticks. Also scooped up were his hunting knife, his work boots—around a hundred items in all.

Incredulous and stunned, Jones found himself in a squad car being read his rights on the way to the Madoc OPP detachment for interrogation. “We’ve been investigating you for three weeks, sir. We know all about you,” he recounts one of the cops telling him. “We got a really good tip, sir. That’s why we’re here.”

At the police station, Jones managed after some difficulty to call Bonnie at her workplace to tell her he’d been detained for questioning in the sex assaults. Her initial reaction was to tell him to quit fooling around. Then she realized it was all deadly serious. “It was unbelievable,” she said later.

The next few hours were the worst of Larry Jones’s life.

The OPP is a formidable organization, made up of close to six thousand uniformed officers, plus civilians and auxiliaries, serving a province of more than 12 million people. Part of its hub in
Orillia, in central Ontario, is its cerebral, highly specialized Behavioural Sciences and Analysis Services unit. And one of those experts was on hand now, in charge of interrogating Jones, to whom it was made plain he was squarely in the police sights.

How did he break into the two houses? he was asked. Did he have a key? (In both instances there had been no signs of forced entry.) What was going through his mind when he was doing this? Other, more personal questions were asked: As a child, had he been molested or beaten? What were his sexual interests? Police also listed for him the charges he would be facing if he was, indeed, the masked intruder. And one particularly loaded line of inquiry remains seared into his memory. Paraphrased, it went like this: “If you were the person who broke into Laurie Massicotte’s house on September 30, and tied her up and sexually assaulted her—if you were—would you be guilty?”

Three times Jones was asked that question, and three times he refused to answer it because of the way it was framed. Instead, he kept repeating his unequivocal denial. “I said, ‘No, I wasn’t there.’”

Other, peripheral issues surfaced in the interrogation. Many years earlier, he and Bonnie had had a rowdy altercation that had briefly drawn police attention. The couple ended up apologizing to each other, but now that incident was revived—as indicative of Jones’s unstable temperament, it was suggested.

During the search of Jones’s home, half a dozen ancient copies of Penthouse magazine had been unearthed, the most recent dating back to 1981. Pornography on the premises, eh? went the line of questioning. What’s the significance of that? Jones told them there was none.

In the course of the questioning, he also learned why the police had turned their attention on him. A few years back he’d stopped by Laurie Massicotte’s house to look at some floor-tile work she’d had done. After that she’d dropped by his house several times,
A village under siege

unasked and never staying for long. But the acquaintanceship would end up being unfortunate for Jones. A week or two after she was assaulted, Massicotte had called police to tell them that although she was blindfolded and never saw her attacker’s face, she now believed she recognized his voice, and that it was the voice of Jones.

Confronted with the police suspicions, Jones denied everything, his mind reeling as he insisted once again that a dreadful mistake had been made. But along with protesting his innocence, Jones also did the smart thing. Instead of clamming up in a panic and perhaps calling a lawyer (who would assuredly have instructed him to stop talking immediately), he willingly gave the cops everything they wanted, except a confession: a DNA sample, extracted from a saliva swab; fingerprints; palm prints. Later he took a polygraph test and passed it with flying colors. Why not? he reasoned. He had nothing to hide.

Nor did his physique match that of the assailant, described by Massicotte as apparently a young man. And so, early that evening, badly shaken after three hours of interrogation, Jones was allowed to go home. The police weren’t completely through with him, though. Even after it was made clear to him that he was probably in the clear, the OPP detective heading the Massicotte investigation, Constable Russ Alexander (later to take a key role in Williams’s arrest), continued to ask neighbors if they’d ever been bothered by him, Jones says. Had they ever seen him peeking through their windows? Notice anything else suspicious about Jones?

The day after Jones was picked up for questioning and then released, Massicotte recalls, “Russ Alexander phones me up and says, ‘We searched Larry Jones’s house. However, we didn’t find anything.’” She asked the detective about Jones’s status. “Let’s put it this way: he’s certainly a person of interest,” was Alexander’s
response, she says. Police also remained suspicious of Jones’s son, Greg, and asked him to take a polygraph, which on the advice of his father he declined to do.

But the damage had already been done. No crime, murder included, engenders the fear and social disgust that instantly attaches to a person suspected of a sex crime, wrongly or not. Some defense lawyers will tell you they would rather have a client convicted of bank robbery or drug dealing than acquitted of a sex offense, because of the lasting opprobrium.

So it was with Jones, and so it would remain until Williams was arrested. “My heart broke for Larry and his wife, because I know their grandchildren, they’re the same age as mine,” says Jo-Anne Albert, the reeve. “Kids are cruel. Parents are going to talk at home and not care that the kids are listening. They have four [grandchildren] up there in school, and for them it was a bad time.”

Jones himself says the experience was devastating. “Nobody came for two or three months. I was all by myself, except for my very close friends. They’ve all come back now, but I can tell you, this was very scary.”

Back home after his long inquisition at the Madoc OPP detachment, Jones now had to deal with the unpleasant reality that the source of his troubles was Massicotte, who, while not a close friend, was someone he’d known for years. Later—after Williams was arrested—she apologized profusely, Jones says. “She says to me, ‘Larry, I’m so sorry. I didn’t really want to phone the police and tell them it was you.’”

So why did Massicotte make that fateful call? She says today it was a combination of confusion and being urged by a friend to pick up the phone and give the police Jones’s name. The friend was one Jonas Kelly, a man related to Jones through marriage and who didn’t much like him. “I was told by Jonas Kelly what to do.
He told me to phone my detective and tell them that I recognized the voice,” she says. “When I phoned them to tell them I thought I recognized the person’s voice, I didn’t even want to say who it was, I was so scared. But then they came right out and asked me. The detective suggested to me it wasn’t Larry, it was his son Greg. And I said, ‘No, Larry.’ And he said, ‘Oh, Laurie, do you think you could come down to the station right away and give us a statement.’”

So she did. Police picked up Larry Jones the same day. There was no other evidence against him.

Jones now believes that Massicotte was unstable and therefore easily influenced by Jonas Kelly. As for Massicotte, she was not reluctant to speak out about her ordeal. After Williams was arrested, she gave several interviews to the media in which she excoriated the OPP for not having issued a warning after the first attack.

Most remarkable, however, was her willingness to forgive her attacker. “I’m not in the judgment department, but I’m in the forgiveness department, and I feel everybody has a God-given right to forgive,” she says. “He let me live. It was like he didn’t want to kill me. I always look at the good in people. I can’t speak for any of the others, I can only forgive him for what he did to me, and now he has to live the rest of his life [in a prison cell]. I despise him, but I can forgive him, because of the simple fact that he let me live, and that’s what I wanted most. And I have to be able to forgive to move on.”

News that Jones had been picked up and questioned at length about the twin attacks spread swiftly through Tweed. And it reached Williams too. Jones knows that, because even though it never occurred to him at the time that the colonel might be
the real predator, he was anxious to learn how widely word of his troubles with police had spread. So, through a mutual friend, he asked a civilian Trenton air base staffer who knew Williams well whether the colonel had by any chance mentioned that Jones—his next-door neighbor—was a prime suspect in the unsolved attacks. The subject had indeed come up, and Williams’s response was curiously casual, Jones recounts. He seemed to have heard something about Jones being detained and questioned but appeared entirely unperturbed. “Get out of town. Larry Jones wouldn’t do something like that,” was how Williams’s response was relayed back to Jones.

Jones chatted briefly to Williams several times after that, talking about nothing very much, and the matter was never raised. “He could have asked me what was going on, but he didn’t,” Jones says. “He carried on like nothing had happened.”

In hindsight, two other incidents—one before Jones was taken in for questioning and one after—took on a distinctly sinister bent in Jones’s mind.

Few visitors ever came to the Williams home, and Jones remembers the day in July 2009 when his neighbor took over as base commander. The commander had laid on a big party on his back lawn. Tables were set up, the grass was newly mowed, a portable toilet was rented. “I thought he was expecting a hundred people from the way it was all set up,” Jones says. But none of the neighbors on Cosy Cove Lane were invited, and not many others showed up either—perhaps fifteen in all.

Given the absence of cordiality, Jones was a little surprised by a conversation he had with Williams in September 2009, the same month the two women were attacked in their homes. Dressed in his camouflage gear, Jones was heading out to shoot a few grouse, and was just loading his shotgun into his truck when his next-door neighbor wandered over. Uncharacteristically
inquisitive, Williams wondered where Jones’s hunting camp was. Jones told him it was about six miles away, in the thick forest that lines each side of Cary Road, an isolated gravel road southeast of Tweed village. At first the colonel wasn’t sure where exactly that was. Jones gave further directions. Williams responded, “Ah, yes,” and there the conversation ended.

Initially Jones didn’t give the encounter much thought, even after a friend of his spotted Williams in the area a few weeks later, on foot, staring off into the distance and appearing lost. But when Williams was arrested, the exchange rushed back to haunt Jones. A few hours after Williams was charged, the body of his second murder victim, Jessica Lloyd, was located. It lay in the woods about a mile from Jones’s hunting camp, some forty feet in from Cary Road, half concealed among a pile of rocks.

Was Williams trying to frame Jones? A second mysterious incident suggests that perhaps he was. On the same night that Lloyd was kidnapped, January 28–29, 2010, Jones says someone broke into his garage, across Cosy Cove Lane from his house, where he keeps his boats and snowmobiles. Curiously, however, only three items appeared to be missing: a blue cigarette lighter, a pair of work gloves and an old coat that his dog, Wes, a West Highland terrier, was fond of sleeping upon. What happened to those items remains a mystery. Jones wonders if Williams could have taken the items with the idea of using them to frame him for a crime, but he concedes he may never know.

As for what he went through with the OPP, Jones takes a charitable view. “Half of those guys are friends of ours, we’ve played hockey together—my niece and my nephew are both OPP officers. So all this wasn’t their fault. They just weren’t trained for an investigation of this magnitude.”
Tweed settled down a bit in the next few weeks, but the tension lingered. Residents pitched in to knit a giant scarf in support of Canada’s athletes at the Vancouver Olympics, as the We Believe campaign sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce took hold. “Tweed was at its best, prouder and stronger, because people felt as though they were finally involved in something that brought them together,” remembers Lisa Ford, who with her husband operates the By the Way coffee shop on Victoria Street.

Then two things happened. Midway through November in the rural outskirts of Belleville about midway up Highway 37 as you head towards Tweed, there was a break-in at the house of an artist and music teacher whose husband was away. The intruder took some sex toys and underwear. And, terrifyingly, he left a taunting message on the woman’s home computer, suggesting he had been in the house at the same time she was on the previous evening, hiding in an upstairs linen closet.

Few people in Tweed heard about the burglary, and the Belleville police who investigated it seemed to know nothing about the two earlier sex attacks around Cosy Cove Lane.

About a week later, there came word of what sounded like a domestic-related homicide in Brighton, just west of Trenton along Highway 401, an hour’s drive from Tweed. A flight attendant attached to CFB Trenton had been found murdered in her home, where she lived alone. Provincial police from Northumberland County took charge of the case and urged local residents to stay calm. “There are no present issues with regard to public safety,” an OPP officer said on November 30, five days after Corporal Marie-France Comeau’s asphyxiated, bloodied body was discovered in her bedroom, wrapped in a duvet.

To the residents of Tweed, there was no special reason to make any connection between the events in their community and either of these incidents, particularly the Comeau homicide.
Brighton seemed very far away. And for the handful who did hear about what had occurred, the least likely person to be in any way involved would probably have been the pleasant, seldom-seen military figure who had arrived in Canada from England more than four decades earlier.