

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Tony Wilson

There's no way I'm one of the gang

A tongue-in-cheek look at life in British Columbia, uh, Columbia

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Some of my colleagues from around the world are concerned for my personal safety, given a recent story in *The Economist* called "British Columbia or Colombia? Organized crime brings fear to Vancouver's Streets."

I must admit, the endless gang violence is so endemic that many of us who live in the municipalities and suburbs of Metro Vancouver no longer leave the safety and comfort of our houses, even to shop.

Others have simply stopped going to work for fear of being targeted as "gang members" and gunned down in broad daylight. Most of us are terrified of the dodgier parts of the Lower Mainland, so we no longer venture out to places such as Vancouver, East Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminister, Surrey, Langley, Maple Ridge, Mission, Abbotsford, Coquitlam, Cloverdale, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, West Van, North Van, Lions Bay or Whistler. One can't be too safe.

Certainly, gang violence has changed my life. I no longer associate with anyone whose last name ends in a vowel. Or a consonant. This ensures that I'm not seen with any potential gang member and get "whacked" by accident. Or on purpose. Indeed, because many gang members are from "ethnic groups" whose names end in vowels or consonants, I try to limit all contact with Asians, South Asians, Africans and, of course, all Caucasians - especially the white ones.

To avoid being associated with motorcycle gangs such as the Hells Angels, I've sold my moped. Just to be safe, all my bicycles are now listed on Craigslist and my unicycle has been returned to the Shriners.

To prevent any misconception that I am part of what is called the "UN Gang," I no longer support the United Nations or organizations such as Unicef. It would be politically incorrect to admit my support for the UN was withdrawn as a result of gang intimidation in Vancouver.

So I tell people that the CERN atomic particle collider that Unicef is building for the UN in Switzerland is very dangerous and may bring about the End Of Days. Although they look a little puzzled, this seems to satisfy them.

As for eating out at restaurants, many gang members also eat at restaurants, and some of those restaurants are "ethnic." So to be safe, I am avoiding all Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian, Thai, French, Norwegian, Dutch, German, English, Korean, African, Caribbean, Mexican, Lithuanian, Scottish, Icelandic, Turkish, Armenian, Japanese, American, Peruvian, Brazilian, (former) Yugoslavian, (former) Soviet, Middle Eastern, Afghan, Russian, Indian, Pakistani and, of course, Canadian

restaurants in the Vancouver area. I am afraid to say the \$1 breakfasts at IKEA are also off the menu.

I steer clear of all motor vehicles that are perceived to be “gang” vehicles by the media. Thus, I do not drive Escalades, Porsches, BMWs, Mercedes-Benzes, Ferraris, Maseratis, Lamborghinis, Lexuses or, for that matter, Fords, Chevys, Pontiacs, Minis, Hondas, Toyotas, Volkswagens, Chryslers, Opels, Fiats, Peugeots or those one or two GM cars that may be left once the bankruptcy is over. Minivans and SUVs are also out, just in case.

I no longer eat bacon. This is to be sure that no one confuses me for one of the “Bacon Brothers,” who are regularly in the media for suspicion of gang activity (rather than for just being brothers).

Although it's just semantics, I do not contact my “brothers” any more. I want there to be no mistake. People might make the wrong connection.

I fully appreciate what the police are doing to make our city and its surrounding suburbs safe. The recent ticket I received for performing a “California stop” in my Miata (not a gang car) clearly indicates to me that we are in excellent hands.

Besides, by the time all the gang members have left Vancouver (one way or the other), The Economist will be writing about the Olympics.

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