



Frank Barazzuol and his son, Toby Barazzuol, then just a baby, were part of the frightened crowd in a photograph taken by Vancouver Sun photographer Glenn Baglo during the Gastown Riot on Aug. 7, 1970. They are pictured Thursday on the site where the photograph was taken. *JASON PAYNE*

FATHER RECALLS FEARING FOR HIS FAMILY IN GASTOWN RIOT

Famous photograph shows young man clutching infant son in melee

JOHN MACKIE

On Aug. 7, 1971, Frank Barazzuol went for a walk in Gastown with his wife Sheila and baby son, Toby.

Unbeknownst to the couple, protesters had organized a Saturday night "Grasstown Smoke-in and Street Jamboree" at Maple Tree Square against a police crackdown on marijuana. And the Barazzuol family walked straight into one of Vancouver's most infamous events, the Gastown Riot.

When the family reached Carrall and Water Streets, they found hundreds of people milling around the corner, many smoking pot. A fake 10-foot-long joint was passed around as a prop, there was a chant mocking Vancouver's anti-hippie mayor Tom Campbell, and a trio of young guys clambered up on a balcony at the Hotel Europe and mooned the crowd.

Initially everything was pretty lighthearted, because the protest had been organized by members of the Youth International Party (Yippie), which was more Groucho than Marxist.

"It was always supposed to be about fun," Peter Prontzos, who helped organize the event. "It was never about confronting the police or whatever."

But the police felt otherwise. When the protesters spilled onto Water Street and blocked traffic, 50 police arrived in riot gear, with four mounted police in front.

Vancouver police Inspector Bob Abercrombie took out a bullhorn and ordered the crowd to disperse. The crowd ignored him, and the police marched in, beating people with batons and riding crops.

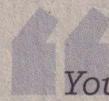
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moved," recalls Barazzuol, who is now 76.

"(The protesters) just held up the (giant) joint. They weren't doing anything like breaking windows or any violence, they just weren't listening to the order to move.

"So then (the cops) charged us."

Vancouver Sun photographer Glenn Baglo was at the scene, and captured the defining image of the Gastown Riot, two policemen on horseback charging into the crowd on the sidewalk at Alexander and Carrall.



You can see the look on my face, I've got such fear trying to protect him and my wife, the baby buggy was in the street.

In the middle of the panicking crowd is a terrified Frank Barazzuol, holding his infant son close.

"It was scary as hell with a little kid," said Barazzuol, an elementary school teacher at the time.

"You can see the look on my face, I've got such fear trying to protect him and my wife, the baby buggy was in the street. We ran up there (into a restaurant) and the cops came and the horses were sliding because the streets were brick. They were sliding and these guys were lashing these batons around."

The Barazzuols escaped the mayhem by running up Alexander, then circled back along Hastings to Victory Square on Cambie, where their car was parked. But the craziness found them again.

"These cops came down on their horses, chasing people," said Barazzuol.

"We were in this little sports car, and they looked like giants and scared us again! This was like a half-hour later."

Some protesters fought back, and 79 people wound up being arrested. But when the press reports came out Monday, it was the police who came under fire, not the protesters.

The Sun had several reporters at the melee who saw "pools of blood" at several locations and police on horseback riding down the sidewalk, "driving people into doorways and pinning them there while they lashed out at them with their sticks."

The paper also reported seeing "a young woman being dragged, screaming, by two officers who held her by the hair and one arm, about 100 yards over broken glass to a waiting (paddy) wagon."

Gastown merchant Larry Kilam was so incensed at the police he phoned aldermen Art Phillips and Ed Sweeney to come see what was happening. After he arrived, a police car almost drove into Phillips, who would become Vancouver's mayor in 1972.

"They sure don't pick their targets," said Phillips.

Sweeney was a member of the NPA, the conservative civic party. But he told The Sun the police were swinging their batons "like you'd use a stick to beat a dog." Another NPA alderman, Ernie

Broome, dubbed it a "police riot."

Provincial judge Thomas Dohn conducted an inquiry into the riot, and found police had "overreacted" because of a false report that windows had been broken.

Dohn said in some cases, police had used "unnecessary, unwarranted and excessive force."

In the end, a couple of police were demoted and one protester was sentenced to four months in jail for throwing a brick. The main organizers, Ken Lester and Eric Sommer, were never charged.

Peter Prontzos said the public backlash against the police actions in the Gastown Riot had lasting implications.

"The cops were beating up people in restaurants, and tourists, and the backlash in the report was so negative that I don't think (the police) ever got violent with us (Yippies) again," said Prontzos.

"They had attacked us once before, once at a peaceful march on Granville I'd gotten jumped by cops. But after Gastown, I don't think they ever got violent."

Pretty soon after that Mayor Campbell was gone, and that really helped.

"The photo of the horse standing on the baby carriage was pretty striking. Fortunately the baby was out of it, but jeez."

The baby carriage he's referring to belonged to Frank and Sheila Barazzuol, and is in a second Glenn Baglo photo of a policeman on horseback riding into a restaurant.

"We were only tourists in Gastown," said Barazzuol.

"We weren't there for this demonstration, but boy we sure got caught in it."

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WHEN COPS RIOT

A dad recalls being caught by accident as police attacked a crowd of peaceful pot smokers
50 years ago, a night that had long-term implications for policing Vancouver **PAGE 6**

Young family caught up in Gastown riot

Police criticized after violently charging peaceful crowd of protesters in summer of 1971

JOHN MACKIE

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Vancouver police charge into a crowd on the sidewalk on Alexander Street during the infamous Gastown Riot on Aug. 7, 1971. Elementary school teacher Frank Barazzuol is seen holding his infant son. GLENN BAGLO FILES

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