



Keep Your Mouth Shut

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On the night of July 13, 1977, a citywide power failure plunged New York’s ten million residents into darkness. Chaos ensued. There was looting in every borough, with hundreds of fires set and thousands of arrests — but just one murder. The victim was 17-year-old Brooklyn native Dominick Ciscone.

Over 40 years later, the Ciscone case is still unsolved, despite multiple witnesses, decades of police attention, and even some anonymous tips. Because that murder might not have been part of the Blackout’s chaos at all — it might have



been planned, not by someone who anticipated the power going out, but by someone who saw an opportunity to kill in the dark.

Dominick Ciscone, courtesy of Mildred Ciscone

Transcript

RACHEL BAILEY

July 13th, 1977. It was a hot, muggy night in New York City. The New York Mets were playing the Chicago Cubs at Shea Stadium, and the Mets were losing.

Crowd noises.

Again.

WNEW BASEBALL ANNOUNCER

Wind up, and the first pitch is a ball. It's too close...

CLARE AMARI

My dad Vincent Amari has been a Mets fan for decades. That night, he was listening to the game over the radio from his apartment on the Upper West Side. But then, something strange happened.

Music in — “Illa Villardo.”

VINCENT AMARI

All of a sudden I hear the announcers saying, well...

WNEW BASEBALL ANNOUNCER

And the lights have just gone off here in Shea Stadium!

Sounds of crowd yelling.

VINCENT

All the lights are going off in the stadium.

WNEW BASEBALL ANNOUNCER

We’ve had a power failure here at Shea Stadium. The lights are all off with the exception of the emergency lights.

VINCENT

A second or two after that, all the lights went off in my apartment. It was pitch dark all of a sudden. So, I knew immediately that this blackout was a citywide blackout.

RACHEL

The New York Blackout of 1977 looms large in our collective memory as an almost mythic event.

CBS EVENING NEWS ANCHOR

The New York City area and its 10 million people were blacked out last night by an electrical power failure...

RACHEL

For many, it encapsulates the slide New York City had taken in the 1970s — a slide into crime, and into urban chaos.

CBS EVENING NEWS ANCHOR

Mayor Abraham Beame declared a state of emergency.

RACHEL

Because when the lights went out, so did people's inhibitions.

CBS EVENING NEWS ANCHOR

Some looters roam the streets, yelling, "It's Christmas time! It's Christmas time!" And so it was – as thousands of them broke security fences and windows and helped themselves to all kinds of merchandise when the Blackout hit.

CLARE

It was mayhem in New York.

CBS EVENING NEWS ANCHOR

There was looting throughout the city in Times Square, Harlem, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx...

CLARE

But amidst all the looting, all the terror, all the destruction, there was just *one* murder. And that one murder? It might not have been part of the chaos at all.

It might have been planned, not by someone who anticipated the Blackout, but by someone who saw an opportunity to kill in the dark.

Music out — "Illa Villardo."

Music in — "Squeegees."

CLARE

I'm Clare Amari.

RACHEL

And I'm Rachel Bailey.

CLARE

And this is Shoe Leather, an investigative podcast that digs up stories from New York City's past to find out how yesterday's news affects us today. This season, we're focusing on the 1970s. We look beyond the bell bottoms and disco to explore what made this decade notorious in New York's history. A decade during which the Big Apple went by a far more sinister nickname — "Fear City."

RACHEL

Fear City was in full swing on the night of the infamous New York Blackout. That one murder victim was Dominick Ciscone, a 17-year-old from a neighborhood in Brooklyn called Carroll Gardens. Dominick loved Carroll Gardens, and Carroll Gardens loved him back — he was a kid with swagger, a kid with heart, but all that changed in seconds because of a bullet from the shadows.

CLARE

More than 40 years later, Dominick's murder is still unsolved, despite decades of police attention and even some anonymous tips. We wanted to know how that was possible. How could such a tight-knit neighborhood be the scene of the only murder of the Blackout? How could Dominick's family still be looking for answers decades later?

RACHEL

What we found was much bigger than Dominick — bigger than one murder, bigger even than a blackout. We found a culture of silence that kept Brooklyn in the dark for years. A culture so deadly serious that just opening your mouth could get you killed.

CLARE

This is Season 2, New York City Drop Dead. You're listening to "Keep Your Mouth Shut."

Music out — “Squeegees.”

CLARE

So on the night of the Blackout the city was in chaos, right?

RACHEL

Right.

CLARE

Absolute Lord of the Flies-style anarchy.

RACHEL

Yeah, let me throw some stats at you. 1600 stores — ransacked by looters. More than a thousand fires were set — parts of the city literally went up in flames. There was something like \$300 million worth of property damage. Almost 4,000 arrests.

CLARE

The power went out because of a series of lightning strikes at a nuclear power plant. It left *all five* boroughs in the dark. ... But here’s the thing — in Brooklyn, in the mostly Italian, working-class neighborhood of Carroll Gardens, things were going OK.

RACHEL

Yeah, some people were freaked out. But it was a close community, so for others, the atmosphere was more like the Fourth of July.

CHARLES SCHOLL

It was maybe a combination of Mardi Gras, New Year’s Eve and.. and a semi... I don’t want to say riot but, chaos. Some people were petrified of what was going on ... other people were taking it like, oh, it was party-time.

RACHEL

That's Charles Scholl. He's lived in Carroll Gardens his whole life. So did his parents, his parents' parents, et cetera. His family ran this popular bar called Par Three, which sat on the corner of Court and Nelson Streets. They had emergency lights, so Par Three turned out to be one of the only places in the neighborhood with power during the Blackout.

CLARE

And yet ... it was just around *that* corner that Dominick was shot and killed.

Music in – “Gra Hovedvei.”

RACHEL

Witnesses said he'd been standing just down the block... around a garbage pail fire with a small group of friends and his brother Andrew. They were just hanging out, singing, enjoying the novelty of the Blackout. That's when, all of a sudden, Dominick turns to Andrew and says, “I think I got shot.”

CLARE

Andrew doesn't believe him at first — thinks he must be jittery because of everything going on. But then, Dominick goes down. Andrew catches sight of the shooter and bolts after him. Dominick, meanwhile, is stumbling in the other direction, towards Par Three, where Scholl sees him.

RACHEL

Scholl was 19 years old at the time and helping out at his parents' bar.

SCHOLL

People might have thought he got hit with, like, a bottle rocket, you know? He had a small hole in his back.

GEORGE SUAREZ

I remember just hanging out ... you know, in the dark, some people have flashlights and candles and stuff and — and then we hear this screaming and, and it was Dominick.

CLARE

George Suarez was a local kid who hung out with Dominick's older brothers. He says that moment was just total confusion. Dominick was trying to tell his friends what was happening.

SUAREZ

And he says it's burning, you know, and — and nobody had a clue what the hell had happened.

CLARE

But then...

SCHOLL

And I think his last words were, "I'm shot!" And they realized he was shot.

CLARE

They all started to realize that Dominick *had* actually been shot.

SUAREZ

When that happened, everything was silent. You know, it was probably one of the scariest moment for me and everybody else that was there, you know, and you couldn't see everybody's faces. So that even made it more scarier.

RACHEL

No one knew *who* shot Dominick, but once people finally figured out what had happened, they sprang into action. Bystanders helped Dominick into a car and rushed him to the hospital. But it was too late. The bullet had ricocheted inside him, hit vital organs, and killed him.

Music out – "Gra Hovedvei."

Sounds of wind.

RACHEL

Back in March, Clare and I went to the scene of Dominick's murder. It was nothing like July 13, 1977... starting with the temperature.

Wind sounds.

CLARE

It is so cold, and it's windy. This is not a fun day to be down here.

RACHEL

We're, we're right here. Finally.

CLARE

So, this was a very different neighborhood than it was in the 1970s.

RACHEL

It's beautiful.

CLARE

It is.

RACHEL

It's trendy.

CLARE

It is. It's upscale.

CLARE

Interestingly, there's a church right there. It's called St. Mary's Star of the Sea. It's a Roman Catholic church. Al Capone was married here.

CLARE

We started to re-trace what happened that night based on eyewitness accounts of the shooting.

CLARE

Shooter comes here, shoots Dominick. Dominick goes staggering around in front of the bar where the light is and where people are. Andrew goes sprinting in the opposite direction after the shooter. Shooter shoots at him. Cuts him across the eye. Hops in a car and drives away.

RACHEL

Later, Andrew would describe the person as a well-dressed man, but that's about all he could make out.

CLARE

And you know, a number of people we've spoken to have made the good point that it was pitch dark.

RACHEL

Exactly!

CLARE

And so, whoever did this, was not a novice with a gun.

Music in – "The Records."

RACHEL

So Clare, you spent weeks trying to track down Dominick's family.

CLARE

I did.

RACHEL

How did that go?

CLARE

Well... it took a while.

CLARE

Hi, I'm looking for Michelle Gregorio?

VOICE

Oh no. This is the wrong number.

CLARE

Oh, okay. Thank you.

CLARE

Is this Mildred Gregorio?

VOICE

No. This is [inaudible].

VOICE

Uh, this is the wrong number.

CLARE

It was not easy, but eventually, our hard work paid off.

Music out – “The Records.”

RACHEL

Hiiii!!!

CLARE

Hi, Rachel!

RACHEL

Are you recording?

CLARE

I am recording.

RACHEL

Yaaaay, tell me what happened!

CLARE

Oh, I just made another call to Mildred to one of the numbers I had not had any luck with last week. And she answered.

RACHEL

No way!

CLARE

Yup! And she was willing to chat. She seemed really fine with it.

CLARE

So I finally got Dominick's older sister Mildred on the phone.

MILDRED CISCONI

Okay, we're here.

CLARE

Alright, fantastic. And now I'm recording, so, we're all go0d.

CLARE

We talked for a while, and she told me all about Dominick.

Music in – “Night Light.”

CLARE

He was born in 1960, the youngest of four, with two older brothers and his sister, Mildred. They were a close family, and those siblings *adored* their baby brother.

MILDRED

He was a sweetheart, to tell you the truth. He was tough, but he was sweet. He was helpful. You know, he had a big heart. And he was funny — he was very comical. I mean, I'm three years older than him and he used to have me in stitches.

CLARE

Mildred shared some photos of Dominick with us. He seems... sweet. A little silly.

RACHEL

In one picture — he's probably around ten — he's posing at the pool in swim trunks, gesturing at himself with his thumbs and puffing out his little boy chest. He's got dark, wavy hair and dark eyes. His Italian roots are pretty obvious.

CLARE

There's Dominick at the beach, buried in the sand... Dominick swinging a baseball bat... You can see his confidence growing as he ages — he grew up to be tall and broad-shouldered, a really handsome kid.

RACHEL

You can see him learning his best angles for photographs, leaning forward, his head tilted just so. But the mischievous little boy was still there. He's sticking his tongue out in one picture; in another, he's dressed up as — of all things — a pizza chef.

CLARE

Mildred says he was good-natured — called everyone “toots.” But that he was also fiercely loyal to his neighborhood and friends.

RACHEL

A protective type.

CLARE

Exactly. She says he'd go out of his way to look after people, and sometimes, that meant getting into fights.

Music out – “Night Light.”

MILDRED

If someone was bothering a girl, he jumped right in and made sure that they stopped. He wasn't afraid to step up with — some people would mind their business. He should have minded his business, but he didn't, and he would help, you know, “You leave her alone, blah blah blah,” whatever. You know, he stood up for himself and the people that he loved.

CLARE

Dominick actually wanted to be a boxer when he grew up. But ... he was complicated.

RACHEL

He dropped out of school and had a few run-ins with the law. He went to Rikers for a few months on a misdemeanor charge. We spoke to half a dozen people who knew Dominick. They said he wanted to be the tough guy ... but that didn't necessarily mean being bad.

MILDRED

I don't care what they said in other articles about Dominick being in jail and Dominick being a tough guy, or, you know — that kid was a good kid.

CLARE

And Dominick was a kid. He was only 17 when he was murdered. Mildred says he was a real momma's boy. Their parents divorced when Dominick was an infant, and even though he looked like his dad, he was closer to his mom.

MILDRED

We used to go with my dad every Sunday, and just because my mom was gonna be home alone, Dom wouldn't come.

CLARE

Dominick was so loved by his family and friends that a lot of people we spoke to wondered if the shooting might have been a case of mistaken identity. They thought maybe Dominick was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. And so it made us wonder ... did the police have any suspects? What did *they* know about what happened that night?

RACHEL

So, to try and answer that question, we wanted to get our hands on the police records from this case. Something we didn't think would be that hard, considering it happened in the 1970s.

CLARE

We thought police would *want* to talk about this investigation — they've spoken to journalists about it before. Maybe our podcast could bring some new attention to a very old, unsolved case.

Sound of phone ringing.

DETECTIVE HAWK

Legal, Detective Hawk.

CLARE

Hi! Um, I have a question about a FOIL request I made.

DETECTIVE

Yes. Go ahead.

CLARE

So I submitted this request about a week ago — a little less than a week ago. I haven't heard anything back, and I was wondering if you could help me understand how I could expedite the process of getting these records.

CLARE

But every time we tried getting our hands on those records, we hit a roadblock. We tried several more times, but no luck. We just couldn't get our hands on the records before publication.

RACHEL

The police told us that because the case is still considered active, disclosing the records would interfere with an ongoing criminal investigation. But we thought there might be another way in.

CLARE

The NYPD's cold case squad is investigating, so we hoped one of their detectives would be able to give us more information.

RACHEL

And I actually got one of them on the phone, but he wouldn't tell me anything until he got explicit approval from NYPD's press office. So I called them.

DCPI REP

Um, we're more than happy to help you if you were referred by somebody within the department.

RACHEL

Mm-hm.

DCPI

If you could send us a quick email —

RACHEL

OK.

DCPI

Have — send an email there with your specific request —

RACHEL

OK.

DCPI

The information you're looking for, you know, everything you just told me, um, and then we will respond accordingly.

RACHEL

And, um, how fast do you think I can anticipate a response?

DCPI

Uh, probably some time today.

RACHEL

Oh, great, OK.

DCPI

Yep.

RACHEL

That's easy. Thank you so much for your help.

DCPI

Thank you so much. You got it. Buh-bye.

RACHEL

Bye.

RACHEL

We are still waiting on that approval.

CLARE

It was dead end after frustrating dead end. But media attention is important in cases like these.

Music in – “An Unknown Visitor.”

CLARE

In 1997, after a Brooklyn newspaper published a “20-year anniversary” story on the murder, two anonymous tipsters told a detective that they might be able to identify Dominick’s killer. But they were afraid to come forward.

MILDRED

They were afraid, because they were like whispering, or, like, they didn't say too much, or whatever. They knew who killed Dominick but they couldn't say who... Some junk like that. And hung up the phone.

RACHEL

People being unwilling or unable to talk is something we heard over and over and over again while reporting this story.

CLARE

There's something we haven't told you yet about the weeks leading up to Dominick's murder — something that could help us understand why someone was able to shoot Dominick and get away with it.

MILDRED

My brother Dominick had a fight, a couple of weeks before, a week before, on Henry Street with some people. Well, in that neighborhood there were guys who were supposedly connected. Gangster stuff, I don't know. My brother had a fight with one of them.

CLARE

Mildred says Dominick was trying to sell drugs — uppers, illegal pills — on a block in the neighborhood. But... it wasn't his turf.

MILDRED

Supposedly he was over there selling it. They told him — they came up to him and told him you can't do that here, this is not your neighborhood, you know, get the hell back down to Court and Nelson, right? And my brother said, "I could do whatever I want, wherever I want. You're not going to tell me —" You know, keep your mouth shut!

CLARE

Yeah.

MILDRED

With certain people, you just — just in case! Whether it's rumor or not rumor, you keep your mouth shut. You don't mess with people who could or have the power to send someone else to hurt you. You know? So shortly after that, my brother got killed, alright?

CLARE

Yeah. And you think...

MILDRED

I think it was. I think it was absolutely, positively connected.

Music out – “An Unknown Visitor.”

RACHEL

Okay. Let's take a step back here. This was a huge moment in our reporting. It turns out that Mildred thinks her brother's murder is mob-related.

CLARE

At the very least, she thinks the people who did it were “connected.” And she wasn't the only one who thought so — after Dominick's murder, their mom was suspicious too.

MILDRED

My mom went crying to everybody. My mom went to connected people that she knew. Because she was born and raised down there on Columbia Street. She knew all the gangsters from her day, when she was a young girl, and the family just knew everybody — they all hung out on the same block.

RACHEL

So, according to Mildred, the neighborhood had ties to the Italian mob. And while Dominick's family wasn't directly involved, she says they couldn't avoid bumping into it. It was just a normal part of life for them. Mildred remembers going as a kid to visit her great-grandmother in Red Hook — another neighborhood in Brooklyn.

MILDRED

She had a club down on Columbia Street which was — like a front. When you walked in the front door, there's my grandmother sitting in the window, like an old Italian woman.

CLARE

She says that in the back of the club, there was this door.

MILDRED

And when you opened that door there was a bar — liquor, round table, big round table, where those people used to go play cards back there.

CLARE

And that's who Mildred thinks Dominick fought with before his death — the mob, or at least someone connected to them. She thinks they were angry that he was selling drugs on their turf, and so they killed him.

RACHEL

And so we wanted to find out — could she be right? Was Dominick's neighborhood really as "mobbed up" as Mildred said?

Music in – "Slider."

FRITZ UMBACH

In places like Carroll Gardens and Red Hook, absolutely — the mob — the mob is organizing everything that's going on. It's almost a company town.

CLARE

That's Fritz Umbach, a professor of criminology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He actually lives in Carroll Gardens. And he says the neighborhoods where Mildred and her family lived — Carroll Gardens and Red Hook — were the ideal locations for the mob to do its business.

UMBACH

Red Hook has this criminal element because of the long-standing corruption and criminal activity that occurs with the Port of New York.

CLARE

In other words, the mob was in Red Hook and Carroll Gardens because those neighborhoods are near the Port of New York. Lots of local Italian-Americans worked on the docks. And that made it easy for the mob to do its work, like smuggling in drugs from overseas.

RACHEL

That's an important point — the mob was smuggling in drugs from overseas. It's worth taking a second here to talk about this. Umbach and other experts we talked to pointed to *The Godfather* as the source of a myth that the mob *wasn't* involved in drug trafficking.

DON CORLEONE

This drug business is going to destroy us in the years to come. I mean, it's not like gambling, or liquor, even women.

RACHEL

In the movie, Corleone and the other dons say that selling drugs is against the mafia's moral code.

DON ZALUCHI

I don't want it near schools. I don't want it sold to children.

CLARE

That is the myth, according to Umach.

Music out – "Slider."

UMBACH

In reality, they're — you know, they're pushing drugs, heroin, in the '20s and '30s. And it's not just low-level people freelancing — it's all the higher ups.

CLARE

Umbach explained that the mob's involvement with drugs in New York City goes back decades, but it was a top-down sort of business.

UMBACH

They're controlling distribution on the ground, but increasingly they start to sort of franchise the distribution... What they're doing is they're selling — they're selling the right to sell the heroin.

RACHEL

Basically, the mob brought the drugs in, but then worked with low-level drug dealers to actually sell it.

CLARE

Penalties for selling drugs were steep in the 1970s, so they usually left that to other, small-time dealers. These are the guys that Mildred thinks Dominick fought with, guys who were, as she said, "connected" — not actual mafiosi, but guys who had ties to the mob through the drug business.

RACHEL

And Mildred thinks that even though Dominick was selling pills, not heroin, that these drug dealers might have wanted him out of the way. He was interfering with their business.

CLARE

But some experts we spoke to aren't totally convinced that Dominick's murder was mob-related. Instead, it might have been something simpler — a turf war just between drug dealers, having nothing to do with the mob. Here's Alex Hortis, an expert on the mob in New York and author of *The Mob in the City*.

ALEX HORTIS

New York had sort of like these invisible maps, invisible gridlines, where kind of the organized crime families kind of divided up or even lower level, not necessarily mafia, but like, you know, drug dealers even to this day. You know, they keep territory, so to speak. You know, you deal there and you deal there and you deal there. And if you cross that, there's problems.

CLARE

Mob-related or not, dealing drugs in Carroll Gardens wasn't exactly a safe line of work. We know this because, if Dominick's murder *was* related to drugs, it wasn't the only one.

RACHEL

A *New York Post* reporter writing about Dominick for the case's 40-year anniversary discovered that three more people wound up dead on the same corner where Dominick died — just a few years after his death. Among them were a known drug dealer and his girlfriend, who'd been shot and left in the trunk of a car with black hoods over their heads. They were found when someone noticed blood dripping onto the pavement.

CLARE

We may never know exactly what happened to Dominick. But with that said, every expert I spoke to, including Hortis, agreed that the facts of the case could point to a mafia hit. Here's Umbach again.

UMBACH

That seems entirely plausible, right. And it could be that they weren't allowing much drug trafficking or they simply wanted drug trafficking in their own hands.

CLARE

OK, so you do think that — so it very much could be that he had a run-in with the mob at some level?

UMBACH

That is consistent with everything that we know.

CLARE

Now, before we go any further, there's something you should know about me. Something you should know about why I got interested in Dominick's case. The truth is, I wanted to investigate what happened to Dominick Ciscione because his murder sounded familiar.

Music in – “Heather.”

I'm Sicilian-American. Remember my dad, Vincent, who was listening to the Mets game broadcast on the night of the blackout? He grew up in Sicily, a large island just southwest of the Italian peninsula and just north of the African coast. I've spent my whole life hearing stories about how wonderful it was — days spent among groves of citrus fruit, sipping almond milk and munching on Indian figs, hot, lazy afternoons in the shadow of ancient Greek ruins. But when I finally visited Sicily myself in the summer of 2015, I discovered a darker side of the island.

VITINA BARBERA

Brutti tempi erano. (“Those were bad times.”)

Sounds of conversation in Italian.

CLARE

I was curious about my family's history, so I was interviewing my grandmother's cousin, Vitina Barbera. She was talking about what she called bad times. The interview is in Italian, so I won't play very much, but there's one part I want you to hear. About 45 minutes into the conversation, Vitina said something that took me completely by surprise.

CLARE

Trovato morto? Ma come mai? (“Found dead? What do you mean?”)

In the early 1980s, just a few years after Dominick Ciscione was murdered in Carroll Gardens, my great-uncle discovered a body lying in his vineyard in the Sicilian countryside. The dead man's car was parked on the side of the road, burned to a husk. My family's certain it was a mafia killing.

VITINA

Perche' sapeva qualcosa e non ha voluto parlare. (“He knew something and they didn't want him to talk.”)

CLARE

Vitina told me the man was killed because he knew something, and they didn't want him to talk. In other words, they didn't trust him to keep his mouth shut.

I learned a lot during that conversation — I learned how the mafia had terrorized the town when Vitina was younger, how they were still terrorizing the town decades later. Assassinations every six months or so, gunshots at a public bar in the town square. I learned how the mafia extorted money from my own relatives by sliding anonymous threats under their front door.

VITINA

Che paura abbiamo preso. ("How frightened we were.")

CLARE

I learned how frightened they were, and that's when I began to understand how it happens — how a culture can develop where someone could be shot in a public place and their murder never solved — the sort of culture where you keep your mouth shut.

Music out – "Heather."

RACHEL

There were witnesses to Dominick's murder. We don't know exactly how many because we never got to see the police reports, but there were people out on the street that night. So, why hasn't this case been solved yet? And what are police doing about it now? Unfortunately, the detectives from the cold case and homicide units refused to speak with us. But at least there's *one* person from law enforcement willing to go on the record.

Sound of phone ringing.

SCHOLL

Hello?

RACHEL

Hi Chief Scholl, this is Rachel.

SCHOLL

Oh how are you, Rachel? Good.

RACHEL

Remember Charles Scholl, the 19-year-old from the bar where Dominick collapsed? He went on to become a cop. And not just *any* cop — he rose to become a Brooklyn police commander.

Music in – “True Shape.”

RACHEL

He’s retired now, and he’s not willing to talk about the current investigation because he doesn’t want to get in the police’s way. But he did agree to talk about the case broadly. For one thing, he told me that Dominick’s murder didn’t get much attention at the time.

SCHOLL

There was still so much going on that when they took him to the hospital, there was still pandemonium ... If it was just another summer night without the blackout, it would have been a total different scene.

RACHEL

Remember — the city was in a blackout.

SCHOLL

You had people screaming and yelling ... And like I said, I don’t think until they found out until when the smoke cleared that, you know, they found out the kid died — like what just happened? You know, I don’t think people really realized.

RACHEL

In other words, the blackout didn’t help. And if Dominick’s murder was related to the mob, police had an even bigger job on their hands.

HORTIS

I don't think that the police, really, the NYPD it's fair to say, really, had any kind of major effective enforcement ability against the mafia as a whole in the 1970's.

CLARE

That's Alex Hortis again, the expert on the mob in New York City. He says the city's law enforcement didn't really have a handle on how to deal with the mob at the time of Dominick's murder.

HORTIS

Mob-related homicides were kind of notorious for how difficult they were to solve for various reasons, for obvious reasons. People didn't want to talk. Even the best police officer would have a very hard time getting a witness to talk if they thought it was mob-related.

CLARE

We asked Hortis why people were so tight-lipped. He told us about a culture of silence rooted in fear — a culture I recognized from my own family's stories. Put simply, people were terrified of the mob.

HORTIS

They were ruthless. They were bloodthirsty, sometimes just outright psychotic. You know, extremely violent people, the mafia. I think the biggest common theme was the use of fear and coercion to frighten the neighborhood.

Music out – "True Shape."

RACHEL

And, whether Dominick's killing was related to the mob or not, that culture of silence has taken its toll on his family.

CLARE

Early on in our reporting, Scholl hinted that the Ciscones hadn't exactly been cooperative with the police investigation. But Mildred had a different story.

MILDRED

The detective now, years later, started to call my mother... And the detective said — went to my mother's house and told her, you know, someone called, they said we might be getting close to closing this case, blah blah blah, my mother would have to relive the whole thing — tell the whole family, "Oh my God, they're gonna get the guy who killed Dominick, blah blah blah," you know? And nothing came of it.

CLARE

In the end, revisiting the case over and over without closure was just too hard on Dominick's mother. So Mildred put her foot down with the detective.

MILDRED

I called him, and I told him, listen to me. Unless you're gonna call my mother and say we got the guy who killed Dominick, make this your last call to her. Don't call my mother, don't tell her you're getting close, don't tell her somebody's calling — she don't need to know none of that. When you solve the murder, then you can call my mother ... Like, just leave my mother alone. And he never called her again.

RACHEL

Tragedy has followed the Ciscone family. His brother JoJo died young in the 80's. And his brother Andrew — the one who chased down Dominick's killer — died in 2002. Their parents are also dead.

CLARE

Mildred is Dominick's only close family member left. She's never forgotten her brother, but after all these years, she doesn't expect that his case will ever be solved. But there's someone else who hasn't forgotten about Dominick — someone else whose life was changed by his murder.

Sounds of police salute, drumroll, bagpipes, applause.

NBC LOCAL NEWS REPORTER

After four decades, an NYPD chief who's as Brooklyn as they get enters 2021 with a new job title: retired! He grew up in Brooklyn, joined the NYPD in 1979, and spent the majority of his career working the streets of his own borough.

RACHEL

When Deputy Chief Charles Scholl retired in December of 2020, his advice to other cops was to remember why they became a cop in the first place. And *he* became a cop ... at least in part because of Dominick Ciscone.

Music in – “Late Night Reading.”

SCHOLL

I learned fast, if you're gonna be a good cop, you gotta learn where you're coming from and where you're going to.

TODD MAISEL

He was very upset about it and he was determined to become a cop after that — to go after and find the person that did it.

RACHEL

That's Todd Maisel, a retired reporter from Brooklyn who covered Scholl for decades.

MAISEL

He was always an optimist, so he would always look for ways to resolve things. He couldn't solve that case but he had influence on other cases because of it.

CLARE

Scholl became known as a huge force for good in Brooklyn over the course of his 41-year career.

MAISEL

His influence on the community was huge. People came to respect him in all types of situations. He was really a man of integrity and he understood how to talk to people. Even the bad guys kinda came around to him.

RACHEL

Scholl is still hoping that something or someone out there can help crack Dominick's case.

SCHOLL

Hopefully your podcast can bring some light to an old — an old story... They're all not solvable, but at least people know — police didn't forget.

Music out – “Late Night Reading.”

Music in – “Squeegees.”

RACHEL

Shoe Leather is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode was reported, written and produced by me, Rachel Bailey.

CLARE

And me, Clare Amari. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Rachel Quester and Peter Leonard are our co-professors. Special thanks to Columbia Journalism Librarian Kristina Williams, Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson, civil rights attorney Ron Kuby, Madeleine Baran and Samara Freemark from In the Dark, Emily Martinez and David Blum from Audible, and Professor Dale Maharidge. Additional sound mixing by Peter Leonard.

RACHEL

Shoe Leather's theme music – “Squeegees” — is by Ben Lewis, Doron Zounes and Camille Miller. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. To learn more about Shoe Leather and this episode go to our website shoeleather.org. To stay up to date on the latest Shoe Leather happenings, follow us on social media. We are on Facebook at facebook.com/ShoeLeatherCast and on Instagram and Twitter @ShoeLeatherCast.

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