

Introduction

Over the years, much has been written about the FBI. There are all sorts of books that tell the stories of great cases, great agents, and the Bureau's great history. From gun battles to organized crime, political corruption and, of course, terrorism, the FBI has been everywhere, involved in everything. All of these things have been written in one place or another and are readily available to the reader motivated to learn about them.

If that is what you're looking for, then you have purchased the wrong book. However, thank you anyway, as I greatly appreciate the royalty payment.

As so much has already been written, why am I adding another book to the large inventory of FBI stories that already exists? Because there is nothing within these previously published works that's very funny. While most law enforcement matters are deadly serious, there's another side to the job that every cop, agent, trooper, investigator, and detective knows is humorous. When we sat around after work in bars and at barbecues, it wasn't the serious work we reminisced about. The conversation always turned to hilarious moments of who did what and to whom. For whatever reason, no one has taken the time to put these lighter moments on paper, or for you millennials, into tiny electrons. Until now.

Here's an example of the kind of story you're in for in the pages ahead:

Another Step Toward Greatness

A student-written, directed, and produced contemporary Greek tragedy was showing at San Diego State University's Don Powell Theatre as part of the Theatre, Television and Film program. One of the lead actors was a large African-American guy. For his commanding performance, he'd dyed his hair blond (think Goldilocks). He was in his early 20s, a hopeful performing arts major at the college. All that stood between him and greatness was the warrant I held in my hands for his arrest.

It seemed my wannabe criminal-actor decided to rob a bank just days before his performance. He had no criminal record and clearly no criminal experience. Note to you readers who are contemplating a life of crime: If you happen to be a 275-pound, dark-skinned African-American male, don't dye your afro bright blond and then walk into a bank with surveillance cameras and witnesses unless you're wearing a disguise. Think hat, mask, anything. However, if you opt to wear a stocking mask, make sure it's not the see-through kind, like another one of my bank robbers wore in a prior case. The sheer nylon—which made his skin appear silky smooth—did nothing to hide his facial features.

Anything that hides your appearance will do. Alas, my bank-robbing thespian hadn't thought ahead, and identifying him was incredibly easy. After all, how many 275-pound Black men with dyed blond hair have you seen in your life? Unless you live in the San Francisco Bay area, these folks tend to not be so common.

So, I tracked my soon-to-be arrestee to the campus theater, where he was performing mid-stage. I made myself comfortable in the audience, as did my FBI partner who had accompanied me on this particular day.

We hadn't been there very long, but I was already bored out of my mind waiting for the dreadful play to end (a "tragedy" in more ways than one). Patron of the arts or not, I couldn't bear it any longer.

I rose from my seat in the middle of the show, and the other agent followed. We politely excused ourselves as we maneuvered around the legs of the seated audience members in our row. Briskly, we worked our way to the back of the theater through the many-mirrored makeup room and around the wings on one side of the stage.

There would be no waiting for a good entrance in this bad play. That much was certain. I walked right onto the stage, confronted the toga-dressed subject and interrupted his soliloquy.

"FBI," I said, identifying myself with the simple letters, then handcuffed him right in the middle of his performance. Without a word of surprise or denial (clearly, he knew why I was there), he oddly said only one thing to me: "Every step I take is another step toward greatness."

As I mentioned, this was supposed to be a Greek tragedy-type play, but my appearance onstage in a requisite FBI Brooks Brothers dark blue suit seemed to have confused the audience. As I exited the stage, with the actor's/subject's hands cuffed behind his back, the audience started to applaud—slowly at first, eventually building to a great ovation. Apparently, most of them believed I was part of the production. On the other hand, maybe they realized I wasn't part of the play, but wanted to thank me for bringing the show to an end.

Once backstage, I was immediately confronted by the student director, who was furious. He claimed I'd ruined his show. I contended, conversely, that having been in the audience myself, the arrest been the best part of his production yet. The audience obviously concurred.

Filled with pride at my newly discovered and yet-to-be-pursued backup career, I promptly returned to the stage—with prisoner in tow. Before the heavily applauding crowd, I took a brief bow, then exited stage left.

"Every step I take is another step toward greatness," said my subject.

I directed him outside to my Bucar (government speak for "Bureau-issued vehicle"), and my arrestee once again said, "Every step I take is another step toward greatness."

He was such a positive guy, I almost felt bad for arresting him, but police work is not like fishing; there is no catch and release. In the back of my car he would go, then on his way to the federal detention center. My partner got in the driver's seat, and I sat in the backseat behind him with my prisoner beside me on the passenger side.

Even then, the subject was still very positive and upbeat.

As we drove away from the theater, the man with the brilliant golden hair that flowed over his dark skin repeated the words that now live forever in my memory:

“Every step I take is another step toward greatness.” And then—as if to confound me more—he added, “This will be good.”

As the prospect of going to jail began to sink in, he chose to put a positive spin on his predicament. Large as he was, he said, “I’m going to use my time in prison to get in shape and lose the last fifty pounds.”

Not wanting to diminish his positive spirit, I nevertheless interjected to curtail his expectations. “You know, they say the last fifty pounds are always the toughest.”

However, sure enough, when his five-year prison stay ended, out he came—in great shape and at least fifty pounds lighter.

After he was released from prison, I don’t believe he ever got in trouble again with the law. I think the bank robbery was a whim for him. Something along the lines of, “I need money. Maybe I’ll rob a bank.” So, he did.

I just happened to be there to co-star in his last theatrical appearance before he took his role to off-off-off-Broadway. On the other hand, it gave him the opportunity to perform for five straight years before an otherwise captive audience. That’s a pretty good run for even the best of actors.

Should they have the occasion to meet an FBI agent, most people are in a bit of awe. Television and movies have perpetuated the myth of what it means to be a special agent and the powers of the Bureau. In many cases, this myth is true. Agents are unique people who have the common denominator of being lifetime overachievers, earning good grades in school, being physically fit, and excelling in their work and in other areas of their lives.

But that does not mean they are perfect human beings. As human beings, we all have certain quirks that make us distinctive. Agents, meanwhile, are exposed to a career full of criminals who have their own unusual quirks, personalities, and circumstances to which most people outside law enforcement will never be exposed or get to see. The result of various combinations of elements often creates situations that can be hilarious.

Perhaps intentionally (so as not to disturb the well-established FBI myth), little has been written about this side of the FBI. Trust me, despite what you are about to read, the myth will be just fine. After reading this book, you might even find you like the FBI more.

The work of law enforcement can be gritty—in what you see and what you come into contact with. It's the rare criminal who is properly bathed. A maid has often failed to stop by the home, apparently for years, in advance of a search warrant. In the world of law enforcement, you're exposed to grime in what you see and what you touch. It's the only profession I know where you wash your hands *before* you use the bathroom.

Ask anyone in law enforcement, “What do you like best about your job?” and they won't tell you it was solving crimes, catching criminals, or putting bad guys in jail. They'll tell you it was the people they worked with—which is code for funny stories about what someone did or how they screwed up. Conversely, ask someone in law enforcement, “What didn't you like about your career?” You'll always hear the same answer: “The bureaucracy.” As I've said repeatedly since my retirement, “I miss the clowns. I don't miss the circus.”

Trust Me

Though some creative license has been taken in how I've decided to share the other stories you're about read, along with a few stories from my police days and my personal life, everything in this book is 100 percent true—to the best of my memory and written records. Nothing has been included from my time practicing law, because honestly, I found no humor in the legal profession. Lawyers rarely smile unless they happen upon a fatal accident.

Also, rest assured that this memoir has been reviewed by the FBI, so there's nothing in here that will compromise national security, though I make no guarantees regarding personal dignity.

Just because nothing in this book is considered *classified* does not mean there are some things that shouldn't be kept private. For example, in certain instances I've changed the names of individuals to protect their identity, or more accurately, their reputation. The last thing I'd ever want to do is reveal someone's true identity—something that might cause them shame and embarrassment. For example, the agent in my book I've named Saul is, in reality, FBI Special Agent Paul Schaff. He might be uncomfortable with some of the things I wrote about him, so for this reason, Paul shall remain anonymous. Forget I even mentioned him.

My goal in writing this book is to educate, inform, and possibly inspire, but most definitely to entertain. Hopefully, those things made it through to the published work you're now reading.

Prior to joining the FBI, I started out as a San Diego police officer. Along the way, I attended law school, then practiced law for a bit before I applied to the Bureau. Because at the time the FBI mostly hired accountants and lawyers, the sole reason I went to law school was to become qualified to apply to the FBI. Nevertheless, changing careers from police officer to lawyer to FBI agent gave me the distinction of having gone from one hated profession to another.

Post-FBI retirement, I'm now a professional speaker and consultant. I still perform work for the FBI occasionally. For a time, they were one of my clients. As soon as I retired, they called and asked me to provide consulting services in some of my areas of expertise on a few special matters. I tried to get out, but they pulled me back in. In this way, trying to leave the FBI is a lot like trying to leave the Mafia. Incidentally, I mean no disrespect to the Mafia.

I began my FBI career in April 1995. After completing the academy's training, I was transferred to my first office, the FBI's Detroit Division. Along with nine other agents, I was assigned to work out of the Flint resident agency (RA), a small satellite office of the Detroit Division about seventy miles north. Some of you may recall the city of Flint from the Michael Moore movie, *Roger and Me*. Let me assure you that Flint was not nearly as glamorous as Hollywood made it out to be.

I was fairly proficient in Spanish, as I'd come to the FBI having worked as a police officer on the streets of San Diego. However, in the wisdom of the federal government, my first assignment as an FBI agent was to be placed as close as possible to the Canadian border.

I spent three years in Flint, although it felt more like twenty-one years—each year there being equivalent to a dog year. Standing on the banks of the Detroit River, Canada was so close I literally could have shot my gun across the river separating our two countries and hit something. Of course, I would have never done such a thing. Likewise, the Canadians were exceptionally nice people who would never consider shooting back. This alone made the Canadians very different from Detroit residents, who used to fire their guns at all times of the day and night for no apparent reason. For a time, Detroiters also had a passion for setting their buildings on fire. I recall one night before Halloween, colloquially referred to as *Devil's Night*, when I was asked to join other agents in standing guard over the federal building to ensure it was still there in the morning.

While I concerned myself with not being injured (or worse) by the fine citizenry of the greater Detroit metropolis, I also found time for serious work, including the Oklahoma City bombing investigation and a wide variety of other cases, as well as serving on the FBI Detroit SWAT team.

After my transfer from Detroit to the FBI's San Diego Division, I worked violent crimes matters, bank robberies, and kidnappings. I was also among the agents who worked on the September 11 terrorism investigation. Along the way, I must have done a few good things, because the Bureau gave me the FBI Director's Distinguished Service Award for some of my investigative work.

Of course, receiving this award wasn't all because of me; I was fortunate to be assigned good cases and had lots of help from other agents whose work made me look good. Frankly, I was also very lucky to be in the right place at the right time. This availed me the opportunity to work interesting cases and make a string of arrests.

Most agents will transfer to various offices during their careers, and I was no exception. After my tour in San Diego, I was promoted to FBI headquarters in Washington, DC, where I served as the FBI's national spokesperson, addressing the national and international media on all matters that involved the Bureau. This was a demanding albeit relatively thankless job. No matter how hard a law enforcement spokesperson works, it is nearly impossible to get ahead of the media and make your agency look good.

For example, early one morning as I lay in bed asleep, a CNN reporter called my cellphone, waking me up. "This is John," I answered.

"Hey, is it true that Eric Rudolph, the Atlanta Olympic bomber, has been captured?" a woman asked.

"I'm going to be honest," I said. "I'm in bed. You woke me up. Let me look into it and I'll give you a call back." I turned on the TV news and made calls to find out what was going on.

The TV reporter spoke live from her news desk. "I just talked with the spokesperson for the FBI, who reported he was in bed and had not heard anything yet."

I was relieved that I hadn't told her what I was—or rather wasn't—wearing.

Later, I was again promoted. This time it was at FBI headquarters, to the executive staff of the FBI's Cyber Division. When it came to technology, the FBI was entering the twenty-first century kicking and screaming, but it had finally acknowledged that the world was run by computers. The FBI knew it had better develop a way to investigate the cybercrimes that would surely follow.

I was fortunate to have been placed in the Cyber Division at its inception. Sometimes, I worked to help draft laws where none existed. Back then, if you were smart enough to hack into a computer, there were few laws to say you couldn't do such a thing. Nowadays, most kids know enough to hack, but there are a lot of laws that can offer victims at least some protection. Working in the Cyber Division was my first real exposure to the personalities of true cyber geeks, few of whom were actually agents. Many were support employees hired by the FBI because of their skills, none of which apparently included much human interaction. Much like the African Khoisan language, which utilizes clicking sounds for communication as opposed to actual words, I eventually became fluent in interpreting cyber geek grunts, mumblings and lack of direct eye contact to explain complex computer algorithms.

In 2005, I received a promotional transfer to the FBI's Phoenix Division, where I supervised the cyber squad and oversaw all cyber investigations for the state of Arizona. This continued my work with cyber personnel, although they were now typically agents. Most were outgoing, although a few remained social introverts, and now they had guns, which caused me to choose my clicking noises more carefully.

In 2011, I became the assistant special agent in charge of the Phoenix Division, the FBI's No. 2 position for the state of Arizona. In this role, I had accountability for all criminal and cyber investigations, as well as oversight of the FBI's counterintelligence and intel collection programs. During this time, I was awarded an honorary doctorate in computer science from one of Arizona's universities based on some of my contributions to the field of cyber investigations. I didn't let the doctorate go to my head and never insisted that anyone in the office refer to me as doctor, though I did continue to diagnose certain coworkers as crazy.

There was serious work to be done as well. This included working on the Sony computer hack and playing a prominent role in the investigation and aftermath of the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

Upon retirement from the FBI I have been pleased to find myself a sought-after speaker. I've enjoyed sharing my unique experiences and intriguing stories, using humor in a way that keeps my audiences informed and entertained. I've presented at hundreds of gatherings and in front of tens of thousands of people, including Fortune 500 companies, domestic and international audiences, the United Nations, etc.; I even presented at the Vatican, where I met with Pope Francis on several occasions.

I handled cyber investigations for many years in the FBI. Whether physical or cyber, security is about protecting you from thieves (bank robbers, forgers, and the like) who want your information or money. Cyber remains a growing trend, and I enjoyed the challenge. How many of you reading this book consider yourself a true cyber geek—meaning you are a technically knowledgeable person? Probably about 1 percent of you.

If you're that kind of person, you're the kind of person I worked with. These were the sort of people who, unlike me, had actually gone to school and earned real doctorates in computer science. Like me, they chose to serve their country instead of going out into the private sector to make real money. They were highly skilled and highly technical people.

Even so, some lacked everyday social skills. Some weren't good at small talk. Some were awkward in social situations. Some hadn't kissed a girl. No, that's not true. A few of my agents were lesbians.

They were a great group of people, and besides who am I to judge? I myself have been known to have a few awkward moments now and then—which I'll soon share with you.

The one common denominator in everything I've done in the FBI, as it is with every other special agent, is that it's all about our ability to work with the public. Despite the stoic *X-Files* figures of Mulder and Scully, the FBI agent's job is to talk with people and earn their trust so they'll share what they know. Whether it's helping a victim recall specific details or developing rapport with a subject to gain a confession, the ability to communicate with others and treat them with respect is paramount.

The work, however, is about investigating crimes. It can be a dangerous world. For years, I've sought to convey to my many agents the importance of being friendly while remaining safe with my simple mantra, "Be nice to everyone you meet. But just in case, also have a plan to kill them."

I loved being an FBI agent. It was twenty of the best years of my life.

I joined the Bureau driven by the mission to protect America and its citizens while upholding the Constitution of the United States. My best memories, however, are of the people I encountered who were interesting and funny, although not everyone intended to be those things.

I wrote this book to share the laughs with you. You now get to read about the moments I experienced during my career. You don't even have to wash your hands before doing so.

Enjoy.

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