ISSUE NO. 24 · SPECIAL EDITION

BASED ON REAL CASES · NAMES CHANGED

THE PANHANDLE

Investigator

VOTED #1 BEST OF FLORIDA & BEST OF BAY

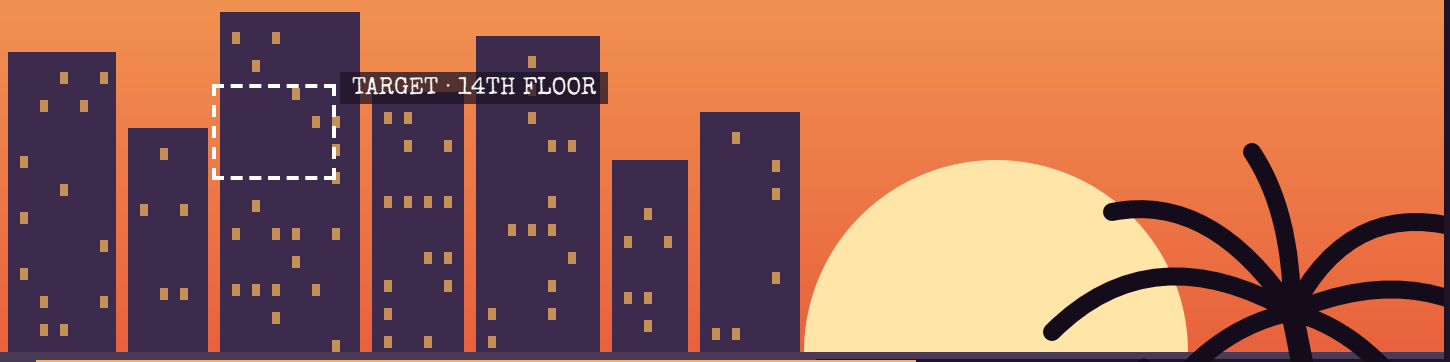
REC 06:47 PM · PANAMA CITY BEACH

SPECIAL EDITION

Undercover

Stories from the field

Real cases from our closed files, told the way we tell them at the office.



FILE 24-01 · PANAMA CITY BEACH

Two Hours

Three days of nothing. Then the boss showed up.

FILE 24-03 · FLORIDA TO TENNESSEE

Three States, One Lie

Jerry West follows a fake conference to the Smokies.

FILE 24-07 · THE EMERALD COAST

Mrs. Perrigan

Joe's undercover "wife" never breaks character.

FILE 24-11 · THUNDER BEACH

Wild Will

One cheating husband. Tens of thousands of motorcycles.

ZOOM 30x · ▮▮▮▯

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Eight quick cheating cases

ALSO INSIDE: OUR OFFICES, LIE DETECTION, BACKGROUNDS, NOTARY, BUG SWEEPS, BCLEO AND FREE SHADOW TEAM AUDIOBOOKS

FROM THE OPERATING PARTNER

You asked for more stories. Here's a whole magazine.

These are real cases from our closed files, told the way we tell them around the office: names changed, places shuffled and the storytelling turned up a notch.

You'll meet the whole crew: Joe and a phone with one calculator too many, Jerry chasing a "conference" through three states, J.D. on a very bad day for one examinee, Jessica and a gate code, Will at a motorcycle rally, and David, our newest investigator, on his first 14-hour stakeout.

If you think you recognize yourself in here, relax. You don't. We changed everything but the lessons.



Jacob Nolin
OPERATING PARTNER

ABOUT THESE STORIES: Inspired by real cases from our closed files. Every client and subject name is invented. Places, dates and details have been changed to protect confidential information, and some scenes are dramatized for entertainment.

WHO'S WHO IN THESE STORIES

Meet the Crew

The investigators in these stories are real. Here's who they are when they're not pretending to be someone else.



Jacob Nolin

OPERATING PARTNER

Retired from the Bay County Sheriff's Office. The one we call when three days of surveillance comes up empty.

Pages 4, 12, 22



Joe Perrigan

ANALYST · CERTIFIED DIGITAL FORENSICS EXAMINER

Builds every case file before anyone gets in a car. Knows where deleted things go.

Pages 6, 16



Jerry West

SURVEILLANCE TRAINER

Started his career undercover in Escambia County. Trains every investigator we hire.

Pages 8, 10, 12



J.D. Nolin

CERTIFIED CVSA EXAMINER

Retired Bay County Sheriff's Office Major. Has heard every excuse, some of them twice.

Page 18



Jessica Kennedy

LEAD INVESTIGATOR, AMELIA ISLAND

Could get a gate code from a brick wall. Usually with coffee.

Page 20

W

Will

FIELD INVESTIGATOR

Owns a tuxedo T-shirt. Has worn it on surveillance. It worked.

Page 24

D

David

OUR NEWEST INVESTIGATOR

Fresh license, new camera, now packs snacks that don't crinkle.

Page 14

4

The Shadow Team

JERRY'S UNDERCOVER UNIT

Four men you've walked past and don't remember. That's the job.

Page 10

INFIDELITY · PANAMA CITY BEACH

Two Hours

The team watched his truck for three days. It never moved. Then the boss drove over, looked at the same parking garage and closed the case before supper.



FEATURING JACOB NOLIN
OPERATING PARTNER · RETIRED, BAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Carla drove down from Alabama with a photo and a feeling. Her husband, we'll call him Brent, was spending a week at a high-rise condo in Panama City Beach for a fishing tournament. Brent did not fish. Not well, anyway.

DAYS ONE, TWO AND THREE

The team set up on his pickup in the condo's parking garage: one investigator on the ramp, one in the lobby with a laptop, one on the beach. The truck sat in the same space for three straight days. Nobody came to it. Nobody left in it. By night three, the notes read like a weather report: hot, humid, no change.

"LET ME TAKE A LOOK"

On day four, Jacob Nolin finished a meeting across town, put on a fishing shirt and drove to the beach. He walked right up to the truck and looked at the windshield. Three days of salt film and lovebugs. The wipers hadn't moved.

"Nobody comes to the beach for a week and leaves his truck alone," Jacob said on the radio. "Unless somebody else is doing the driving."

THE MAN, NOT THE TRUCK

Then he asked for every photo from the lobby. He scrolled through 300 pictures of strangers and stopped on one: a man in a ball cap and sunglasses, head down, climbing into a rideshare at 6:10 p.m. Same cap, same time, all three nights. And on night two, he was carrying flowers.

"Fishing buddies don't get flowers," Jacob said.

CASE CARD · 24-01

CLIENT	"Carla," a wife
SUBJECT	"Brent," her husband
LOCATION	Panama City Beach
TEAM	The whole crew, then the boss
TIME TO SOLVE	1 hour, 52 minutes

CLOSED



JACOB NOLIN: THE BOSS, THE BACKUP AND, WHEN IT COUNTS, THE CLOSER.

6:05 P.M.

At 6:05 the next evening, Jacob was sitting on a bench outside the lobby with a sweet tea, looking like a man waiting on his wife to finish getting ready. At 6:10, the ball cap came through the doors. The rideshare was already at the curb.

Jacob let it pull away and followed in his truck, two cars back. Ten minutes later it turned into Pier Park.

TABLE FOR TWO

A woman was waiting at a high-top on a restaurant patio. When Brent walked up, she stood, kissed him and fixed his collar, the way people do after a long time together. Jacob took a seat at the bar, ordered the shrimp and filmed everything. Video only, no audio, the way Florida law requires.

After dinner they walked the boardwalk, holding hands, and caught a rideshare back to the condo at 10:48 p.m.

BACK AT THE OFFICE

Jacob was back at his desk before the team's shift ended. The report went out that night. The team asked how he'd done it. Jacob just held up the photo of the ball cap.

"You watched the truck. I watched the man."

CASE CLOSED Affair confirmed in under two hours: the rideshare, the restaurant, the kiss and the walk home, all on video.

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BEST OF FLORIDA #1 2 YEARS IN A ROW

BEST OF BAY #1 3 YEARS IN A ROW

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DIGITAL FORENSICS · FORT WALTON BEACH

The Calculator That Couldn't Add

An old phone in a kitchen junk drawer. A husband who thought he'd deleted everything. And an analyst who knows where deleted things go.



FEATURING JOE PERRIGAN
ANALYST · CERTIFIED DIGITAL FORENSICS EXAMINER

Tasha found it in the junk drawer, under the takeout menus: her husband's old phone. Derek had upgraded months earlier. The old one was on her account, in her name, paid for with her card. She brought it to us in a sandwich bag.

FIRST, THE PAPERWORK

Joe Perrigan doesn't touch a device until we know the client has the legal right to it. Tasha did, and her attorney agreed. So Joe photographed the phone, logged it and made a full forensic copy. The original went into an evidence bag. Joe worked from the copy, the way it's done when a case might end up in court.

TWO CALCULATORS

The phone had been cleaned up to look innocent. But in a folder labeled Utilities, Joe found two calculator apps: the real one, and another that looked exactly like it.

"Nobody needs two calculators," Joe said, and opened the second one in his forensic software instead of on the phone. It wasn't a calculator. It was a vault: a hidden app for photos and messages that only opens when you type a secret code.

MIKE FROM THE TIRE SHOP

Inside were 212 photos and a contact saved as "Mike, Tire Shop." Mike had sent 1,400 messages, most of them after 10 p.m., many of them with hearts. The number belonged to a woman in Destin. She did not sell tires.



JOE PERRIGAN BUILDS EVERY CASE FILE BEFORE ANYONE GETS IN A CAR, AND HE FINDS WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY'D ERASED.

WHAT JOE LOOKS FOR

1. Two apps that do the same job.
2. Contacts with business names that text after 10 p.m.
3. Location data hidden in photos.
4. Screen time at 2 a.m.
5. Deleted messages still in the database.

PHOTOS REMEMBER

Most photos carry data people never see: the date, the time and often the exact place they were taken. Joe mapped them. Seventeen were taken at a Destin hotel on a weekend Derek had spent "at a training in Atlanta."

DELETED ISN'T GONE

Derek had deleted his regular text threads before the upgrade. But deleting a message usually just marks the space as available. Joe recovered 600 of them from the phone's database, including one that read, "She thinks I'm in Atlanta lol."

Then came the screen time logs. The phone had been busiest between midnight and 2 a.m., five nights a week.

THE REPORT

Joe's report ran 40 pages, every finding tied back to the forensic copy. Tasha read it at our conference table, closed the folder and said, "I'd like a copy for my attorney, please."

WHAT WE DON'T DO

We don't hack accounts, guess passwords or touch a device the client doesn't have the right to search. Everything Joe found was sitting on a phone Tasha owned, and every step was logged so another expert could repeat it.

CASE CLOSED A hidden vault app, 212 photos, 600 recovered messages and a "training in Atlanta" that was really a Destin hotel. All from a forensic copy.

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INFIDELITY · FLORIDA, GEORGIA & TENNESSEE

Three States, One Lie

He said he was going to a sales conference in Atlanta. Jerry West followed him more than 600 miles to find out what kind of conference has a hot tub and a heart on the welcome sign.



FEATURING JERRY WEST
SURVEILLANCE TRAINER

Renee's husband, we'll call him Mitch, had been to a lot of conferences lately. This one was four days in Atlanta, he said, and he'd be too busy to call. Renee had heard that before. She called us from Fort Walton Beach on a Tuesday. Mitch was leaving Thursday at dawn.

TWO PHONE CALLS

Before any wheels rolled, Jerry West made two calls: one to a licensed investigator we trust in Georgia, and one to another in Tennessee. Every state has its own licensing rules, and Jerry plays by all of them. If Mitch crossed a state line, a licensed partner would be waiting on the other side, with Jerry running the case.

5:02 A.M.

Mitch backed out of the driveway at 5:02 a.m. with a rolling suitcase, a garment bag and, oddly, a cooler. Conference people don't usually pack coolers. Jerry noted it and settled in well behind him.

THE PICKUP

Just over the Georgia line, Mitch pulled into a big country restaurant off the interstate. He didn't go in. He parked next to a white SUV with a South Georgia dealership sticker. A woman got out, hugged him for a long time and moved her bags into his truck. Her SUV stayed behind.

Then they kept going north. Right past every Atlanta exit.

CASE CARD · 24-03

CLIENT	"Renee," a wife
SUBJECT	"Mitch," her husband
STATES	Florida, Georgia, Tennessee
TEAM	Jerry West, with licensed partners in GA and TN
RESULT	Affair confirmed

CLOSED

THE ROUTE

5:02	a.m., leaves Fort Walton Beach
11:40	a.m., picks her up in Georgia
6:15	p.m., crosses into Tennessee
600+	miles, one way

THE CONFERENCE PHOTO

That afternoon, Mitch texted Renee a photo of a crowded hotel lobby with a banner that read "Welcome, Sales Team!" Joe Perrigan ran it back at the office. The picture had been on a hotel's website since 2019.

UP THE MOUNTAIN

By evening they were in the Smoky Mountain foothills, checking into a rental cabin with a hot tub and a wooden sign that said "Our Little Hideaway." Jerry and the Tennessee investigator took turns on the only road in.

FOG

On day two, fog rolled over the switchbacks and the couple's truck disappeared around a bend. Most people would speed up. Jerry pulled into the gas station at the bottom of the mountain instead. "There's one road down," he said, "and they're out of ice." Twenty minutes later, they pulled in for ice and firewood.

SOUVENIRS

Three days of hiking, a dinner show and matching sweatshirts later, Mitch dropped her at her SUV and drove home. He brought Renee a gift: a tote bag that said "Atlanta." He'd bought it at a gas station in Tennessee. Jerry got a picture of that, too.

CASE CLOSED

Three states, two licensed partners and one recycled conference photo. The cabin, the hand-holding and the tote bag, all on video.

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CASE FILE No. 24-04 STATUS: CLOSED

UNDERCOVER · PANAMA CITY BEACH

The Real Shadow Team

Four men who don't look like investigators, the trainer who taught them how to disappear and a condo case that needed every one of them.



RUN BY JERRY WEST
SURVEILLANCE TRAINER · BEGAN HIS CAREER UNDERCOVER IN ESCAMBIA COUNTY

If you've listened to our Shadow Team audiobooks and thought the undercover parts were a little far-fetched, we'd like to introduce you to Jerry West's real crew.

There are four of them. We won't print their names, and you wouldn't recognize their faces if we did. That's the point. Jerry started his career undercover in Escambia County's Special Investigation Division, and he built this team the way he was taught: ordinary-looking men who blend into any crowd, take direction over a radio and never, ever stare at the target.

THE CASE

A husband in Tennessee hired us. His wife, we'll call her Lacey, was spending a "girls' week" at a beachfront condo in Panama City Beach. He had a feeling there weren't many girls involved.

Lacey's building had a lobby, a parking garage, a pool deck, a tiki bar and a beach. That's five ways in and out, and only so many places a person can sit without being noticed. So Jerry put a shadow on every one of them, and kept himself on the radio.

"Nobody ever looks twice at the fisherman."

THE TEAM (CODE NAMES ONLY)

1. Deacon: the jogger who has been stretching for 40 minutes.
2. Gator: the surf fisherman who never catches anything.
3. Tank: the guy in the reflective vest. Nobody questions the vest.
4. Ghost: the tourist. Fanny pack, sunburn, map held upside down.



JERRY WEST, RUNNING THE SHOW FROM A PARKED CAR. ASK HIM ABOUT HIS FIRST UNDERCOVER JOB SOMETIME.

THE BOX

Tank "fixed a flat" in the parking garage for most of an afternoon. Ghost worked on a laptop in the lobby. Gator fished the surf. Deacon stretched. Jerry sat in a car down the street, running all four on the radio like an orchestra conductor. "Ghost has the eye. Tank, stay put. Deacon, you've stretched long enough."

When Lacey's car left the garage, the team boxed it: one car ahead, one behind and one on the next street over, so no single car stayed on her long enough to be noticed.

SUNSET

On night two, Lacey walked down to the beach with a man who was not her husband. At the water's edge, he kissed her. Gator was 30 feet away, untangling a fishing line, with a camera in his tackle box. The couple never looked twice at the fisherman.

FRIDAY

By the end of the week the team had the kiss, the man's car, two dinners and a sunrise walk. Gator caught zero fish. Tank was offered a job by a real tow company.

"Ghost has the eye. Tank, stay put."

CASE CLOSED Four undercover investigators, five exits covered and one kiss on the beach. The client had his answer by Friday.

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INFIDELITY · 30A

Two Guys, One Boardwalk

Hawaiian shirts, a bocce set and a cooler full of seltzer. Jacob Nolin and Jerry West go undercover on 30A, and the ceiling fans give the whole thing away.




FEATURING JACOB NOLIN & JERRY WEST
UNDERCOVER, BADLY DRESSED ON PURPOSE

The client was a wife who knew her husband's schedule better than he did. We'll call him Preston. He owned a beach house on 30A and a small private jet, and he'd told her he was spending the weekend there "alone, to think."

THE PROBLEM WITH 30A

There's nowhere to hide on 30A. The houses are close, the streets are narrow, and a man sitting alone in a parked car gets noticed by four neighbors and a golf cart. So Jacob and Jerry didn't hide. They checked in.

THE COVER

Two middle-aged buddies on a guys' trip: matching Hawaiian shirts, sunburns in progress, a bocce set and a cooler of seltzer water. They set up on the public boardwalk behind Preston's house and played the worst game of bocce ever recorded on the Gulf Coast.

THE FANS

Preston wasn't there. The house looked empty. But Jacob noticed the ceiling fans on the back balcony were spinning.

"Nobody leaves the fans running in an empty house in August," he said. "Somebody's coming back, and soon."

CASE CARD · 24-05

CLIENT	A wife
SUBJECT	"Preston," her husband
LOCATION	30A
TEAM	Jacob Nolin and Jerry West, undercover
RESULT	Affair confirmed

CLOSED

UNDERCOVER KIT

1. Two Hawaiian shirts, very loud.
2. One bocce set, never mastered.
3. A cooler of seltzer. No beer on duty.
4. SPF 50, applied too late.
5. Two cameras that look like nothing.

WHEELS DOWN

Back at the office, Joe Perrigan kept an eye on public flight tracking for Preston's jet. At 4:10 p.m. it landed at the regional airport. "He's 40 minutes out," Joe radioed.

Jacob packed up the bocce set. "Change of plans," he told Jerry. "We're going to dinner."

THE PHOTO

They got the last two-top on the patio of a restaurant down the road, Preston's favorite. At 6:30, he walked in with a woman in a sun hat and a lot of jewelry. They sat two tables away.

Jerry ordered the fish tacos. Jacob held up his phone to take a picture of his buddy "for the wives back home." Jerry smiled. Behind him, perfectly in focus, Preston leaned across the table and kissed the woman in the sun hat.

"Take another one," Jerry said. "I blinked." Jacob took twelve.

BACK AT THE HOUSE

That night the balcony lights came on and the fans kept spinning. Two people, one house, and a bocce set that never left the trunk again.

> ***"Take another one. I blinked."***

CASE CLOSED The jet, the dinner, the kiss and an overnight for two, documented by two guys in very loud shirts.

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TRAINING FILE · PENSACOLA

Rookie Week

New license, new camera and no idea what a 14-hour stakeout does to your legs. Our newest investigator, David, gets his first week with the team.

D

FEATURING DAVID
INVESTIGATOR IN TRAINING

David showed up on Monday with a fresh license, a brand-new camera and a lunch packed by someone who loves him. By Friday, he'd learned that the lunch was the most important part.

MONDAY: JOE

Day one was in the office with Joe Perrigan, learning how a case starts long before anyone gets in a car: background reports, vehicle records, property records, social media. "The fieldwork is the fun part," Joe told him. "The report is the product. If it's not in the report, it didn't happen."

TUESDAY: JERRY

Day two belonged to Jerry West, who trains every investigator we hire. Jerry's rules came fast. Never park facing the house; use your mirrors. Back into the spot so you can leave quickly. Find shade, because an idling engine gets noticed. Write down the time and what you see every few minutes, even when what you see is nothing. And manage your water. You'll figure out why.

WEDNESDAY: THE REAL THING

On day three, David rode along on a real case in Pensacola: a husband suspected of meeting someone on his lunch break. David had the eye. At 11:58, the husband pulled out. At 12:01, David hit a red light on a six-lane road and watched the car disappear.

DAVID'S NOTEBOOK · WEEK ONE

1. Back in. Always.
2. Snacks that don't crinkle.
3. Nothing is boring if you write the time down.
4. Jerry can hear you chewing on the radio.
5. Lost him? Think. Don't speed.
6. The report is the product.

WEEK ONE

1	target lost
1	target found, 13 minutes later
14	hours in one shift
0	crinkly snacks allowed

THINK, DON'T SPEED

David's first instinct was to floor it. Jerry's voice came over the radio before he could. "Don't chase. Think. Where's he going at lunch?"

David thought. On Monday, Joe's research had turned up where the other woman worked: an office two miles east. David drove the speed limit, pulled into that lot and backed into a space. The husband's car was parked out front. Ten minutes later, he walked out with a woman, and they left together in her car.

"Lost him at 12:01. Found him at 12:14," Jerry said that night. "That's the job."

THURSDAY AND FRIDAY

Thursday was a 14-hour shift on the same case, which is where David learned what the water rule was really about. Friday was report day with Jacob Nolin, who read David's first draft, handed it back and said, "Tell me what you saw, not what you think." David rewrote it twice.

The final report was good. The client got photos from the parking lot and a two-hour lunch. David got a nickname he has asked us not to print.

> ***"Lost him at 12:01. Found him at 12:14. That's the job."***

WEEK ONE Training complete. One target lost, one target found, and a rookie who now packs snacks that don't crinkle.

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UNDERCOVER · THE EMERALD COAST

Mrs. Perrigan

For one undercover job, Joe Perrigan needed a wife. Our confidential informant took the role, then took it very, very seriously.



FEATURING JOE PERRIGAN
LEAD INVESTIGATOR, AND A VERY PATIENT HUSBAND

The client was a builder. He'd finished a beautiful new home and listed it for sale, and he had a suspicion: the sales office in that neighborhood wasn't showing it to buyers. He needed to know what really happened when a qualified buyer walked through the door.

That meant somebody had to walk in as a buyer. Two somebodies, actually. At that price, buyers usually shop as a couple. Joe Perrigan would play the husband. He needed a wife.

ENTER THE CI

In our world, a CI is a confidential informant: a trusted civilian who helps with undercover work. Ours took the assignment on a Thursday. By Saturday, she had written a backstory.

They'd been married 22 years. They had two kids in college and a golden retriever named Biscuit. They met at a wedding, where Joe spilled punch on her. Joe had bad knees, which was why they needed a one-story house. She had a wedding ring. She had family photos on her phone. Joe had questions about where she got the family photos. She told him not to worry about it.

"She had a wedding ring. She had family photos. Joe had questions."

CASE CARD · 24-07

CLIENT	A home builder
COVER	Married couple, house hunting
LEAD	Joe Perrigan
UNDERCOVER	Our CI, as "Mrs. Perrigan"
AUDIO	None. Florida requires all-party consent.

CLOSED

MRS. PERRIGAN'S COVER STORY
Married: 22 years
Kids: two, in college
Dog: Biscuit, golden retriever
Met: a wedding. He spilled the punch.
Must-have: one story ("Joseph's knees")
Deal-breaker: stairs

SHOWTIME

At the sales office, she held Joe's hand the whole time and called him "Joseph" in a voice his own mother never used. Every time the salesperson pointed to a two-story house, she sighed. "Joseph's knees," she said. Joe limped a little. He hadn't planned to.

They were shown a two-story model and pointed toward an older home. When Mrs. Perrigan pulled up the client's one-story listing on her phone and asked to see it, they were told to call another agent. The client's house never got a showing.

MEMORY IS THE RECORDER

Florida requires everyone's consent to record a conversation, so Joe recorded nothing. He memorized it. The minute they reached the car, he wrote down every question, every answer and every house, in order.

SHE STAYED IN CHARACTER

Halfway through his notes, Mrs. Perrigan put a hand on his arm. "Joseph, you didn't even ask about the closets."

"We're done," Joe said. "You can stop."

"We're done when I say we're done," she said. Then she asked if Biscuit could come next time.

CASE CLOSED Two buyers, one cover story and a sales office that never offered the client's house. Documented in detail, with no audio, the legal way.

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LIE DETECTION · PANAMA CITY

The Major

He walked in to prove he wasn't cheating. He walked out apologizing to the man he'd called "Pops." A lie detection exam that went sideways.



FEATURING J.D. NOLIN
CERTIFIED CVSA EXAMINER · RETIRED MAJOR, BAY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Our surveillance team had worked his case for weeks. They documented one overnight trip he never told his wife about, and nothing else. So our report offered a next step: if he had nothing to hide, he could take a CVSA exam with J.D. Nolin.

To everyone's surprise, he said yes. He said it loudly. He said it on speakerphone, in front of his wife.

"POPS"

He showed up 15 minutes late, in sunglasses he didn't take off, and looked J.D. up and down. White hair. Glasses. A cup of coffee. "Let's do this, Pops," he said. "I'll beat your little machine."

J.D. smiled and offered him a chair. He has heard that before.

THE EXAM

J.D. explained the process and went over every question, word for word, before the exam began. No surprises. That's the rule. The questions were simple. Did you spend that night with another woman? Have you had a romantic relationship with anyone other than your wife this year?

He answered every one with a smirk. When it was over, J.D. reviewed the charts carefully. Then he reviewed them again.



J.D. NOLIN RETIRED AS A MAJOR AND SPENT YEARS TRAINING INVESTIGATORS IN INTERVIEWS AND CONFESSIONS.

EXAM CARD · 24-08

EXAMINEE	"Rusty," a husband
EXAM	CVSA, questions reviewed in advance
RESULT	Deception indicated on the key questions
EXIT	Polite, eventually

CLOSED

THE RESULTS

Deception was indicated on the relevant questions. J.D. said so calmly, the way he says everything.

Rusty did not take it calmly. He stood up so fast his chair hit the wall. He called the machine junk. He called J.D. an old man, and a few other things. Then he leaned over the desk and pointed a finger at J.D.'s face.

THE MAJOR STANDS UP

J.D. set down his coffee and stood. He didn't hurry. He didn't raise his voice. He didn't need to. Something in the room changed, the way it does when a man who spent a career in law enforcement decides a conversation is over.

"Son," J.D. said quietly, "you can sit down, or you can leave. I'm going to help you with the second one." He walked Rusty to the door. He never laid a hand on him.

THE HALLWAY

Somewhere between the office and the parking lot, Rusty did the math. By the front door he was saying "sir." By the sidewalk, it was "Major." By his truck, he'd apologized four times and asked whether this would be in the report.

"Drive safe," J.D. said, and went back inside. His coffee was still warm.

EXAM CLOSED Exam completed and results reported to the client. One examinee shown out, politely, by a man he should have called "sir" from the start.

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LOCATE & SURVEILLANCE · JACKSONVILLE

The Smile

Three dead-end nights, a locked gate and a No Trespassing sign. Jessica Kennedy didn't climb the fence. She brought coffee.



FEATURING JESSICA KENNEDY
LEAD INVESTIGATOR · AMELIA ISLAND

The client was an out-of-state employer, and the assignment sounded simple: document a woman's weekend activities. They gave us her address in Jacksonville.

THE HOUSE THAT WASN'T HOME

Night one, the house was dark. Night two, a package sat on the porch, and the trash cans hadn't moved. Night three, the same package was still there. Jessica wrote in her notes: "Nobody lives here. Not anymore."

FOLLOW THE PAPER

So she followed the records instead. An old business filing led to a man's name. His background report led to a gated condo complex across town. And sightings of the woman's car showed it had been parked there again and again.

THE GATE

There was one problem. Every walk-through gate was locked, and every one had a No Trespassing sign. Jessica walked the public sidewalk outside at night, took a few photos and went home without setting a foot where she shouldn't.

"Never climb a fence you can talk your way through."



JESSICA KENNEDY LEADS OUR AMELIA ISLAND OFFICE. HER SECRET WEAPON IS NOT A SECRET.

JESSICA'S RULES

1. Smile first. Ask second.
2. Learn everyone's name, then use it.
3. Bring coffee. Bring two.
4. Never climb a fence you can talk your way through.

TWO COFFEES

The next morning, Jessica walked into the security office with two coffees and that smile. She introduced herself as a licensed investigator, asked the guard's name and asked about the photo on his desk.

The guard, we'll call him Mr. Earl, has eleven grandchildren. Jessica heard about all of them. Twenty minutes later she knew which buildings had the most parking and when the shifts changed. She left with a temporary gate code and an invitation to his church fish fry.

INSIDE THE GATE

Two days later, she drove through that gate and found the woman's car on her first loop. The next weekend, she documented the man from the background report driving it.

SAME WEEK, DIFFERENT CASE

A restaurant hostess on Amelia Island seated Jessica at the only table with a clear view of a cheating husband's booth, because Jessica asked about her earrings. The husband never noticed. The hostess invited Jessica back for Taco Tuesday.

"Bring coffee. Bring two."

CASE CLOSED

New address found, gate access granted, and the car and its driver documented. One temporary code, eleven grandchildren, zero fences climbed.

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INFIDELITY · DESTIN

Closer Than Close

The team needed close-up evidence at a crowded beach bar. Two investigators got nervous. The boss ordered a shrimp basket and sat down right next to the couple.



FEATURING JACOB NOLIN
OPERATING PARTNER

Some cases can be worked from a parking lot. This wasn't one of them. Our client's husband, we'll call him Kyle, met his girlfriend at the same Destin beach bar every Friday at sunset. The client's attorney wanted faces, the missing wedding ring and anything that showed what these two were to each other. From the lot, all you could see was a ball cap.

COLD FEET

Two of our newer investigators tried first. The first one walked in, saw Kyle glance up from his drink and walked right back out. "He looked right at me," he said on the radio.

"He looked at the door," Jacob said. "Everybody looks at the door."

The second made it as far as the bar, sat six stools away and filmed a beautiful video of a margarita.

"HOLD MY SWEET TEA"

Jacob was in his truck across the lot. He handed his sweet tea to the nearest investigator, put on a faded fishing shirt and a cap from a bait shop, and walked in like he'd been coming there for twenty years.

"He looked at the door. Everybody looks at the door."

CASE CARD · 24-10

CLIENT	A wife, through her attorney
SUBJECT	"Kyle," her husband
LOCATION	A Destin beach bar
DISTANCE	About two feet
RESULT	Close-up evidence obtained

CLOSED

HOW JACOB GETS CLOSE

1. Have a reason to be there. Order food, not just a drink.
2. Talk to the bartender first, never the target.
3. Watch the band, the TV, the sunset. Never them.
4. Let them start the conversation.
5. Leave first.

TWO FEET

He took the stool right next to Kyle and ordered the shrimp basket. He talked to the bartender about fishing and to nobody about anything else. He never looked at the couple once. Within ten minutes, they were talking to him.

Kyle's ring wasn't on his finger. Jacob spotted it when Kyle paid: it was clipped to his keychain. When the sun started going down, the girlfriend handed Jacob her phone. "Would you take our picture?"

SAY CHEESE

Jacob took six. Then he held up his own phone. "Now y'all take one of me, so my wife believes I made it out of the house." They laughed and took it. The camera in his shirt button recorded video the whole time. No audio: Florida law requires everyone's consent for that.

Before he left, the girlfriend leaned over. "We've been together two years," she whispered. "Don't tell his wife." Everyone laughed. Jacob laughed loudest. "Your secret's safe with me."

OUT THE DOOR

He tipped 20 percent, left before they did and was home by nine. Out in the lot, two investigators had watched the whole thing on the live feed without breathing.

CASE CLOSED Faces, the ring on the keychain, a sunset kiss and a selfie with the target, collected from two feet away by the boss in a bait-shop cap.

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INFIDELITY · THUNDER BEACH, PANAMA CITY BEACH

Wild Will

Tens of thousands of motorcycles, one cheating husband and the one investigator we'd trust to blend in at Thunder Beach. We're still not sure how he does it.



FEATURING INVESTIGATOR WILL
FIELD INVESTIGATOR · ONE OF A KIND

Every team has one. Ours is Will.

Will is a very good investigator. He is also the only one of us who owns a tuxedo T-shirt, and the only one who has ever won a door prize at a bingo hall while on surveillance. So when a case came in at Thunder Beach, the giant motorcycle rally in Panama City Beach, nobody had to ask who wanted it.

THE CASE

A wife told us her husband, we'll call him Ronnie, was riding to the rally with "the guys." She had seen the guys. They were all at home. Ronnie was taking his Harley and a brand-new leather jacket, and he had trimmed his beard. He told her not to wait up.

GEARING UP

Following one motorcycle through a rally is like following one seagull on the beach. So Will didn't plan to follow. He planned to blend. He borrowed a bike, bought a leather vest at a flea market and covered it in patches from places he'd never been: a pancake house, a Biloxi casino and a lighthouse in a state he's never visited. He added a bandana and fake tattoo sleeves, and practiced his biker nod in the mirror.

Jerry looked him over and said he looked like trouble. Will said thank you.

CASE CARD · 24-11

CLIENT	"Ronnie's" wife
SUBJECT	"Ronnie," her husband
LOCATION	Thunder Beach rally, Panama City Beach
INVESTIGATOR	Will, in disguise
RESULT	Affair confirmed

CLOSED

WILL'S RALLY KIT

1. One borrowed motorcycle.
2. Flea-market vest, 14 patches.
3. Fake tattoo sleeves.
4. Three cameras, well hidden.
5. Earplugs. So many earplugs.

THE PARKING SPOT

Will found Ronnie's bike outside a beach bar on Front Beach Road and parked right next to it. When Ronnie came out, Will was admiring his chrome. They talked bikes for twenty minutes. Ronnie told him which bars had the best wings. Will told him about the lighthouse.

THE PINK HELMET

Then Ronnie's riding buddy walked out of the bar: a woman in a pink helmet, who climbed on behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist. At the first red light, she kissed the back of his neck. Will, two bikes back, waved.

THE SLOW RACE

They spent the afternoon at the rally grounds, where Ronnie entered the slow race, a contest to ride as slowly as possible without putting a foot down. Will entered too, as cover. Will won. Ronnie came in fourth and did not seem happy about it. The pink helmet hugged him anyway, and Will got the hug on camera while holding a trophy.

That night, they checked into a motel on Front Beach Road. One room. One bike in the lot, with a pink helmet hanging from the handlebar.

CASE CLOSED Affair confirmed: the ride, the kiss at the light, the hug and a one-room night. Also, one slow-race trophy.

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CHEATERS' CORNER

Different Towns, Same Excuses

Eight quick cases from Panama City Beach to Pensacola. Working late, fishing trips, girls' weekends and gym nights. Here's how they really went.

QUICK FILE · PANAMA CITY BEACH

Twelve Minutes at the Top

He told his wife he was working late. We found him at Pier Park, in line for the big Ferris wheel with a coworker. Our investigator bought a ticket and climbed into the very next gondola. At the top, the couple kissed. One gondola back, our investigator had the best seat in the house and a very steady camera.

QUICK FILE · DESTIN

The Valet Ticket

A wife found a crumpled valet ticket in her husband's console from a Destin restaurant he'd never mentioned. The next Friday at 7, our investigator handed her keys to the same valet stand. At 7:12, the husband's car pulled in. He got out. So did a woman in a red dress. Our investigator tipped the valet for a good spot. It had a perfect view of the front door.

QUICK FILE · FORT WALTON BEACH

Separate Checks

Every Thursday, a man and his girlfriend ate at the same seafood place and paid in cash, so nothing showed up on the credit card statement. Our investigator sat in the next booth for three Thursdays. They held hands under the table, split the hush puppies and argued about the tip every time. His wife wasn't surprised by the girlfriend. She was surprised he tipped 12 percent.

QUICK FILE · PENSACOLA BEACH

Two Doors Down

A wife was sure her husband's girlfriend lived in condo 9C. We watched 9C all night: a retired couple, a cat and the 10 o'clock news. At 6 a.m., the door that opened was 9E, two doors down. Out came the husband, tiptoeing, carrying his shoes so he wouldn't make a sound. He was quiet. Our camera was quieter.

QUICK FILE · PANAMA CITY BEACH

The Dry Workout

He went to the gym five nights a week and came home bone dry. Our investigator watched him walk in the front door of the gym, straight out the back and into a white SUV. Two hours later he came back for his truck. In his driveway, he splashed bottled water on his hair before going inside. We have that on video, too.

QUICK FILE · DESTIN

Girls' Trip

She said it was a girls' trip to a Destin condo. There were four girls. There was also one guy, who showed up at 9 p.m. with flowers and stayed until checkout. On the last night, the girls posed for a group photo on the balcony. He took it. Our investigator, down on the beach, took one of him taking it.

QUICK FILE · NAVARRE

Gone Fishing

He told his wife he was fishing with his brother. The brother's boat sat at the dock all day, with the brother on it, alone, catching nothing. The husband was two miles away at a sandbar party on a different boat, with a different woman. Our investigator spent the day in a kayak, which is harder on surveillance than it sounds, and harder on the shoulders.

QUICK FILE · PENSACOLA

The Second Phone

His car stopped at the same gas station every night on the way home. He never bought gas. Our investigator watched him park by the air pump, take a second phone out of the glove box, talk for 20 minutes, put it back and drive home. Once, he checked his tire pressure. For realism.

EXCUSES WE HEARD THIS YEAR

Ranked by how often the camera disagreed.

1. "I'm working late."
2. "It's a guys' fishing trip."
3. "She's just a coworker."
4. "It's a conference. You wouldn't know anyone."

QUICK FILES are based on real cases from our closed files. Names, places and details have been changed, and a few have been combined, so no one can be identified.

END OF FILE · EVERY OFFICE

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