

Rick Velasquez: Former FBI Agent Lives Among Us by Kim Stockberger



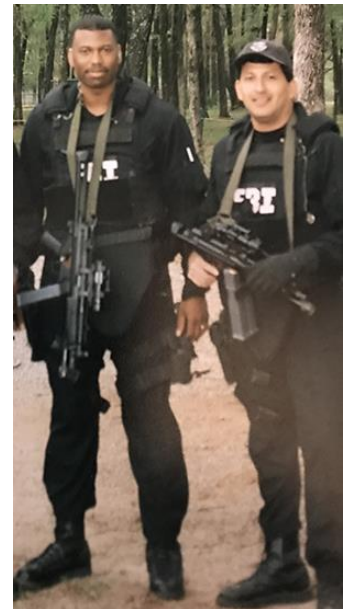
I had coffee at Einstein's Bagels with Rick Velasquez. One hour scrolled into two and I could have listened to him all morning. One day in the life of an FBI agent and member of S.W.A.T. is exactly as you would imagine.

A finance major from University of Texas, Rick started his career as a bank examiner with the US Office of the Comptroller. He applied for the FBI after noticing that the agents he was working with did not have a good understanding of bank fraud. Rick thought he could do it better and applied with the Bureau.

The application process is rigorous and takes a full year to complete: There is a job

application that weeds out basic qualifications, followed by Phase 1 which is an aptitude and memory test. As an example, candidates are given a two-page bank robbery scenario and after a short time, they are quizzed on what they recall and understand about the crime scene. Phase 2 is a live interview with three FBI agents that assess for character, integrity, instincts and general understanding of what is happening in our state, country and the world at large, both politically and socially.

This is followed by a background check where, as Rick recalls, "Two of my high school teachers called me and said they'd been contacted by the FBI." One teacher joked, "I knew you were headed for trouble." Once the background clears, you receive a Conditional Letter of Appointment, inviting you to the Academy.



The FBI Academy at Quantico, VA has four areas of focus: firearms training, physical training, classroom education around US laws, and practical application all culminating in a specialty training at Hogan's Alley. They have built a town replica complete with apartments, a pool hall, and a movie theater. Rick recalls being told that a fugitive (white male, 6'1," 200 pounds, short dark hair) is in the pool hall. The mission is simply to make the arrest. When he entered, however, all two dozen men looked exactly the same (all off duty local Firemen). The Bureau is testing the candidates to see if they will panic, ask questions, or wait until the suspect leaves. According to Rick, "there are several right things to do and several wrong things to do. I guess I got it right because I was offered a position in Dallas. Originally, they gave me a spot in El Paso. I joked,

'No way. That's not even *in* Texas.'"

I asked Rick about two of his favorite cases.

The Disney Case: Rick wrote a book called, "[Texcot: Dreams, Lies and Fraud](#)," which chronicles the story of Thomas Lucas, Jr., who convinced high profile doctors, lawyers and professional athletes to invest \$60

million dollars in land deals because Disney was planning Frontier Land, a new theme park in North Texas that would make them all instant millionaires. All the park maps, ride schematics and hotel designs were entirely invented. Rick was key to Lucas's arrest and conviction.

The Serial Killer: In Rick's second year in the FBI, he was assigned a sweep of a serial killer's home in Dallas. The accused was kidnapping prostitutes and killing them with a .22 then taking their eyeballs as a trophy. They had a warrant to search the killer's home, but couldn't leave lest they render the current warrant null. So, Rick and his partner were asked to stay the night. Rick says this South Dallas house was full of holes in the walls which let in the winter winds, there was no electricity, and it was Halloween. They navigated the house all night long with nothing but flashlights and Rick said he felt like every time he'd open a cabinet he'd find something gruesome. This movie style nightmare was playing out for real in Rick's everyday line of work.

Rick finally retired in 2016 after serving our community for 25 years. He said that while the decision was easy, he misses the men and women he served with, trained with, and grew to love. Today, Rick owns a private investigation company called Baird-Velasquez and Associates, Inc. Ironically, he's helping citizens who may be falsely accused of crimes by the government. This turnabout seems like a hand in a glove for his second act. He says he left behind the stress of the job, but remarks that he didn't know it was stressful until he looked back.

I asked him what he wanted folks to know more than anything. This is what he said: "The FBI does change you. You see things...too many things and that can make you overly and unfairly skeptical of people. It made me a very protective father, but I couldn't help it." Rick and his wife, Stephanie, enjoyed raising their kids, MacKenzie and Connor, in the Whiffletree neighborhood since 2006.



He continued, "When I was young, I could have never imagined that I'd be on a SWAT detail with six guys deep outside someone's door with a battering ram, throwing in a flash bang, clearing the room, neutralizing threat, alert and aware but not fearful. I never imagined being called to spend 18 days sweeping the Smoky Mountains for Erik Randolph (the bomber of the Atlanta Olympics), surrounded

by hornets, confronting bears and snakes and being chased by wild hogs. I'd get calls out the blue on a Saturday to hop in my car to Oklahoma to help track a fugitive. We never had the right coat for the weather. This was the greatest job in the world. It was an honor and privilege to serve America, my fellow citizens and be a true patriot just like my father. No regrets."

My final question was "what do you do now for fun?" Rick responded, "If there is a particularly interesting trial happening in Collin County, I go watch it. That's what a nerd I am."

Rick Velasquez is not a nerd. He'd blanch if I said he was modern day hero. But few men are willing to sacrifice what he did in service to North Texas. He displayed true courage in the face of uncertainty and actual threat to life and family. He tours high schools educating students on how to serve in this capacity and does outreach to our most vulnerable population. He's not done giving, that is clear. I'm pleased and proud to have met him and frankly, I'm glad he's holding down our little corner of the picnic blanket.