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THOU SHALL NOT STEAL



TRUE STORIES

Inside the World of Retail Loss Prevention

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Preface

This book is long overdue. I can't tell you how many times I tried to sit down and write down these memories for others to experience, but ...regardless of my prior excuses...I knocked it out and got er' done.

I finally did it... and whether you enjoy these stories or not, these are real events that I experienced over the course of several years in the field of Loss Prevention.

These are my stories... and if anyone wants to dispute them, they can write their own book. I will tell you that most names have been changed to protect the innocent ...and also... to protect the guilty!

However... dates, locations, and circumstances are all very real.

Why did I write this memoir?

Well...my intentions for writing these real stories are simply for others to share a "day in the life" of a Loss Prevention employee with everyone outside of the LP circle.

I want to dedicate this book to my darling wife, and to my bosses, the Rocky Mountain Puerto Rican, and the Unofficial Mayor.(you know who you are)

Thank you for your guidance and direction along the way. It's not every day when you get to come to work and return home, and actually enjoy time spent with the Boss! (Yes, Dear...that includes you!)

I would also like to give a shout out to the thousands of Loss Prevention Agents, Investigators, Officers, Auditors, and Executives that represent this profession every day. Thank you for a lifetime of friendships and memories that will always be with me.

The Author

CHAPTER 1 - BACK IN THE DAY

The majority of the content you are reading was assembled in the current year this book was published. However, the experiences described throughout these pages occurred “back in the day” when many, many, things were different in the world of Loss Prevention.

Those of you in the business can relate to the analogy. For those rookies who have no clue what I’m talking about...I’ll try to keep it simple.

Back in the day we had never even heard of “sexual harassment” and “quid-pro-quo”. Zero Tolerance was not even in our vocabulary at the time.

Can you imagine where you would be right now if it was?? Pretty scary!
(see Chapter # 5 for more details)

CCTV use was on the rise, but many retailers never seemed to provide enough labor to use their cameras effectively. Hence...you worked the floor...usually alone. Your two-way radio was your biggest weapon... and your quick thinking kept you out of trouble. You did whatever you had to do to catch the crooks. I do mean *whatever!*

Retail theft is a serious problem. It's much more serious than most people realize.

How big you ask?

Well...the NRF (National Retail Federation) reports that theft cost U.S. retailers nearly 45 Billion dollars in 2008!

Did you catch that number? That's 45 Billion... with a "B"!

And there's no indication it's slowing down. The 21st Annual Retail Theft Survey (conducted by Hayes International) revealed that apprehensions and recovery dollars from both shoplifters and dishonest employees increased substantially over the past three years.

I won't bore you with a pile of statistics and percentages, but if there's anything you can take away from this book...it's the fact that theft is out of control in our society!

There's a reason "Thou Shall Not Steal" (The 8th Commandment) made God's Top 10 list. And... because theft will always be an issue for businesses, as well

as society in general, Loss Prevention and Security services will always be in demand. Good news for us...bad news for the crooks!

Unfortunately, regardless of the demand for LP, the industry continues to change. Many retailers now enforce a “no pursuit” policy for LP employees. I can see the benefits of a no-pursuit policy (less injuries) but it really does give the crooks an advantage. Definitely not the case when I was chasing bad guys. We chased them until they were caught...or until we ran out of gas. Even if that meant bending the rules...just a little. (See Chapter # 5)

Today, some retailers, believe it or not, will not even allow their security teams to use handcuffs. I don't understand the mentality of that thinking... not even for a second. If you can't restrain a suspect, why even bother stopping them in the first place?

Other companies force their LP employees to get at least two separate incidents on video before they will allow them to apprehend a suspect. No video... no stop. Period. Oh...and you don't think the thieves know this? Think again, buckaroo!

And don't even think about interviewing a female suspect or a female employee without a female witness right by your side...right?

Yes... things are very, very different these days. It's kind of sad in a way.

The Good News is...the Loss Prevention industry has evolved into a rewarding profession... not just a job.

The days of “hooking and booking” have essentially faded away... making room for proactive prevention programs and corporate shrink committees. I have to admit, the morphing of this industry has been a blessing to many of us who still

make a great living every day reducing shrink, preventing losses, (loss prevention, right?) and protecting the profits of our employers. It beats getting stabbed and spit on every day, right? (See chapter # 6)

The Bad News is... it's just not as exciting anymore! At least not at a higher level. Wouldn't you agree?

Now our days are filled with personnel conflicts, balancing budgets, and overtime expenses. Some of the drama we put up with now is enough to drive you to drink...even if you don't already indulge.

It's definitely a far cry from some of the "western days" we used to endure. But...regardless of the current conditions we work in today...we can be thankful for holding rewarding jobs... and we can always reflect on the stories and events that we experienced in the past. For better...or worse.

Personally...I have a ginormous list of memories from back in the day. Some I'll never forget... and others I hope to purge from my brain forever. And now...you can sample a taste of "a day in the life" of a Loss Prevention Agent... by simply turning the page.

Let's get started...

SPECIAL OFFER

P.S. - You can also sample a FREE lunch...compliments of the Author. All you need to do is take the **L.A.(Rodney King) Riot Quiz** at the back of this book. Answer just two questions correctly and you'll be munching on a Double-Double faster than you can say,"Can we all just get along?"

Good Luck!

CHAPTER 2- WHAT DOES A THIEF LOOK LIKE?

This is a very common question asked by the hordes of Public Defenders in America. The question is always asked of the LP Agent while testifying in a court of law... with the Public Defender hoping and praying the witness (you) will display some sort of discrimination or bias toward their thieving clients.

Public Defender: "So..Mr.Wanna' be Loss Prevention Agent... just exactly what does a shoplifter look like?"

LP Agent: "He looks just like the guy sitting next to you wearing the orange jumpsuit". (That gets them going!)

Public Defender: "So ... what made you watch my client on the day he was in your store? Was it the way he was dressed? Or the color of his skin?"

Lp Agent: "Actually... I wasn't watching your client at all on that day. I was watching the display of product that keeps getting cleaned out! He just happened to appear in front of my field of view and started boosting the same exact product I was watching!" (Now they're losing it!)

Public Defender: "So... how long have you been a Loss Prevention Agent?"

LP Agent: "Approximately 5 years."

Public Defender: "So ... you got started in this field because you couldn't become a Police Officer?" (Trying to push your buttons)

LP Agent: "No... I love my job! I get paid very well to catch crooks."

Public Defender: “No further questions.” (They usually give up with answers like these)

The truth is...there is no specific description of a common thief. Certainly, there isn't a physical description that would accurately describe a person who would rip you off.

If you even start to try and figure out who may or may not steal based on the premise of their race, age, or apparel... your kids are gonna' be skinny... because you won't make it in this line of work.

Now...that doesn't mean we can't *predict* a suspect's next move, does it? Of course not. There are many clues that thieves provide to the trained observer (us)... before they actually go to the dark side. You know what I'm talking about, right?

I'm not going to reveal any trade secrets here... but... just for the record...when it comes to predicting what a potential thief is going to do...anyone with half a brain in this business knows what to look for about 99% of the time. And 99% of the time... we're right on the money! It's called ...EXPERIENCE!

It's also about recognizing and predicting a suspect's behavior.

They say that “The Eyes Are the Window to the Soul”, right?

Well...the “scoping” eyes say a lot about what's coming next. The look to first base...then third base...then a selection is made...and finally....SHAZAM! ... they go dirty! (see chapter # 10 for more clarity on LP jargon like “going dirty”)

Of course there are some “customers” who are scrutinized a little harder than others... but it has absolutely nothing to do with their race, age, or religion.

It has everything to do with their actions.

Perhaps they are wearing a jacket or a coat in warm weather. Or maybe they load up their basket with multiple items... without even looking at the product they're selecting

Catching crooks actually does take a little skill. It's a constant elimination process as you "evaluate" potential thieves that catch your eye or cross into your field of view. This process is just a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the skills that make us successful trained observers.

I don't want to get off track with boring gibberish...so I think I'm done explaining the so-called "profiling" methods that we are always accused of demonstrating.

The bottom line is...thieves come in every color, shape, size, age, dress, and background you can imagine.

I know... because I have caught a vast variety of different types of thieves, and nothing surprises me anymore. I mean... nothing!!

Keep reading... and you'll understand exactly what I'm talking about

CHAPTER 3 – FELONY STUPID

It always amazed me how stupid some crooks were. I made it a habit to always ask every crook I caught WHY they did what they did. Some answers were boring and predictable. Others were off the chart!

For example, one day I caught a new employee stealing cash out of her till. It was the third time we had her on video in less than a month. As we were processing the case I asked her the standard question:

"Why did you take the money?"

"Because I needed to buy my books for school. College books are expensive."

"I agree. What are you studying in school? What's your major?"

"Criminology!"

Like I said earlier...I don't get it.

Or what about the brainiac thief we caught stealing two bottles of tequila for his vacation trip down to Mexico.

He was acting like a real "Adam Henry" (see LP Jargon) to us because he felt we should cut him some slack. Apparently, he was going to law school. Of course I was interested in his story, so I asked a few qualifying questions.

"Where are you going to law school?", I asked.

"I already went to law school, dude. I'm about to take the bar exam."

"Ok...but where did you go to law school?", I repeated.

"Up north.", he answered.

"Where up North?", I continued.

"Soledad.", he mumbled.

"You mean Soledad...the State Prison?", I asked.

"A law degree is a law degree. Don't matter where you got it.", he replied.

"Maybe you should've studied the definition of "theft" a little harder", I shot back.

"I guess the professional courtesy ain't gonna' happen, is it?", he asked.

"Sorry bro...not today!", I assured him.

Are crooks really that dumb?

Yes, they are. Some are even dumber than that Jailhouse lawyer.

Like the guy who actually came into our store and swiped a padlock from the shelf and walked right back outside and used it to lock his bicycle up to the leg of

the newspaper stand. Then he re-entered the store and proceeded to conduct his grocery shopping.

What was this idiot thinking?

Since my partner and I were working on an unrelated case at the time, the Store Manager grabbed this genius out of the line and brought him back to the breakroom. He explained what he saw and we took the guy off his hands for questioning.

“Why did you steal our lock?”, I asked.

“Because I didn’t want anyone to steal my bike”, he said.

Do I need to say anything else to prove that this guy had the brain of a scarecrow??

Sometimes when I asked a thief the *Why* question and I would get a very honest answer. It wasn’t always what I expected, but it was honest.

Other responses were priceless.

“Why did you take that EX-LAX without paying for it?”

“Because fool...I cants go dookie!”

Priceless. LOL!

Or when I asked an older male shoplifter his height and weight for the arrest report.

“How tall are you bro?”

“About five-nine”, he said.

“How much do you weigh?”

“Two oh ten”, he answered.

Priceless. LOL.

One of my favorite “felony stupid” crooks got just what he deserved.
But it didn’t have to be that way...

Let me explain.

The Roach Motel

Retail Grocery Chain

Moreno Valley, Ca.

I was working a plainclothes shoplift assignment on a hot summer day in the beautiful city of Moreno Valley. My partner and I expected to have a busy day at this location due to the prior activity we had seen in the past.

It didn’t take long to get the party started.

Enter one Black Male Adult into the hardware aisle. He was a scrappy-looking older guy but he was built with muscles. He didn’t look too interested in the hardware section until he moved over to the insect spray. He then “gave the look” and I knew he was going to go dirty. Sure enough, he selected eight boxes of “Raid” Roach Motels and quickly concealed them into his front waistband. After the concealment, he didn’t waste any time exiting the aisle and walking toward the front door.

It was time to meet him at the door and introduce ourselves.

We hit the door in a sprint as he was making his way to a compact car in the front of the lot. He saw us coming and tried to run. Fortunately for us, he was older than we thought and his running days were over. We beat him to the car, but he didn’t give up without a fight!

Surprisingly, he had a lot of strength. It wasn't easy getting him handcuffed but we managed to get it done without hurting ourselves or hurting him.

Our standard rule was still in effect – fighter's go to jail. Not many exceptions in my book. This stop was no different.

I asked "Scrappy" the standard questions.

"Why did you take the roach motels?"

"Because I got roaches in my house you f*cking dumba\$\$."

"Why did you take so many?"

"Because they're crawling all over my kids!"

"Why did you fight with us outside?", I asked.

"Because I can't go back to prison mother f*cker!"

"Are you on parole?"

"I ain't saying nothing else...just do what you gotta' do!"

"Ok. Fair enough."

As we processed the report for Scrappy, I needed to get a price check on the Roach Motels for the evidence sheet. So I called a Manager upstairs to help us out on the price check. The Manager grabbed one of the Roach Motels and took it back downstairs to get it scanned. A few minutes later he came back up with a strange look on his face.

"What's up?", I asked him.

"These are priced wrong. When I scanned the box it came up a different price than what's on the shelf."

"Ok...so you got the right price then?"

“Yeah...but...if he (pointing to Scrappy) would’ve just tried to pay for these, we would’ve had to honor our scanning guarantee. He would’ve got all of these for free!”, he explained.

Bummer!

Scrappy was picked up by the PD thirty minutes later. We found out he was on parole and had numerous priors for burglary and robbery.

A few months later I had to show up in court to testify against Scrappy. I never had to get on the stand because he agreed to be sentenced to 15 years in prison for his third strike. I guess you could say he “checked in” to his own roach motel for the next chapter of his life.

Sorry about that Scrappy!

It didn’t have to be that way!

Speaking of court - reminds me of another “felony stupid” crook.

One day my partner and I were sitting in a Pomona courtroom waiting to testify on a repeat booster we had caught a few weeks earlier. As we were waiting, we were listening to the case in front of the judge, which involved a couple of armed robbery suspects and a bank employee who was testifying on the stand.

As the DA was setting up the identification of the two suspects, who were sitting next to the PD wearing orange jumpsuits, the DA asked his witness, “So...can you identify the two suspects who entered your bank on the day in question?”.

“Yes...I can. They are seated at the defense table wearing orange overalls”, she stated.

Just then...one of the robbery suspects jumped up from his chair and shouted,
*"You couldn't see us b*tch. We was wearing masks!"*

Need I say more?

Priceless.

Every once in a while I would play a quick game of Retail Jeopardy with the young gang-bangers we caught stealing. Nearly ninety-nine percent of the juveniles we caught had a passion for stealing Oakland Raider gear. It never failed for us to catch at least two or three wanna' be gangsters stealing a Raider jersey, hat, t-shirt, or sweatshirt from the athletic apparel department. I happen to be a Raider Hater (sorry all you black & silver fans) but even though I wasn't a fan, I still gave these punks a chance to go free with my Retail Jeopardy game.

The rules were simple.

Once we caught them stealing a piece of Raider apparel, I would simply say,
"Ok...name just two players on the Oakland Raiders team and I'll let you go home ...no questions asked."

"Ummmm...Ronnie Lott?"

"Yeah... that's one. One more and you're free to go."

"Uhhh...that's all I know homie." ... "Wait... Montana?"

Priceless.

The sad fact is...not one of them could name two players.

I guess they weren't watching very much football in between tagging all those restroom stalls.

Seriously, I made that offer at least 40-50 times during my time working at that department store, and not a single thief could recall two Raider players!

Just goes to show you...Raider fans aren't real bright!.

CHAPTER 4 - NAME DROPPERS

I hate name-droppers. Don't you?

These are the thieves who expect special treatment after they get caught stealing...based on who they know. Sometimes these scenarios made our jobs tough.

Consistency is the key to keeping it simple. Treat everyone the same and you'll never have to worry about favoritism. However, the real world works a little different some times.

The Tightwad

Clothing Retailer

San Bernardino, Ca.

I remember catching a middle-aged woman stealing about \$250.00 in new clothes. She just selected a few outfits and concealed them inside another bag she was carrying. I made the stop and she was very cooperative.

During the interview she broke down and started sobbing. I couldn't get her to stop crying long enough to get an explanation out of her. Why all the tears lady? She just kept crying so I had no choice but to call the local PD to process her. The Mall Officer arrived a few minutes later and the mood of my suspect quickly changed. She started screaming at the top of her lungs that this was all his fault! (The Officer) He just listened to her for a minute and then he told me to leave the room. I wanted to give him some privacy but I wasn't feeling good about this scenario. I told him I wanted to stay. Then my suspect blurted out, "Don't leave. He's my husband and he beats me all the time!" The officer, her husband, then yelled back at her to "Shut the hell up!" and again asked me to leave the room.

Talk about a rock and a hard place! Geeez!

Reluctantly, I left the room. But I was quickly rescued by a Uniformed Sergeant who showed up... just in time to make sure everything was going smooth. Thank God!

It turns out that this Officer, my suspect's husband, made his wife buy all her clothes from local yard sales. He was just a controlling cheap-skate that guarded the checkbook... and she was tired of wearing second-hand clothes.

Pretty simple.

This was an easy call for us when it came down to prosecution. We gave the wife a “professional courtesy” and released her.

The last I heard about her husband was that Internal Affairs was looking into the spousal abuse claims.

I wonder if he put some of his money away for an attorney?

The Marlboro Man

Food Retailer

Los Angeles County, Ca.

It was always an adventure to work in certain cities that were overflowing with crime. The day always flew by... and you never could predict what you were going to experience before the end of your watch.

This day was no different. We were in Pomona, Ca. YEEE! HAWWWW!

Just as my partner and I sat down upstairs and looked out of the two-way mirror... I heard the Store Manager call for us on the Com-Line. I picked up the line and listened to him describe a “bad feeling” he had about a “big guy” at the register... who had just written a check for a few cartons of cigarettes. We decided to go down to the sales floor and take a closer look.

Less than a minute later we approached the Manager and asked him where the customer was waiting while he called the bank to verify funds?

The Manager quickly screamed, "He's outside getting on his motorcycle!"

We ran out to the parking lot just as our impatient check writer was stuffing three cartons of Marlboros into the storage container of his Harley Davidson. (The bike was drop-dead gorgeous!)

We yelled the common verbal commands of "Stop! Security! Yadda...Yadda...Yadda!... but he wasn't listening. And the Manager was right... he was a BIG Dude! (Later we inputted him as 6'-5", 280 lbs., solid muscle!) As this guy tried to start his bike, my partner went straight for the choke... and I tried to get a grip on his wrists. So far so good...until the bike started to move.

Shii-take' mushrooms!

With a hard push to knock him off-balance, all three of us tumbled sideways on top of that beautiful bike! Oh well...it was painful to watch but definitely made our life much easier. After another minute of choking and wrestling, we managed to get a pair of handcuffs on the Marlboro Man... all the while he screamed, "You don't know who you're dealing with you (f-bomb) rent-a-cops!"

We escorted him and his fanny pack back into the store and sat him down on the floor in the breakroom.

Why did you fight with us?

"Because I don't want to go to jail! My Boss is gonna' be pissed!"

Who are the cigarettes for?

“Me.... you (F-bomb-ing) idiot!”

Well you can't write a check and just walk out with our smokes before we verify funds. Then you tried to boogie on your bike, didn't you?

“My ex-wife must have closed that account. Can't you cut me a break?
I need to go to work tonight.”

Where do you work?

“I'm a Hollywood actor's bodyguard!”

Really? Where is your ID?

“In my fanny pack. Take a look inside.”

When I unzipped his fanny pack it was jam-packed with VIP passes and ID cards for hundreds of venues and stadiums. You name it... this guy had a pass to get in. Maybe he was a big-shot bodyguard after all?

He was still a thief.

Along with the passes I also found a little black book inside that fanny pack. When I started to thumb through the names in the book, Marlboro Man went bezerk! He started screaming, “You can't look at that! You can't see my private notes!!”

I kept browsing through the book as I explained that I was just looking for his ID card. As I flipped through the names, Marlboro Man had “scored” them with a rating of 2-5 stars next to their names. OH BOY... he had some names in that book! I’m talkin’ about some big time Hollywood beauties! (You know I can’t mention their names...)

Is this little book the reason why you got divorced?

“You could say that... so what’s gonna’ happen now?”

We’re going to finish our report and you’re going to go to jail. Sorry!

“Cut me some slack dude! I’ll get you tickets to anything you want! Lakers, concerts, the Playboy Mansion! You tell me where you want to go and I’ll make it happen. Just don’t call the cops.”

(Now here’s a teachable moment! Don’t ever compromise your integrity in this line of work. Ever!!)

Thanks for the offer pal... but no thanks! Your job and your little black book don’t impress me. If I remember correctly... you called us Rent-A-Cops. PD is enroute.

“F-bomb!... _____ is gonna’ fire me!”

Adios ...Muchacho!

(I wish I could name the actor but I don’t want to throw “Rambo” under the bus.)

CHAPTER 5 - FOOT PURSUITS

When I was younger I loved foot pursuits! To me, there was nothing more exciting than chasing down a crook and tackling him at the end of a good pursuit.

Back in the day, it was not uncommon for us to go into pursuit two or three times per week.

More often than not we would come back to the store with “one in custody”.

Over the years, as I look back at the some of the pursuits I was involved in, I can actually say that I was a complete IDIOT for chasing a suspect on a few of them.

I can add LUCKY to a few scenarios as well...because I was able to survive a few of those pursuits by the skin of my backside!

Thank you Lord!

Today I have a much different outlook on foot pursuits then I did in the early days. Of course, I'm a little out of shape today so the results would probably be dismal if I had to run farther than 100 yards.

It sucks getting old!

Onward.

Here's some solid advice regarding foot pursuits:

“The Farther You Pursue...
the More Danger You Will Encounter!”

You may want to write down this little proverbial gem or put it somewhere close to remind you that pursuits are *Dangerous!!*

Now...I know all about adrenaline and excitement when you're chasing a bad guy. Remember...I did it for many years!

But...because I did so often...and I escaped some hairy situations, I am urging you to think twice about pursuing anyone outside the perimeter of your immediate surroundings.

Reality is... we don't have guns, helicopters, or bite dogs to help us take a crook into custody.

Sometimes the only thing we have is common sense...and a little creativity.

Most of the time we win and the bad guys go to jail.

Other times...we have to eat crow.

Which reminds me...

The Gazelle

Retail Clothing Store

San Bernardino, Ca.

One of the most memorable foot pursuits I ever had was back in San Bernarhetto when I worked at a retail clothing store inside the mall.

We were watching a black male juvenile in the athletic shoe department.

We guessed, after looking at the current condition of the shoes he was wearing, that it was time for a new pair of sneakers for this kid.

And...surprise...surprise...we were right on the money!

He requested his size in three different styles of shoes and Donna was happy to accommodate his request.

Our number one suspect tried on the first two pairs of shoes but he didn't seem to like them. The third pair fit just right...because once he laced them up he put his "tired" shoes into the box and quickly slid them right under a rack of sweatpants.

Here we go.

My partner was waiting outside the store near the mall entrance and I casually began to follow "sticky feet" toward the lower level exit as he casually strolled his way out of the shoe department.

We had him trapped. One in the front...one in the back. This was going to be easy.

The Gazelle had different plans.

Once this guy was about 10 feet from the exit, he turned, looked at me, and smiled from ear to ear. He had that look of confidence. He had that look of a Champion!

And then he bolted!

This kid took off like a rocket, running right through a crowd of mall shoppers, and even though my partner was waiting in front of him, he missed him by 5 or 6 feet.

I wouldn't consider myself super fast but I was holding my own and staying with him the first 50 yards.

Of course I was yelling , STOP...SECURITY...STOP! the entire time... but he wasn't listening.

Actually...I think he was laughing. At yours truly!

My hopes of catching him were quickly fading.

He had some wheels. And they were twice as fast as mine.

By the time I reached the end of the mall, in front of Carl's Jr., The Gazelle had pulled ahead of me far enough to turn around and give me a big, white-toothed smile, accompanied by the middle finger.

What a classy thief!

The last I saw of him was the white bottoms of those brand new sneakers making their way out of the mall exit doors...never to be seen again.

I was gasping for air about this time and decided it was in my best interest to just tuck my tail in and head back to the Security Office so we could get a photo of this kid out to the other stores.

It sucks to come back to your peers and managers empty-handed after a foot pursuit. You almost feel like a total failure.

My partner and I were reviewing our botched plan of execution as we walked back into the security office and talked about our mistakes.

Man ...that kid was fast!

As we were cueing up the video-tape the phone rang in the Security Office.

I picked it up...still breathing a little heavy...and said, "Hello."

A male voice on the other end asked, "Is this Security?"

"Yes...how can I help you?", I responded.

"This is the Fast Mother F*cker you were just chasing...with the new sneakers! Yooooou can't catch me...Yoooooou can't catch me!", he taunted.

Then he laughed and hung up!

What a punk!

Foot pursuits were always exciting because you never knew when they would surface. Many times, my partners and I would try to guess how our suspects would react when we approached them or tried to make a stop.

It was a constant guessing game of wondering if they were going to resist, run, cry, lie, or even try to kill you! (See Chapter # 6)

It was a little difficult to predict what was going on inside a suspect's brain but many crooks provided non-verbal clues about what they were going to do next, if you had the training or experience to recognize it.

Many times we were wrong. Other times we were right.

It always amazed me how fast the action could heat up!

One minute you're headed for a lunch break, the next minute you're knee-deep in a pile of shiitake mushrooms!

Just like the time I was working a plainclothes assignment in Los Angeles County...

The Linebacker

Retail Grocery Store

Los Angeles County

My partner and I were walking the salesfloor during a non-productive morning when we decided to take a quick break at the donut shop next store.

"But first", my partner explained, "I need to visit the porcelain throne before we go."

Oh Brother...!

"Hurry", I said, "I'll be right outside waiting for you."

As my partner walked toward the rear of the store, I decided to hang out in the front lobby and catch up on the Hollywood gossip by reading a few articles from

the National Enquirer. The headline “Man Eats His Own Face” had caught my eye earlier.

As soon as I picked up the magazine something else caught my eye a few checkstands over.

When I looked up, I saw a husky black male in his early twenties, approach the checkstand and select four packs of Duracell batteries.

He was a good-sized dude and it was no surprise that he was wearing a college football jersey and a pair of shorts. He definitely looked like an athlete.

I was hoping he was going to pay for those batteries...but...God had a sense of humor that day because he gave a quick glance around the front lobby area and immediately stuffed the batteries into his front waistband.

You have got to be kidding me??

I’m all alone, the Manager is in the back room, my partner is on the toilet, and the “linebacker” is walking out the front door.

Now what?

I quickly asked myself...”Is the juice worth the squeeze?”

Remember...in this scenario... you don’t have a lot of time to make a decision.

The answer was...”You betcha”!

Nobody was ever going to call me “Kevlar Man!” (See Chapter # 6)

So...against my better judgement...I decided to pursue the battery booster on my own. I figured I would use my excellent verbal judo skills and he would just follow my verbal commands and come right back into the store.

Fat chance!

I ran outside behind him just as he was starting to pedal away on his BMX bicycle. Of course this caught me by surprise because I was hoping he drove to the store in a car...parked far away in the parking lot.

A bicycle? How old was this guy?

Anyway...

I hit the linebacker with a hard flying tackle of my own and knocked him clean off the bike! Of course... I'm sure I yelled "Security" at some point during my short flight in the air.

Yippie! So far...so good!

The bad news was...when I made contact with this dude, my badge fell off my belt, and my right foot got caught up in the rear spokes of his back tire.

The good news was...the linebacker lost his right shoe on impact and the four packs of batteries fell onto the sidewalk.

I guess I didn't hit him hard enough though because he jumped back up on his feet and the foot pursuit was on!

I told you it happens fast.

The linebacker ran across the front of the shopping center and I gave chase. Even with two shoes I was having a tough time keeping up with him.

Just as he neared the end of the shopping center, in front of an oil change shop, he started yelling, "Help!... Help!... Help me!"

Of course this got the attention of the employees working in the oil shop. Faster than you can say "Jiffy Lube", a mechanic starts running toward me wielding a huge metal wrench.

You can't be serious dude?

I instinctively reached for my badge but remembered dropping it back by the store. The mechanic literally threatened to "drop me" with his wrench unless I backed off from the big dude that was running from me, who was now making his way across a busy intersection towards a residential neighborhood.

I tried to explain to the grease monkey that I was the good guy and he just helped the crook get away.

Thanks for nothing, pal!

Just then I heard a car behind me come to a screeching halt.

It's my partner and he says, "Get in. Let's go get that guy!"

I jumped into the passenger seat of his Camry and we raced out of the parking lot as I replied, "Holy rusty metal Batman! It's about time you showed up!"

We spotted our guy as we drove across the street heading West.

He was walking fast with his fingers interlaced and his arms over his head. This was a good sign. He was winded.

Our plan was to drive up next to him as close as possible and make an attempt to take him into custody. We felt good about our plan because he was walking down a sidewalk between a busy intersection and a retaining wall. He was almost trapped.

Not a bad plan... considering we didn't have any other options.

My partner came to a stop just in front of the suspect, who had not spotted us, but was starting to jog again.

We pulled up parallel to our sweaty booster as we both jumped out of the car and ran after him.

The linebacker made a few more head fakes that almost worked again but 50 yards later we were able to corner him behind a vehicle that was parked in a driveway. I'm not sure why but he jumped up onto the trunk of the car and started screaming "HELP!"...again.

What a sissy!

His cry must've been heard because a guy came out of the house and started screaming at our suspect to get off his car "RIGHT NOW!"

We yelled for the homeowner to call the Police for us and told him we were the good guys. Of course the guy didn't call because he was too worried about the top of his car getting dented.

The suspect then jumped off the car and started to run past us again. My partner was finally able to grab his arm and slow him down with a wrist lock. As soon as I got next to him though he was able to muscle his slippery body out of the hold and started running again.

Was this ever going to end???

This is about the time we really could've used one of those net guns. You know...the kind that shoots out a web just like Spider Man??

Hmmm?? I may have to consider testing one of those in the near future.

I digress back to Batman instead.

My partner was so frustrated after our suspect slipped away that he wound his arm up, and threw a fistful of keys, as hard as he could, in the suspect's direction.

Then a funny thing happened.

It was almost like everything went in slow motion for a few seconds.

The ball of keys hit the linebacker so hard in the back of his neck that they literally penetrated into his skin. And they stuck!

Ouch!

Fortunately for us...this brought him down.

Unfortunately for us...we now had a crowd of curious people around us from the neighborhood... and it was not a friendly crowd.

Remember those words of wisdom I mentioned earlier about foot pursuits?

It's worth repeating right now.

“The Farther You Pursue...
the More Danger You Will Encounter!”

Let's put this in perspective for a second.

We were chasing a big, sweaty, linebacker for stealing batteries that we already recovered back by the store. We were about two miles from the store, surrounded by low-life beer drinkers, in an unknown residential neighborhood, with no cell phone, and no weapons. And let me remind you...my partner left his car 75 yards away and the keys were now stuck in the back of our suspect's neck.

This was not good.

To top it off...one of the friendly “boyz in the hood” yelled out, “You can't do that sh*t to a brother that's running away. That's like shooting somebody in the back! What's wrong witch you fools?”

Now I was getting a little nervous. This could escalate very quickly.

I looked for a friendly face in the grass behind me and instructed him to call 911 immediately. He looked at me and said, “I ain't calling nobody. Call the Police yourself. I wanna' know why you're chasing him.”

Tough crowd.

By this time our suspect had pulled the keys out of his bloody neck and threw them over a chain link fence.

Smartest move he made all day. For him.

But he didn't seem to get the same vibe we did about the neighborhood residents, because he got back up and started running again.

Instinctively, we ran after him.

To our surprise...nobody tried to stop us. Not even Mr. Bigmouth, who apparently felt we were now the criminals.

The linebacker only ran a short distance though. A few houses down from the bloody key incident, he ran around the back of a small house and jumped the fence into the side yard. He then walked around the back of the house and went inside through a screen door.

This was getting out of hand now.

Did he live here? Was this his house?

Or was he desperate enough to walk into a stranger's house to get away from us?

Would he take somebody hostage?

Time for us to knock on the front door and see if anybody was home.

I approached the front door wondering if we were ever going to see a patrol car come to the rescue as I rang the doorbell several times.

An older gentleman came to the door and cracked it open about an inch.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“We are chasing a theft suspect. He went into your back yard a minute ago. Please call the Police. He may be inside your house!”, I explained.

The old man then opened the door all the way and I could see he was carrying a shotgun in his hand.

He said, “Get the hell away from my property or I’ll shoot your a\$\$!”

Ok...Reality Check!

It was time to go. Once and for all. The old man could take care of himself.

I quickly backed away from the front door and told my partner it was over.

“Let’s go. We’re gonna’ get killed for a few packs of batteries”, I said.

“Yep...let’s get the hell out of dodge,” he said. “I need to find my keys and we’re out of here! This is nuts!”

And that’s how it ended.

We walked back, found the keys in the backyard of a senior citizen, and we drove back to the store in silence.

I think we were both replaying, in our minds, all the things that could've gone horribly wrong with that pursuit.

We were very lucky to come back in one piece. More than once.

We felt so miserable about what happened, we never called the PD.

Apparently nobody else did either because we never heard from them the entire day.

It wasn't going to matter anyway. The Linebacker was long gone by now.

We wrote up the paperwork and listed the suspect as a "John Doe" – AKA The Linebacker.

I never got my donut that day. But I learned a valuable lesson.

I promised myself and my partner I would never chase a thief that far, ever again.

My partner responded by promising me he would never have another bowel movement during our shift...if he could help it.

Teamwork!

You gotta' love it.

Airborne Booster

Retail Clothing Chain

San Bernardino, Ca.

Working at the mall was always an adventure. Besides dealing with all the groupies in our store (see chapter # 8), we were constantly catching crooks - day in and day out. Many times we would create a little competition with each other to see who could compile the biggest recovery during the month. It was a great way to build a little excitement within our department. And we had plenty of opportunities to add to our totals.

I scored a huge winner one night with another parolee who thought he was smarter than the average bear.

I guess he forgot the golden rule:

“Never Steal from a Grizzly In His Own Backyard!”

I was monitoring the CCTV at the time and I spotted this squirrely-looking hispanic male enter the store and walk directly over to the Men’s Department. This guy was around 45-50 years old and he had more ink on his skin than the LA Times.

He went over to the Levi display tables and starting scoping the department with his beady little eyes.

I had seen this look before. We were about to get boosted for some Levis.

I radioed my partner, who was on the salesfloor, and advised him of our new tattooed friend in the Men's Department. Then I instructed the female associate to give this customer some breathing room.

Just as our associate walked over to the opposite side of the department, Mr. Parolee pulled out a 25 gallon Hefty trash bag from his pocket and opened it up. He then quickly began sweeping piles of jeans into the plastic trash bag until it was almost filled to the maximum capacity. The bag looked pretty heavy now as it must have contained at least twenty or twenty five pairs of Levis.

My partner was trying to get a position near the exit door but we didn't want to spook this guy so he stayed back and gave him some space. We figured he wasn't going to be able to run very fast with that sack full of jeans, so we weren't worried about him getting too far away.

Once he felt the coast was clear, our Levi booster threw that bag of jeans over his shoulder and made a mad dash toward the exit near the parking structure.

He hit the door just as my partner and I were in pursuit from inside the store.

It only took a few steps for this loser to realize that he couldn't run from us carrying that bag of jeans. We were gaining on him fast!

A few seconds later Einstein dumped the Santa Clause bag and fled on foot across the top of the parking structure. He was moving much faster now. Of course, we pursued him, because we knew that he would soon run out of real estate. He was running across the top level of the parking structure and he would be trapped in the corner in another 25 yards.

Unless he had some magical flying reindeer waiting for him, this was going to be easy. And I was going to jump into first place in the recovery contest!

YAHHHHOOOOO!

Until the rocket-scientist reached the top corner of the structure.

Once he realized he was trapped, he began to climb the barrier wall overlooking the congested city street, three stories below.

Then he did the unthinkable.

Just as we caught up to him ...he jumped!

Without a chute.

We were close enough to look over the top of the parking structure and watch him land on the street below us – with a dull thud!

Ouch!

It looked really painful when he hit the ground.

At least he landed feet first. Even though his legs looked like they “shattered” when they hit the ground, at least he didn’t land on his head or his back. I have a feeling that would’ve hurt even more!

After the jump, my partner and I looked at each other in disbelief.

Now what?

Was he alive?

Should we still arrest him?

Was this our fault?

Will this be on the news?

Hundreds of thoughts ran through our minds but we were a little confused about our next step. This had never happened before.

We decided to meet with Mall Security and call an ambulance for our suspect. So we ran back toward the stairwell in the parking structure and met with a Uniformed Officer who radioed an ambulance for the guy who was now dragging himself across the street trying to get near the sidewalk.

We ran over to the street where the suspect was laying and stood on the sidewalk just watching him try to crawl onto the curb. A few cars had pulled over and blocked him from getting hit by oncoming traffic.

I explained to the Mall Officer what led up to the suspect jumping and he said we didn't do anything wrong.

I wasn't so sure at this point.

An ambulance arrived a few minutes later and gave the suspect some medical aid. One of the paramedics quickly advised that both legs of the suspect were broken in multiple places.

Ouch ...again!

I guess he wasn't going to be trying on those Levis anytime soon?

I still wasn't sure what to do at this point so I asked the Mall Officer for his opinion. He was non-committal so I asked the Paramedic for some advice.

His response was much better. He said, "If you prosecute this guy, he goes to the hospital and we pay his medical bills. If you don't prosecute, we call a family member for him and they come pick him up. After that... he's on his own. It's your call."

That made it a no-brainer for me.

Since we already recovered our merchandise, we were not going to press charges.

Sorry Boo-Boo!

Good luck!

Good night!

We're outta' here!

For the record...I actually did feel a little guilty that night. Just a little.

But the next day I went straight to the top of the recovery board and I was now the top dog in the store for the monthly contest. This made me feel much better again.

Hey...at least I'm being honest!

All I can say about the Airborne booster is, "I betcha' he won't do that again!"

WARNING! - Mature Content!

CHAPTER 6 -THE TRUTH ABOUT LOSS PREVENTION GROUPIES

Earlier I mentioned that I have many memories about the unpredictable nature of this job. One of the realities of the Loss Prevention industry that hit me early on was that we have groupies.

Yeah... it's true. We really do have a flock of sinful followers that want to get to know us on a very,very, personal level. For some reason it just seems to be a part of the retail culture. (At least it was during my days working the floor.)

Now, the human side of me likes to admit that it feels good to be wanted.

I think most of you would agree, right?

It's pretty flattering when you have two attractive employees verbally "claiming" you the first week on the job! They immediately want to know if you have a girlfriend?...are you married?...(to them, this is never a signal to stay away)... where do you like to party?...etc.

It's actually a little intimidating for some of us guys with morals and standards. For others...well...they're just "leper-whores". (See LP Jargon)

Some of the girls I interacted with were pretty darn blunt. It was very common to hear whispers in the break room and on the salesfloor such as “He has muscles...” or “He’s good looking... he can handcuff me anytime!”

Based on the vibe you gave back to these girls (As in...I’m available)...it wasn’t unrealistic for you to score a new gal-pal before you even got your first paycheck!

Life is good, yeah? Think again.

Onward.

Unfortunately... most young, entry level LP Agents know a lot more about shrinkage than they do about shrink. This thinking can quickly stall or even ruin an LP Agents chance for career growth. Trust me on this one.

While we are on that topic, I have a little advice to share with those who are smart enough to listen and follow directions. Here is the best advice I can give you regarding LP “groupies”...

RUN AWAY FROM THEM...AS FAST AS YOU CAN!!

Did you catch that? Really....run like Forest Gump!!

And if they chase after you...run *faster!*

Very simple.

I truly hope you follow my advice...because if you think your scenario is different... or you won’t get caught...or you’re smarter than the average player, the only thing you are playing with is fire! It’s only a matter of time before you get burned! And when you get burned...your career in Loss Prevention is over.

Don't take this advice lightly. One of my old Bosses...(The Puerto Rican) constantly reminded our team with his words of wisdom.

He would always say, "Don't dip your pen in company ink!" or "Never fish in the corporate pond".

I understood what he meant but some of my partners never even considered his advice. And of course...when they got caught by the Store Director smackin' lips with the cute girl in the housewares department...in the back of the stockroom...on the clock...there were serious consequences for them... and for our Boss. And even though he hated to hear about our alleged relationships, the Puerto Rican always tried to go to bat for us...again ...and again. Sometimes he was successful (if you had a rack of stats) and sometimes it was a painful ending.

Many of the obvious "fisherman" were fired on the spot.

At least they couldn't say he didn't warn them.

After just a few short months in this business, I could see why the Boss constantly reminded us over and over about not getting involved with the groupies at work. If you were a halfway decent looking LP Agent, all you had to do was say "Security" and one of the groupies would melt for you.

Many times...when business was slow...or when we were bored...a few members of the LP team would jump on the CCTV system and scope out the female employees who were on the clock. If they found one that liked to "play", then they would dial up their extension and just say, "Show me something!"

If the store was really dead... we got a quick boob shot or a fast look up their skirts via CCTV. (One of my partners labeled themselves the Fashion Police because they had to make sure the panties and the bra colors matched!)

Of course...we never recorded any of those episodes. Ever. Honestly.

Just to give you an idea how flagrant this topic was...let me be more specific and provide some real life "situations".

One day I came into work after my days off and one of my partners, who we'll call "Ace", couldn't wait to tell me about what happened the night before.

"Bro...last night was wild! We had a foursome with the chicks over in LadiesWear!", he said.

"What? Are you serious?...with who?", I asked.

"Yeah...me and "Ghiradelli" (another male LP employee) were at the club having a drink with Brenda and Sandra. We were just having a good time and then I suggested we go back to my place and just get naked!"

"You're kidding me?" I asked in disbelief.

"They couldn't get in the car fast enough!", he explained.

"Then what happened?", I asked.

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