



YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE

Chuck Cheesman, Investigator

One of the first questions I am often asked by a potential new client, another investigator, or another protection agent I meet for the first time usually sounds something like this, 'So, what's your background?' or, 'What agency were you with?' You see, one of the most common assumptions made by people as it pertains to my field is you have to be a former law enforcement officer to be a PI or be in executive protection. These days I take a certain satisfaction in watching the bewildered look cross the face of the unsuspecting person asking the question as I reply, oh, I was never in law enforcement, in fact I was a welder for many years. The next question usually goes some thing like this: 'How in the world does a welder become a Private Investigator?' Well, as it was put to me when I asked the same question prior to starting my journey, you can't, it is not possible. 'You just can't get there from here. You need some kind of law enforcement background to get into those fields. You better stick with what you know'. It is lucky for me I have to learn those lessons the hard way.

The fact is, if you would have told me 10 years ago that I would be the owner of my own Investigations firm and have had thousands of hours of experience conducting surveillance and interviewing witnesses, doing everything from working cases for attorneys and insurance companies to following cheating spouses. I would have laughed out loud. In fact, I would have said it was impossible. After all, I am a construction worker. What could I possibly learn about that? You can't get there from here.

Well, the story is simple, not. You see, I was also studying for my black belt in Kenpo back then. This would have been in the mid 90's when I moved to the Corona area. I was training and competing in martial arts when I met my current instructor Steve Garcia. It turned out that Mr. Garcia had been involved in personal security earlier in his martial arts career and still kept in touch with some of his friends who were still active in the business. Through my association I had the opportunity to train with people like Dave Hebler, Dan Laxon, Willy Steele, and Rick Hughes. Mr. Hebler had protected Elvis for many years in the 70's and Mr. Laxon had a great deal of experience in the field as did the others. At some point it was suggested that I get into the bodyguard business. I never thought much of it at the time until the subject came up with my accountant. It turned out that if I had some sort of training in the field I could write off my martial arts training and competitions as continuing education for my second career as a bodyguard. Well, off I went to find credible training in the personal protection field. You see, this all started as a way for me to get a tax write off.

I ended up taking a three day training course hosted by Dr. Kobetz in Las Vegas. I learned that executive protection was nothing like I thought it would be. I also learned that the person training me happened to be one of the most renowned authorities in the field. I was so impressed with what I learned in three days that I went to the training facility in Virginia for more in depth training. What I attended was one of the most



intensive training courses I had been subjected to since Marine Corps boot camp. After completing my training I was accepted into the Nine Lives Association where I was introduced to some of the most accomplished professionals in the field of executive protection. I learned from the best the field had to offer.

It didn't take long before I realized that I needed to be an expert in counter-surveillance to be effective in this field. So, how do you become an expert at counter surveillance? The logical solution to my way of thinking was to become an expert in the art and science of surveillance of course. Now the question, how do you do that? The answer, go do it. Simple enough I thought. Ok, not many credible surveillance schools open to civilians around here so now what? I got out the phone book and started talking to private investigators. When I told them what I was trying to do and asked if I could work with them free of charge in exchange for the experience, I was asked what my background was. Guess what they told me. That's right. 'It is not possible. You can't get there from here'. All except one out of the hundred or so that I called over a span of about two weeks. He even made an appointment for me to meet with him and discuss the possibility. I arrived at the appointed place ahead of schedule prepared to make a good impression and was promptly stood up. In fact it was only after I kept checking back to see if we could reschedule for another month that I finally met with him. The meeting went well but nothing happened after that for another couple months of keeping at it. I guess by then he figured I was serious enough that he gave me a job on a domestic case, or cheating spouse. I was to follow a client's husband when he left work and see where he went. I waited for several hours at a location outside an office in Long Beach waiting for the man to come out and go to the gym. After waiting for half a day he came out and headed over to the 24 Hour Fitness on Ocean Blvd, it was a Family Fitness back in those days. I stayed on this guy for about three hours. I watched as he wandered aimlessly around the gym seeming to have not the slightest clue what to do. I later found out the client became suspicious because the man would spend three to four hours a day at the gym five days a week and made no progress in his fitness program. Of course his wife knew he was having an affair. After reading my report and viewing the tape I shot of him at the gym she decided her money would be better spent on a personal trainer for her husband instead of an investigator. That was it. That was how it started. It wasn't long until I was working cases on a regular basis. A short time after that I attended a conference for the NLA in New Orleans. I was wandering around on Bourbon Street at 3:00 AM with my then fiancée Dawn, now my wife, and Bob Tucker an NLA member I had become friends with during some training in Phoenix a few months before. Bob made a comment about possibly starting his own agency in a few years when he retired from the Ross Police department in Northern California. I suggested he partner up with me since I was going to start my own company and I needed a qualified manager. The logic here was to start now and have things built up over a few years and be established before he retired. He liked the idea. So, after several meetings we eventually incorporated a company called EPIC International. It wasn't long before we were contracting and subcontracting security and investigation contracts all over Southern California. We worked some great cases often for much bigger companies than ours that had big images



in the industry. I smile now when I think about the fact that we were providing service for clients that had no interest in us because we were considered too small or too inexperienced. Yet the very companies that they hired brought us in to handle the assignments as subcontractors to represent them.

A few years went by and we were doing well enough but we began to see a problem with the accountant we had included as a partner. So, all things considered Bob and I decided the best thing was to dissolve the company. That was a sad day for me. Although things didn't work out the way we hoped I had more than the required six thousand hours of investigations experience to qualify for my own license. It was around that time I went on my own and formed C Patrick Associates. Since then I have spent many hours in the field training and working on criminal defense cases, insurance fraud, and of course cheating spouse investigations. I have had many former law enforcement officers and some very experienced investigators work for me since then. Sometimes I can't help but smile when the question is asked. 'What is your background?' And once the shock wears off at my reply, the inevitable question, 'How the heck does someone with your background end up a Private Investigator?' 'Well the truth is, as I was told a long time ago, you just can't.'

So, remember this story the next time some one tells you, 'you can't'. It has been my experience that when you find a mountain across your path there are four options you may choose. You may go over it, around it, through it, or you can let it stop you and there you will stay. If you are willing to do what is necessary and pay your dues. You can do anything. It may not be easy but, you can in fact, get there from here!