

# Sandy Wall - Episode 805

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

working, people, swat, call, training, stories, swat team, law enforcement, city, great, talk, gun, houston, life, police department, day, cops, patrol officers, shoot, canine

## SPEAKERS

Sandy Wall, James Geering

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**J** James Geering 00:00

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week, it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, SWAT legend and the author of The Long Road Home Sandy wall. Now in this conversation, we discuss a host of topics from Sandy's early life, his journey into law enforcement, working narcotics, the evolution of the SWAT program, Swat, Medic, school safety, and of course, his book, which is filled with some incredible stories from his career and some of the men and women that he served with. Now, before we get to this amazing conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of over 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men or women's stories, so I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you, Sandy, wool enjoy. Was Sandy, I want to start by saying thank you so much for taking the time and coming on the behind the shield podcast today.

**i** 01:41

It's my honor. Thank you for the opportunity.

**J** James Geering 01:43

Now we were connected by Chuck to cheer us. So just as an icebreaker, how do you guys know each other?

**i** 01:53

I used to run the safari land training group. It's Safari land. I don't know if you're familiar with him out there, but the largest manufacturer of law enforcement equipment in the United


States. And they had a training program primarily consisted of the use of their products, which Chuck being a SWAT guy, he probably could have taught a whole lot of things, but he primarily was a self defense instructor. And one of our product lines was my dad NOC batons. And he was one of our instructors, and hosted our conference a few times up there at his agency. So I've known him for years. He worked for me as an instructor through when I was running the program, but a great guys super talent. Really enjoyed my time with those guys.

 James Geering 02:37

Beautiful. Well, kind of first question where on planet earth are we finding you today?

 02:42

I am in beautiful South East Texas along the coastal then we call it not far from the Gulf of Mexico. I'm about halfway between the city of Houston and the City of Corpus Christi, and about 30 miles inland, if that makes sense.

 James Geering 02:59

Okay, absolutely, it does. So I would love to start at the very beginning of your timeline. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic what your parents did and how many siblings?

 03:12

Okay, yeah, I was born about 30 miles from where I'm at right now a little town called Bloomington, Texas. And at three older brothers, I'm the baby of family. I was supposed to bend a girl, my wife kept trying to have a daughter and have a daughter. And then when I finally popped out, she The doctor said I was a boy. And she looked at him and said, Well, you're fired. And then she looked at my dad and said you're fired too. So that was in four fours on hand. So he bought her a boat and named it Angela, which was going to be the girl's name if I would have been a girl. But my father was worked in the pipeline industry, connecting products from chemical plants and that sort of stuff. It's chemical plants along the Gulf. Gulf coast here is pretty prominent, it's big business and employs a lot of people. And so that was his job. And my mother was pretty much a House Maker with you know, four boys. Two of them are quite a bit older. And then one of them was just a couple years older than me. And but yeah, she kept herself busy with odd jobs and picking up little stuff toward the end of her of my time at home. She became a part time nurse, but But yeah, she. So we grew up in the country, not as some small town life about 2000 people in my hometown. I had 52 People in my graduating high school class. So we knew everybody and you know where they lived and what their brothers and sisters names and what their dog's name was, you know, it's small town life. And my my brothers had all moved off and became successes and it was my time. Finally I went to a couple years of college and just didn't really enjoy that and saw You're about joining the Houston Police Department. And I thought, wow, that would be interesting. And the rest is history.

**J** James Geering 05:07

When you look back at that small community, what were the pros of that kind of living where I live now in Florida, I'm part of a very kind of new manufacturing community. But it's five housing subdivisions around a communal Park, swimming pool, basketball courts, tennis courts, and that kind of old fashion, you know, the kids come home and the lights come on. That's what they've got. And the kids play together. And they're all different ethnicities, and a lot of people the first generation immigrants, but it's the kind of community and kind of neighbor mentality that I feel that some areas maybe we've lost a little bit. What was what was the, you know, the, the dynamic of growing up in a small town versus the Houston city that you ended up working in?

**S** Sandy Wall 05:56

It was much like Mayberry RFD you know, there was no crime. We never locked our doors, we left the keys in our cars. We went on vacation, we might lock the doors, but that would be about it. I can never remember any crime at all. And you knew all your neighbors we played my mother and father didn't have a clue where we were all day that the rule was, you'd be in by dark. And as long as we were in by dark then that was it. She had a she had no idea where we were at. And we went all over that part of the county and on our bicycle. Sometimes we might go 20 miles to go fish in a creek or, or to go hunting along the riverbank. And yeah, it's, it was great. It was carefree. I really enjoyed it. But then once I decided I was going to go a law enforcement career, I decided I was going to be all in I have nothing against small town policing. Those guys do a wonderful job. And it can be just as dangerous as big town policing. But they're just more crime in a big city. And so that's why I decided to go to Houston. Well, actually, I looked at Houston, Austin and San Antonio. And at the time, Houston was paying the best, and they were actively recruiting. So it was kind of a easy button for me. And, and, and it was, you know, of course, that little little small town kid the big city, and I write about this in my book, I was totally lost. I had no idea about traffic about cry about downtown Houston, where the police academy was, and and I'm screwing up, left and right. And there's a lot of stories in there right at the beginning about me trying to get my footing and getting my feet on the ground and getting my head above water.

**J** James Geering 07:39

We're just back to the childhood for a moment. You were out hunting and fishing. What about sports? Were you playing any sports during their childhood?

**i** 07:48

Yeah, and I wrote about my book. Two of my three brothers were very gifted athletes. Both of them went to college on one on a football scholarship, one old track scholarship. The other one, the oldest was the smart one of the bunch. And he went, he became an aerospace engineer at the University of Texas. So I was the odd man out. I wasn't smart. And I wasn't that good athlete. I mean, I could make the team and I played all the sports but I was never a standout. I was too small. I think I graduated from high school weighed about 150 pounds. So I was just

skinny. And yeah, I have to it. But I had a great high school experience. I never was bullied or anything like that. And, and and was was relatively popular. But everybody knew everybody we it was it was high school was just a really memorable time. And I think back on it very fondly.

 James Geering 08:49

Being the youngest of all the boys did that create any sort of tenacity that carried through when you became a police officer?

 09:00

Maybe my brother that was two years older than me, you know, we still live together, we lived in the same house and the old the other two brothers were quite a bit older, they'd already left so I never got picked on by them. But my older brother was a little bit bigger than me most of the time and and it was a you know, a friendly competition. We loved each other and we got along great, but it was it was always a friendly competition. And so I learned you know, the ins and outs of taking care of and take standing up for yourself a lot of it through him. So and I'm sure that paid dividends down the road.

 James Geering 09:36

So walk me through going from small towns a big city because I grew up on a farm in England and I found myself initially working in the Miami area as a firefighter. So quite a cultural change there. What was your experience?

 09:51

Yeah, same thing I you know, finding apartment I had no furniture. I started out right at the beginning. I do just had a mattress didn't even have a boxspring or stands or anything. And that was my bedroom and my clothes, I just laid them out on the floor. And that was it. And then I had some toiletries in the bathroom. In my living room. I had a cardboard box with the TV on it and a beanbag and that's the extent of my furniture that's I was starting out extremely meager and and of course, you know, in an apartment these people all around all the time and all hours of the night and a city they just never seen sleeps the size of Houston that was that took some getting used to and just hearing noises and we were my apartment complex was right next to the freeway so there's trucks going by all hours of the night and yeah, it was it was a real culture shock and then the traffic Oh, you know, you can imagine Houston traffic and and then having to travel all the way downtown which was about a 20 mile one way commute and, and trying to get used to that I was late my very first day and walked into police academy, which was a super nono. And it was because of the traffic. I had driven that route the night before to be prepared, but I had no clue about the traffic. And then Monday morning I get up and oh my god, it was a different world. So I was in big trouble right from the get go. And I write about that in the book. It got me way behind the curve.

 James Geering 11:26

 James Geering 11:20

So you know, we'll obviously talk about policing modern day, but when you first entered the profession, what were the fitness standards or the philosophy towards fitness and also the defensive tactics side.

 11:40

It was terrible. Now the academy I overtrained for that. I thought it was going to be kind of like the military bootcamp. And it wasn't it was it was rigorous. You know, you had to be in shape. But it was nothing like what I had trained for. I was doing two a days. But we're getting ready for that. And, and, and so the physical part was relatively easy for me. As far as the the police department, there were no physical standards. The police officers walking around were much more likely to die from a heart attack than getting shot or getting killed in a car wreck because of they're just totally out of shape and and you know, once they hit the street out of the academy, they were all pretty lean and and in shape. And then it didn't take long riding around in that police car and eating fast food and all the bad things that come along with that lifestyle. It guys started adding weight to their waistline and they were going back and getting bigger gun belts and bigger uniforms. And you know, by the time they were 678 10 years on the force, they didn't even look like what they look like coming out of Academy so that was an occupational hazard Absolutely.

 James Geering 12:56

When you look back now because I mean there's there's there's factors I talked about a lot that will contribute to that but back then what what do people put it down to?

 13:08

Just like ah rookie Yeah, you're in pretty good shape right now. But you Wait Can you get out here on the street? You know, you're gonna find out what real policing is like and you hang on to be able to keep that that waistline Believe me, it just it just comes with aging. That was the the word I heard the phrase I heard a lot. And one thing I'm proud of is I weighed the exact same way today as I did when I came out of the academy and weighed 185 pounds I haven't gained and dropped a pound and I hadn't lost a pound and I stayed right there because that was the weight that I felt like I was the best dad and I was always an you know workout nut like so that wasn't a gifted athlete, but I love to work out I love to stay in shape. And I know it helped me a lot in my career but you know smoking was pretty prevalent in the police department back then. Definitely fast food and of course in Houston we got Mexican food we got barbecue, we got all the things that are really not good for you in in you know mass quantities but we had guys that would put it away.

 James Geering 14:12

Now what about the defensive tactics side that the hands on training, restraining that kind of thing?



14:20

Back in those days, I came out of the academy in 1976 Actually January of 77. Any tactics you've you learned were in the police academy. And as soon as you got out on the street, your senior officer would would tell you hey, you forget all that crap you learned in the academy almost tell you how it's really and he pulled out that step five, sell flashlight and said this is your best weapon. This is how you fight on the street you crackheads open and you know and and I saw it happen a few times now. I don't. I'm not gonna say I never saw an abusive officer. I probably did. It had to forget those. But most of them were in good fights. I mean, the group was fighting actively. And but there were no punches pulled, there were no you know, strikes of, you know, that are recognized now, it was a Kel light flashlight to the head, and putting down and putting down quickly, and I guys would, a lot of times have gone to hospital. But you know, that's just the way it was back then nobody thought anything about it. When I graduated from the academy, the Houston Police Department didn't even have an internal affairs division, if there was a use of force complaint or anything like that, it just went up through your supervisor. And, and a lot of times those things were handled, you know, if you kind of get my drift. And it wasn't a lot put of effort put into getting rid of, you know, problem children out there. But once we got the an ID division up and going, and there were some cases where people were made example of, then a lot of that started taking care of itself.



James Geering 15:58

Now, as far as the crime landscape in the late, late 70s, what were you faced with? What were some of the biggest challenges of that point?



16:05


Well, you know, Houston was a growing city. And, and with crime, you know, it grows too. We have a pretty high crime rate. Well, I wouldn't say that we were along the lines of Chicago or New York, but then we would have, I'm gonna say about 250 to 300 murders a year. And, you know, most of my, when I first hit the street, I've worked patrol for three years. And most of your day when you episode and that was stands for sign on, when you left roll call, went out and got into a police car and told the dispatcher that you were in service for a call, he handed you a call, and you went to that call, and you would get there and people were been waiting for two hours for some cause. So they're pissed off at you. And you're like, sir, I just got this guy has got on duty. And so you handle as best you can maybe make an arrest, maybe have to write a report or whatever, then you tell the dispatcher, I'm back in service, clear, take this call. And there was no time for active policing. In other words, going out and looking for bad guys and trying to be proactive, fighting crime, it was handling calls, and we were going from one to another to another to another and, and I was working evening shift most of my patrol life and, and fighting traffic. I mean, I can remember a robbery in progress alarm at a 711. And it's two blocks up the road, I can even see the sign of the 711. But I can't get there because it is bumper to bumper cars between here and there. I might as well jump out of the car and take off running and get there quicker. So that was some of the frustrations in a big city. And in the evening shift that when I finally did ride back shift, I was like, Oh my God, you can actually drive around. It was amazing. Because three o'clock in the morning, there's not that many people out. And you could you could drive fast. It was it was pretty, pretty different dynamic or night shift.

 James Geering 18:02

Now what about areas like gangs, you know, certain drugs? What were you seeing back in the 70s, then

 18:09

we didn't really have the gang problem. I'm not gonna say there weren't gangs. When we said gangs, back in those days, we were thinking motorcycle gangs, and maybe some criminal elements, but not gangs, like you see to now with all the tagging and the signs, and you know, and all the stuff we didn't have any of that. That didn't start happening until and I think it actually came from I could be wrong. I'm my my, I'm thinking it came from California, all this tagging on signs of, you know, railroad cars and buildings and all that. But where they started getting the Crips and the Bloods and all that we have none of that back in those days. If there was a gang, it was a loosely organized criminal gang. And we did have some cartels out of Mexico are trafficking drugs. And then we had some, you know, prostitution rings and stuff that were somewhat organized. But it was a different type of gang than we have today.

 James Geering 19:07

Now you've written a book, *The Long Road Home* and it's you know, there's so many stories in there. So what I do is try and kind of just get you to pull a couple out as we progress through each stage. So when you're in patrol before you get to swat, you know, what was some of the career calls that you'd love to tell about that portion of your life?

 19:27

Well, one of my best ones, I guess I'd say I ended up getting a chiefs commendation for it, even though it was strictly by luck. I was riding with this guy named bubba. And Bubba was a gun nut. And I'm young rookie riding around and he said, Hey, and this was right after the first Dirty Harry movie came out, and everybody wanted a Smith and Wesson 44 Magnum, and he said, Hey, I've got a 44 Magnum. I bought it at the gun show on a way to work and I said, you're kidding me? And he's like, yeah, he wants to see it. And I'm like, yeah, so we pull over and he pops it drop that And we're looking at it. I'm like, wow, real Smith and Wesson 44 Magnum, and he says you want to shoot it? Like, yeah, but we're in city, Houston, he said, this evening, if there's nothing going on, say about 1010 30, before we go back to the station, we'll go out off Patterson Road, which was on the edge of town, you had to get out of our beat. But that wasn't uncommon back in those days, because nobody could track your car. So you know, you can go wherever and, and we'll get off a little road, I know, and we'll shoot it. I'm like, That's awesome. And about that time, a rape in progress just or a rape attempted right just occurred, and it was right down the road. So we jump in the car. And of course, we pull out and we're trying to get there. And we're all caught up in the traffic and another police unit made their first and they get on the radio and said the suspect had left the scene and a 1962 Bonnyville. Pontiac with no hood over the engine and a doghouse sticking out of the trunk. And we're looking at each other like, oh my god, this is gonna be so easy to spot what an idiot, you know. So we're driving around looking looking looking. And after about an hour or looking for this car we gave up. And

so we got more information said the guy had a gray jumpsuit, and he said had Harvey was his name on his nameplate, and he had greasy, dirty hands like he was a mechanic. And so we're kind of throughout the entire shift of answering calls and doing whatever we were doing. We're always on the lookout for this car. But I'll be honest, toward the end of our shift, we pretty much forgot about it. It's like Nah, he's not still in that car. He's dumped that car somewhere. And we'll probably find that next week sometime. And so then Baba says, hey, it's about 1030 You want to go out on Patterson road and shoot that gun? I'm like, hell yeah. So we go out there. And it's a little gravel of type road that kind of cuts between two major thoroughfares. And it's real wooded. There's nobody around. And so he stops the car and it gets out. And he says, Get go find some beer cans, and we'll set them up on the road. I'm like, okay, so I got my flashlight out. And I'm over there looking for some cans out in the ditch. And then here comes some headlines. And he says, hey, look like we're investigating something. So we're both standing there shining our flashlights around, like we're doing something policing, you know, and and as the car goes by, we kind of glanced back. It's a 1962 Pontiac Bonneville with no hood over the engine and a doghouse sticking out of the trunk. We bout fell down trying to run and get back to our car, we jump in the car, go pull him over, the guy gets out. He's got a great jumpsuit still got the name Harvey right here. And his hands are all I mean, it's him. And of course, you know, and I think I titled that chapter, I'd rather be lucky than good, because we just got lucky. But of course Bubba wrote it up is like dynamic detective work. And we never would look into this guy. And we had a hunch that he might be, you know, cutting through some backroads. And the sergeant said up to the chief's office that we got accommodation for and the whole time we were out there going to shoot beer cans, you know, on the side of the road.

 James Geering 23:14

That's funny when you talk about you know, a partner that has a gun fetish and pulls out one of those guns. I think it was one of the police academy characters anyway, have you ever watched those movies? I forget his name now. But

 23:25

oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know who you're talking about.

 James Geering 23:28

So what made you decide to progress into SWAT and then talk to me about the the what that look like? What was the special operations? What was SWAT back in those days?

 23:40

Yeah. Well, I never really thought I had a chance to make it on the SWAT team, but one of the other guys from my academy class, and I was in better shape and a little more athletic than him. And he was smarter than me. And he made and I thought, oh my god, if he can make it maybe out to try out, so I still didn't have a lot of hopes. But I put my name and a hat when when there was an opening coming up, we had about a 24 man SWAT team. And there was like



three or four openings. So I thought well, maybe I'll I got a shot here and went down there and filled out my application. They did a background check on me. A couple of things you couldn't have had, you could have never been found guilty of untruthfulness you know, like on a witness stand or whatever you could have never had and a excessive force complaint that was found to be true. And something else I can't remember what that was, but I met that criteria. And then we did a PT test and it was push ups sit ups pull ups and a two mile run. And I I was in great shape. So I smoke that and came up right near the top of the competition for that. And then it was the background check in the department and you had to go see the part Mental psychiatrist, and they gave you this written test. It was the weirdest test, you know, it was questions in there, like, do you avoid cracks in the sidewalk? You know? And do you? You know, when you walk into a room, do you think people are talking about you? And do you like long legged women? And I don't know, it was some really, really stupid questions in there. But believe it or not, when I had my follow up interview with him, he tagged me. I'm telling you that test, he learned a lot about me in that test, it was almost spooky, how much he learned about me. Anyway, and then the last thing was the interview with the three sergeants down there. And I'll never forget, this was another great little story. There's sitting there and trying to ask you these questions. And, and one of the questions which really kind of caught me, they said, Could you pull the trigger and kill a person? Even though he's done nothing to you? You've seen him do nothing to anyone else. It's just someone over the red radio told you take him out? Could you do it? And I'm like, I'm thinking I know, you know, this is gonna be like a sniper situation. And the green lights been given kind of thing. So I knew deep down inside, I was kind of questioning myself if I really could, but I wasn't about to say no. So I said, yeah, if if, if I trust the supervision of the person telling me that and I figure it's got to be for that they know something that I don't so yes, I could. And they got around to asking me if I go to church, and, and he was right after that question to come out. So I'm thinking they're going with the angle, like, how religious Are you? Are you so religious, and she could take another life? And, and I said, Yes, I go to church, and he said, how often I sit here every Sunday, and they really, and you can see him kind of looking at each other and kind of pushing back. You go every Sunday. What's what's church you go to, and I said, First Baptist Church over Memorial Drive, really? Every Sunday? Yes, sir. Every Sunday. I said, I got an extra job there. I'd direct traffic in my direct traffic out and all man they busted up laughing. Yeah, cuz I would go to the church, I just had an extra job direct the traffic there, but that call them and I knew right then I'd hit a I did a home run. And I came out number one, when the when the list came up of the people that compete, it was about 40 people on that list. I was number one. And so I was real proud of that. I still have that letters matter of fact.

 James Geering 27:23

Well, again, we talked about the crime environment when you first joined PD, what was the SWAT environment, you know, what were compared to, to the environment that you still teach in today? You know, what were were on that kind of Genesis was it as far as the progression of tactics, fitness equipment, etc?

 27:48

Yeah, well, we weren't near as active, say active, we got a lot of calls, we get anywhere between 20 and 30 SWAT situations a month. So we were pretty busy. But it was mainly just surround and combat, we did not do dynamic entry. Even though we were tasked with hostage

rescue. We never trained on it. We didn't we didn't have a clue how to do a dynamic entry. And, and chemical agents was a big part of our lead gases, we gas him out. And and we did go in and do slow searches. We did a lot of that. But we didn't have near the equipment. We didn't have tasers right at first I talked about in the book, there's a transition there when tasers finally show up. And there's a couple of really funny stories in there. When we get to try them out, because the department would when anything high tech like that, they will usually give it to swat and let them try it and get their opinion as to whether or not it's something that could be implemented into patrol. But things like that, and then less lethal munitions started coming around being bad kind of things. And we started implementing those. And then flashbangs it was like holy crap, that was right after the the princes gate incident in in London, with the saps storm, that building and they were using these explosions. And we're looking at like, What the hell does that and they didn't take but about eight to 10 months, maybe a year we had vendors coming around and saying, Here's what they were using. And we're like, really? Oh, cool. And then they take us out and show it to us. And we were like, That's awesome. And then and then we started training with the military a lot. The Army Delta Force guys would come out of Fort Bragg and they were always going to big cities and looking for buildings that they could destroy and their training trying to replicate an environment that they might have to go overseas and operate in. And so we started learning from those guys. And that was a paradigm shift for us. They were teaching us things about explosive breaching, and of course deployment of flashbangs and and dynamic entry and tools that we had never even fathom and how a real hostage rescue is done. And that just took As to a new level. And those guys today now they have so many assets. I mean, they got little drones that can fly through the building, they have robots, they have all kinds of things that we did not have. We didn't even operate much with dogs back then. And that was a that was not good, because we later on started working with dogs and found out what an asset they could be. But back then we did. So there was just very little equipment, very little assets, very little training. But yet we had a mission, and then we went to some hostage situations. But we never did a hostage assault, we always negotiated it to an end, and or went in unfortunately found everybody did. And that happened a few times.

 James Geering 30:40

I heard you on I think it was the Resilience Project. I think I got that right. I think it was a San Antonio law enforcement officer. And it was an interesting comment that you made, and I was gonna jump on it. Now as soon as you open the door, the dynamic entry, which seems to be you know, the kind of gold standard from from the the white belt, non police officer looking in, you were talking about ultimately, you changed your mind on that. And that actually, you kind of gone back to the philosophy of of not going in, though the training that you had realizing how dangerous and how precarious some of these situations were. So I'd love to you for you to expand on that if you were

 31:22

Yeah, and I was referring mainly to narcotics evidence going in, and we live three years in Narcotics Division, and I was on what they call the writing. And we were kicking doors left and right. And we were going in to rescue the dog. And we were risking our lives to rescue dope, you know, and it was so stupid looking back on it now. But at the time, that's what everybody did. And we just accepted it. And over the years now I look at how many police officers I know. And there's several that were killed doing that very thing. And believe me, I just got lucky. And

and it was overdose. And most of the stuff that we risk in our lives on is going to be legal one day, and or the courts really don't do much time there right back down. And yet we were risking our lives to go in and do that. So when lives are in jeopardy, then that's a whole different thing. You know, when when they're holding hostages, and I'm still not gonna anytime we can negotiate a resolution, that's always a better option, getting to release the hostages come out surrender, that's that we all go home, right? But anytime we go in to a structure into a stronghold objective, where someone knows we're out there, and they're know, we might be coming in, and they're ready for us, they always have the advantage. I mean, if you think of a military term, there's three assaulters for every defender because of the tactical advantage that the assaulters that the defender has, and the soldiers have to overcome. Now things like flashbangs and explosive breaching and all that sure that that helps, but they only got to get lucky one time, and we got to be good every time. So yeah, I'm not one eight and I'm the biggest hypocrite in the world, but I'm not one for doing dynamic entry for narcotics or for evidence that can be you know, seized later on. But a hostage situations, that's a different situations.

J

James Geering 33:20

We have seen in the fire service, you know, risk a little to save a little risk a lot to save a lot. And they're sometimes you know, it's kind of like the moth to the flame, you'll get people pouring into a warehouse or some of these buildings where, you know, there's been no report of anyone being in there, no entrapment. But you know, all of a sudden, we're filing firefighters in or putting them on the roof. And then we get some of these catastrophic events where we lose firefighters for what was a building that was covered by insurance. Did you see the same kind of thing in law enforcement, you want to be that guy that's kicking in the door, even though sometimes you actually do the smart thing is to stop and wait and evaluate and not go in?

i

34:01

Oh, yeah, I talked about in the book when I was working narcotics. I was an adrenaline junkie. I was the usually the first one in the door, and I wanted to be the first one. And it I just did not really, you know, there was always that adage, it will happen to me. Or I'm that good. And of course now I have a different philosophy. But yeah, I grew up rushed in and every time we got up, we got to Warren i One of the stories I write about that I didn't get scared because we were inside a stairwell going up trying to sneak up to the bad guy's apartment. And the one of the crooks comes out on us, and we're compromised right there in the stairwell. And the guy one of the guys in the team grabs that guy but as he looks over shoulder in the room, he yells, shotgun, and so I can't see in the room yet, but my buddy has said he saw shotgun so then I'm thinking do I still go do I not go but I got this entire team behind me push You meet. So we went, and I ended up having to shoot the guy. And it's just by luck. I didn't get shot. But I look think back on that, that was so stupid. It was just for dope. You know, we could have grabbed that guy and back back down the stairways and got to a position we could defend and fight from and call them out and not risk my lives or even had to shoot that guy. But, you know, it's just it was a different philosophy. It was a different mentality, the rules of engagement were different. And we I still think the primary thing driving me is I just never really thought it would happen to me.

J

James Geering 35:35

Well, with you working in NOC narcotics for a while as well, I want to put a question to you that I think the law enforcement community is the hardest question to ask. Because for years, sometimes decades, these men and women have been asked to enforce certain laws, especially when it comes to drugs. In my time in fire, and EMS, you know, you get to see you get to see behind the curtain, you get to see the reality of you know, is the War on Drugs working, you know, are we improving crime? Are we improving addiction, etc, etc. And I've seen firsthand, I've got family in Portugal, for example. And I've spoken to people that initiated the decriminalization of addiction, that that doesn't mean the smugglers doesn't mean the sellers, but the people who are consuming and seen some of the great results that they've had, which then freed up police resources and court resources to attack the real shitbags, you know, the smell of the sellers and the smugglers with your career, and I'm not wanting to load this question, what is your perception of the war on drugs? And if you're not a huge fan, what are some of the solutions that maybe we should be looking at?

J

36:45

Well, obviously, we're not winning it, and a tremendous amount of resources have been poured into it. I mean, you think about it's like, it's like guns, they're saying, We've got to quit selling these guns? Well, we've got drugs have been illegal for for as long as I can remember, and they're still everywhere, you're not going to get rid of the guns that you're just gonna open up a blank market, right. And so, but it's like things like marijuana, oh, my God. You know, I can remember when I was a young cop marijuana, I mean, just, if you'd had a roach, just one little bit of a, you go to jail for that. Now, nowadays, now you get a ticket written if if anything, but I can remember, as a big city cop pulling people over and find a little bit of dope on him, I didn't want to have to go all the way downtown because I worked on the northwest side of town, and it was a 20 minute trip down there didn't have to tag the dough. So just make a meeting, then just you can eat it, or we're gonna pour it out. But I'm not taking you to jail for a half a baggie of marijuana. It's just crazy. You know, and, you know, once again, tie up my resources and things that I could be doing proactive to go find a hijacker or burglar or Carthy. And that's where I wanted to focus my time. So I do, I do think that the war on drugs is it's if anything, it is kept it to a dull roar. But we are never as long as there is a need or a market, there will be a supply. And we're never going to stop that we just keep it to a dull roar. And you're right, a lot of people have gone to prison for a lot of years. And they were nothing more than users. And that I think that's less and less of that now. But if we can catch somebody trapping it, or, you know, with enough dope on him that they obviously had any intent to deliver, you don't know, no user has, you know, two pounds of cocaine, then those guys, they need to be thrown under the jail. But um, yeah, I, it's I just think of all the resources, time and effort that we did when I was even in narcotics. And we did, it's still out there. It's just as prevalent if not more than it was back then.

J

James Geering 39:00

Yeah, it's just it's, it's, it's an important conversation, you know, whichever answer it is, you know, but I think for me, watching through a responders lens, so many of the, so much of the suffering so many of the deaths were related to prohibition, you know, putting the addicts in the shadows, you know, in the underworld, versus, you know, we have a mental health crisis. I

mean, we know that through school shootings, we know that through so many things at the moment the fact that people already that destroy families and friendships over a mask that's mental ill health, you know, not be able to have a normal conversation. So you know, looking at it proactively and taking an addict and making them a medical patient, not a criminal, but then again, cutting the head off the snake and not only supply and demand but also then focusing on the the criminals and follow the violence is one of my guests said, that seems to be a much more progressive idea than you know, as you said, doing the same thing and expecting different results.

 39:58

Agree. Yeah, it's a It's a vicious cycle and it just continues on and the I don't see any end in sight.

 James Geering 40:06

Yeah, I think I think having the humility to try something different would be a good start. But, you know, that's, that requires leadership. So.

 40:14

Yeah. And a willing participation. You know, even if you got a leader out there saying this is what we need to do if that people are not buying off on it, they're not. And yeah, absolutely. It's gonna take a lot of years to change the mindset of the United States when it comes to something that controversial.

 James Geering 40:33

Yeah, yeah, I think it's storytelling. And it's seeing that works in other places that are also inhabited by human beings. We got to stop thinking that we're this unique group of individuals. We're not we're people, just like Portugal and Norway and Iceland and other places.

 40:48

Right. Yeah. You know, but having said that, I was in that Stockholm in Holland, the major city there. Got,

 James Geering 41:03

it's got all the Amsterdam,

 41:05


anyway. The Amsterdam that's it? And of course, drugs are illegal. And oh, my God. I mean, it was everywhere. I was shocked, like smelling people smoking dope. And just the filth and I don't know that they have the crime there that we have. But the filth and the I guess it almost like a degeneration of human decency and culture. I don't know if those two elements go hand in hand or not. But I was, I thought, Man, this could be a beautiful city if they cleaned it up. But it didn't look like they would there was the effort or the will to do it.

 James Geering 41:44

Yeah. And I've heard that more than once as well. And one, one response I've heard is that so many people from other countries are going there to almost have that kind of drug Las Vegas experience. That, you know, that's one of the contributing factors. But But yeah, that's that's certainly not a good advert for legalized prostitution and drugs, if that's the case.

 42:04

Yeah. Yeah, I agree.

 James Geering 42:07

So with the SWOT specifically talk to me about the the evolution then you said, for example, some of the tools flashbangs, etc. What was some of the real benchmarks when it came to tactics and or equipment through your career?

 42:22

Well, as I mentioned, you know, we started training with the army, the special ops guys, and they were showing us and you know, we had some navy seal, the SEAL Team Six, but now they're called dev group, they would come to town, and we get to see how they work. And then we started a training organization within Texas, it was called the Texas tactical Police Officers Association, I shouldn't say was, it still is it's an extremely viable, vibrant organization. And what it does is link all of these cities together and their police departments and our SWAT teams primarily, and learning from each other. When I was first on the SWAT team, I didn't have a clue any I didn't know any SWAT officers in Dallas, or Fort Worth, or San Antonio or Austin, or, you know, the list goes on and on mainly big cities. But through this organization, starting to train with them and going to conferences. I we started developing those relationships and friendships and we were sharing experiences, hey, well, what did you guys do for this problem? And we'd learned from them. And then we got to where we were actually going to their police department and training with those guys and bringing those skills back. And we were doing this thing we were sharing with them. So that and then the working with the military were the two things that literally took our police department, to an hour our SWAT team to a new level is is you know, if they've already faced this problem and got a solution for why did we need to reinvent the wheel, you know, let's just do what they're doing. It's working for him.

J

James Geering 43:51

That's something I see in the fire service. You know, we're so siloed and fragmented. And there's exactly like you said, there's departments that are doing the strength and conditioning the fitness sides really well. And there's some that are doing EMS really well. And there's some that have great fire prevention, but it's a city and a county and they're next to each other. And a lot of times they don't talk Don't knowledge share. So what was what did that landscape look like for you in Texas? And what made you you know, who was it that initiated that and made you create that collaboration of knowledge?



44:25

Well, I believe or not, I got kind of bamboozled into becoming the president of the Texas tactical Police Officers Association. And at the time, they were just a little fledgling group. It was about 130 140 members from around the state. They did a conference once a year and maybe one or two classes and that was about it. And they weren't a 501 C three, they had lost their their state franchise or incorporation. And their bylaws were totally outdated when even being adhered to. So anyway, that was my claim to fame with them is I took and I rewrote all that, well, I didn't, I got some attorney, an attorney that with the city and, and some other people helping me and we rebuilt the foundation of that organization. And then it really started building and there are over 5000 members. Now, there's classes going on any given day, somewhere in the state SWAT classes, and, and they're there, they're teaching them, they're bringing in instructors from other places, sometimes World Champion shooters or World Champion Martial artists to teach, you know, physical or defensive tactics and, and anyway, it's it's a, it's a, it's amazing how that organization has grown. And they do wonderful things in terms of preparing these SWAT teams to all be on a even keel and to learn from each other and to be at a base level that that they can do the job that they need to do. And that's those those things, they're just been invaluable to how the, the law enforcement and especially the tactical side of law enforcement has grown.

J

James Geering 46:10

Chuck told a great story about the bombings. And he was giving so much credit to the regular patrol officers that were there initially in some of these events. And I heard you kind of touch on the same thing. So what is your perspective? You know, we have obviously SWAT in my, my profession, we have, you know, squads, and other stations have specialized in ropes, and hazmat and all kinds of things. But all of us are going to be first responding to a lot of these events. And we you know, the more knowledge we have the better. What is your philosophy on the standard of training for the patrol officers in a sea?



46:48

Well, it's, it's inadequate, I think with especially Believe it or not with big cities. Because of the numbers. When you have five or 6000 police officers in a city city, you can imagine how much budgetary and time requirements it takes to roll those guys to say mandatory in service training, they may be gets it get it once a year, I, I would say that most of the smaller cities not not real small, not like eatle, Mayberry RFD but let's say a city with a police department about 50 6200 Peace Officers, sworn officers, they do a better job at retraining and those standards

keep them current and adequate. Because First off, it's not overwhelming number of officers, they have to train and but yet they still have a budget because of the city that they're in, that can serve, you know, support that that training, but most most police officers out there do not get the amount of training that they should both physical, the equipment. And, and you know, think of active shooter, I can remember back in my day, when we as a SWAT team were training active shooter, but the police department would not let patrol officers training and we're, we're screaming at them, it's not going to be us that makes a difference. By the time we get there, all the killing is going to be over, it's going to be those patrol officers. And the argument was that's that's hostage rescue. That's SWAT tactics, what it may be it is hostage rescue, but the fact remains what they do those first two or three and sometimes just that one officer on the scene, that's the one that's going to make the difference. And we have to supply them with both the training and the equipment, and the authorization, the knowledge that they can do this and go in and do it. That's what's truly going to save lives. And of course, training the people that are knee deep in the situation, you know, your teachers, and your administrators and people janitors, I don't care those people in those schools, what they do get a lot of times, make the situation much better, even before the first patrol officer shows up. If it's the school resource officer, all the better. He's already on the singing. But sometimes it's just a matter of seconds. And even the first responders not police officer is not going to make a difference. But they still need that training. And we saw what can happen and you validate and some of the other cities. When we don't have leadership, we don't have that the proper training. And it's it's it can be horrific.

 James Geering 49:27

So there's a whole spectrum of philosophies of how we addressed the school security issue. Obviously, again, there's a much deeper mental health, you know, discussions of that as well amongst all the other contributing factors, but you have everything from you know, every teacher with a gun all the way through to nothing. Where do you fall, you know, with with your experience and your perspective on how we provide protection for our children while we're going through this insane kind of mental health crisis that we're seeing in the last few decades.

 50:00

Yeah, well, obviously, I'm not necessarily against administrators or even some T teachers being armed in a school, I would not want them to be packing it on their side for the kids to see or anything, I don't know exactly how that would work out where the weapon would be, but they gotta have it, it's got to be readily accessible within, you know, two or three seconds, they're off, they can get that gun. And here's the other thing, the standard of training, you don't just get to carry that gun, you have to be at a same proficiency. And I would tell you that most people that I know, and I've known two or three teachers that have admitted to me that they have a gun at school, even though they're not supposed to. But, and you know, what, if they trained with that gun, they're probably going to be as good or better trained than some of the police officers, I know, that would show up. And more importantly, is, if they got it, they've got to be prepared to use it. Because if you pull that gun, and then you don't, when it's obviously appropriate and necessary, clear and present danger, then you're probably going to become a victim of that gun. And so, it there has to be a lot that goes into that is a standard of training, policies and procedures. And once again, I wouldn't want the kids to know that a teacher or administrator is armed, that has to be, you know, handled somehow, I'm not sure. But you



know, we taught a class, it was called emergency response to an armed intruder. And we weren't going there with the guns, but we were teaching teachers, what can be an improvised weapon, if it comes to that, and you would when their eyes would open up like this, how to barricade their door of a classroom that I'm telling you a SWAT team with a battering ram can't get in, and just little things that they can do, that would tremendously increase their survivability of themselves and the students that they're entrusted to protect. And then of course, you know, escape and how to escape where to go. And we always say, if you don't know, don't go, because you just take off running down the hallway, you might run right into the shooter, you got to be little things like that. But as with any tactic, as with any technique, it has to be practiced. And it has to be practiced on a frequent basis, because it is a perishable skill, and it will go away. And you know, you've heard the old adage, people say, Wow, if it ever came down to it, I could do it by God, well, you will not rise to the occasion, you will default to your level of training. And if you don't have that training, then it's just fight or flight, or a fetal position in a corner begging for your life. And none of those are good options. So it says much about mental preparation, as it is about physical preparation, but both of them are important.

J

James Geering 52:50

Now, what about training with law enforcement, fire and EMS, I've worked for agencies that have been so so good, and had such a great relationship with law enforcement, we did some phenomenal training. And I've had somewhere you know, they literally were in the same building upstairs, and they never even talked to each other, which was insanity. So you know, with all the kinds of agencies that you've been exposed to talk to me about, you know, the ones you think they've done it best, and some of the maybe some of the horror stories out there, too.

o

53:22

Well, you know, I can remember back in the day, when the fire department tell us, we're not going into a hot zone, if there's bullets in there, or a guy with a gun. It's you, you've got to make that scene secure before we go in. And we're like, Well, wait a minute, follow us. And there's people that you could, could possibly say, and really, I mean, it's gonna be dangerous. I'm not telling you how dangerous it is going into a burning building, man, why are you so worried about a gun, we're gonna be there, we're gonna. But the paradigm shift once again, gotten to where now my police department, they have firefighters, paramedics that work with them, they come out and train with them, they wear their same uniform, they even have gone through the the certification, they can carry a gun, and they work hand and foot with those guys. And of course, they have the comms to communicate with the rest of the responding fire department. And there are that, that transition in between. So I know several police departments. And once again, I will credit the Texas Tech to Police Officers Association in supporting that, and in going out and encouraging these agencies to train with each other, whether it's a county police department, and the County Sheriff's Department and the police department, or the police department and the fire department and trying to you know, support each other and be there and instead of working independent of each other, you know, it all comes back to the team. We've got to be pulling this rope in the same direction, or we're going to not get anywhere. So I'm a huge supporter of bringing that those assets and those things that a fire department can do and they do it A hell of a lot more like breaching doors then then

police departments doing then police off? And as so yeah, I'm sure the well, you know, why should you be sitting on this technique or this tactic or this knowledge when it could be helping someone else that's doing the same job saving lives.

**J** James Geering 55:18

Now with the SWAT medic position, again, there's a spectrum. You know, my place I worked for two departments ago, there was no SWAT medic program. So we were all the way in the cold zone, you know, in an ambulance, then you have the ones that kind of go in but they're they're not armed. They've just got a you know, probably a helmet and a vest that everyone wears, no matter what shape or size you are. And then you have, as you said, the true in my opinion, you know, warm zone, SWAT medic that actually has not only the protective equipment, but has the ability to use a firearm if they need to, but obviously, that's not their primary role. They're not going in first, which is your kind of favorite dynamic when it comes to that Genesis. Oh, that excuse me, that fusion of fire and EMS.

**i** 56:04

I like the fact that those those paramedics are coming right with us, you know, if you take a bullet to the chest, and I've got a sucking chest wound, I mean, I don't want me to have somebody have to get me and drag me back out to the warm zone. I want that medic right there. Now in the originally, we started taking SWAT guys, and we were training them on emergency medicine. And that was better than nothing. But I don't want a guy working on me that hasn't ever done it for real. He's done it in Swat in the in the tech medic school. It was last year and he's thinking okay, now, I want a guy that when he's not training with me or working on me, he's on an ambulance every night running NotCot and shooting Doa is he's saving lives every night, His skills are so fresh. That's you I won't work in a mate. And I'll take that guy, even maybe a night maybe not our emergency room doctor, but a medical doctor that runs a practice out of his, you know, some buildings somewhere. We were doing tech medic work. And we had a doctor there, and they were getting ready to start IVs and he was terrible. And he finally got frustrated says I don't do this yet nurses do this for me. And he got up and walked off to get pissed off because he couldn't start an IV. But you got to thinking about he's right. I mean, he those things are all done before he gets involved. He probably hadn't done an IV since he was in medical school, you know, so I want that guy working on me and working on my on my friend or my partner or just poor citizen here that that does this for a living every day, their skills are just way too fresh, to be ignored.

**J** James Geering 57:42

Now, one more area in this kind of conversation, the SRO position. I had, sadly, a personal event with an SRO at my son's Middle School, where I've been just a horrendous police officer, you know, and she made some awful decisions that had some detrimental impacts to my son. But then, you know, you see some of these other events where there's almost a shooting, and they've got some great SROs that run towards a danger and neutralize a target. And obviously, you've got parkland in the valley, which is you know, another horrendous example. So what is your holistic philosophy on which kind of offices end up at best schools? Because I know in the past that used to kind of be a kind of retirement one foot out the door kind of position.



58:32

Yeah, that's exactly right. It got to be was, you know, it's like guys that just want to retire and to get a little thing. But in this day and age, our children are my most valuable resource. And it still drives me crazy when I go by and I see whether it's just a police officer school resource or that they're just shoved or uniform. They're way overweight there. I guarantee he hasn't drawn that pistol. Like his life depended on it since he left the police academy. I mean, you look where he positions things on his belt as extra ammunition. You can just see this guy or gal either one doesn't have a clue hasn't ever had really fight for their life, or they haven't done it in way too, you know, way too many years. But yet, they're protecting one of our most valuable assets. So that's just, that's unthinkable to me so that their training, and their standard shouldn't be the same as a guy or a gal that's writing nightshift patrol and in a in a in a ghetto somewhere. They in fact, I would like to see them rotate out every once in a while and get a little bit of more of that exposure and rotate back in. I don't know if that's feasible, but that's what we were doing. You know, I always used to always say if I can be chief for a day in my command staff, all these other assistant chiefs that live in the ivory tower that have this glass ceiling between what's going on in the street and what they're yes man or Elena, I would tell them, if one day of the week you're going to get out of the office, and you're going to go get in a patrol car and you're going to ride with a line patrol officer, you're going to find out firsthand what's going on on the street, instead of listening to, you know, a Yes, man tell you Oh, yeah, they're good. I've talked to those guys. I'm out there all the time. Yeah, we don't have to worry about them. And then you go talk to the patrol officer, and he goes, What the hell is he telling, he's got to be crazy, you know, go find out for yourself. And the same thing with those school resource officers. If your job, you know, it's, it gets down to 99.9% of your job is going to be boring. But then that point 1% is going to be sheer terror. And your life and the lives of those interested in you depend on how well you operate in that terror. And if you're not out there, practicing those skills and operating under elevated conditions. I'm not saying you know, it's ever going to be like the real thing. But there are things you can do in training to elevate whether it's due time or physical exercise, or the unknown, just not knowing what's around that next corner and get that heart rate pumping. Because when your heart is racing, 180 beats per minute, trying to have fine motor skills, is in cognitive thinking skills is going to be difficult, if not impossible.



James Geering 1:01:24

So as we move forward to 2023, what are the things that you've seen that have kind of evolved now, when it comes to strength and conditioning and the combatives, defensive tactics kind of hands on element?



1:01:41

Well, I think that the culture today is much better. I mean, the fact that most cops don't smoke cigarettes anymore, that's the you know what, back in my day, when I first came out of police academy, he was probably just the opposite. Most did, and a few did. And they smoked in the offices. And in, we all probably drank too much. But there was cigarette smoke everywhere. It was just me it was accepted. And now it's just the opposite. And then we're starting to learn more and more about, you know, when we start seeing our friends die of heart attacks and

cancer and things and we're thinking, yeah, he was kind of burning both. Can you think all the things that he or she did wrong? To put themselves in that situation? Not always, sometimes it was just, you know, in the cards, but I think the culture has gotten much better. And, and then the minimum standards for law enforcement, you know, there's, there's quite a few departments now. They're, they're incentivizing their officers to come in and do a PT test sometimes mandated in Houston, it's incentivized. And what you get is you get one free holiday a year, if you come in and pass this PT test. And I remember right at the end of my career doing this, and two guys that were extremely large in front of me, they had to take your blood pressure first. And their blood pressure was too high to go and take the test. And they were high fiving each other because he didn't have to take the test now. Because their blood pressure was too high. And I'm looking at him like, oh my god, really. And I can remember measuring somebody for body armor, and I can't even get the tape all the way around their waist. And I'm thinking body armor is the least of your worries, you're probably gonna die of a heart attack way before you get shot, you know, but I do see a shift and I think it is getting better. And I think more officers are taking care of themselves. I think they are exercising more, it's still not enough and still not pushing themselves. But you know, I'm still in the gym four days a week. And and and I don't have to anymore, but that's just the mindset that I've always had and and I wish more people did

 James Geering 1:03:56

now what about the combative side? You know, when you first started that was pretty much when the Bruce Lee films are coming out. Now obviously we've got you know, Brazilian jujitsu and obviously, as always, there's always been wrestling but Krav Maga and some other things that some of the law enforcement guests have said they like putting into their training. What are some of the things that you if you were on the street today, what would you lean into now?

 1:04:19

Oh, I would be definitely into more grappling taking somebody down in mobilization stuff because back in my day, we boxed in the police academy we had a box and you had to fight and all that but that's all we did that in Baton strikes. Well, you know, as well as I do, a fist fight is usually not going to end up very well and you're gonna get hurt, they're gonna get hurt, and you're probably not going to end up standing anyway, you gotta go to the grain. So if you're gonna go the ground and let's learn fight on the ground, and I if I can just survive even a guy that's bigger and stronger than me, if I can wrap him up and stay close to Him where He can't hurt me and just hang on until the cavalry gets there because they're common. And now Now that's me speaking in urban law enforcement, you get these poor state troopers up in a state that state like Montana, I mean, their backup, it may be hours away. So they're in a different situation than me. But for me, I can remember having to put down what we call assist, the officer may mean that you, you get on radio, and you said, I need help. And then everybody's coming. And I'm going to tell you in an urban city like Houston, within four or five minutes, look, that's, that's it, you hear sirens coming. And it's usually going to be a lot quicker than that. So if I can lock this guy up, and keep him from hurting me, and just survive till the end. That's right. If I know some emo mobilization tactic that can get him to submit, then that's even better. But my, I think, grappling and immobilization and the other thing I would like to say about that is there's skills that can be retained, and it doesn't take a lot of talent, you just have to practice it. And you have to practice it fairly frequently, and against another adversary, not against the

dummy that doesn't hit back, you know, because it's the old Mike Tyson, quote, you know, everybody's got a plan to get hit in the face, you know, and, and you gotta get, you gotta get, you gotta get your nose punched every once a while to realize what it's like. I always like to think back, we don't let police officers carry a taser, unless they've been tased. We don't let police officers or SWAT team guys carry flashbangs or use flashbangs, unless they've been exposed to them. Same thing with pepper spray. I mean, the list goes on and on and on, you need to be exposed to it. Because you're out there using it, you're probably going to get exposed to it that way. And we want to prepare these people. So heaven forbid, it happens to them in a real world environment. This is nothing new. I've been through this, I've been trained, I got the confidence I can survive this. You know, and it's the same thing with fighting, you have got to know what it's like to be in a real fight. And in within safety protocols. I think that that is a necessary skill. And it has to be done regularly.

**J** James Geering 1:07:05

I think that's when the strength and conditioning side comes in. So important is you know, you can be try and get comfortable being uncomfortable in jujitsu, you know, you can do some of the training where you are Kind of replicating the fight, but also a workout, you know, whether it's a foot pursuit or you're in a fire, trying to breach your way out because you're trapped. If you haven't been tired, really, really tired for a long, long, long time, you're going to tap out really early. But if it was two days ago, that you put yourself through the grinder that's going to serve you very well on the street as well.

**o** 1:07:37

Absolutely, just that conditioning, and once again, even if I can't immobilize this guy completely. And if I can't get him to summit or anything like that, I can just stay close to him stay out of his range of his weapons, meaning most of them are going to be his fifth and lock him up to an extent. And then outlast him. I'm telling you, almost every foot chase I was in and I suppose I was always in shape is very few that I out sprint them, but I outdistance him and I had a foot chase from hell in the book. I chase this guy. In fact, I had people telling me later on they they kept hearing me on the radio, and they're like, Oh my God, how long is this going to go on? This foot chase lasted almost 15 minutes. Now you can think 15 minutes jumping fences and climbing things and fallen down and getting up and 15 minutes of a dead out sprint. But I just outlasting I never really was faster than him. But I tried to keep him inside long enough to wear him out. And I did.

**J** James Geering 1:08:43

That's exactly what one of my friends she's a canine handler. And she said she never tries to keep up with them. She's as long as I can keep seeing them. I'll be doing you know 80% of what they're doing. Because they're gonna get tired, that adrenaline is gonna run out and then she's gonna be able to catch them up.

**o** 1:09:00

Absolutely, absolutely. And you know, she's got that she's got that hair missile, she can send

absolutely, absolutely. And you know, she's got that she's got that main missile, she can send that that's great. But I know she doesn't always have you. Unfortunately, we had a canine officer killed and the dog was in the back of the patrol car and he watched his his partner get killed. If he would have been out there, it would have been a different situation. But it's one of those tragic things didn't work out for him. But yeah, we used canines a lot in Swat, especially on a guy that we're going to hit him with beanbags or something try to take him into custody. And flashbacking hit him with a beanbag and it says Dong, and we call it the air missile, because it's just with T and they'll get there real quick and keep him real busy until we could get up there and getting the rest away in under control.

 James Geering 1:09:47

I had one of the kind of revered canine trainers Mike Goosby from LAPD on the show and he was talking obviously about his career and some amazing stories and most of the stories were how someone was Something killed because of the canine, you know how it was actually the less lethal force. But he was also talking about the movement to try and get rid of a lot of canines, you know, because of the optics rather than the actual reality. What is your perspective on that?

 1:10:16

I think dogs are a valuable tool. And it's it obviously, like anything, any tool can be abused. And sometimes they put the dog in danger, because they send the dog into something that he shouldn't be sent into. But I think if they're used appropriately, they are an invaluable tool. And just like you said, I've seen situations where we would have probably had to end up killing this guy, had we not had a canine, because he was waiting in ambush for us. And, you know, we would, you know, come up to a threshold, we, you know, we look around, we use our camera poles and everything, try to spot him, but there's areas that I just can't see. And well, now they can send the robot, but back then we'd send it off. And I had our dog take down guys that had guns in their hands. And I don't know why they didn't shoot that dog. But they did. And thank goodness they did. But we would if he was waiting on us, and he could have killed one of us, we probably would have killed him. But that dog say both of our lives.

 James Geering 1:11:24

Well, I want to get to the book, just one more topic before we do. You know, we are in an environment, the moment where certainly pleased and somewhat even fire are being demonized by the public. And again, it's not most it's those squeaky wheels, the small percentage to seem to have all the airtime at the moment. Talk to me about you know, again, king for a day, what would you do to try and shift that branding of law enforcement back to, you know, to where it should be to the fact that you hold bad apples in departments accountable, but the rest of the men and women are out there trying to do good in the world and, you know, be proactive and reduce crime, rather than be reactive and have to end up on some god awful YouTube video?

 1:12:09

Well, you know, I think TV shows like cops have done a world of good of taking the general public and put them in that police car and seeing what those cops are out there doing on a daily and what they have to put up with. And you're right, I think it you know, we can have 100 police officers out there that save lives every day. And then we have one bad apple, and that's the one they're going to remember, you know, and they're almost as bad as the ones that do nothing I can remember no saying on when I first became a cop, it says you can do nothing, you're a car career, and you will get a pension. But you can go out and do something and get your ass run off. And you know, I hated that mentality. Because they're afraid of doing something that might cause them to lose their pension, you know, and that's kind of where it's getting, you know, I sit in my living room now and, and I look at cops that are doing stuff and with the, with the best intentions, but it's just gone terribly south for them. And now they're not only going to lose your job, they may lose their freedom. I think of that female Sergeant up in Indianapolis a while back that accidentally drew her gun instead of her taser. She went to prison. And I I just feel so terrible for her. That, you know, I think she had the best intentions. And maybe it's poor training. Maybe she just had a brain fart, I don't know. But you know, these citizens, police programs that some agencies have, where they get citizens to come in and ride with the police department and or take some of the training. I think those are invaluable. We had a an activist in the city of Houston, that was always on our ass. I mean, he was always on the news, EMF and ours. Maybe not. He's a he's actually a preacher. So he wouldn't have imagined this but he was always you know, down at the Honest, honest, honest. They put him through at the police academy, one of these shoot don't shoot scenarios. Thanks for putting through several. He he flunked everyone he ended either shooting the wrong person, or he got shot. And he came out of that program. And they actually got it on the news camera him saying, I've got a different perspective of what law enforcement has to put up with, you know, because he saw, you know, you're making that split second decision. And when you're scared to death, and your life is on the line, whether it's good or bad, but But anyway, getting back to your question, I think anytime we can get those TV cameras out there showing the public what we do on a daily basis, I think when we can get the news media to be Broadcast and make a bigger deal about all the great things that cops do on a daily basis. And then these police academy, so these civilian police academies, getting them more involved in what's going on, that would be my answer. But you're always going to have that activist you're always going to have that squeaky wheel. And I hate it when cops get a bad attitude, because they think that that's everybody. And it's not, it's a small fraction of the general public. I think far and away, the public out there has a very good opinion of cops in what they do.


 James Geering 1:15:34

I agree 100%, I really do? Well, you have this story career. One of the areas that I see a lot of people struggle, especially, you know, when we're talking about the mental health side is the transition out, you know, we start as a brand new wide eyed rookie, you know, we go through our different kind of stations and specialties, and then one day, the door closes behind you and your ID doesn't work anymore. What was that transition like for you? Because you're obviously such a passionate, you know, police officer even to this day?

 1:16:05

Well, it was, it was relatively easy for me, not easy, but relatively easy. And that's because I actually got hired away by a support Atlanta, a law enforcement company, and they they had put me in the training unit. So I was still in the industry, I was just doing it from a different


perspective. But I'll tell you, you know, back in my day, we had these pagers. Most cops don't even know what the hell a pager is now, but we wore them and it was 24/7. We had we had this out book, and unless your name was in that out book, and they went over that five people in there, and if your name went into then you were on call 24/7. So that pager was always with you. And I, the day I left the police department, I wanted to go over the ship channel bridge and throw that pager into the ship channel. But I did because I have to write a letter on it and probably pay for it. But when I went home that night, of course I'm on call, every night I would come in, I'd have to park my police car in a direction. So you know, my kids or my wife didn't trap me in and it's easy to get out. And I would literally lay my clothes out. And I would make a pot of coffee so that when the pager went off at the bank, I'd run into kitchen hit brew, and then I'd run back there and get dressed and you know, slap some water on my face. And by the time they come out, I'd have at least one cup of coffee already brewed. And I put that in my coffee cup. And then I'm hitting the door, and I'm headed out. But the best feeling came over me when I parked my car that night. And I realized I'm not going anywhere, unless I want to. There's not going to be a pager, there's not going to be a phone call. I'm here all night tonight. And that was such a warm feeling that came over me. I can remember like it was yesterday.

 James Geering 1:17:54

When I transitioned out I left after 14 years. So it wasn't a retirement, it was more just transitioning to focus on what I'm doing now. But it was the same thing. I mean, not only were you not having to answer to certain people anymore, which in itself was a huge weight off the shoulders. But I lay on my bed and go doesn't matter. There's no tones gonna go off. I'm not gonna have to get up at 1am 2am. And like, I can sleep all night, so I know exactly what you're talking about.

 1:18:21

Yeah, yeah, I'm on chapter 10. And I hear you talking about your tones and some of your stories that were really good. I can't wait. I'll have it finished by tomorrow.

 James Geering 1:18:30

Beautiful. Well, that's a perfect segue. So let's talk about your book. So the long road home, you know, you transitioned out you're working for Safari land, what made you decide to sit down and write a book?

 1:18:43

Well, you know, I'd get with friends, mainly non law enforcement, like my wife's high school teacher, and we'd go out with her fellow teachers, and that didn't and they're always Hey, tell us tell us a Police Story. And so I get to tell him stories. And then another one, another one. And then by the end of the night, typical phrase I would hear would be man, you ought to write a book. And I'm like, I can't write a book. I can barely spell. And, and but then, after I developed this career, and these, this, you know, I guess resume, I had a professor, a friend of mine from the Texas State University asked me to co author a book with him. And I said, you know, Tom, I,



you know, I know I'm Yes, yes. Look, I'll do all the heavy lifting. I just need you to write about tactics and about training, you know that. So I thought, well, yeah, I know that. So I did. And, in fact, I have it right here. It's called training the SWAT trainer, by Thomas Garrison Sandy wall. And anyway, we donated all the proceeds to a scholarship there at Texas State University. So we didn't make anything, but it built me the confidence like, you know what, maybe I could write a book. And so I worked for 28 years for the Houston Police Department. 15 years for support land and then I finally said that's it. I've had enough COVID was about to start. And I could hear you know, it was coming in from over China, and I wouldn't get on planes anymore. And I told my wife, I said, Man, I've got to stay busy, or I'm going to end up committing suicide or becoming an alcoholic, like all my friends. And, in fact, the two characters in the book, they're two of the main characters in the book have since committed suicide. And and then another one, three or four more alcoholic. So I knew if I didn't stay busy, something bad was going to happen. So I told my wife that she said, Well, once you've liked that book, we've always talked about it. And I said, you know, I don't think I could, she said, Sure you can, I'll help you. So I started sitting down every morning, I'm an early bird, I get up about four o'clock in the morning, I have my coffee, what's a little bit of news, and then I'd start typing, type out a story. And I print it and I'd hand it to my wife. And then when she finally got up, and she'd get a reading pin, and of course, being a high school teacher for 23 years, and she would rip it, man, I mean, oh, he would get an F, she handed it back to me. And I was just, Oh, my God, this is horrific. I can't believe I didn't see that. So I saw it for a while and get my feelings hurt. And then it finally I said, okay, so I'd sit down and I'd rewrite the story, I handed it to her again. And this go on for two or three times. And then finally, I get a little smiley face. And I was so happy. I was like a third grader, you know, they got an A in class. And so I would put that into a folder. And so I just started writing stories, all those stories that I had told all those years, and some stories from friends of mine, that that, you know, told me the story. And I thought, well, I'm going to add that story to it. That's a great story. And once I got them all, it took me about three years, just you know, an hour or two in the morning here and there. I didn't write write every day and and I got them all. And then I had to sit down and think okay, now I gotta come up with a storyline to link all the stories. So that was the hardest part that took almost a year of Lincoln. I'm in consecutive order with the storyline and and, uh, you know, I've got a villain, you meet him right at the beginning of the book. And then I got to transition of the main character. And as he starts to become demoralized, and he starts, you know, self medicating with alcohol, because of all the things he's stinky seeing, and he's involved with, and then and then he has a tragic event at the end that he almost dies. And, and then there's the Savior. That's that's the surprise. There's a lot of turmoil in it. It's mainly funny stories, but there's a lot of you know, there's there's several tragic stories, several extremely dangerous stories, and one or two that that in terribly. But anyway, that's, that's half and I once I finally got the manuscript, I sent it to a cop friend of mine that had written a book and was very successful. And he wrote me back said, Man, I love this book. He said, can I give it to a publisher friend of mine? And I said, Sure. And then the next thing I know, they call me said, Man, we want to print this book. And I'm like, really? Awesome. So the rest is history.

J

James Geering 1:23:05

That's amazing. Yeah, I mean, there's so many stories and I think this is kind of a unique book because they're a Sony in the fire service. There are quite a few books now of people with their own story and their mental health struggles, and maybe they're near suicide, which are important. But and then there's some some books normally older from like, you know, older FDNY, war years that are, you know, war stories, but we don't have a lot of those where it's just, you know, like you said, it's, there's a theme to it, and there's a through line, and there's,

you know, good guy and the bad guy and all that stuff. But it's real life stories from a career. So I found it very refreshing that you combine not only the kind of biography element, but you brought fiction into it, to tie it all together.

 1:23:49

Thank you. Yeah, it was it was a people that knew me, called me up and said, Man, I can't believe you didn't tell that story about that time that we were in. I was like, I forgot all about that story. So now I'm writing a sequel. And I'm writing those stories that I left out and and then I got a storyline in mind linking them all but I haven't quite nailed that down yet. But that's gonna take me another two or three years, but it was really a labor of love. Because I had a blast. I your mouth, my wife would come in here right now and tell you that she would hear me laughing in here as I'm driving, because I was reliving what happened and I got about how funny it was. And then as I'd write it, and then I've reread it to myself and I start busting out laughing. Just it's some of the crazy stupid things that you just can't believe really happened. But they did. I'm telling you, every one of those stories in here really did happen. They've been changed a little bit to make them fit the storyline. But that's that's the the amazing thing about it. It really did happen.

 James Geering 1:24:51

When I wrote mine, there was definitely an element of catharsis as well. Did you find it therapeutic as you were writing these

 1:25:00

Oh, absolutely a lot of things made sense. And some people that I held grudges against, I don't hold a grudge against him anymore. I look back on it. And you know, I either work for them or worked around them, and I just didn't like them at the time. And I'd go up to him right now and shake their hand, give him a hug and tell them, you know, I love them. And I've come to a happy place as a result of reliving all that place.

 James Geering 1:25:27

Beautiful. Well, you touched on, you know, how heartbreakingly several people in the book have now passed away? As we kind of close this out, what is your perspective of the mental health crisis within your profession specifically?

 1:25:44

It's bad, I don't think the general public realizes, you know, we hear about 22 veterans a day on average, commit suicide. And that is, that's horrific and unbelievable. And I I'm, I give to wounded warriors, and I give to tunnels to towers, and I do what I can to support those people. And my son was in the army, and I love him and respect him for doing that. But I don't know what the numbers are for first responders that way this placement fireman or, or medical

personnel, even even er rooms, but when so much of your life has been involved with death, and gore, and and disappointment, because of the bad guy didn't get what was coming to him, or, you know, got away with it or whatever. That that takes a toll. It really does I how these homicide detectives, and I've got several of their friends, how they put up with it. I don't know, I don't know if you if you've read enough of the book, but I start talking about this box in my brain. And in whenever I would experience something really, really bad. I would somehow find a way of opening the box up and tucking it away and it's closed, and I'm dealing with and I just went off, it's like it never happened. And then after 28 years, but 26 27/28 year, that box is getting really, really full. And then I get one of the worst stories of them all is right at the end. And I can't get the lid closed. And I know it's my time. I've had enough, you know, when my box is full, you know that and I think sometimes maybe cops, they don't they don't want to reach out. And maybe fire firemen as well, I don't know. But there's that macho ism, right? And they I'm tougher than that. And I don't want to help and one of my buddies that's in the book that committed suicide. I wish I could have been for him there for him. But nobody knew what he was dealing with. In fact, the second one, I'd say the same thing. He was already retired, but I didn't realize what he was dealing with. And I wish I could have been there for him. If he would have reached out, you know, I I know I would have gotten a car and drove, you know, 10 hours in the middle of night to see him and talk him out of it. But it didn't work for that it would didn't work out like that.

J

James Geering 1:28:15

Well, this is why it's so important that we have these conversations. I mean, this is statistics of known deaths, I believe, as double the line of duty death in fire and police, you know, with suicides alone, but that's the ones that are reported. There's so much stigma and shame. You know, a lot of them aren't reported. Then you have the overdoses, which are even more stigmatized, but I would argue is still part of the same problem and mental health crisis. So you know, these conversations are invaluable with you specifically.



1:28:41

And alcoholism as well in the police department. I know it's rampant it really is. It's just people self medicating. With that so that they can forget and go to sleep. I did it. I don't consider myself an alcoholic but I know I drank too much especially toward the end.

J

James Geering 1:29:00

So now with with you identifying that, you know, your box was going overflowing What have been some of the tools that have helped you navigate that and kind of put some healthier coping mechanisms back in.



1:29:13

Well, that was a it was a big part of that course that was several years later. I would say that we start in an alumni within our SWAT team and we get together every Thursday at a lunch and we all get together and we tell war stories and we reminisce and we support each other we I'm

three of the guys that are in the book. We're going to Montana in two weeks for an outing up there to go trout fishing. And and I think that camaraderie and that sharing of not only the pain, but the good times as well. And and and seeing the big picture is all important and then sometimes you really need to get professional help and the In the psychiatrists in the book, the department psychiatrist, he was there my entire career, and I had to see him more than once. If you were involved in the shooting, you had to go to him and, and, and he could always tell there was something going on with me. And he would always follow me out to my car and say, Sadie, you can always call me I'm here. And he gave me his private cell phone, or well, when his cell phone number, he gave me his home number and office number. He said, You call that number anytime you need to talk, and I'll be here for you. And I'd love it. After doing that I never did. That was too much. So I wish it would have because it could have probably made my life a little bit easier. But I was just not willing to let that shield down and let somebody in.

 James Geering 1:30:47

Yeah, absolutely. And this is the problem I've talked about a lot. And a lot of us mature, a little bit older than me, but a lot of us in our generations were raised on that kind of match. Oh, John Wayne Schwarzenegger, you know, men don't cry bullshit. And now sadly, that's caused a lot of our men and women to, to just kind of hold it all in. And like you said, they seemed fine until they weren't. So that thing. Now this is a good thing about the younger generation coming on as a hope this conversation is making them right from the front door go, it's okay for me to have a bad day. It's okay for me to, you know, use therapy to I mean, there's so many things now that do work. So I hope at least the generations behind us will be in a better place. And some of us that were, you know, beginning. I mean, you You began in the 70s. I began in pretty much the beginning of this millennia, but there was 00 discussion on mental health even as young as I was. Well, absolutely.

 1:31:40

You were put that up talked about that. Yeah, absolutely. And I just finished the chapter where you're talking about taking your physical therapy and how much it did for you. And I think back on God, I wish I would have gone through the physical therapy you went through because all the aches and pains of now, you know, 22 years on the SWAT team doing some crazy, crazy things and competitions and all that. And I was powerlifting. And, and yeah, I'm suffering from all that now. But yeah, I wish I would have gotten better therapy at the time.

 James Geering 1:32:16

Yeah, yeah. Well, even that, I mean, you know, what you're provided through a department is not always the right one. You got to become your own advocate to As you read, you know, I didn't exactly take the initial advice that was given to me.

 1:32:29

Right. Yeah, I agree. Yeah, absolutely.

 James Geering 1:32:32

So your book is *The Long Road Home* Sandy wool. Where can people find the book?

 1:32:38

Well, right now it's on Amazon. I had it on several other venues. And my publisher and I, we kind of split ways, and we reissued it But Amazon is the primary place and it's in Kindle paperback and hardback.

 James Geering 1:32:53

Beautiful. Well, Sandy, I want to say thank you so much. I mean, thank you to chuck as well for connecting us. But you know, it's been such a great conversation. You have such a unique perspective, especially like myself being a small town, you know, young boy going into right into the heart of the shit and becoming a first responder, but you know, your perspective on school safety and fitness and combatives and some of the other things we've talked about are invaluable. So I want to thank you for being so generous and coming on the behind the show podcast today.

 1:33:22

Once again, I just said thank you for the opportunity and hopefully our shared experiences and the stories we tell someone's out there listening and it could help them especially down the long road.