

DISORDERLY

CONDUCT

The Oddities Of
My 20-Year Life As An
FBI Special Agent

John Iannarelli



with Joey Robert Parks

DISORDERLY

CONDUCT

The Oddities Of
My 20-Year Life As An
FBI Special Agent

John Iannarelli

Copyright © 2021 by John Iannarelli
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher. Requests for permission should be directed to permissions@indiebooksintl.com, or mailed to Permissions, Indie Books International, 2424 Vista Way, Suite 316, Oceanside, CA 92054.

The views and opinions in this book are those of the author at the time of writing this book and do not reflect the opinions of Indie Books International or its editors.

Neither the publisher nor the author is engaged in rendering legal or other professional services through this book. If expert assistance is required, the services of appropriate professionals should be sought. The publisher and the author shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused directly or indirectly by the information in this publication.

ISBN-13: 978-1-952233-47-0
Library of Congress Control Number: 2021903030

Designed by Joni McPherson

INDIE BOOKS INTERNATIONAL, INC.*
2424 VISTA WAY, SUITE 316
OCEANSIDE, CA 92054
www.indiebooksintl.com

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
The Academy	21
The Agents	41
The Supervisors	83
That Which Cannot Be Unwritten	99
The Cases	117
The Sources	135
The Searches	147
The Subjects	161
The Arrests	181
Epilogue	195
Acknowledgments	197
About The Author	203
Other Books By John Iannarelli	205

The Cases

Everything the FBI does revolves around casework. Because a subject is the one who's suspected of committing a crime, the FBI builds a case so the criminal might be brought to justice. A source shares stories about what the bad guys are doing. A case is opened, and the source is put into operation to gather evidence. In any work the FBI undertakes, there's always a case and a case number for the file the work is associated with.

The necessity of having an open case prevents the government from randomly investigating someone or something just because it feels like it. For a case to be opened, the checks and balances of having an open case require a "reasonable suspicion" of a crime. It's a much lower standard than conviction (beyond a reasonable doubt); it requires a show of criminality beyond mere suspicion, but less than the probable cause needed to make an arrest. Most times, of course, the subjects make it very easy to prove reasonable stupidity.

Cowboys And Indians. And Israelites.

I sat in my ASAC office one Christmas Eve and looked forward to going home early to enjoy the holidays. But an angry rabbi had other ideas.

This rabbi didn't belong to any synagogue. He opened his own place of worship and chose, of all places, an Indian reservation. He got into an argument with his spouse, and sadly, it turned into a domestic violence situation. When the police responded, he held her hostage inside their home on the reservation. Because it was federal land, the FBI had jurisdiction.

Agents, SWAT, hostage negotiators, and others were dispatched to the scene, which was several hours' drive from the office. I arranged for a formal case to be opened. Given the confluence of the impending Christian holiday, the Jewish faith leader, and all this happening on Native American land, I thought a more than general case name would be appropriate, hence, *Operation Mishegoss*. No one else in the Bureau seemed to understand my sense of humor. Some thought it was the name of an Indian tribe. My Jewish readers are probably laughing right now.

Catch Me If You Feel Like It

As an FBI agent in San Diego, I conducted bank robbery investigations regularly. One time, when the robbery had happened a few days prior, I conducted all the follow-up stuff FBI agents do when a bank robbery has occurred. I took witness statements and went over everything with the bank manager to make sure I hadn't missed anything.

As I sat with the manager at her office desk, I went over the details of a statement I'd heard and written practically dozens and dozens of times before. "Give me the money now or I will shoot you." Few bank robbers have any sort of flair for originality.

The assistant manager poked her head in the door and looked at the manager and me. “Excuse me, but somebody is trying to pass a bad check right now at the counter.”

Game for any break in the routine of going over witness statements, I followed the assistant manager to the teller counter and approached the guy she was talking about, the one trying to pass the check.

“Hey, can I talk to you for a second?” I showed him my badge and pulled him aside.

I quickly ascertained that yes, he was trying to pass a bad check. As a precaution, I hooked him up with handcuffs, not wanting him to get squirrely on me. I hadn’t searched him yet, so from a law enforcement officer safety standpoint, I knew he could have a weapon. I didn’t want to have to shoot him. I certainly didn’t want to write up the required paperwork if I did. I was not enjoying writing witness statements as it was, so if it meant not shooting this guy, well, damn it, I’d do whatever it took not to have to put further pen to paper.

More importantly, though, I was wearing a nice suit with no desire to get it dirty. Unlike it was for my police uniforms, dry cleaning was not an FBI agent tax-deductible expense.

How did I know he was trying to pass a bad check? A better question is, how did the bank teller know? This is the story of a local mope.

A *mope* is a law enforcement term for an individual who’s likely to be involved in some sort of criminal behavior. It’s somewhat above jaywalking, but below the level of organized crime. The term comes from the old violation of moperly, where someone could be charged for loitering where they didn’t belong. We just call them aggressive

panhandlers today. If you've ever driven a car in New York City, you've probably had your windshield cleaned by a professional mope with a squeegee. Sort of like the Mr. Goodwrench of vagrants.

This mope had been going around stealing outgoing mail from mailboxes attached to homes or at the edge of the sidewalk. It's a very common practice. I tell people: "Never put your outgoing mail in your mailbox for pickup, especially if it contains checks. Take it to the post office." When people put their outgoing mail in their mailbox, they usually put the flag up on the mailbox. The flag is like a signal to the criminal: "Hey, you. Yeah, the one with the crystal meth-pocked skin and that faraway stare in your eye. Come steal my mail."

Every time this mope would find an envelope addressed to a utility company he knew there would be a check in an envelope, and he'd take the check home. The envelope, too. Can't have people knowing their outgoing mail has been stolen.

Once home, he'd apply acetone—a colorless, flammable liquid solvent typically used for cleaning in a laboratory or removing nail polish—to take the ink off the check without ripping or damaging the paper. The acetone just washes the ink right off.

In the mope's case, it's also a convenient additive to increase the volume of his crystal meth concoction, like how Grandma used to add Wonder bread to her stuffing on Thanksgiving.

Contrary to what you might think, a check doesn't always get indented when you write on it with a pen. Many pens don't let the ink sink into the paper. It depends on what kind of ink your pen uses. I recommend people use certain pens because the ink will bleed right into the paper, making it impossible to remove with acetone. The one *not* to use is a ballpoint pen, because that ink can easily be washed away.

After the bank criminal took the ink off the section of the check where the amount was written and to whom it was made out, he rewrote it out to himself and changed it to a larger amount of money. He would be reasonable with the amount he made out for himself because he wouldn't want the check to be rejected by overdrawing the account.

The check in question was from a notable national bank. (I don't want to say which one, but let's say it rhymes with Tank of America.)

He picked a Tank of America branch at random, away from the area where he stole the check. This way, he wouldn't run the risk that one of the tellers would know the holder of the account and become curious as to why a check was written to him. He'd enter the bank, knowing they'd cash a check drawn from one of their branches. He'd pick a time of day when it was busy, because it's always better if there are a lot of people around, as it would be less likely he'd stand out. There might even be other mopes in line waiting to cash their own stolen checks, so he'd blend in.

He got in line. Several tellers were helping people at the counter. Pretty soon, he was called up by the next available teller. He stepped up to the counter and handed his check to a female teller. She took the check. Looked at it. And stopped.

She just stared at the check. It was her check. He'd stolen it from *her* mailbox. She didn't live in the neighborhood where the bank was located. She commuted to her job at the bank. For that matter, just like the mope who stole the check.

What are the odds that someone would steal mail from a random neighborhood, pick an arbitrary bank, get in line, get called up to a teller window by a specific teller who just happened to be available to help the next person in line, and then it's *that* teller's check?

Add to this that there also happened to be an FBI agent in the bank at that very moment, albeit with a nice suit that he desperately wished to remain clean.

So, there I was with my gun and my credentials. I even had my handcuffs. I got to take this guy into custody and get a stat (statistic, like points) for making an arrest. In law enforcement, it's all about the stats. How many arrests? How many reports? How many cases?

And there I was, with one handcuffed stat I got for very little effort.

After transferring my subject to the local police for a ride to jail, I told the agent who accompanied me, "Given the odds of this kind of luck, we're definitely stopping on the way back to the office and buying a lottery ticket."

Who's Your Daddy?

While working on the reactive squad charged with investigating bank robberies, kidnappings, etc., I received an extortion case. According to the credit card company, a new card had been delivered by mail to a woman, but she indicated she never received it. Instead, she'd been a victim of credit card fraud and on top of which had received a threatening letter in the mail related to the theft of her credit card.

Like the story of my previous mope, I suspected someone had stolen the mail from her mailbox. When the woman received a bill for purchases she didn't make, we knew the thief was using her credit card. Before the woman could cancel the credit card, she received a letter that stated if she called the police, canceled the credit card, or did not pay the bills racked up for the unauthorized purchases, she'd be killed by the credit card thief.

While certainly scary, what made this case unusual was that the extortion letter wasn't handwritten or typed, but was prepared by cutting out individual letters from magazines and spelling out the entire message by pasting the letters on a sheet of paper, like what you'd see in an old gangster movie.

Even though someone had committed this crime, you have to appreciate the workmanship involved in preparing the extortion letter. Criminals just don't have the work ethic today they once had. That attention to detail and pride of ownership is gone. Today's thieves are all about type, click, send. But I digress.

My female victim was very distraught, but it didn't take me very long to figure out who might be behind the crime. All the letters appeared to have been cut out of magazines for a teenage audience. Also, the letter had no postage. It had simply been placed in the mailbox. It just so happened that a teenage girl lived right next door to the victim.

One evening, I went to the residence. I hoped to speak with the parents before I talked with the girl. Upon approaching the house, I clearly heard a heated argument going on between the teenage girl and an older woman (whom I presumed was the mother). As bad as the girl was being in the argument, the older woman was worse. She cursed relentlessly and used terrible language directed at the teen. I even heard a couple of slaps. I knocked on the door and announced myself: "FBI."

The argument stopped. Things got quiet. After a minute or two, the girl answered the door. She wasn't intimidated at all by my presence and instead was very hardcore.

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak with the other woman in the house."

“F— off.”

“If you don’t get the other woman to the door, I’m coming in.”

After cursing me out a little more, the teenager eventually got the other woman to the door. She identified herself not as the mother, but as the babysitter, as the teen’s father worked nights at a downtown bail bonds business.

As I wasn’t getting anywhere with the alleged babysitter or teenage girl, I learned the purported father’s name and business location, and then drove over to have a chat with him.

If you’ve never been inside a bail bonds business, think sleazy adult bookstore but without the ambiance or class. They can be very seedy, with their clientele standing around and waiting.

I explained the reason I was there and about the extortion letter. The father seemed relieved that was the only reason I was present, which I thought was odd. He admitted the teen had probably written the letter and he’d have a chat with her.

I brought up the issue of the babysitter and that I’d overheard abusive behavior toward the girl. To my surprise, the father defended the babysitter, saying the daughter got out of line sometimes and needed to be slapped every so often. That answer was not going to do.

The next morning, I contacted child protective services. After a little research, it turned out things were not as they appeared. The babysitter was actually the teenage girl’s mother. (She’d denied being the mother because she had warrants for her arrest and provided a false name at the time of my inquiry).

Without letting on what I’d learned, I called the father and advised him that either he or the babysitter would have to bring the girl to my office to give a statement before I could close the case and not bother them anymore. I advised him that the FBI does not

arrest minors, and no matter what they told me, the girl wouldn't be federally arrested.

After I pestered him with calls and multiple visits to his home, the father eventually brought the girl to my office. She confessed to both stealing and using the neighbor's credit card and to writing the threatening letter. Likewise, the "father" finally admitted he was actually not the teen's father, but the "babysitter's" boyfriend, acknowledging she was actually the girl's mother.

As we left my office, I reminded them that the FBI does not arrest minors. No matter what the girl told me, she wouldn't be arrested by anyone from the FBI.

However, when we reached the exit, I introduced the daughter and her mother's boyfriend to a police officer (whom I'd arranged to be present and was able to arrest minors), and he arrested the girl for grand theft and extortion—in lieu of the feds not being able to do so. I then told them the police were at their residence at that very moment arresting the mom for her warrants.

The boyfriend was free to go. Because he was in the business, perhaps he was able to arrange a bail bond discount.

Undercover

After eight years in the field, I was promoted and assigned to Washington, DC, as the FBI's national spokesperson. I like to think it was a competitive process and I'd been selected from the best of the best, but in truth (by now having a better understanding of how the government operated), I knew deep down it was probably a choice between the guy with Tourette's syndrome and myself. The other guy probably passed on the offer.

As I had referenced earlier, Eric Rudolph, the Olympic Park bomber and one of the FBI's ten most wanted fugitives, was captured in 2003. Despite the success of this capture of a high-profile FBI fugitive, made by a keen-eyed North Carolina police officer, one of the FBI assistant directors was very unhappy and called to yell at me.

“Why are you talking to the media about this case?!”

“Haven't you heard? I'm the spokesperson for the FBI. This is what you pay me to do.”

Apparently, that was not the correct answer.

Hot Tub Soon To Be Serving Time Machine

I once investigated an insurance fraud case that involved a well-known, wealthy business leader who was regarded as a pillar of his community. However, one of his businesses wasn't doing well financially, so of course, this reputable businessman decided to do the right thing. He'd give his employees two weeks' notice, arrange for severance pay, and liquidate his business assets.

Nah, just kidding. Actually, he decided to burn his business to the ground and collect the insurance money. To my good fortune, the community leader took it upon himself to hire someone else to do the dirty deed for him. That *someone* just happened to be one of my sources, who was all too happy to wear a wire so we could record the businessman soliciting arson and insurance fraud.

The meeting between the businessman and my source went exactly as expected. The community leader/businessman offered to pay my source to throw some gasoline around and burn down the businessman's building. As a bonus, my businessman subject (married for a long time, with children) also solicited my source for sex in exchange for money so he could engage in a homosexual affair.

Now he was on tape soliciting a felony to burn down a building, but the misdemeanor solicitation for prostitution charge would prove to be more problematic—as it would likely require some explaining to his wife.

While all of this went on, unbeknownst to me, another guy who owned a business adjacent to the rich businessman's building also wanted to get rid of his business. He had the very same idea that the way to go about it would be to burn down his building, too! This second guy, however, was a much more hands-on sort of fellow. Imagine a do-it-yourself businessman who cuts out the middleman, along with the homosexual prostitution solicitation. Why hire someone when you can light your own building on fire yourself? So, maybe it burns down my subject's building in the process as well, although arsonist number two did not know arsonist number one had the same goal.

When I first learned a fire had broken out in the building, my immediate reaction was, "The wealthy businessman had hired someone else to start the fire and didn't follow through using my source." Only later in the investigation did I learn what actually happened. Eventually, both subjects were convicted: one businessman for solicitation of arson and the other businessman for the actual arson. Both were also charged and convicted of insurance fraud. The irony is that if the rich businessman had just waited a little while, his neighbor would have burned down the building for him and he could have legitimately collected on the insurance claim.

During my investigation, I also discovered the actual arsonist made a bunch of fraudulent insurance claims for losses to property in the "accidental" fire, including a large jacuzzi that had allegedly been in storage in the building. However, I also learned that prior to

setting the fire, the arsonist removed all of his valuable items from the building—including the jacuzzi.

During the post-fire investigation of putting together a case, I went by this second guy's house. His property was surrounded by a tall wooden fence, so I walked through the adjoining neighbor's backyard, climbed the fence, and sat on top of it. What did I see but the arsonist and his girlfriend relaxing together in the supposedly destroyed hot tub! I used my Bureau issued camera and captured the two of them on film in the hot tub post fire. When the case was brought to trial, those photos made excellent exhibit evidence of the insurance fraud.

Speaking Of Fraud

I once arrested a con man for fraud. The law firm he chose to represent him—I swear—was named Spender & Robb.

Would You Like Fries With That?

I'd been assigned an embezzlement case; a bookkeeper had abruptly quit her job at a McDonald's restaurant. She disappeared from her last known residence after it was discovered she'd stolen \$50,000 from her former place of employment. The McDonald's was on the grounds of the San Diego Marine Corps Recruit Depot, which was federal property. This made it a federal case, removing investigative authority from Officer Big Mac and turning it over to the FBI. Although \$50,000 is a lot of money for the average business owner, in the FBI world, agents generally deal with much larger cases and much bigger numbers.

I had a full caseload at the time—kidnappings, bank robberies, and extortions—cases where actual lives could be at risk, so the

bookkeeper would have to wait until I found some spare time in my schedule. The owner of the McDonald's didn't understand this. He thought I wasn't taking his case seriously. He'd been leaving me voicemails telling me he wanted to see some action.

One time, he called my phone and caught me at my desk. He demanded his case become my top priority. I tried to reasonably explain my other cases and the time constraints, but he wasn't having any of it. He continued to press. This went on for a while, until he told me that, as a respected businessman and taxpayer, I needed to remember that I worked for him.

If I worked for him, I was long overdue for a raise, not to mention that someone needed to do something about all of those unpaid hours I was working. As calmly as I could, I told him that, respected businessman or not, I didn't care if he was Mayor McCheese. I was not going to ignore lives that were on the line for his case. I would get to it as soon as I could.

I would have done exactly that, had he then not called my supervisor after hanging up with me. After complaining to my supervisor, the next thing I knew, I was working full-time to solve the embezzlement. Nevertheless, it wasn't a very complicated case.

The bookkeeper handled the money. She marked the books with the money that had been collected. She was supposed to deposit the cash at the bank. The money never got there. There was enough evidence for me to get an arrest warrant, so I just needed to locate the bookkeeper and take her into custody.

The problem was that after the bookkeeper quit her job, she moved from her last known residence without leaving a forwarding address. I knew she had family in the area and she was born and raised in San Diego. Without having any ties elsewhere, I figured

it was unlikely she'd fled the area, especially with only \$50,000 in stolen cash to live on. She had to be somewhere close to her familiar surroundings.

Fugitives are often caught at the homes of family members because there is a human tendency to remain close to the familiar and comfortable. The question was where to start looking. I tried speaking with her known family members, but either they didn't know where she was residing, or more likely, they didn't want to cooperate with the FBI to have her arrested. Fortunately, I had another avenue of investigation I could pursue.

I failed to mention that this bookkeeper was particularly large. Her driver's license listed her at 5 feet 4 inches and 250 pounds, but I figured based on photographs that she was at least 300 pounds or more. This gave me an idea.

Armed with a photo of the bookkeeper, I went to the area where she'd previously resided. I started visiting all the fast-food restaurants in the area, one by one. Sure enough, after a couple of tries, an employee at a Burger King counter told me, "Yeah, I've seen her before. She comes in every morning for the French toast sticks."

At last, my first solid lead! At 7 a.m. the next day, I stood outside Burger King with another agent. Just as I suspected, my bookkeeper showed up right on schedule for her French toast sticks. We grabbed her before she entered the restaurant—mostly because, if we waited until after she left the restaurant, her hands were likely to be sticky from syrup.

Show Me The Money, Pirate

I responded to a bank robbery with some agents from my squad. The two subjects involved, a man and woman robbery team that was

far from professional, had already been spotted and detained by the local police. They were drug addicts in search of cash who hadn't thought through their getaway.

Their escape plan was to be on foot, but this proved problematic as the man only had one leg. In place of his missing appendage, he wore a prosthetic that was, quite literally, a peg. My only experience seeing someone with a peg leg was in pirate movies, never in person. I don't recall any peg-legged pirates walking too quickly, and certainly not running from the police. This peg leg made a clicking noise with every step he took. Had he not been discovered so quickly, we may have been able to continue tracking him by sound.

Despite their inept getaway and quick capture, the robbers didn't seem to have the stolen money on their persons. With police assistance, we retraced the route they traveled (or hobbled), but were unsuccessful in finding the money. Besides hoping to return the stolen money to the bank, getting a conviction is a heck of a lot easier when you can produce evidence of the stolen cash. It was time to convince at least one of them to tell us the truth about the money.

We separated the two subjects, and I talked with my bank pirate in an attempt to find out where he'd hidden the booty plundered from—I kid you not—Seacoast Bank. He denied knowing anything about any money. He continued in this vein for some time. As we stood outside on the concrete sidewalk on an unusually warm San Diego day, me in my Bureau suit, I began to lose my patience.

"I know you're lying," I told the pirate, "simply because I can tell that both you and your story don't have a leg to stand on." Honestly, how many times in life would you ever have the opportunity to use that expression in a literal context?

Eventually, I wore down the subject. He finally said he knew where the money was, but “someone is going to have to retrieve it.”

“No problem,” I said. “That’s what we do. Just tell me where it is and I will personally get it.”

My peg-legged pirate subject leaned in close to me, and referring to his partner in crime, whispered, “Have you checked her vagina?”

It took a moment for it to register.

I’ve found money hidden in a lot of places in my career, but this would be a first. Understandably, I was no longer eager to be the one to go looking for it. Because the money was inside of her, we needed a search warrant unless the subject was willing to give consent. Plus, I’d never done any searches like that before. Would I need my gun? What would I find once I’d, excuse the expression, made entry? Where is the Vagina Whisperer when I need him?

To my surprise, after I told the female bank robber what I knew, she provided consent to be searched. Was her consent a reflex reaction? I found it unlikely she’d say no to anyone interested in having a look down there. Nevertheless, off to the hospital she went, where a trained professional with a signed consent form performed a successful cash-ectomy.

The doctor reported how much cash was removed, and we recorded the amount and denominations. I recall it was quite a bit of money—more than I thought could possibly be hidden there. I asked the doctor if he was certain all the money retrieved was from the bank robbery. As expected, he didn’t have any expertise in that sort of thing. In any event, there’s a lesson in all of this: don’t put money in your mouth; you never know where it’s been.

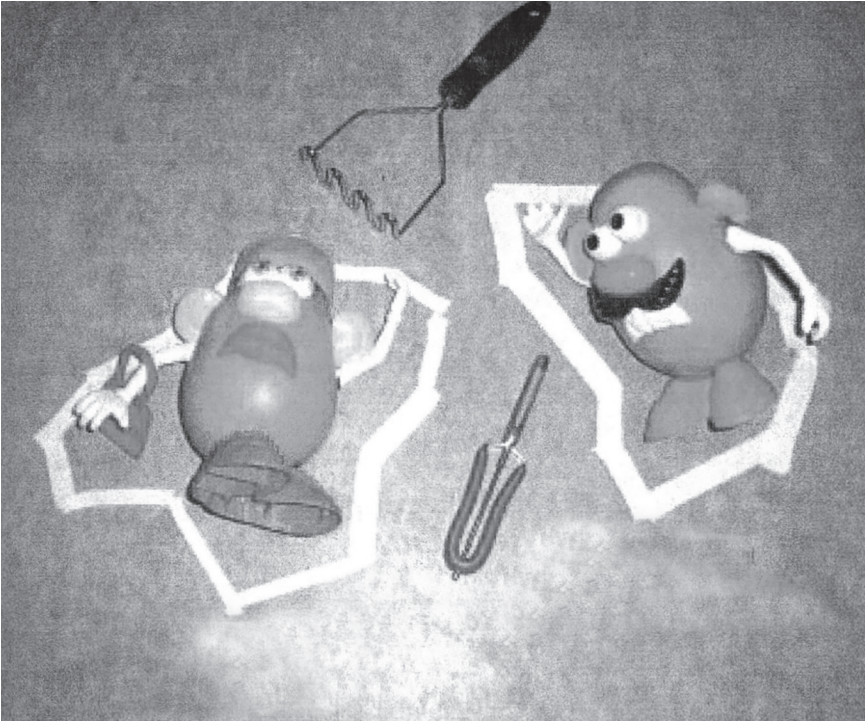
Mr. & Mrs.

I've worked many threat and extortion cases in my career. Some of the subjects have been much more creative than others. In one case, death threats were being made against a husband and wife for the sole purpose of intimidating them. The couple was rightfully concerned. The person making the threats had traveled to their residence, set foot on their property, and left behind an ominous message.

Did he throw a brick through their window? Stick a knife in the front door to hold up a menacing letter? No, this criminal's approach to sending threats was much more imaginative: In the victims' driveway, he placed Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head figures to represent the couple. What's so disturbing about that? Did he stand them up in the driveway with a sinister letter in their hands? No, that would be mere child's play with a child's toy. Rather, he laid them flat on the ground on their potato backs, then chalked a body outline around each potato victim. To emblazon his ghastly intent, he added a potato peeler beside one potato cadaver and a potato masher beside the other.

As odd as it may seem to you and me, it's hard to understand the mindset of someone going to all of the trouble to purchase Mr. and Mrs. Potato Heads, assemble them, and then place them on the victims' property in the precise way he did. The perpetrator turned out to be an angry coworker of the husband and wife. As odd as his MO was, it was probably easier than writing a threatening letter on an Etch-A-Sketch.

DISORDERLY CONDUCT



Crime scene where the subject had staged Mr. and Mrs. Potato heads in the victims' driveway in an attempt to intimidate them.

About The Author

John Iannarelli (a.k.a. “FBI John”) served for more than 20 years as an FBI Special Agent and was also the Bureau’s national spokesperson. His investigative work included the Oklahoma City Bombing, the 9/11 attack, the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, the Sony hack, numerous bank robberies, kidnappings, and other assorted crimes. He is the recipient of the FBI Director’s Distinguished Service Award, as well as an Honorary Doctorate of Computer Science.

John is a former San Diego Police Officer and graduate of the University of San Diego School of Law, having also completed international studies at Oxford, England. In addition to being a national news on-air consultant, he is an attorney, the author of five books and a highly sought-after keynote speaker. John is a Certified Special Professional (CSP®) by the National Speakers Association. He has presented to numerous Fortune 500 companies, domestic and international audiences, the United Nations, and the Vatican, where he has personally met on several occasions with Pope Francis.

You can learn about John’s services by visiting his website FBIJohn.com and follow him on Twitter @FBIjohn.



FBIJohn The Voice of Cyber & Security

Speaker | Author | Consultant

John Iannarelli, CSP®
FBI Special Agent (Ret.)

🌐 **FBIJohn.com**

🐦 **@FBIjohn**

✉️ **john@FBIJohn.com**

☎️ **866-324-5646 | 866-FBI-John**