

The Langley Files: CIA's Podcast
FILE 012

The Art of Deception: CIA's Disguise Experts Take You Behind the Scenes

(music begins)

Walter: At CIA, we work around the clock and across the globe to help keep Americans and others around the world safe. Secrecy is often vital to our work.

Dee: But we're committed to sharing what we can when we can. So let us be your guides around the halls of Langley as we open our files and speak with those who have dedicated themselves to this mission.

Walter: These are their stories.

Walter and Dee: This is The Langley Files.

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Dee: Imagine for a moment that you're a CIA case officer on assignment to an adversarial country overseas. As you go about every minute of every day, you know that your adversary's security services are on a mission to spot and surveil intelligence operatives in their territory—that is to say, they're on a mission to spot and surveil you. But that's not the tough part.

Walter: The tough part is you're there to conduct clandestine operations, such as secretly meeting with individuals who have information of vital national security importance to the United States, and often its allies and partners. Individuals who will be in grave danger if caught sharing that information with you. Individuals CIA has a solemn responsibility to protect. But how can you conduct your operations under the very nose of those adversarial security services trying to watch your every move?

Dee: Well, if this were a Hollywood movie, you might sneak under the radar by donning a disguise so convincing it would fool your own family members...

Walter: Indeed, many listeners are no doubt familiar with the Mission: Impossible's miraculous masks, and the Academy Award winning film "Argo," in which Ben Affleck portrays a CIA disguise wizard on a mission to rescue imperiled Americans in Iran. And as our listeners also know, here on The Langley Files we often dispel the many myths and misconceptions about CIA in popular culture. But this is one time that Hollywood fiction mirrors fact. Because CIA does in fact use, and has always used, disguises.

Dee: But how do CIA officers quickly transform themselves into someone else under pressure and surveillance? How do they choose their disguises? And above all—who makes those disguises for them?

Walter: Well, today on The Langley Files, you're going to find out—because you're going to hear from members of that very team. In just a moment, we'll be speaking with two currently-serving CIA disguise experts.

Dee: So stay tuned, because this is a first.

(music ends)

Dee: Welcome to you both. Thank you very much for joining us here today. I know Walter and I were very excited that you were willing to come on the show and talk to us all about disguises. It was one of the episodes that I know Walter and I both wanted to get on the show.

Walter: From the very beginning ... on our list.

Dee: From the very beginning that was like one of the tee ups, like, we have to get the disguise people in here. So we appreciate your time.

Walter: Carrie, Joe, as Dee said, thank you so much for being here and to kick things off, can we ask - are you in disguise today or is this really you?

Carrie: I don't know, I mean ...

Dee: If it's a disguise, it's sure life-like that is for sure.

Walter: Yeah, I think it's a good disguise.

Dee: I think just let's periodically keep an eye on them to see if there's any tells.

Walter: The real twist will be if we take off our disguises.

Dee: Oh my gosh, we should have done that.

Joe: A twist all along.

Walter: (laughs) That's right.

Carrie: Joke's on us.

Dee: So off the bat can we get your expertise on the difference between what is actually a disguise versus a costume.

Carrie: I mean they both really have the same meaning, you're trying to look different than what you normally look like, right? So, but for disguise, for us, our our mission is to help save lives and change identities to protect people's true identity. Uh, costumes are more fun. You know, you get a Sasquatch costume - that can't be a disguise walking around the hallway, you know.

Dee: Well...

Walter: We're a global organization...

Carrie: I mean, Halloween maybe?

Joe: This is true.

Carrie: But really, it's, you know, they're they're almost one and the same, but at the same time, it's one is a little more, um, has a little more believability as you are impersonating another person or just trying to look like another person versus a character.

Joe: I definitely agree with everything she said. Um, and the key is disguise for us is creating that persona, not just the outward appearance. It's it's that realism, kind of like you're becoming the essence of someone else, to really have that confidence to be able to sell this persona as you go and do your you know, your operational acts.

Carrie: We often tell our customers when we see them, you know, disguise that we issue is really only like 10% of a disguise toolkit, that 90% is on them. It's the way that they walk. It's their mannerisms. It's, you know, do you talk with your hands, things like that. It's things that they don't really think about, that we train them on, um, noticing about themselves. It's a lot of self-analysis, not just the tools and the tradecraft. Um, it's, you know, training them on how to really look at themselves and determine if you know, an adversary were watching me from across the street. Am I giving myself away? I may have a wig on, but, you know, am I still doing everything I would normally do if I wasn't wearing a wig? So we teach them all of these things.

Joe: If I were to, you know turn you, Dee, into say, like a 90 year-old man ...

Dee: Brilliant. Let's do it.

Joe: Could you sell that?

Dee: Got it.

Joe: So it's more than just the the external.

Dee: That makes absolute sense. Is it hard for people to get into that mode of kind of retraining their normal habits or their movements?

Carrie: Oh yes.

Joe: Absolutely. That's that's part of the the extensive training that our officers have to go through.

Carrie: I mean think about the adrenaline rush, right? You know you've got this whole disguise on you're trying to be somebody else. But then your brain is focused on the operation that you're trying to complete. So, um with the adrenaline rush and everything we're teaching you know, slow down, don't forget. You know, there are certain techniques that we're able to teach them to do that help them remember the mannerisms that they're trying to create instead of just take away. We often get people in our chairs and they'll say, oh, my gosh, I look just like my aunt or something. You know my brother, and we tell them, well think about that person, you know, what are their mannerisms? What is it about them that if you saw them at the end of the hall, you'd say, I know who that is, so you know, and then it's easier to kind of imagine that other person, instead of trying to create somebody you've never met before. We instruct them to wear their disguise material as much as they can even at home. Um, just to be able to get used to seeing themselves in it, you know, look in the mirror and talk to yourself. And, um, it is it is acting, so and some of them don't have that acting background, so it does take a little extra time for them to get accustomed to it. But, we always remind them we're not here to make you look better or worse, just different. Um, so, yes, it's going to take a little time to get used to this new look. But you know, once you, once they get confident in it, smooth sailing.

Joe: We like to think of disguise not as really the materials, but think of it as a skill set. So, um, you know, we have officers come in and you know they, for any line of work that they do, you know, they have to learn new skill sets, and disguise is one of them. So because they might be suddenly in a different

location without the gear we give them, but understand how to change their appearance reliably based on the techniques that we can teach them.

Walter: And to zoom out for a second here, we're talking about officers who are doing operations around the world. It might mean, just throw out one example - meeting with a source, uh, someone in foreign country who's giving us information of national security importance and trying to do so in a way that they wouldn't be recognized or spotted if they were under surveillance.

Joe: Exactly. To protect their identity and also to protect the source. That's that's exactly what we do.

Walter: Let's pull on that thread and talk more about why CIA needs disguises and have we always used disguises?

Joe: Disguise itself goes back, you know, as far back as history pretty much. Um, as long as there's been spycraft, there has been the need for disguise. Our office itself actually has its roots in the OSS. And we were talking a little bit about some of the artifacts you can see at the museum that actually talk about the different disguise techniques that they're using back then for, you know, World War II support, parachuting behind enemy lines, and having entire kits to like help them make insignias and paraphernalia to blend in as German officers. So that's pretty wild to me that we've been doing this kind of stuff like ...

Dee: From the get go, right?

Joe: Yeah, from the get go.

Dee: And for our listeners that haven't tuned into some of the previous episodes. The OSS is the Office of Strategic Services. That was our predecessor before CIA became CIA. So you're talking, you know, over 75 years ago that this tradecraft has been kind of embedded into what we do in our day-to-day operations overseas.

Joe: We're actually one of the oldest surviving disciplines from the OSS days.

Walter: Oh. That's cool.

Dee: That is really cool.

Joe: There's an old disguise manual from the OSS days.

Dee: Really?

Joe: I think we have, like, a copy floating around the office somewhere. And, um, and it talks about like, okay, after you've jumped out of the plane and landed with your team, like, make sure you have like, your kit to, like make, um, German officer insignias to fit on a uniform that you can steal from someone nearby where they're stationed, like all kinds of wild stuff.

Walter: Is the handbook still good?

Joe: The root of it is good. So, like, you know, the basics are always solid. I wouldn't use lead, uh metal anymore. And you know some of that lead-based paint that they were talking about to make some of their little things. But our materials have definitely evolved, and we're always looking to incorporate new technology whenever it's viable and trying to scale to meet, you know, critical mission need.

Carrie: And the fact that disguise is still one of the oldest technical skill sets used in the Agency successfully... So it's one of those things that will probably never go away just because it's been around for so long, and it's always been successful. So ...

Joe: Yeah, there will always be a need to meet with someone, you know. And there's a lot you know there's always talk about, oh, the world is digital and virtual, but there is always going to be that need to do something in the physical.

Dee: There's always that in-person, the contact.

Carrie: Just blending into an operating environment and protecting yourself and your family.

Dee: And we're a worldwide organization, so there's a multitude of variations of what somebody should be looking like or acting like based on the operation.

Carrie: Exactly.

Dee: So I'm assuming that the tradecraft that your your people bring into the department to make these disguises and teach the tradecraft is pretty extensive.

Joe: Absolutely. We actually have a great diverse background of skill sets from all different types of backgrounds. Like, I myself was illustrator, graphic designer, cartoonist.

Dee: Awesome.

Joe: And but we have folks that study fine art. We have folks that come from cosmetic, cosmetology backgrounds and even special effects backgrounds and it's really we're always looking for folks with just like the passion and like, natural hand skills.

Carrie: Like, you know, for me I started I came into the Agency from the career of being a makeup artist. So when I came into the Agency and I saw that we had a disguise department, obviously I beelined to that and worked to come over to that side of the house. And, like Joe said, we have a lot of people that you know come from all different backgrounds. Security, administrative. Um, I think the biggest thing for us is if folks just demonstrate the ability to do artistic work and have the hand skills to do, you know, things with the arts and have a passion for it to to be creative. Most of the things in our job is trainable and coachable, and that's the nice thing about our offices, there's so many different people from all different backgrounds that just come together with passion for the creative and art side of the world.

Walter: I hope there's somebody listening to this whose job choices are like, you know, choice number one, Broadway makeup artist or set designer, choice number two, CIA. And they're listening like, maybe I don't have to choose...

Dee: Those choices. Yeah, absolutely. Um, so can we talk about you two then just for a little bit? Um, you talked a little about your background, but what was it that made you join the Agency to begin with? If not for like you said, you didn't even know that disguise was a thing here until you got here. So what made you want to join?

Joe: I was actually looking for a job, and I absolutely wanted nothing to do with the government. And I wanted to be, um, in the art field, like somewhere in New York City because, um, that's, you know, that's

the art center of the world. That's where I wanted to, like, pursue my passion to be an illustrator or cartoonist. While I was waiting on just to get some basic interviews um, a family member who worked here, they kept saying, hey, you know, we have an art department. And I'm like, I don't wanna do that. And he goes, no, come on, give me your resume, give me a resume. And, um, they convinced me to submit a resume, and I got a phone call and they said, hey, do you want to come work for the CIA. We really, really like your work. And I said, wow, okay. So just blew me away. And suddenly I was like, oh, this is wild and got through all the processing and started my career. And I actually started out as a graphic designer illustrator, and I ran into someone from the disguise department, and they saw my work and they said, hey, you know, you're really good. Um, I like your work. Would you like to come work for us? And I was like, oh, cool who are you? And they said, well, I'm from disguise. I went down there and I saw everything that we do, and I just fell in love with it. And I pretty much like bet my career on, I'm going to go and apply, I'm gonna try, and they accepted me. And I've been there ever since.

Dee: That's excellent. I'm gonna ask the same question to you Carrie.

Carrie: So for me, you know, I was like, I mentioned a makeup artist and I was working for a large corporation doing that. So there was some travel and weekends and everything, and I wanted a Monday through Friday 9 to 5. And I applied online, um, CIA.gov, and that was right before the terrorist attacks of September 11th. So I applied in August. And then when that happened in September, um, I was contacted pretty shortly after because there was a huge hiring surge back then, um you know, and but that's when the patriotism really started, you know, bubbling up because it's like, okay yeah, I'm I'm really glad that this is the place that I'm potentially going to be employed in because, you know, um, just being able to help save lives or protect officers in the world that are helping to bring information that protects us back is amazing. So, I got in the door. And, you know, one of the great things about this organization is the ability to network and through my initial classes and trainings and things like that, I just got to know a lot of people and some of them were officers that worked in the disguise department. And that's, you know, how I was introduced to it and then just talking to them and, um, had the ability to help out and help, you know, make some things for, um, the war zones and just overseas on my downtime. Um, and through that, they're like, you really like this, don't you? And I'm like, yes. So next time a vacancy came open, I jumped and I got it. And I've been with them ever since, so I just can't imagine being anywhere else. It's one of those, you know, missions you join and it's very wholehearted. You feel rewarded, you, you know, see the customers when they return from the field. And you see, you know the successful operations that have come out of things that you've helped them do, and, uh, just it's very fulfilling.

Walter: Well, that's awesome. Can you talk to us maybe about what the day-to-day life is like in the disguise department?

Carrie: Oh gosh. I mean, every day is different. One day you can have somebody going to Europe. Another day, somebody's going to Africa. I mean, it's...

Joe: Its, that's one of the great things about the office is every day is going to be different. We supply the global mission. So we help everybody. And we're doing everything from making things in our different labs to constantly ordering materials and researching and then training.

Carrie: Yea, a lot of research and development, innovation.

Joe: A lot of training.

Carrie: A lot of training.

Joe: We provide a lot of training. A lot of folks don't know that about us.

Carrie: Yeah, and then, you know we'll have our customers come in and they have their mind set on what they feel that they need to, you know, go overseas with and their toolkit. And when we talk to them and sit down, we're like, that's great and all, but actually, I think you might benefit from the X Y Z, and then they're like, oh, my gosh, I didn't even know that existed. So a lot of you know the day may begin looking like it's going to go one direction and then do a total turn by the end of the day so...

Joe: It's very fluid.

Walter: Does anybody ever come in like, you know, I've always wanted to do a mustache disguise. With their heart set on some, you know, some character they wanted to...

Carrie: We get a lot of requests for Brad Pitt.

Dee: Oh really? Ok.

Joe: And we tell them if we could make you look like Brad Pitt, we would.

Carrie: Or can you help me lose 20 pounds? No, Sorry. We only can put on weight. We can't take off.

Joe: It's easy to add. It's very, very hard to take away.

Dee: So that's a kind of a good lead into my next question for you guys. What does a disguise look like? So, aside from what we envision in our head from those that work out, don't work for the Agency, right? Assuming you're adding weight where you can. Are we talking - you add tattoos, birthmarks? Like what makes your disguises distinct?

Joe: If you can think of it, we could probably make it happen.

Carrie: Yeah, it depends on what the requirement is, you know? Where are they going? What do they need to look like? What, um, environment are they blending into? You know, is it a subgroup that they would need to blend into in that country...

Joe: Also what is their operational window of time to apply it? But we typically can provide from head to toe, several profile changes per officer.

Carrie: And I think like that's where the confusion gets... A lot of people assume that we're just like Hollywood, and we've got somebody in a chair all day long, applying things and make-up and spraying and all of this and gluing. But really I mean, we are there to train the officers to be able to independently disguise themselves because they're they're working quickly. They're walking down the street. They're turning the corner. Um, you know we train them on how to take their pants off in public without anyone even noticing and then changing into something else. And... yeah.

Dee: Like Superman in the telephone booth. That's what I'm envisioning right now.

Walter: Yeah, plus, plus, plus...

Dee: Plus, plus, plus.

Carrie: People don't see what they don't know they're looking for.

Dee: That's a good point.

Carrie: So I mean, for us, that's to our advantage. The phone usage today, right? People are looking at their phones constantly, and so that has helped. It's like, okay, they're distracted so you can get away with pretty much anything you want.

Joe: So think about today. Do you remember every single person you walked by today?

Walter: No, I was thinking about this interview. I was excited.

Carrie: Everyone's distracted.

Joe: Exactly like everyone is the most important thing in their own universe. And so we take advantage of that, and we also teach our officers to remember that mindset because it's very counterintuitive, especially if you're gonna start taking your pants off in a crowd.

(laughs)

Walter: Could you say that today is tougher than ever for disguise based on the amount of tech that's around, but it's also in some ways, paradoxically, better than ever because people are fixated on their phones?

Joe: I think, um, it's kind of better than ever. And also we've never been more important because of the rise of technology.

Dee: They were talking about like, did you pay attention to everybody that you've seen today and in my head I'm thinking, I'm staring at the two of them and I still can't figure out if they're wearing disguises. So, no, the answer...

Walter: I think Joe is. I can't be sure.

Dee: I think Joe is. I'm totally sure he is.

Walter: Could I ask... a whimsical question maybe?

Joe: Sure.

Carrie: I'm scared.

Dee: Whimsy. I love it.

Joe: Never be afraid of whimsy.

Walter: Do officers ever get lost in their disguise personas that you teach them? The mannerisms, the way of speaking... is it ever like, "no, you need to let The Captain go. You need to go back to being, you know, Paul, or Joe, or Mike, or whatever."

Joe: Funny story. I did have one officer—this was early on—who liked their look so much that when they came to pick up, a month later, their finished disguise product, they looked exactly like their disguise. They had cut their hair, dyed their hair...

Dee: Really? Oh my gosh.

Walter: Oh wow.

Carrie: I was going to say that. Yes, that's happened to me. I gave a nice blonde wig, and a lady came back with bleached blond hair. And I'm like..

Dee: She's like, I pulled this off.

Carrie: Oh no! Now we have to go back to square one.

Walter: Extreme Makeover: CIA.

Joe: Yes, but I'm like, uh, you know what you did, right? And they're like, but it looks so good.

Dee: But now you can't be that.

Joe: And I'm like now I gotta make you a new one.

Walter: Make you back into what you were before.

Carrie: Yeah, right. Like thanks for the compliment, but ...

Joe: Yeah I'm glad I helped you find who you really want to be.

Dee: For somebody that has no background in the skills that you both obviously, um, are very steeped in, what is like the first step to making a believable disguise. Like, what is it that you first think about or what is it that you're working on?

Joe: Uh, for me, it's it's you really are assessing the person. Like, as soon as they walk through the door, I'm looking at them and I'm studying them, and I'm already trying to decide how am I going to change this person? And that's just the visual side. Then there's also the research and study, and like reading up on their operational requirements, where are they going, what are they ultimately trying to do? So how extensive do we need to get? And then what are they really up against? So is that on the, like, the physical threat and also the technical threat, and that all comes into play when we're developing our disguise solutions.

Carrie: Yeah. I mean, some could be as simple as just giving, you know, a hat and a different bag. Um, instructing on the officer paying attention to details like, um, you know what color is the sole of your shoe. Do you have reflective stripes on your shoes or your bags? Things like that, you know. Will you be operating at night so headlights might shine on your reflective stripes? You might want to tone that down. So these are all the, like, the fine minute things that people don't really think about. But, like um, Joe said, yeah, it's mostly just as soon as they come in, we properly assess them. Um, you know, we do a questionnaire. You know, where are you going? How long will you need it? How often will you use it? Will it be a controlled environment? Outside? Inside? Daytime? Nighttime? A whole list of questions that

we pretty much, um, interview them and have these consultations with them prior to determining the tools that we add to their toolkit.

Walter: We were saying when you guys first sat down, that Joe seemed to be, you know, sizing us up for just... you know... that muscle of disguise appraisal.

Joe: Yeah, I really want your face. I think we should add it to our library.

Walter: It's going to be in the Halloween episode.

Dee: Can you put a handlebar mustache on him? That would be a thing.

Walter: I want to be The Captain...

Dee: You could be The Captain. Finally.

Walter: My disguise persona.

(laughing)

Joe: Unfortunately, we get caught staring a lot and get yelled at.

Walter: Just part of the job. Yeah. Are there any instances in which a disguise caused more problems than it solved?

Joe: Yes. Um, there was one incident, again, this is back in the war zone where we apparently made our officers look so legit that as they rolled up to a particular checkpoint that they looked too much like the opposition tribe that was in that region. And they basically got, um, came under fire from the checkpoint because they looked too much like the adversary and it caused a big problem. But everyone was fine and very quickly were like tearing things off.

Dee: Mmm.

Walter: Wow.

Joe: Later I heard about this incident from one of the the folks that was that that happened to and and he told me all about it, and I said, oh, I'm sorry that happened. He goes, no, no—but, hey, could you give me another disguise? Because it got burnt up in the car.

Dee: Oh, my gosh.

Joe: I really liked all the stuff you gave me, and I'm like, yeah sure. But he was very he was very attached to the materials I had made him.

Dee: That's crazy.

Walter: So no mishaps like rashes or allergic reactions or anything like that, though, on the far more minor side of the spectrum?

Carrie: No. Everything that we issue is medically cleared, um, from our in-house medical services, and then we just use human safe items.

Joe: Any new materials that any new products we also test in-house as well, especially on ourselves. Like I said before, like, everyone tests a lot of stuff on me, so.

Carrie: Even stick-on adhesive mustache tapes that we'll test. And, you know, you don't want to be in the middle of a meeting, um, and your mustache starts to peel off, so we'll test a lot of the items before we issue them out.

Joe: I actually have a mustache story.

Dee: What's your mustache story?

Joe: Um, so again, gave a disguise to an officer and again, got some great feedback. And this particular officer was with their informant, uh being taken into this very like, high level meeting at a restaurant. And a lot of very bad people and dangerous people in this room. Um, and he was just there to observe and just, like, take notes. And, um, but the food that was that had been ordered for the group was, I guess, like, hot pot. And when they opened up the bowl, the steam hit his face, and the glue from the mustache actually started to dissolve, and his mustache started to do the... zoop...

Walter: Oh wow.

Joe: And so he said he spent the entire hour just kinda going, yeah, like holding it in place, um until he was able to excuse himself to go to the bathroom and, like, do a quick reapply. But it was like a totally unexpected thing that affected, um, his disguise.

Dee: I guess so, right?

Joe: But this just, like, just like to shout out to the like, the amazing talent and skill of our officers that have to do these kind of things.

Dee: Yeah, the wherewithal to know that that's happening, in the environment that he's in, enough to keep it in place to excuse himself. The composure, but also like the adrenaline that I'm sure was going on in his own body. That's crazy.

Carrie: Joe and I joke all the time, like laugh about how we could never wear disguises. It's just, it's too much. It's hot, it's itchy, it's, you know, and then to be doing an operation at the same time and and just having that adrenaline rush and everything, it's it's too much. Like we're totally happy just making them and issuing them. I give it to our case officers who, um, don them all the time to successfully complete operations.

Dee: Absolutely.

Walter: That's incredible.

Dee: They're trying to throw us off the scent, Walter.

Walter: Yeah. Still definitely wearing disguises.

Dee: 100%.

Carrie: Oh, you're in for a surprise.

Walter: So do you guys really love Halloween? Or are you just over it by the time, you know, October 31st rolls around?

Joe: I think we all have a sweet spot in our hearts for Halloween, I love Halloween.

Carrie: It's so expected from our group anyway.

Joe: Yes. That's the problem.

Carrie: If we don't do it, they're like - what's wrong with you guys? But we have a lot of fun with it for sure.

Dee: So do you, yourselves dress up for Halloween, like outside of work? Like, do you go to parties and try to like fool your friends or something?

Carrie: Oh, yeah. And I'm sure, Joe you know, can agree that most people when we're at these Halloween parties or functions, they are impressed with our our costumes and then wondering, how did you get it to look so good? I'm just, you know...

Walter: It's classified.

(laughing)

Joe: Like already, I'm trying to plan out my next one.

Dee: Are you really?

Joe: Yeah and usually it starts at, like, the beginning of the year.

Dee: That's like, it's straight up what Walter over there does. He's been thinking since last year.

Carrie: You just need to come visit us, Walter.

Joe: You'll have to come to our next Halloween party.

Walter: Reminds me, has there ever been a really cool recruitment story of a disguise expert from the outside world at a Halloween conference or Hollywood or Broadway or something like that?

Carrie: They're doing a lot of similarities to what we need to do. So you know, if there's any that can give us um, tips and tricks and, you know, and we we often research what's the latest, um, materials out in the industry whether it's makeup artistry, or adhesives and things like that.

Joe: Yeah, we're always we're always looking to see what industries, um, parallel as much as possible what we're doing. And it comes from a lot of different sources, especially on the special effects side. We're always researching. We're always looking. We always listening. Yeah, and we've been able to find some really, really cool stuff that way.

Walter: That kid out there who is like, man, theater or CIA? I wish I could do both. Listen up, buddy.

Carrie: Yeah, see?

Dee: Yeah, choices. So I need to know, do you, both of you, have a particular favorite disguise that you've created? Of course, what you can share.

Joe: Well, it was a joint effort. I just want to say that. It was across the team, which is one of the reasons why it was so one of my favorites. Because it wasn't just one particular discipline. It was a combination of everybody, uh, to pull off a really awesome thing, and I'll speak in very, very generalities. So we had an officer that was in a high threat area, and they were under 24/7 surveillance. And they had, I believe, a 10 to 12 person physical surveillance team on them. So they, by the way, they're a rock star. This officer just totally blown away with how capable they are. We worked with them for about a week straight in country. And when the time came, this officer went to their specified location as hey, this is part of my daily routine. And within basically under five minutes, walked right back out as the complete opposite gender, and just from head to toe, and and combined all the different disciplines to this particular person to master to, um, to pull this off. And then literally walked past their 12 person surveillance team that surrounded the area, and they never even picked up on them. And the kicker was, as they got through that that circle, they went to go pick up a taxi and the taxi that arrived, out popped one of their known surveillance that was late to the party and held the door open for them.

Dee: What?

Joe: And they got in and then went off and did their thing. Yeah, this this officer is a true rock star. Now imagine just the courage to pull it off, that's... I'm I'm utterly impressed by this officer.

Dee: Amazing.

Walter: Cool under pressure.

Dee: Way cool under pressure.

Joe: Made our stuff look good.

Dee: Yeah, well obviously so.

Carrie: We always call those are true players. We give them everything we feel that they need to be successful, and then they just push it even further. And then when they come back with their success stories, we are just blown away because we're like, wow, like they totally took what we gave them and made it into something even better.

Joe: Thank you for letting us help enable that.

Dee: Amazing. That's a great story.

Walter: To be that person, in that moment, too... having the door held for you by your surveillance as you walk past them...

Dee: Just the adrenaline.

Carrie: And I mean, like, you know, you're lighting a cigarette and everything and puffing away when you don't even smoke. Just to add to that believability.

Walter: Just to really sell it.

Carrie: Like, this individual truly knew what they were doing.

Joe: Yep. Total rock star.

Dee: I mean, it does. It just does speak to, like, the skill set and abilities that our officers portray on a daily basis, but also the extent of which our operations put them in positions where they feel like they have to do something like that. It's crazy.

Walter: So I have one last, fully bonkers question. Are all of our disguises human beings?

Dee: That's a really long pause.

Carrie: That's a good question.

Joe: That's a really good one. I can get very existential with that one.

Walter: I mean, I'm reminded of Carmen Sandiego, the video game when I was, a computer game, when I was a kid. There was this one animation of like a tree that would stand up, blink, and walk past in disguise.

Dee: I thought you were totally going, like the UFO alien route there for a second.

Walter: I was thinking trees or furniture, but...

Joe: But we're going to get all kinds of listeners now.

Carrie: That bird is watching me.

Dee: Birds are real.

Joe: I guess I guess the best I could say is, um just we'll use whatever is appropriate and not... we're not, like, even our day to day... sometimes we feel like we're getting into a pattern, but there's always, like, cool, extreme projects to break away from the norm. And again, we've got an amazing team of people to help, you know, just make all this cool stuff happen. So we're only limited by our imagination.

Dee: That's really awesome. No better way to wrap that up.

Walter: That's the close-out quote.

Carrie: Walter's going to be staring at all of the trees now when he leaves today.

Walter: As I walk back to my car. That one? No...

Carrie: I should have come dressed as a tree.

Dee: Oh, my gosh. It would have been amazing. Totally would have noticed.

(laughing)

Joe: It's been fantastic to, like, talk more about what we do.

Walter: You're telling us.

Carrie: I mean, obviously we can't, we couldn't get too into the weeds about things. But just having the the ability to talk about what we do and our passion for it and our mission is is, you know, it's really cool because we don't really get to talk about this to the public. So, um, yeah, I mean, like, we mentioned the skill sets, it varies. And as long as you have a passion for art and creativity and you have good hand skills, we welcome anybody to, um, you know, come on board and train and learn and be a disguise officer.

Dee: Carrie, Joe, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

Joe: Thanks for having us.

Walter: Thanks guys.

Dee: We are very excited. You fulfilled one of our checklist must haves. So we really appreciate you being here. And thank you for what you guys do. Honestly, at the at the heart of everything, those folks can't do what they do without you. So thank you very much for all that you do.

Joe: Thank you.

Carrie: Thank you guys.

Walter: Thanks guys.

Dee: So Walter, we sat here for a really long time with Carrie and Joe, and maybe I'm just bad at picking up on stuff, but I'm pretty sure that was the real them. I don't remember seeing a wig or makeup or...

Walter: I'm less convinced. I'm pretty sure Joe's nose started to droop partway in, and that Carrie's eyes were blue when she came in and brown when she left.

Dee: So I obviously would not make a good case officer.

Walter: I would not say that. But I do think we should stop by their shop sometime and find out the truth for ourselves, and maybe try on some of those items they talked about. Maybe they could dress us up as trees.

Dee: Trees... I like it... alright. And speaking of trees, in our last episode, we posed the following - In the quiet natural surroundings of CIA's Headquarters here in Langley, Virginia, our Agency officers can often take a stroll to enjoy some much-needed fresh air and soothing scenery. There are times, however, where officers are not alone in their wanderings. There happens to be a particular woodland animal that frequents the grounds here and often seems quite at home amongst the people and the buildings. In fact, this known creature has become somewhat of an unofficial mascot of the CIA. So our question was - which type of animal is often a spectator of the employees' outdoor adventures here at Headquarters?

Walter: Well, obviously this could be many different types of woodland creatures, but the one that's been deemed our unofficial mascot is, believe it or not, a fox. That's right, a fox that Agency officers fittingly refer to as Mischief. Mischief is a Headquarters staple, having acclimated to his human neighbors, or at least we assume so. Mischief the fox can often be seen hanging out in different locations around the compound.

Dee: You know, there's been, often, times that I ran into Mischief. Not physically, but he seems like he just doesn't even care that a person is within like 20 feet of him.

Walter: He's got that CIA cool under pressure.

Dee: That he is. He's a cunning little guy. Speaking of cunning, let's try another trivia question.

Walter: On this episode, we discussed the lengths to which CIA officers go to in order to change their identity to ensure their affiliation with CIA remains unknown. However, there are some times in which CIA officers, and their sources, need to be sure that who they are meeting with is a friend and not foe. So, these individuals might wear something to guarantee the other person understands their affiliation. One example of using this tradecraft comes from the 1950s. Russian Lieutenant Colonel Popov, who was the first GRU Soviet Intelligence Officer to spy for the United States, wore a particular clothing accessory in order to ensure the CIA case officer meeting him knew who he was. So our question is, what was this accessory?

Dee: Our listeners will have to tune in to the next episode to hear the answer.

Walter: Or they can take their sleuthing skills over to our YouTube channel and see if they can figure it out right now.

Dee: And that's it for today's episode. Thanks everyone for tuning in.

Walter: Until next time ... we'll be seeing you.

(music begins)

Walter: Hey Dee, check this out.

Dee: What... what are you doing? You guys, oh my gosh, he's... he's taking a mask off. Are you serious? This whole time, Walter?

Walter: This whole time.

(music ends)