

#55 (SCOTT PAYNE)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

In over 20 years, working undercover with the FBI, Scott Payne infiltrated the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang, got naturalized into the Ku Klux Klan, and drank goat's blood initiating into the white supremacist, neo-Nazis, known as The Base ... all as part of his cover. We talk about his work and the impact it had on him.

Welcome to Reducing Crime. I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe.

Okay, I'll just be up front that you're in for a bit of a treat with this episode. My guest, Scott Payne, started his law enforcement career in the Greenville, South Carolina County Sheriff's Office. But after five years, he moved on to join the FBI. Over more than 20 years, he served in their New York, San Antonio, and Knoxville Field offices. He's been an FBI SWAT team operator and a firearms and tactics instructor. But Scott's primary role has been as an undercover agent in numerous long-term operations.

He's helped to infiltrate and bring down drug trafficking and alien smuggling organizations, gangs, public corruption cases, and domestic terrorists. His long-term undercover work for the Bureau saw him successfully infiltrate the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang, the Ku Klux Klan, and the anti-Semitic White nationalist group known as The Base. A musician and singer, he's even performed Lynyrd Skynyrd songs at Klan rallies, all as part of his cover. He retired in 2021, which was handy, because an article with photos of him in Rolling Stone Magazine last year was one of the biggest stories of the year and has been nominated for a Magazine Pulitzer.

In a first for the Reducing Crime podcast, I sat down with Scott on stage at the opening plenary session of last year's Tennessee Association of Law Enforcement Analysts Conference in Nashville. It's a great conference, and a big shout-out to the hundreds of people who came to that opening session, and to the conference organizer who made it happen, the inestimable David Gordon. As you join us, I'm just explaining to the conference crowd that this is my first time doing it in front of an audience, and indeed, it takes me less than a minute for my brain and my mouth to become quite disconnected.

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Never done this before, by the way. Never done it in front of a big crowd of people. I'm following the Arnold Bax rule and Arnold Bax said, "A man should try everything once, except incest and folk dancing." So with that in mind, I'm going to start in here and just chat to man... So Scott-

Scott Payne:

Sir.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... you started in patrol in the Greenville County Sheriff's Office in South Carolina.

Scott Payne:

Yes, sir.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you've also been an FBI SWAT team operator, an under, other cumber... Oh, keep getting my mucking furd's wuddled. This ladies and gentlemen, if you ever host a podcast, is why you edit. You've also been an undercover firearms defensive tactics instructor, an active shooting instructor. You've led investigations into drug trafficking organizations, murder for hire, public corruption, and white supremacist groups. You've even had a fucking article about you in Rolling Stone Magazine. So I think it's fair to say you're a bit of a crazy bastard, aren't you?

Scott Payne:

Slightly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So with all that training, what I learned about you is that you are really crap at sacrificing goats.

Scott Payne:

It wasn't me that was crappy at it, it was the white supremacist.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When you joined the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, did you think, "You know what, in about 10 years' time, I'm going to help some white supremacist out, sacrifice a goat in the middle of the woods."

Scott Payne:

I'll tell you real quick what I said, I had a saying, and I said, "I've been doing undercover work since 1996, starting at street level narcotics and working my way on and off, still working undercover." And that was like 2019, I think, I said, "I've never had to burn American flags. I have never had to burn Bibles, and I sure never was with a group of people that kidnapped a goat and sacrificed it at a pagan ritual and drank its blood." And I said, "I did all that in three days with those guys."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that was middle of the week, too, it wasn't even enjoying the weekend.

Scott Payne:

No, it's just...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's like a school night, really, wasn't it?

Scott Payne:

It was weird. It's not like hunting. I mean, I can go hunting. It was just weird.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, I mean, what did you learn from that experience, other than the fact that some of them are basically clusterfucks?

Scott Payne:

That I still use my tactical skills and told the kid with the gun to look at what he was shooting at.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So he closed his eyes.

Scott Payne:

He closed his eyes, turned away. And we're all in a circle, and I'm holding the goat. So I said, "My man, look at what you're shooting at." And then they started chopping heads and stuff. And passed the blood around in a big glass of something. It wasn't like a goblet or anything. But by the time it got to me it was already clotting, so it was like all chunky.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, because before that it was fine.

Scott Payne:

Yeah. Oh yeah. And, see, as an undercover coordinator, in my mind, I'm going through all the administrative minutia of the FBI. I'm like, "Did I need to get approval to drink this blood right now? I'm not really sure."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's got to be a paperwork trail for that, right?

Scott Payne:

Yeah, right. So when it got to me, I was like, "Oh man, I'm not turning that up." But I did stick my fingers in it and suck the blood off my finger. [laughter] Don't judge me. I didn't want to kill it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When you're looking at this level of incompetence, should we be worried about these guys or just pity them?

Scott Payne:

So that's the big question, especially in domestic terrorism. I mean, we've got our First Amendment right. You can go out here and say, "I want all Blacks to die. I hate Jews. I want everybody to die." So you can be in these chat rooms with a 1,000 people spewing all kinds of hate and all kinds of memes, but that's not against the law. But we have to be there and observe and try... Hopefully, people come forward, see something, say something, because which one of those jack wagons is going to step forward and go to the next level to do something harmful?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I was reading that the founder of the site Intelligence Group was quoted as saying, "There's one and a half million guys online plotting murder." With one and a half million people out there potentially plotting murder, how do we sort the wheat from the chaff?

Scott Payne:

We just got to stay vigilant. I mean, I can tell you this, I mean the FBI does it. We have certified online covered employees. In other words, you're not going to do what I do. You're not certified to go face-to-face, but you don't even have to be an agent. You can be part of our professional staff and get certified as an online covered employee, and you might work under my undercover platform. And we've got you out there and you're just building your bona fides.

And the good thing about online is it's a lot like playing video games. If you get kicked out, you can respawn right away with a new identity. And you're looking for the crazies, you're looking for something. And we get people calling us saying, "Hey, we got this guy/gal, can you go in there and target him?" I mean, listen, these kids are fueled with hate. I was in one group for five months, a little over five months, but for the first five months I went through every post. I would go to bed at midnight, whatever, wake up at 7:00 in the morning, 6:00 in the morning, I'm 3000 posts behind. And they're from all over the world. They're UK everywhere. Everybody's just in there spewing hate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is all your time in the Bureau. Was this always the plan? I mean, when you started in patrol in Greenville County Sheriff's Office.

Scott Payne:

I always loved narcotics and undercover, and I got there decently quick. It's one of those things when I look back, I'm not sure that I knew exactly what I wanted to do. But when I look at me and my life and how I am as a person and dealing with people, yeah, it was there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's very much an option of going into staying in the street side of things or moving through the management ranks. You decided to stay at the front line for 20 years.

Scott Payne:

I never went into management, not because... I mean I thought I would because you want your high three to retire. But I love dealing with people. So as an agent, I'm running sources, I'm building cases. As an undercover, I'm working stuff, I'm going out, I'm dealing with people. If I was a supervisor, the only people I'd be dealing with would be my squad and they'd probably get tired of me pretty quick.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the biggest investigations you're involved in was the Aryan Nation. You were in the JTTF in Knoxville for 2015 through '17. That was a long job. That was right through some really tumultuous times. What was going on in those... I mean that's through Charlottesville and a whole bunch of stuff was going on.

Scott Payne:

Well, there's a lot of people in here that help me with that. It takes a village, right? It's a team. But when I went to JTTF, a buddy of mine had a case on an Aryan Nation guy. I mean he's a felon. Everybody says he has a gun. But every car stop we ever did, or every source that said they had one, he never had a gun. And I started just going on the interviews with him, and I'm a criminal enterprise guy, so that means it could be gangs, it could be the cartel. We lived on the border of Mexico for six and a half years. So I worked cartel a lot. So I started looking and it's like, "Look, these guys are peddling dope. Maybe not everybody's a white supremacist in the group, but there's plenty of TDOC here."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

TDOC?

Scott Payne:

TDOC, Tennessee Department of Corrections. So they're a prison based gang, kind of followed the Christian identity. But, of course, when they get out on the street, they're all using. They're breaking their own bylaws, but they're creating a havoc. And we were able to show that they were furthering violent ideology and taking money from drug sales and holding a picnic to recruit some new white men and Aryan angel women. And we worked on it about a year and a half. And I partnered up with DEA out of Johnson City, and we ended up with 44 indictments, which is not a bad lick.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's great. You got inducted into the Klan. I don't know if I should say congratulations. What's the appropriate term for getting inducted into the Klan? I mean, well done. Do they make you by the robes?

Scott Payne:

I was being fitted for the robes. I'd already passed my K Uno test, and I was being fitted for the robes, when the source crapped the bed, and the case agent literally crapped the bed. So the case just kind of washed away.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can you get that reimbursed?

Scott Payne:

No, but I'm sure I got to give it back, if it's on a property sheet.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What is the actual process of getting in? How do they induct you in there?

Scott Payne:

It's called a naturalization process.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Isn't that what happens to aliens?

Scott Payne:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Speaking as one.

Scott Payne:

Right. To be transparent, I didn't really know what I was doing. I was just there to play music for the white supremacy rally. I had to dive through my repertoire of songs and take anything of color out, you know because I can't sing Otis Redding at a Klan or Hootie in the Blowfish, so something like that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that what they teach you at undercover school?

Scott Payne:

No, I learned that on my own. So you go through a naturalization process. I'm blindfolded, you formed a chain, they walk you around, yell at you, spout some stuff from the Bible, spouts a lot of historical stuff to me, and I'm not making light of it and I don't get desensitized and get lax, I don't underestimate. But I was having to bite my lip on some of it, because it was just like a scene out of Django or Harold and Kumar. It was, listening to them try to read the verbiage and then mess up and go, "Wait a minute man, let me turn my page back. All right. What I said was..."

But, yeah, I got knighted and I was walking across the field and it's pitch black. I'm in the middle of a field in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of Alabama. And I said, "I think I just joined the damn Klan. Yep. That's what happened. I just joined the Klan."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've talked about hanging out with the Outlaws and the Boogaloos and the anarchists and the Neo-Nazis and the outlaw motorcycle gangs and The Base. Is there one particular group that was really flagged up in your mind as, "Oh, we got to keep an eye on these guys. These guys are off the charts compared to everybody else?"

Scott Payne:

Man, there's several. I mean, they're not like big groups, but it's the ones in those groups, right? I'd say The Base. The Base you got, again, it's that young kid, been bullied doesn't have a girlfriend. Matter of fact, I said during the case, I'm like, "If they could just get a girlfriend, I think they wouldn't hate so much anymore." Or a partner, whatever I don't care which way you go. I'm just like, "Date somebody. Shit, let me take you to the mall. Let me show you how to talk to somebody. Go over there and get that girl's phone number. Don't care how you do it. Let's just break the ice."

I thought it would've relieved a lot of pressure. But they're angry. They're angry. And I mean you got to look at the ideology. So, you're in one national socialist group and they're talking shit, and it's memes and N this and Jewish this, but they're not talking about satanic killing people. You get to The Base, I mean, man, there's a lot of hate. And they're shooting and they're shooting good, at least The Base. I told you all my tactical stuff, I still teach. I'm not the best, but I'm definitely not too shabby. A 19-year-old kid led our firearms training in The Base, and it was good that kid could shoot. Adderall helped, but, you know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you've hung out with the Klan guys, so you've hung out with people who are burning Bibles and American flags. How do you keep Scott? After a while, I'm guessing a lot of these folk are starting to buy into these ideas, because it's all they're exposed to, right?

Scott Payne:

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And here you are getting exposed to these ideas, too. How do you keep that balance without going, "You know you guys are all batshit crazy, right?" Or going the other way, which is starting to buy into it. How do you find that balance when you're trying to maintain your personality in the game?

Scott Payne:

So later, towards the end of my career, when I did The Base, the last year and a half of my career, I was doing a lot of the militia stuff, just prior to January 6th and after, at that point in my life, we're a faith-based family, that's what keeps me grounded and keeps me real. I know who I am. Now early on, some of the cases, yeah, it's tough. You're hanging out with somebody for two years. I'm holding their baby on my lap, and I'm not at home. And our youngest baby is the same age as that guy's baby. So, they're doing the same things, and you're looking at him and you're like, "Man, he loves Jack Daniel's. I love Jack Daniel's. He likes to fight. I like to fight. He likes to ride. I like to ride. He's just broke a few laws."

And then. Meanwhile, your case team's treating you like trash. You have a shoulder surgery. You get five messages from a case agent who knows you have a shoulder surgery and not asking you how you're doing, he's saying, "You need to call me. You need to do this. You need to do this." I'm on a fentanyl patch, man. I can't even stand up to pee. But I'm getting Nextel hits from the Outlaws going, "How you doing brother? How's your shoulder?" Yeah, it can affect you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean you told me this last night, I really like your definition of what undercover work is.

Scott Payne:

The bottom line is this, undercover is you are forming relationships and you're betraying them. And you need to be able to do that and justify it in your mind, so it doesn't have an adverse impact on your psychological or your psyche, your mind. Sometimes it's tough, sometimes it's not hard at all. People burning Bibles and flags, I don't like you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But there's the two sides to it, because those guys are obviously nuts. But you have to form a relationship with them. You either form relationships with people you don't give a damn about, but that's the hard part.

Scott Payne:

It is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or you form relationships with people you do care about, but then the betrayal part becomes challenging.

Scott Payne:

Yes, it's tough. That's a good way to ask it, actually. I guess, whiskey helped me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, because that's always good-

Scott Payne:

Sitting out there on that a 100-acre farm with a bunch of white supremacists, and I'm not talking about the Klan, I'm talking about fully kitted, plate carriers, ARs, sit up in their bedroom all night and hate. And they're on this, all night. Hating. Hating. Yeah, it's tough. I just had to find some kind of common ground. Basically, I'll make myself laugh. That's what it is. I'll sit there and crack jokes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You picked up your phone then. How much is technology now just enabling all this kind of stuff?

Scott Payne:

Oh, it's tons. You get your relatives that aren't used to the internet. My stepdad, bless his heart, he's like, "I know for a fact this is what's happening. It's right here." And he shows me the website. I says, "It's all fake, but it looks real now."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

My 91-year-old mother, every now and again tries to FaceTime me, and all I see is the top of her head. Find a six-year-old and they're writing R code.

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Scott Payne:

Yeah, it's really bad, because there's so many things you can dive into, especially on the dark web, again, like 4chan, 8chan, I think there's a 12chan now, Telegram, Wire, Riot. They're always trying to find something that they think isn't compromised.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How do you avoid bringing this stuff home with you?

Scott Payne:

It's tough, but it's tough for any law enforcement officer or people that work it, especially if you're a uniform cop. It happened to me. How often do you show up in uniform and everybody's like, "Man, it's so good to see you. It's so good to..." They're like, "Get the F out of my house."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, I don't think there's ever been a time like that in law enforcement, no.

Scott Payne:

It's not easy, especially for me, because I'm a workaholic. And there have been times in my and my wife's history where not only did I wear myself out, I just wasn't putting in what I needed to the family. But I'm always working. I get it honestly, and I paid the price for it at one point.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're bringing this home (beep)?

Scott Payne:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most of the time it's okay, when wasn't it?

Scott Payne:

She may have a different version. I'm like, [inaudible 00:16:51]

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When was it okay?

Scott Payne:

Cakes and pies, man. Cakes and pies, come on, my favorite. There were times, like the Outlaw case, it was really tough, because I was gone all the time. I was gone every two weeks. But then I'd come back home, and I'm a case agent. And all of a sudden one day you're the most senior person, but you're not been in the Bureau six years. You're training people, you're running SWAT trainings, you're going out on kidnappings. And I think the biggest problems with us that

we found is just when we weren't communicating, because the doubt creeps in and she may think I'm thinking something but I'm not thinking it. And I may think she's thinking something and she's not. But we're not talking.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

She's at home and you are out with a bunch of bikers and strip clubs. Sorry, I'm not helping here am I? I'm not helping.

Scott Payne:

Thanks for bringing that back home, doc. I mean we had some issues and we'd get in an argument and I mean nothing physical or anything, but it's still bad.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, you're doing particularly challenging work and you're away for extended periods of time. I think for most street cops, you do a shift, you might have to do some overtime. You might miss the odd event here and there, but you're back most of the time. But you're away for weeks on end, uncontactable for weeks on end. There's got to be a strain. I know you've spoken to other people like Joe Pistone, who was the original agent who was the source for the Donnie Brasco story, about having to deal with this. Because he struggled with all of this too.

Scott Payne:

Actually, Joe's a very good friend of mine. Mentor, I still call him a mentor, he calls me kid. But back then they didn't have a Safeguard assessment group. And in the FBI, if you're an active undercover, you mandatorily have to be psychologically assessed twice a year.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you passed? I'm just joking.

Scott Payne:

Yeah, right. The file's thick. One thing is for sure though, I'm pretty consistent, because I think I started getting assessed in 2001, and other than when I had a mental and physical crash in 2007, everything else is pretty the same. But Joe Pistone actually helped create that whole process, because of everything that he had learned. So, him and a certified clinical psychologist, who was an FBI agent, created that program. If you're going through some hairy stuff, they won't let you go back. Me and [redacted] got into it, it was a 911 hangup. She didn't know that once you do that, the cops are coming no matter what. I said, "They're coming."

So Safeguard is notified and they say, "You can't go back undercover until you fly here to DC and get assessed." Okay, I get stripped in the basement at gunpoint. They almost find a wire. "Did you get stripped in the basement? They almost found a wire on you?" I said, "Yeah, they go, you can't go back." So I've been Safeguarded like three times in three months.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So that was with the motorcycle gang, the Outlaws.

Scott Payne:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You'd been working inside their organization for some time, but then you go into their clubhouse one day and things are a bit different.

Scott Payne:

It was a two-year case. I'd been with them for a year and a half. And my backstory, for those who don't know the undercover stuff, it's all about your legend. It's all about your backstory. And even when I'm training street level narcotics, I'm like, "Look, at least have a good backstory, because you never know if that person you're targeting ends up being a major target for a state agency or a fed agency. And you may be the person we need to be that undercover. But if you came in with a shitty story, we're going to have to go in cold with somebody else."

So my legend was based out of McAllen, Texas, because that's where I live. So as soon as they met me, I mean, first of all, it's in Massachusetts. With this accent, in Boston, come on. As soon as I ordered the first drink, "Where the F are you from?" And I'm like, "All right, I'm getting noticed now." So I had to have a reason to be there. As soon as they found out and I started bumping the Outlaws, they knew that I was on the border, they're like, "Man, can you bring some dope? Can you bring a kilo up?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you mean by bumping?

Scott Payne:

Cold bump is what we call it. Basically, I'm going up cold, I don't know you. They've given me information about you. I know you go to this bar every Wednesday night. I'm just going to be another patron in the bar, and I'm going to do a cold bump. I'm not going to have a source introduce me. I'm just going to use my skillset.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So almost kind of bring them to you.

Scott Payne:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not you push yourself in on them.

Scott Payne:

And that's what I did on that case. Told a lot of jokes. It didn't take me long to have a crowd of people around me at a bar with this accent in Boston. And they had good intel on a couple of Outlaws that were, they needed a lot of attention. They love being the center of attention. So they saw this bigger dude, I used to be bigger.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you're like, what, a 100 pounds soaking wet right now aren't you?

Scott Payne:

Yeah, I know. I know, right? I'll show you some pictures later. Not dirty though, just me bigger. Unless of course the conversation goes that way, I don't-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm a little bit disappointed.

Scott Payne:

I know, right? [inaudible 00:21:19] Okay. All right. Just for you, doc.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, 56 years I thought I've been heterosexual, but you can turn a chap's head, you know?

Scott Payne:

You never know. You never know. So they saw me, and they come over to me. They're like, "Hey," they're yelling across the bar, "Hey, where the F are you from?" So now I didn't even make the intro. They call me over and that goes back to in the basement, when they're stripping me at gunpoint. Because what happened was, it was a year and a half, it takes a long time. You don't just come out and lay this out. There's breadcrumbs everywhere. But what they ended up figuring out, per my story, is that I was a high-ranking member of an international theft ring. We're not moving dope. We're moving stuff south, 4x4 V8 vehicles and Harley-Davidsons go for a nice penny stolen in Mexico.

So that's how it started, doing insurance scams. And then they carjacked somebody, and they'd be like, "Tex, we need to get rid of this thing. And I'm like, "Okay." So now it's been a year and a half, now we start laying out the story that, actually, I did use to be in the dope game, but I stopped, because some of my people got popped and heat was getting too close. But one of my guys that's down in the cartel called me, he needs some transportation assistance to get some dope into Canada. And my whole story was, is, I mean, why would a heavily Hispanic organization keep a gringo around? Well the story was, because I'm the guy that paid the dirty border patrol agent at the checkpoints and the port of entry.

So we laid out the story that they wanted to take dope into Canada, and that gave the Outlaws a chance to bump these cartel guys to start trying to buy keys off of them. So we did a drug protection, but because we upped the ante, the United States Attorney's Office wanted me to go to the clubhouse to get evidence of them discussing this drug protection for evidentiary purposes and search warrants and seizing the clubhouse. And of course, I said, "Hell, yeah, I'll do it." I mean that's what we do, right? "I'm Scott Payne, bitch. I'm going in."

And I'd been in that clubhouse, I don't know how many times. There's one door I never went in. And that night they took me in that door and walked me down to, you can say a basement, it was more like a cellar. I couldn't even stand up straight. I could probably touch the walls on both sides.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Were your Spidey-senses tingling?

Scott Payne:

Yeah, it was an oh, shit moment. They told me to come. And I get there and they're still having church, which is their weekly meeting where they discuss business and stuff and pay their dues. And Joe Dogs - the president is like, I'm knocking on the door, I'm like, and he peeks, he's like, "We're still in the meeting." And I go, "Well, why the hell did you tell me to come over here?" I didn't pick up on it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you think they're trying to figure out what to do with you?

Scott Payne:

Well, yeah, they were discussing what was going to happen. So you got 13 to 15 Outlaws, a locked door, with a metal bar across it, three deadbolts, cinder block walls. Doesn't matter how tough you are, you're not going to get out of there. You got to learn to talk. And what you couldn't see is that I had video in my jacket. So if you watch the entire video, you'll see me cracking jokes and making them laugh like always. But when my head turns away from him, they'll be like, "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're just cold faced,

Scott Payne:

You see a dude in the back, looks like he's dancing to the song, but he's warming up. And they carried me down in the basement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you think that was it?

Scott Payne:

I don't know if I did. I knew it wasn't good.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No shit.

Scott Payne:

I'd much rather hear that story about an undercover and go, "Man, that sucks," than to be standing there naked going, "This sucks." I joke about it now, but it's an oh crap moment, just like being in a shootout or anything traumatic. I forgot my middle name. Basically, I took my jacket off. I took my shirt off. I took my boots off.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They told you to take all your clothes off.

Scott Payne:

Yeah. And I dropped my drawers and pants around my ankles. I never took my socks or everything off other than that. But I stood there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So if I'm going to carry a wire, I should basically keep it in my sock.

Scott Payne:

I don't know, man.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what happened then?

Scott Payne:

So I had audio and video on my jacket. The thing is, is surveillance could never get close enough to the clubhouse, because of counter surveillance. So I was pretty much on my own.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did they do surveillance outside the clubhouse?

Scott Payne:

Yeah. And it's a small street, but I mean it's like house, house, big black building. It's painted black with Outlaw shit all over it. I somewhat passed the test. I remember my middle name, trying to talk, because we're big on not vapor locking. And I didn't even realize I did a distraction technique by saying something to them. And that made them scream upstairs to ask the probate what he needed for the website. So I'm like, "Okay, now they're just running my name."

But I'm looking at Clothesline, who's the enforcer, and out of that two-year investigation, my closest relationship with Scott Town, my second closest relationship was Clothesline. So this is the guy stripping me in the basement at gunpoint. I didn't see plastic. I was looking for plastic. If I'd seen plastic, I probably would've tried to fight.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you mean?

Scott Payne:

Plastic on the floor, because they're going to kill me. I mean, easy cleanup. I'm like, "I'm going out anyway, I might as well start swinging."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Clothesline, was one of your closest friends in that group?

Scott Payne:

Yes, sir.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What were you reading from him?

Scott Payne:

Even though I'm saying something and he's saying something, what my face is saying is, "Tell me I'm okay." And his face back to me was kind of like, "You're okay." But he says, "Hey, we got a lot of stuff going on, trust me." I've done all kinds of with you, six to eight jobs. He's not wearing bracelets; I'm removing stolen stuff for them. They killed somebody. They did a home invasion, all kinds of stuff like that. Dope sales. He goes, "Trust me, if somebody accused me of being a Fed, I'd probably smash them in the fucking mouth."

And I looked at him and I said, "Well, I'm not happy." And he said, "I wouldn't be either." Well, we finish, and we think everything's good. Then he grabs my jacket and he says, "There's not anything in your jacket. I don't need to find, right? Like some naked pictures of my old lady." And he's like, "Ha, ha, ha." And I go, "Ha, ha, ha," because it's in the jacket. And...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you think he was going to find it?

Scott Payne:

Yeah. Because he's kneading it with his hand, and he's getting close. And in the video, you hear me... Again, I don't know I'm doing it. It's a traumatic incident. You're having an oh shit moment, it's an adrenaline dump. You have auditory exclusion, everything's going, whoa, whoa, whoa. Everything slows down. You got time dilation. Your eyes are going click, click, click. It might be five seconds, but it feels like it's five minutes. And you hear me audibly sigh, because I think I'm done. And he's kneading that jacket. And you literally hear me go, "Ah." I don't even know I'm doing it. And I'm like, here we go. But he didn't find it. He looked right at it, and didn't find it. And I made it out.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you ever discover what happened that you merited suddenly all this attention?

Scott Payne:

Because through the Outlaw Nation, Outlaw Association Motorcycle Club, they passed it up to, the head of the Outlaws at that point was Milwaukee Jack, and he ordered them to check me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This was around the time, and you've been very honest about this, which I appreciate, that you had a mental, physical breakdown.

Scott Payne:

Probably within six months after that. Yeah. Because I'd been going for three years at a pace. I'm an idiot, a true workaholic. And I'm not saying I'm better than anybody. Let's get that out there. This is not a chest beating Scott Payne bitch show. This is a I found my threshold. I think your threshold changes every day. I think your comfort zone changes every day with working out.

For three years I have been working two different undercovers. I was running multiple cases, multiple sources, doing good work. And then, oh, man, I had a family. Did I forget to say that? You come home and I'm beat, and what I didn't realize, and she just told me, we've had to dive back into our conflicting times, which we don't want to do, because we're so happy right now. So we started kind of hashing back in and she told me, my wife, when we were driving down the... "I was shutting her out." I would come back home and I just wanted to veg, because I was working so hard. And she might have a question about bills or the family, and I'd be like, "I don't even want to think right now." But I was just shutting her off, and she was just trying to be supportive.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then you just broke.

Scott Payne:

Yeah. 2007 Daytona Bike Week, I lied at the Safeguard assessment, because there's an open-ended sentence thing and it says the last time I relaxed was... But I'm sitting there doing the testing, and I'm on the laptop, and I'm like, "Last time I relaxed? Last time I relaxed?" I had no clue what I did to relax at that point. I didn't take days off anymore, because my argument to management was, "You can't tell me I can't go do an undercover if I excel in cases and sources." So if that meant me losing my days off, that's what I did, because I'm an idiot. And I applied the warrior mentality to everything in my life, and it doesn't work great when you apply to everything.

So I found myself in a hotel room, by this time, in 2007, but at that point I'm a zombie. I've been going for three years at this pace. I'm drinking as much coffee as you can. Hydroxycuts, Ripped Fuel, whatever the heck you want to do. I'm on antihistamines. I'm on decongestants. I'm on inhalers. I'd get on a plane flight, get off, and have a sinus infection. So I'm there and I've been out with the Outlaws and the Mongols all night. I wake up the next morning, nice little hotel right on the ocean. And it's one of those deals where you've been out all night and you wake up, and you move and you can still hear the whiskey and eggs swishing in your belly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, nobody's ever had that experience-

Scott Payne:

Oh, my God.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... in this room, have we?

Scott Payne:

So here I am going, "I'm going to do some exercising. This is bull crap." I'm doing pushups, sit-ups, burpees, mountain climbers. And I went to get up, I couldn't catch my breath. I had an anxiety attack. I start shutting down. My truck driver, who's an undercover, knocks on the door. I'm wrapped in a towel, just pouring sweat, as white as the towel. And he's like, "Are you okay?" And I go, "I don't think so man." So we're sitting out on the back porch looking at the ocean and he goes, "Scott, I've been doing undercover for a long time." He goes, "Is it that you're anxious about the end of the case, because that causes stress?" And I'm like... He goes, "How about the fact that you're getting ready to betray all these guys that they're your friend? How about them discovering who you are?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Was this him helping?

Scott Payne:

Yeah. Right? So he goes through this litany of things. He goes, "Is it any of those?" And I go, "Well, it is now, dammit." I said, "Whit." So what do I do? I take a nap, cowboy up, man. I go back out. I'm out with the Mongols again. And once you break it all down and you go to therapy and everything, they'll tell you, the cocktail that I made that morning, prior to me working out is a cocktail for anxiety, an inhaler, Hydroxycut, the blackest strongest, coffee, whatever you can make. You're shooting it down. You're like, "Whoa, let's go." Hair follicles tingling, whiskey whisking in your belly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay, I got to say you're actually making this sound a little attractive.

Scott Payne:

Hey. Well, you could have had advantage of me if you'd walked in the room that day. I'll tell you what. I couldn't have put up much of a fight. I went home, I'm going to say I probably slept close to 18 to 20 hours the first day. But through that week, I slept over 16 hours a day every day. And I was not depressed. I know what that feels like. I was not sick. I know what that feels like. I was that damn tired.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most people would be like, "That's it. I'm done. I'm washing out," to that point.

Scott Payne:

Oh, not this smart man.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What was the family feeling about... I mean, you've got two daughters, got a wife. What drove you to get back into it? It sounds like this was a great big fucking warning signal.

Scott Payne:

Yeah, well, there's a mandatory timeout phase. I called Safeguard that Friday. One of the psychologists is a good friend of mine, Meredith Krause. She helped pilot the Safeguard program for Canada. I trusted her enough to call her. And it was Friday at like 6:30 and I said, "I think I'm crashing." So they came down and did it onsite, interviewed my wife, put me through the whole gamut, and I was listed as DNR. And if you get DNRed, that means they do not recommend you to continue undercover work.

So I finished the Outlaw case on the phone, setting up some more deals for a couple of months, and then they took it down. I was a wreck, man. Yes, a mandatory six months off. And then you can say you were interested in going active again. And I was, I mean I love undercover work. I know without a shadow of a doubt that one of my reasons being on this planet was to do undercover.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that, is it something that can be trained? Can you actually take somebody and train them to be undercover? Or do you think it's a natural thing that you couldn't identify, and people have just got it or not?

Scott Payne:

So I think you can be trained, and this is why. Going back to what undercover is, this is not acting school. It's not acting school. Because if you go deep undercover, don't get me wrong, if I'm going out here and I'm going to make three quick buys and we're going to hit you with a search warrant, I can lie. I can come up with, "I'm getting ready to go pick up my kids. My ex-old lady's got them. They're going to smell this. I can't do it. I got a piss test tomorrow." Three buys, you can do it.

But deep undercover, if you're pretending to be something that's completely different than what you are for a long period of time, one or two things is going to happen. You're either going to slip up or you're going to become it. So you got to be careful. So I'm always Scott. I'm always me. I may or may not be married. I may or may not have kids. I may or may not play college ball. I may or may not be a musician. But I still got tats. You'll know I work out, and probably you're going to know I ride motorcycles.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You used to meet with your team and contact officer every two weeks. Is that enough? Is it enough to keep-

Scott Payne:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... you grounded?

Scott Payne:

No. No. It depends on what you're doing. And it depends on who your contact agent is. Now if I'm just going and doing a quick thing and I'm coming back. But if I'm out there drinking goats' blood and burning bibles that don't burn, by the way, that's a pretty cool story. Yeah, it's good to have somebody.

But I'm going to tell you what happened after I crashed. I didn't just get let back in. I had to show them, and I mean I documented it. These are the steps that I've taken in my life to prevent this from happening again. I had trip wires set up. I had accountability buddies set up. People that are, some of them are in this room and even during The Base case, they'd be like, "Scott, go the hell home." And I'd go, "I got you, and I am. I just got to pop in this one thing. But you're right, I'm taking the next two days off." I learned how to relax again. I learned how to take care of myself. But in this job, I mean, you may go seven days with no sleep. It's just that at the end of those seven days, go relax, reboot. No case is worth losing your family over. Losing yourself over.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, that's the thing, I mean we talked about getting sucked into the whole system. Can you get out? Is it easy to get out? Is it easy to readjust? And I mean, I say readjust. I mean, I'd use that term very liberally, because I fucking know you, but as much as you can readjust.

Scott Payne:

It was, and it is. Still involved with law enforcement. I still travel the country teaching. I still meet new people. I still engage. And you've seen me at a bar, I still have fun. I like messing with people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You drink everybody under the table.

Scott Payne:

No, it's not a thing to be proud of. Law enforcement, number one for what? What are we number one for? Alcoholism, suicide, and divorce. Sign up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. You make it sound really sexy. That's going to help that.

Scott Payne:

Oh, wait, didn't you say that moonshine company was going to be here tomorrow?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, we're not going through a recruitment crisis. So you're just helping fabulously there.

Scott Payne:

You have to take care of yourself. And there's still those stereotypical stories where you're in a department and you're psychologist, you go tell the psychologist, now you get put on time out. Now you don't want to talk to that psychologist. Just know you got somebody. You got to have somebody to talk to.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The 30th of June 2020 in Knox County, Tennessee was declared Scott Payne Day. Two things about that. First of all, why wasn't it Scott Payne, bitch, Day?

Scott Payne:

I'm not sure the mayor wanted to put that on the, you know...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But, secondly, when that day came around, I mean, firstly congratulations, that's absolutely awesome, what was your feeling? Relief? Confusion? Elation?

Scott Payne:

I almost cried on that one. So Glenn Jacobs, the wrestler, WWE Kane is a buddy of mine. So, yeah, it was pretty awesome.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're out now, because your photograph's been in Rolling Stone magazine, all that kind of stuff. Did that day feel like kind of an end of an era for you?

Scott Payne:

That's a good question. I don't look at it like that. I'll tell you what happened. After The Base case, we took it down in January of COVID year, and we're out drinking, and I don't remember what the conversation was, but I just remember hit me like a brick in the face. I'm like, "I'm satisfied with my career. Man, I have had a good run as a case agent. I've had a good run as an undercover. I've had a good run as a trainer." And I'm like, "It's time."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Pretty happy.

Scott Payne:

Yeah, buddy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

All right. I think we're going to call it at that. Hey, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for this little adventure sitting in to see this recording. Spend some time listening to both of us. Ladies and gentlemen, Scott Payne.

Scott Payne:

Thank you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This has been episode 55 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Nashville, Tennessee in August 2022. Given Scott's also a musician, I thought you'd like to listen to his cover of the Sam Cooke classic, Bring it on Home to Me. If you've heard it before, you may just have been at a Klan rally.

Scott Payne:

(singing)

Jerry Ratcliffe:

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Scott Payne:

(singing)

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Be safe and best of luck.