

## Crossing the Border

My sister Ruth got a call from her friend another woman named Ruth she met while in college. Now Ruth wasn't her name at the time, but that's not my story to tell. I sort of knew her back when she was in college, and I was out trying to make a name for myself behind the gun, but that was a long time ago. Since then I got married, had kids and started my business but not in that order. Ruth finished school and became a teacher. My sister Ruth gave the other Ruth my number, and she called me asking for help with a problem. An hour later and we were on a borrowed plane to New Mexico. I work with a young couple that inherited the wealth of a well-off Russian mobster. They turned that money into a successful resort on the big island here in Hawaii. I helped them get out of a problem they had back in the 48, so they offered us a place on the island and an opportunity.

Together we run a special security service in Hawaii working for paranoid business moguls and celebrities with more frenemies than friends. At one time we were more mercenary than paparazzi blockers, although in some cases I would rather deal with drug dealers than angry overprivileged camera jerks. We would do jobs that others wouldn't take, but we would also never work for dealers, dictators or the Four-H club, but that's another story. Let's just say people take their children's sewing seriously. Over the years we gained a lot of friends around the world including a group of former Soviet Union soldiers that invaded Canada in the 1970s to some friends with the Israeli Defense Force. They provide us with gear that is technically..... well extremely illegal, but when you invade a country, you don't want to go in halfway. This time they sold us nine of the FN P90 submachine guns with suppressors. The total of which would land us all in jail for the rest of our lives, but like I said we were invading Mexico.

Ruth told me about her friend Cathy who sounded familiar, but I couldn't place the name as well as Wendy. The two women found a man from Mexico trying to find help to save his sister from a gang-controlled drug-filled village along the border. They had taken control of the village killing the older inhabitants while enslaving their children for work on a tunnel or in this Jorge's sister's case raped and called wife. In the three years she was in bondage she had three

children meaning she spent most of that time in some phase of pregnancy while he repeatedly raped her. Over the last two months, there have been both shocking and tragic attacks on a gas station filled with truckers and families, a church with a nursery in the basement filled with children to a school. All this horror was drawing attention to the border that was more attention than any argument over a wall has ever brought. It's hard to argue that walls don't work but do we want to be such a country. We breed fear while projecting hate tarnishing that one bright star turning that city on the hill into just another one on the block. Oh, look I'm on a soapbox sorry about that.

With some calls, I found a connection with satellite and views of the village showing what looked like military maneuvers nearby. Another friend in the Drug Enforcement Agency or DEA told me they along with the Mexican government were searching for connections to the terror attacks along the border as well as a connection to a large tunnel found months earlier. Using this information both TC and I came to the same conclusion, we needed to go that night. TC is my right hand, partner, conscience and friend from near the beginning. Her name is Tima Cocks, but she hates when people call her Tina by mistake, so everyone calls her TC. I met her back in 2003 in Africa while on a Job for the doctors of WHO. That is the World Health Organization not the science fiction show. Her Father was a doctor with WHO from New York, and her mother was a translator from Singhal. They formed a charity that on the surface promoted women's rights across the world but in secret acted like an underground railroad helping women and their children escape dangerous domestic lives. They did this everywhere from the middle-east to the mid-west of America. My wife Sara was going to be put to death after she accidentally killed her abusive husband back in Afghanistan.

With us on the plane was a woman named Janet. She was a former- SWAT member in Los Angeles. In an accident, she lost most of her dominant hand. What she didn't lose was her ability to plan, you know that whole tactics part of SWAT. When we moved to Hawaii, she followed and was a large part in reforming the company and is now a partner. The loss of her dominant hand and the trauma causes her to be a little hesitant and more than a little clumsy. Other companies wouldn't hire her, but I like to hire the right people not just a gun but a mind.

However, she did nearly get us killed on a job in Canada, but that's a longer story. Rounding out the team were Dan and Ted two longtime team members and the new Jimmy. He hates being called that but he's the new guy, and his name is Jimmy. The original Jimmy was one of the worst operators I ever worked with and a good friend. After starting a popular in-home chef service in California, he sold his business and moved to Hawaii where he ran for sheriff. His new position helps us operate, but it also keeps him from working with us directly, but none of that has anything to do with this story.

Before we left, Janet printed an aerial view of the village to help in the planning. We also brought night vision goggles, body armor, and radios with the kind of throat mics that look just so cool in the movies. My children also pack what they called a care package containing pictures they painted, one of Trina's troll dolls, the eye from Jenny's third favorite teddy bear so she can keep an eye on us. My two-year-old son Jordon sent his army men along with the red queen from a chess set he found in the back of a closet. Sara keeps taking them away from him, and he somehow keeps finding them again. To make room for their care package they took out the extra batteries, ammo and the little flags we were going to use to explain our attack and yes, I called home and made sure the kids didn't have the ammo. About ten minutes out the pilot called back from the cockpit saying he was starting to run low on fuel. Ten minutes later, we landed on what was little more than packed earth.

We met up with Wendy and this man straight out of a movie cast about the army. They wanted to go back to her hippy commune of a gas station, but there was no time. We packed the trucks leaving this dark pink and whitish van for the pilot. I didn't tell them about the guns. This Jorge guy said his partner would provide guns but something about them I just didn't trust. My years in the business has me not trusting people I haven't vetted. I also don't trust Wendy. We drove south heading to a warehouse in Mexico to meet up with this Luis guy. A friend of the team would meet us at the border helping us cross without a search. They thought it was because of Jorge, but really, I didn't want to explain the illegal firepower in the back. Then I got the call. My seven-year-old daughter is in the middle of her first crush. God, I hope this is her first crush.

Her way of showing it was to hit the boy in question in the gut then kick him between the uprights. Sara said Trina was a little ball buster.

Luis was yet another member too handsome to be real army, and no I'm not jealous. He let us in and showed us to an archeological discovery of weapons from world war one or I don't know the Spanish American war? I swear there was a Kentucky long rifle. TC had this short barrel 50 caliber Barrett with armor-piercing rounds. I nodded to one of Wendy's men to bring out the bags from the truck. I showed them the guns telling them the ammo in them is the only ammo we had. Luis said we would never win a direct firefight with the cartel and I must agree. My policy is and always will be to stay away from intentional firefights but also never back away from one when it starts. Wendy told me she wasn't happy about the guns but thanks for thinking ahead. She gave two of the sniper-rifles I brought to a teenage girl and a middle age man saying that this was the only way they would come along. TC rolled the map out on another table, and that was when I realized the little flags were gone. In searching for something to use I found my son's army men as well as the red queen. I also found two diecast cars from well I just don't know where along with a Santa clause in his sleigh a small gift from a Santa in a top hat but that's another story.

I showed them the army men along with the cars and the red queen which stood for Maria and her three children. Luis proved he was not only army but observant by marking everywhere we already knew they had guards. Yes, this was a test, and he passed. Our plan was simple. There's a street in a blind spot in the security. We would leave our two snipers just outside the city about 1500 yards away from the house working more like spotters than snipers. The rest would come in with Jack, Ted, and Dan stopping in key points to provide coverage as we exit. TC would be the closest, and with her Barrett, she would cover the street in front of the house while we take the house and hopefully kill the scumbag holding her as his slave wife. Everyone agreed, so we left to commit an act of war in a foreign country.

We made our way into what had to be the quietest darkest village I could remember. It also didn't fit the stereotype pushed by Hollywood on what a Mexican village would look like, but just maybe that's my problem. After dropping off the guys, we found an abandoned house next to the target where TC could set up with views of the street as well as the back of the house. Something didn't feel right about all this. It was too simple. Jorge and Luis went to the center of the village to a warehouse to blow it up taking the gang's arsenal away. For some reason, Wendy kept calling Janet Tina but as long as she didn't call TC that then I don't care. Using the goggles heat vision option, we could count out four figures with one of them being the bad guy. He was on top of what I hoped was Maria and not one of the children. He finished then left the house. Maria got out of his bed and walked over to the door. We had stun guns just in case she fought us and I know that sounds bad but who knows what the time being abused did to this young girl. Janet dropped her gun, again. Luckily it didn't go off or make a noise. TC said, "*Tina so help me if I have to, I'll hot glue that gun to your hand.*" Tina attempted to flip her the bird and, in the process, dropped her gun again. The call went out the guys were moving in, and we had to go. Luis called Jill and had her search the southwest part of the village finding what had to be a welcoming party. The kind with guns. They somehow knew about the raid about to happen. But nothing about all this felt like something an army would do.

We entered through a sliding glass door that wasn't locked. I guess people don't rob gang members. We saw her just as she saw us. Her face was more resolved then startled. Like she thought we were there to kill her. Wendy gave her a note from her brother along with a picture of him holding the note. From inside we could hear the gunfire. Maria looked at Wendy and asked, "*how do I know I can trust you?*" The gunfire grew louder. Jill said over the radio, "*the army is pushing past the people on the southwest as they scatter. There shooting everyone in sight.*" A second later she said, "*I don't think these guys are army.*" Wendy turned to Maria and in her best broken-Spanish said, "*your brother sent us to save you and.*" Maria said in English, "*this will take forever if you keep trying to talk Spanish. Just say what you have to say.*" My kind of girl. God that sounds wrong. Wendy said, "*you can stay here and be shot or come with us and live.*" It wasn't how I would have said it, but this isn't my job. We helped Maria wake and dress her children then go. No one asked why there were only two children.

TC saw a Jeep racing down the street firing into houses. She shot the driver spreading his head across the others in the Jeep sending the Jeep into the front of another house nearly clipping another Jeep that had the keys in it but more on that later. I told Wendy to get them out, then I called TC saying I was coming out. She knew something was wrong. TC said, *“I got your back Jack just get out and go.”* I replied, *“are you telling me to hit the road?”* TC came back with, *“shut up whitey”* and all was right with the world. She knew I just couldn’t abandon Jorge and Luis to die without trying to help. Your friends know who you are, and your good friends know when not to try and talk you out of being who you are. A man covered in brains and blood came running out of the house firing into the air. He had a head wound and was missing his eyes. I shot him. As I passed a Jeep they nearly hit, I saw the keys in the ignition and took them. Using the shadows cast by street lights I made my way to the warehouse where the guys should be while listening to the others as they called out their exit.

A few blocks away, I heard a suppressed round and saw Jorge drag a man into a garage. My first thought was to catch up with them then another idea came to mind. I put my ear to the back door to hear if they were alone and when all I could hear was my heartbeat, I used this little recorder hoping to record and play it back using headphones. The man they dragged in was the guy holding Maria. He said, *“I thought you two died in the desert.”* Jorge said, *“how could I leave without my sister Maria and your bastards.”* The man said, *“she loves me.”* Jorge replied, *“she’ll get over you.”* Luis said, *“we did an awful lot to bring this about. Jorge and I thought or knew that if we brought enough heat to the border, then the army or someone would move in and cleanse the village of your filth.”* Jorge said, *“we killed so many Americans to make this moment possible, and it was all worth the cost.”* They all but admitted to the three terrorist attacks back in America. I should have shot, but instead, I just left them there.

I made my way back to the Jeep and drove to the exit point. Along the way, a call came out that Luis was shot in the back of the head and died in the street. I hoped Jorge would stay with him, but he showed up, and we left. We dropped our gear at the warehouse where a friend

would pick them up and dispose of them. News reports about the village came out turning the roads into a police state. I pulled Wendy outside and played the recording. Instead of looking at Jorge she turned to Maria. I said, *“if I wanted to make some noise and I didn’t care who I killed then shooting at a school or blowing up a church would make a big noise.”* She didn’t say a word, so I said, *“the man holding her killed one of the kids when she tried to leave him.”* She said this on her way out the door to Janet. I told TC, and together we made plans on moving Maria and her children with us back to Hawaii but only if she wanted to go. To help her with this decision we made sure Maria went with Wendy on the trip back away from Jorge so she could hear the recording and know what it meant. In one day, her brother became her hero than a mass murderer. TC called and started the process to make Maria and her children legal enough to fly. I left Jorge for Wendy to deal with, and I just feel sorry for him.... Well not really that sorry.

The pilot found someone who would deliver the right kind of fuel and was ready to fly. I helped the others pack the gear we brought back, but most of it was either back in Mexico or given to Wendy. She liked the night vision and heat cameras. Maria with her children went to the plane. Jorge tried to stop them from leaving not knowing TC was watching him with her gun ready. Jorge asked, *“where are you going?”* Maria turned and said, *“I know what you did, and I don’t want you around my children.”* Jorge turned around to see Wendy with a gun at her side pointing down. She said, *“I can’t prove it was you at the truck stop the church or the school, but I do know what was said in that house and that you aren’t welcome here.”* Wendy nodded to the plane saying, *“she’s going with them to Hawaii where they will help her make a new life for her and her children. Just maybe put all this past her, but she says she never wants to see you again.”* She dropped a set of keys at his feet, *“take the dark gray truck and go.”* Wendy would later tell me she couldn’t shoot him without knowing they did the deed.

A month later and Maria was settled into her new life on the island. Sara spent the month helping her cope with her education while finding her help to deal with the last three years and the loss of her youngest. He had stomped their baby girl to death when she wouldn’t stop crying and as a punishment for Maria trying to flee the house. By then the world knew about her brother Jorge and his partner Luis. He was caught by the police in Mexico with one of the P90s, and

when they ran his prints, they matched ones the American FBI had sent around the world turning him from a man with an illegal gun to one of the most wanted terrorists in the world. If he lives to stand trial, he will most likely die by lethal injection.

I tossed the army men in the trash because Jordan was too young for them and the red queen was missing. Somehow a day after I came back home, he had more army men and another red queen. To his credit, he doesn't try and eat them. He lines them up and tosses the queen at them knocking them down. I will find out how he keeps getting them but just not today. Sara is taking Maria out in her car to start to teach her how to drive leaving me at home with the kids. All five of them..... and I couldn't be happier.