"How Do I Know You're

The drug dealer wannabe out of Friends Select, the FBI superhero, the snaky snitch. It was a routine setup. Then something went terribly, terribly wrong

March 22, 1996, 1:15 p.m. In the shadow of the Ben Franklin Bridge, Delaware Avenue is alive with the midday rush. Construction workers labor noisily in the road, slowing the steady traffic. In the Comfort Inn parking lot, a faded silver Mercedes-Benz sits unnoticed among the empty cars.

"How do I know you're not a cop?"

"How do I know *you're* not one?"

The three men in the Benz are here to discuss business—just a bit of routine negotiation, nothing more. In the passenger seat sits 24-year-old Jonathan Cramer, a college-educated kid on his day off from work at a gourmet food store, who for the last 40 minutes has been swearing up and down that he

Not A Cop?"

By Sabrina Rubin

Illustration by Sue Coe

can produce a kilo of cocaine. Behind the wheel, reading a newspaper with practiced nonchalance, is drug dealer turned government informer Alan "Rudy" Cohen, who has done Cramer the favor of introducing him to a prospective buyer. The buyer, a windbreaker-clad guy old enough to be Cramer's father, is in the back seat—decorated FBI agent Chuck Reed, working undercover.

"What's in the briefcase?" Cramer asks, continuing with the chicken game.

"There's nothing in there," Reed answers.

"Can I see?"

A hundred yards north, the backup agents listening on the other end of the wire lean closer to their radio. "Hold it, hold it!" Reed is suddenly saying. "You're under arrest."

Cohen takes that as his exit cue and throws open the door. He doesn't want to have to look Cramer in the eye as Cramer realizes he's been duped. One step, two ...

And then the crackle of gunfire, swelling for a moment above the jackhammers in the street. Then, silence.

Five months later, 55-year-old Cohen is ensconced in a glassed-in booth deep inside the federal prison system. "The judge wanted to know why I didn't have more remorse," he says, running a hand through his shoulder-length silver hair. Round, owlish glasses magnify his sunken eyes. "Remorse? Remorse for what?" Absently, he plucks a stray hair off his green prison shirt.

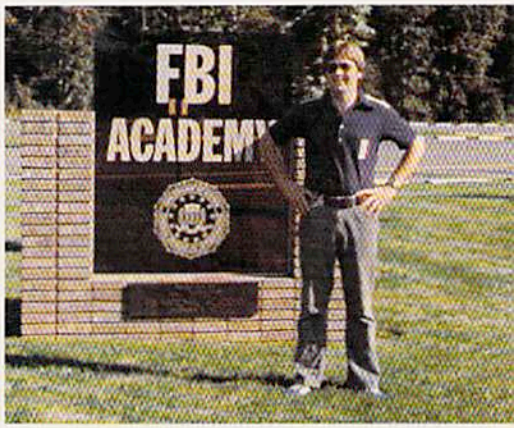
Cohen is seated in this secluded room to tell his tale in private—fellow inmates, it seems, wouldn't look kindly on him if they knew he was a government snitch. On the other side of the glass, visiting hours are under way: Hugs are exchanged, babies cuddled and cheeks dabbed, all with a hopeless sort of cheer. The window filling the far wall looks out upon rows of fences made entirely of glittering loops of razor wire.

In the fall of 1995, Cohen was staring at a 40-year sentence as his reward for an exceptionally long career in the drug trade when he agreed to cooperate with the government to lessen his time. Most of his leads, the feds soon discovered, were garbage. There was one name, though, that held faint promise: Jonathan Cramer, young Center City resident, wayward kid of middle-class Jewish parents. And so Cohen, aka "Rudy" (a '60s nickname he preferred to use in drug deals), became the catalyst drawing Cramer and FBI agent Reed into the same baffling, deadly orbit.

Months later, friends, family and a reporter who has talked to some 60 of their ranks are still groping to explain the tragic waste. "You wanna know what happened that day?" offers Cohen. "It was the fickle finger of fate which occurred." His mouth stretches into a grin, and he sits back, beaming with pride over the insight. "The fickle ... finger ... of fate."

Chuck Reed always liked numbers. Numbers were straightforward: Either they added up or they didn't. The rest of Chuck Reed's world was much the same: There were "good guys" and there were "bad guys," you were one or the other. Reed's wife Susan always smiled at such talk of good and evil, as if the world were a cartoon, the SuperFriends vs. the Legion of Doom.

Chuck Reed seemed an unlikely superhero: a bearded, bearlike man with a thickening middle and glasses. Later, his friends would joke that Reed was like Clark Kent, so quiet and unassuming in the office, yet so aggressive on the street. But until the summer of 1982, much of Reed's FBI career was spent behind his desk, analyzing financial paperwork. That's about to change.



Reed is looking over a complaint by a singer named Frankie Smith, whose single "Double Dutch Bus" went gold, but whose record label isn't paying him all his royalties. Reed sifts through the label's bankruptcy papers, thumbing through the data as if the numbers were just numbers, not dollar figures. It's better that way—not as overwhelming for a man who has never been able to take money for granted.

Finances were tight during Reed's childhood in upstate New York and Vermont. Chuck grew into a serious and shy young man, gentle and awkward. He was a good athlete but bookish, with a startlingly accurate memory. He developed a passion for tinkering with cars—a talent born of necessity, as the Reeds couldn't afford auto repairs. Finances only seemed to get tougher when Chuck and Susan Laplante met as part-time drugstore clerks and were married in 1972. The newlyweds did what they could to make ends meet: Chuck worked days as a milkman while Susan studied nursing and waitressed. At night, they worked together as janitors.

In 1974, their first child was born. With a family to raise, Reed decided to become an accountant. The years sped by as Reed picked up his CPA and fathered two more sons. A third son, Kelley, was named after a fellow milkman, whose arthritis was so aggravated from clutching milk bottles that his hands had permanently cramped into claws. Reed was moved by the simplicity and pureness of the man's devotion to his job. That, Reed would tell his boys, is a true hero.

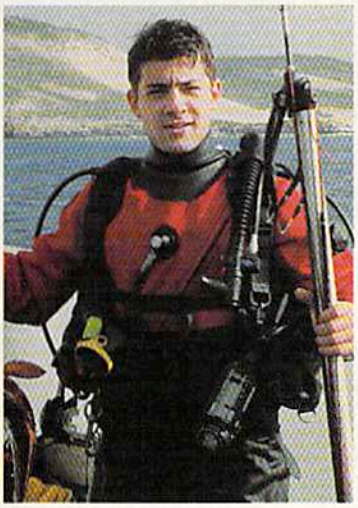
Reed worked as an accountant for three years but was still just scraping by. Working on a municipal audit one day, he discovered a carefully concealed misappropriation of funds in a federal job-training program. When the case was turned over to the feds, the FBI was impressed. A year later, Reed was in training at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, thereby entering the Bureau by one of its most popular routes, accounting. The other is through the military, the difference being that military

folk tend to do better than accountants on the obstacle course.

Now, as Reed studies the record company's books, one name starts to stand out: Larry Lavin, a young Main Line dentist. In addition to owning a major chunk of the record company the dentist has substantial stakes in a limo business, a prizefighting operation and an arena that had burned in a suspicious fire the year before. *Hmm, where's this guy getting all his money?* Reed decides to check it out; before long, he is on to the largest cocaine ring in Philadelphia history.

In the early 1980s, drug investigations are still a relatively new undertaking for the FBI. Until the '70s, drugs were dealt with by the DEA, the IRS and an alphabet soup of other federal and local agencies. But as drugs began to appear in more and more of its investigations, the FBI declared its own war, with a special emphasis on organized narcotics rings. Reed is undaunted by the fact he has never worked a narcotics case; the more of the Lavin case he peels away, the more Reed realizes how badly he wants to catch the bum. Reed and his wife worked hard for everything. Drug dealers—their smarmy arrogance, their disdain for the law, the way they rake in money hand over fist—Reed finds them an insult to the working man. Particularly those like Lavin, with the advantages Reed never had. *And what if a guy like that got to my kids?* Reed shudders at the thought.

An unlikely crime fighter, Chuck Reed was an accountant before graduating, left, from the FBI Academy in 1979. For Reed, his family, left and below, was everything: wife Susan, sons Josh, Todd and Kelley.



At Friends Select and later USC, Jonathan Cramer, spear-fishing off Catalina Island in 1993, above, was full of promise—captain of the high-school wrestling team, student-body president.

Reed hated drug dealers—their smarmy arrogance, their disdain for the law. He found them an insult to the working man.

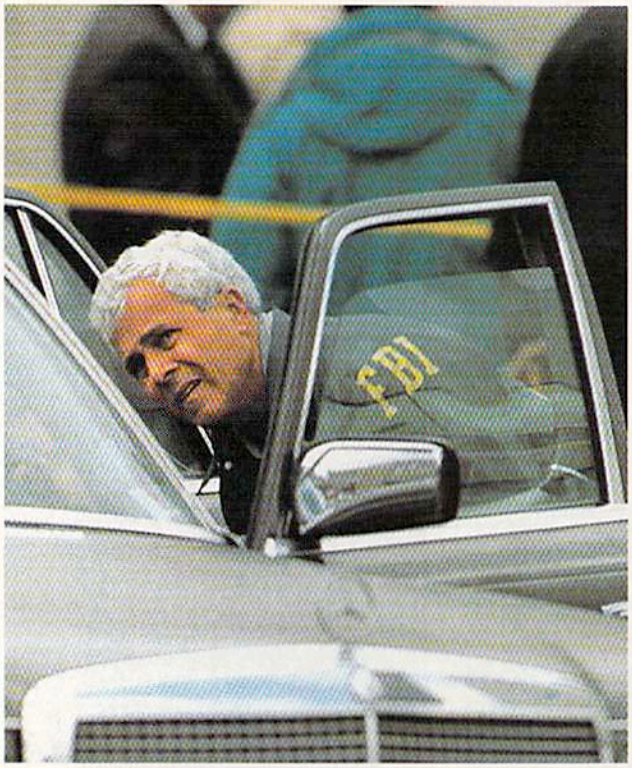
He puts a match to the little pipe and inhales, then looks around to see if anyone noticed he just burned his finger. Fourteen-year-old Jonathan Cramer holds his breath until he thinks his lungs might explode, then exhales a cloud of sweet-smelling smoke. Cramer feels privileged: Not many freshmen are invited to senior parties, but a gaggle of older girls has taken to him. He's on the short side but is lean and muscular, with a neat wave of brown hair and an impish, easygoing grin. He walks with a swagger, the walk of a guy who knows where he's going.

With an average tuition of $10,000 a year, it's a bit of a stretch for Paul and Marlyn Cramer to send their two sons to Friends Select at 17th and Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Founded by Quakers in 1689, the Friends system is a group of well-regarded pre-K-through-12 schools. The classes are small—Jonathan will graduate in a class of 54—so students get lots of attention. Plus, the Quaker-inspired program focuses on values like nonviolence, simplicity and one's "inner light," particularly appealing to Marlyn. That Friends Select students have something of a reputation for experimenting with sex and drugs is a less-discussed fact.

In his circle, Jonathan Cramer is a leader: the first to lose his virginity, the first to try pot, the most brazen with teachers. In tenth grade one day, Cramer skips class to go to the movies, forging a note to get his brother Matt out of his eighth-grade class. Jonathan is caught. "How could you take your little brother?" the headmaster scolds. "Well, I was gonna invite you, too, but I didn't think you'd want to go," Cramer answers innocently.

Like more than half of his classmates, Jonathan is a child of divorce. Only four when his parents split up, he can barely remember them all living in a brownstone at 20th and Spruce.

PHOTOGRAPHS: REED, COURTESY OF REED FAMILY; CRAMER, COURTESY OF CRAMER FAMILY



Agents search Alan Cohen's Mercedes in the parking lot of the Comfort Inn on Delaware Avenue. Six months later, many questions remain.

His father, Paul, is a man's man from the Northeast, a building contractor who, during the course of his work on homes and businesses, got to know a few wise guys and various shady elements. Marlyn, who has custody of the boys at the neat, well-kept house on Taney Street she shares with her boyfriend, is a New Age woman who drags her kids through EST.

When his sons are in high school, Paul moves to Ventnor, and Matt, who is having a hard time getting along with his mother, follows. Jonathan spends summers working for his father's company, and develops a passion for construction, woodworking and, like his parents, gourmet cooking. Paul is a small-time gun dealer on the side, and from him Jonathan learns the firearms trade, occasionally accompanying his father to a shooting range. He also loves motorcycles, getting one quick on the heels of his driver's license. Tooling around Philly, he meets other bike enthusiasts, older guys who take Cramer under their wing and indoctrinate him in South Street biker culture.

In the late 1980s, the South Street scene is dominated by punk rockers with rainbow-colored mohawks and inventive uses for safety pins. Lined with eateries, clubs, novelty shops and fashion boutiques, South Street is a place where worlds collide—whites, blacks, Center City yuppies, folks from the projects, South Philly mobsters, skateboarder lost boys doing flips in the open lots—all enjoying a scene just seamy enough to be sexy. Drugs are simply part of the package, of the pick-me-up variety, sold in small, ready-to-consume quantities. Younger dealers navigate the crowded sidewalks, muttering, "'Shrooms? Weed? Acid?" Cloaked by the heavy pedestrian traffic, deals are often done right on the street.

Through his new-found pals, Jonathan Cramer samples a steady stream of drugs. Still, he would never consider himself a "user." In fact, his disdain of those who let their recreational drug use spiral out of control drives a wedge between him and Matt. "When you act like you deserve respect," he admonishes his increasingly drugged-out little brother, "people will treat *you* with respect."

At school, Cramer's flirtation with life on the edge only enhances his popularity. He's the kid other kids could go to when they need the occasional dime bag, the one chosen captain of the wrestling team, then student-body president. When he graduates in May 1989 and heads to the University of Southern California, Jonathan Cramer is bursting with excitement and promise.

The time and energy the Lavin case requires is hard on Reed's family, especially when Lavin, realizing the FBI is closing in on him, flees. In 1985, Christmas is canceled so Reed can oversee the wiretaps.

"What would you do if you saw him while you were driving and we were in the car?" his sons ask excitedly.

"Throw him in the trunk," Chuck answers with a grin, making them scream with delight. When his eldest son, Josh, was in third grade, the class drew pictures of their idols; Josh's was of a bearded, bespectacled man, and was captioned: I WANT TO BE AN FBI AGENT, JUST LIKE MY DAD. Todd, the middle child, has more trouble adjusting, becoming terrified when his father leaves the house in the mornings. But over time, the whole family has been bolstered by Reed's ability to inspire confidence in Todd. So Susan Reed is in for a rude awakening when it comes to light that an associate of Larry Lavin has put a contract out on her husband. Reed remains calm.

"Hey, kids!" he calls as he walks through the door of their Harleysville home that evening, smiling. "We're going on vacation! Let's get packed!"

The Lavin case has taught Reed some crucial lessons. The first is that nearly all cases, even the biggest, rise from inauspicious beginnings. Hereafter, Reed never leaves a stone unturned. The second is the value of "cooperators," or informers, most often criminals who opt to plead guilty and help the government catch other criminals in exchange for less time behind bars. Largely through the help they give, Reed's cases never end so much as sprout more and more related cases. By the time he is wrapping up one, he has another on deck and so many more on the side that he has to divvy them up among fellow agents. The new federal sentencing guidelines introduced in the late '80s don't hurt (before there were stiff mandatory minimums, more suspects tended to be willing to take their chances at trial), but Reed views the use of cooperators—of turning "bad guys" into "good guys"—with a kind of evangelical glee. He appreciates what a big decision it is for them to rat on their buddies, as well as the very real danger they face doing so. Cooperators, in turn, learn to count on him, dialing his beeper number at all hours.

Now Reed is one of about a dozen agents working at the FBI resident agency in Lansdale. Being assigned to an RA convenient to one's home—rather than having to commute to regional headquarters at 6th and Arch—is a privilege for which there is a waiting list, and Reed has welcomed his transfer. The Reeds love the rural feel of Harleysville, where Chuck spends most of his free time with his sons. He coaches their Little League games, helps with their homework, plays *Jeopardy* along with the TV, winning pennies to bet on the final round. He has passed on a passion for cars to his boys, and much of their weekends are spent hunched over an engine together. Reed's love of cars comes in handy at work, as well; normally not good

JIM McMILLAN/DAILY NEWS

After being mugged while working in Kensington, Cramer bought a .45, then a box of hollow-point bullets. "Cop-killers."

at small talk, Reed is able to talk cubic inches and four-barrel carbs with suspects while undercover or with criminals whom he hopes to "flip." Outside the office, mild-mannered Chuck and his wife have many acquaintances, but few close friends. "Who's gonna come to my funeral?" Chuck complains to Susan with an irreverent gleam in his eye. "My family will take up a couple of pews. Maybe a couple of friends." Attending the rare party, Susan always preps Reed on the way: "Now be nice, Chuck. Potential funeral goers here."

Like so many other college grads in 1993, Jonathan Cramer is in for a rude awakening. At USC, his fraternity filled his social life with parties, camping trips and visits to gun ranges. Now, with college over, the psychology major hasn't a clue what to do. The house in Center City where he grew up is for rent—his mother has met a new man, remarried and moved into a house on Front Street. Jonathan moves in with his dad at the shore, working for the summer as a foreman. Come October, he's still there, lonely and directionless.

"You went to a good college," Paul Cramer says, sitting his son down one day. "And USC was a lot of money," he reminds him. "I don't want to see you hammering nails all your life."

The pep talk seems to help. Cramer moves into a Center City apartment with his college girlfriend, a student at Rutgers Law. With his college loan payments just kicking in, he lands a bank job. The pride of Friends Select again looks to have things under control.

His owlish glasses scan the newspaper apartment ads. It's September 1993, and Alan "Rudy" Cohen is planning another drug deal involving a ton of marijuana—literally. With an estimated value of $2 million to $3 million, Cohen's "ton of fun" is the culmination of a lifetime's labor for the aging hippie with the well-fried brain cells and a 19-month prison stint (plus a recent near-miss) on his dossier. All Cohen needs is a safe meeting place for him and his cousin, who has offered to be his partner in the deal. Perched in his rented Atlantic City apartment among his herb charts and Oriental rugs, Cohen spots an ad in Center City that looks good. He makes an appointment with the owner, Marlyn Cramer Kline.

The house is perfect—in a transient enough area near Fitler Square, with no neighbors across the street. Cohen asks if he can pay in cash. Kline sizes up the gray ponytail, the wrinkled clothing, the rambling, Dennis Hopper-like speech and agrees, but adds in the lease that if drugs are found in the house, Cohen will be out. He moves three weeks later. The house is in need of some repairs, so Kline sends her son Jonathan Cramer over to take care of them.

When Cohen calls his cousin to tell him the house is a "winner," he has no idea his voice is being captured for posterity in the FBI wiretap room. His cousin has been cooperating with the FBI ever since his arrest a couple of years back for brokering marijuana sales to Ronald Tabas, a South Philly racehorse-owner-turned-drug-ringleader who had been caught after importing 60,000 pounds of marijuana into the country. "This is going to be an unbelievable run for the roses," Cohen tells his cousin—and the FBI. "I'm tellin' ya, it's gonna be an everyday fuckin' affair ... it's like goin' out duck huntin'."

A year and a half later, after being caught red-handed with a rented moving truck stuffed with nearly 2,000 pounds of marijuana, Cohen is back in Atlantic City, sweating out the pre-trial preparation for three counts related to narcotics trafficking, when the phone rings. "Remember me? Marlyn's son?" comes the tentative voice on the other end of the line. The kid practically begs to come over. He has solid drug connections, explains Jonathan Cramer when he shows up at Cohen's door, lots and lots of them. But could Cohen, just this one time, hook him up with a little something? Cohen looks at the kid as if he's crazy. "I'm in enough trouble already!" he bellows, hardly giving the incident another thought—for a while, anyway.

Cohen's plan is to raise an entrapment defense at his trial. Upon learning of this, though, the government reminds him of their tape recordings. Two weeks before opening arguments, Cohen files a guilty plea and agrees to cooperate with the FBI.

Still, Cohen is about as uncooperative as cooperators come. He tries to stave off agents Leo Pedrotty and Chuck Reed, but the two aren't buying it; they continually remind him that if he doesn't cooperate, turn over some name, he'll die of old age in jail. Cohen begins to panic. *Damn*, he wonders to himself, *who can I throw them to get these guys off my back?*

The sense of well-being Jonathan Cramer experienced the fall after his graduation from USC hasn't lasted long. His first job outside his father's contracting business, tracking down delinquent loans for Norwest Financial bank, is a grim reminder of his own financial situation; his next one, as a credit solicitor for Crusader Bank, isn't much better, requiring nighttime visits to unsavory neighborhoods. On one trip to Kensington, he's pistol-whipped by three guys who take off with his car, leaving him bleeding in the street. Cramer upgrades his .25-caliber gun from college to a more powerful .45 and applies for a carrying permit. He reasons he'll probably never pull the trigger, but having it on hand should be a deterrent. He employs the same reasoning when it comes to ammunition: If he *does* ever need to shoot someone, it will be only in a life-or-death situation—so he'll want to get the job done. He buys a box of hollow-point bullets. "Cop-killers."

Life sucks. Not only does Cramer hate his job, he has to arm himself to do it. The pay isn't great; the interest on his school loans is growing fast and he owes his parents money for his business suits and car. He cares to see few of the people from high school he knows in town. Worse, things are on the rocks with his girlfriend.

That's when Jonathan Cramer tries heroin. At first, it's just out of curiosity—the drug is in fashion, after all. In no time,

though, he becomes enveloped by the same druggy haze he yelled at his brother for falling into a couple years earlier. Snorting (Jonathan's too squeamish to stick a needle in his veins) the fine white powder gives Cramer a warm, unearthly rush, an instant vacation from his life. Then comes the February morning he wakes up racked with pain, his hands shaking. He stares at the pasty, hollowed-out face in the mirror. Calling in sick to work, Cramer gets some methadone pills, cranks the heat in his room and lies under a pile of blankets, convulsing with chills for a week.

By spring, Cramer is back to putting up the good Gen-X fight, attempting to endure his third entry-level Philadelphia bank job in two years, this one at PNC—when he and his girlfriend break up. Cramer moves to an apartment on 5th and Kater, a half block from South Street.

The scene there is even grungier now than Cramer remembers from high school. Back then, he was unable to get into bars; now, he sees that each one has its own resident supplier, with access to far greater quantities of drugs than are available on the teeming pavement. Cramer has re-established ties with his brother and spends many nights renting movies or grabbing a bite with him. Other nights, Jonathan does a line of coke in a bar, or just holes up in his apartment alone, nursing a bottle of tequila. Every day, money becomes more of a problem. With real estate in the dumps, it's a terrible time to be in mortgage financing, and Cramer spends countless hours chasing fruitless leads. He's all but given up on repaying his parents the money he owes them. He tries to block out thoughts of his credit cards and school loans; now he's just worrying about the rent.

And then, like the dark prince himself, Alan Cohen reappears. It's true, Cohen wasn't very helpful last summer when Cramer tried to buy some marijuana from him, but now the old pothead has an intriguing proposition. Cohen says he knows someone eager to buy a kilo of coke. With his legal entanglements, Cohen is obviously indisposed; on the other hand, if *Jonathan* can come up with the stuff, he'll get to pocket the proceeds (to be split with Cohen, of course).

Meanwhile, as January '96 wears on, what little there is of the mortgage business becomes buried under three feet of snow. Cramer is eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for most meals. He calls his father nearly every night. "Go out! Meet girls! Have a drink!" Paul encourages him. Jonathan sighs: "I can't afford it."

For Chuck Reed, life just keeps getting better. His sons have grown up nicely, with two in close touch at college and the third a senior in high school. Chuck and Susan are moving into a new chapter of their lives: When Kelley leaves the nest, the two will find themselves alone again. But unlike when they first were married, they will now have the luxury of time to spend together. As much as Chuck and Sue love Harleysville, they miss Vermont. A couple years back, Reed was offered a transfer there, but Todd and Kelley were so happy in their school he felt compelled to decline. Next time it comes around—in 1997, hopefully—he won't turn it down.

In the office, he's been working alongside the same partner, Jack O'Doherty, for 12 years. They've seen it all—drugs, money laundering, racketeering, murder. They are an odd couple: Reed, laid-back and casually dressed; O'Doherty, the prototypical FBI agent, tightly wound and always in a suit.

Desperate to get the FBI off his back, Alan Cohen tries to cough up a name. Finally, he does: "Jonathan Cramer."

"What, you don't think you're an FBI agent if you don't wear a tie?" Reed chides him. When O'Doherty does dress down, Reed teases him even worse: "You look *more* like an FBI agent now!"

The Ronald Tabas marijuana investigation ended the way all Chuck Reed's cases do—in other words, it didn't. As winter 1996 arrives, in fact, Reed's friend, agent Leo Pedrotty, is involved in one of its many spinoffs, grappling with a new cooperator, Alan Cohen. Right off the bat, Cohen fails his drug test. He maintains it's due to residue lodged in his fat cells after three decades of smoking dope, but the FBI agents just roll their eyes.

Then there are Cohen's wonderful leads. "Some guy on South Street who rides a bike." Or this one: "I think his name's Louie ... or Iggy ... or something." Cohen insists he doesn't know big-time dealers, only small fish—doubtful, coming from someone who was awaiting a *ton* of pot to be delivered to his doorstep.

The last straw comes when Cohen is asked to name the potential customers for his ton-o-fun. Cohen swears he had planned to use the marijuana mostly for his personal use, distributing the rest to cancer and AIDS patients on South Broad Street. Pedrotty feels like belting the guy. He sends Cohen a letter stating that his cooperation has been worthless and reminding him of his pending sentence.

Finally, Alan Cohen coughs up a crumb of information. It's coming back to him, he says. ... There was this one kid who showed up at his door bragging about how well-connected he was. Yeah, that kid seemed like he could be a real big operator. His name? You want his name? "Jonathan Cramer."

In late January 1996, Alan Cohen—with a tape recorder strapped to his leg, the FBI parked down the street—starts the first in a series of meetings with the new suspect. Cohen has been well-prepped—he doesn't mention drugs directly, simply asking if Cramer has "anything" and letting Cramer take it from there. Cramer is never shy. Indeed, like most unwitting investigative targets presenting their credentials, he responds by making himself out to be the second coming of Scarface. The FBI makes a note of it, but isn't yet convinced. They've encountered too many targets who can talk the talk, but little more.

Eventually, Cohen is instructed to tell Cramer he has a friend from Virginia, a drug courier named Chuck. Chuck's boss is looking for a new cocaine source and is willing to pay $30,000 for the first kilo. If all goes well, Cramer might have a regular customer.

It's around that time Cramer bids his final goodbye to the Philadelphia banking business. "I need time to clear my head," he tells his father, failing to mention the thoughts racing through his mind about which South Street drug dealer he should contact first to locate a kilo of cocaine. He's heard of a guy who goes to Temple—or was it Penn?—he also might try. And if all else fails, he's working up the nerve to approach some guys who may have links to the mob.

During February, Cramer receives several visits from Cohen. One time, when the old hippie shows up at Cramer's door, Cramer's ex-girlfriend—who still occasionally puts in an appearance—is there. He and Cohen head upstairs to talk shop in private, Cramer wobbly from a dose of tranquilizers. In the course of their conversation, Cramer reaches into a drawer and

pulls out a new Glock .40-caliber semiautomatic pistol. "For protection," he slurs.

At the end of the month, Cramer runs out of money and moves in with his mother and stepfather at their gated townhouse complex behind the I-95 sound barrier. The community is so quiet that if it weren't for the Comfort Inn sign framed in Marilyn Kline's bedroom window, it might otherwise never occur to her that the house is practically on Delaware Avenue. Jonathan lands a job as a chef's apprentice at the Chef's Market gourmet store a few blocks away on South Street and for the first time since he left USC actually has some hope he has found work he enjoys.

But then the honking starts: first just once a week, then once every couple of days, then daily. From her bedroom window, Marlyn Kline can see the faded silver Mercedes of her old tenant, Alan Cohen. Each time, Jonathan sprints downstairs for a minute or two.

"Why is he bothering you?" his mother asks.

Jonathan's answer is always filled with gloom: "I dunno."

A tape with a suspect's own voice admitting his guilt is the most effective weapon against a common defense used in drug cases: entrapment. Chuck Reed, in particular, is a big fan of the "wire," or tape recorder. In the past, agents would often wear wires on their chests, until spy movies made the technique common knowledge. Wires can be worn or carried in any way imaginable, varying in size from about five inches square to as small as a matchbook—although the bigger the wire, the better the sound. Some have tapes inside, others transmit to a recorder elsewhere. Transmitters are also used for protection, so backup agents can listen in and respond immediately if a crisis arises. Though a fatality in the line of duty at the FBI is still relatively rare, the advent of stiffer mandatory federal sentences has provided suspects with an added incentive to take their chances shooting it out with agents rather than go away for a guaranteed 15 or 30 years.

On the tapes Cohen makes, Cramer knows the lingo and is well-versed in drug prices. The agents listening in have few illusions he's really the big shot he claims to be; on the other hand, if he ends up finding them a kilo, they likely can get to the person *he* bought it from, and *that person's* source and so forth up the chain.

As he zeroes in on the fast-talking, downy-faced suspect around the same age as his oldest son, Chuck Reed keeps reminding himself that even the mightiest cases rise from the smallest of seeds. And how, if all works out, he might be able to help steer this kid back on to the straight and narrow.

On March 15th, the back lot of the Philadelphia Museum of Art swarms with activity as nine FBI agents prepare for Chuck Reed and Jonathan Cramer's first meeting. Cohen has a transmitter fixed to his hip; Reed has the recorder. Reed climbs into the passenger seat of Cohen's Mercedes and closes the door with a mighty slam. Behind the wheel, Cohen looks over nervously—Reed scares the hell out of him. Reed picks up Cohen's portable and starts making calls. "Hey," Cohen whines, "I'm not made of money!"

Cramer is waiting for them at Mulberry Market, a deli at 2nd and Arch streets. Reed defers the shotgun seat to Cramer; he can watch him better from there, and besides, the acoustics of the recording will be better if made from the back. He shoves his briefcase into the space between the bucket seats.

Reed and Cramer feel each other out: Reed demands to know how Cramer can really get him a "key." Cramer wonders how *he* can be sure *Reed* really has $30,000 in the briefcase. Hey, Reed shoots back, how does *he* know *Cramer* won't stick him up? "Look," Cramer finally says, "if I were here to rip you off, I could take your money any time I want. Okay? Nobody's taking your money." Reed opens the briefcase to reveal $30,000 in small bills.

Cramer directs Cohen to Gargoyles, a bar about a block from the deli. The FBI backup cars park up and down the surrounding streets. A few minutes later, Cohen, Cramer and two of his "friends" are negotiating beside the Gargoyles' pool table. One of the friends asks Cohen for his driver's license, much to the chagrin of the snitch, who's scrupulous about maintaining his "Rudy" drug-dealer persona.

In the car afterward, Cramer tells Reed about the plan his friend had proposed inside: to deliver the kilo in installments, rather than all at once. The FBI agent, of course, already knows about the proposition; Leo Pedrotty, listening to the conversation via the transmitter, phoned Reed in the back seat of the Benz with the information.

"We'll talk later," Reed shrugs, feeling that feigning indifference gives him more credibility. Saying he's going to take the train back to Virginia, he and Cohen leave the would-be dealer behind and drive up Market Street. Ten blocks later, Cohen's portable rings. "Do you want to

do a half key?" Cramer asks. "I can do it right now!" Reed tells him to chill out; he has a train to catch.

At the Art Museum, the mood is light. Just then, Cohen's car phone rings *again*. "I'm at the train station!" Cramer shouts. "I can't find you guys! I want to do the deal!"

"I can't talk to you now," says Cohen before turning off his phone. "I'll call you next week."

On the phone with Cramer on Monday, the cooperator successfully covers for the near mishap: "You made Chuck so nervous when you said you could take his money, he made me drive him to Virginia!" He goes on to say that Chuck wants to slow things down; he's coming back Friday to take them to lunch—not to actually do the deal, but to make sure everyone's still on the same page. Cramer sounds glad; he was apparently worried Chuck had lost interest in him altogether.

The week passes quickly. Thursday night at 7, Cramer checks in. "We'll pick you up tomorrow," Cohen tells him, "at 12:30."

At 7:15 p.m., Josh Reed calls home from college. *Jeopardy* is on TV, and he wants to know his dad's score. Turns out Chuck isn't playing; he's vacuuming. Josh calls home nearly every night, even when there's nothing to say, just to touch base. His father mentioned earlier that he's beginning a case involving a kid about Josh's age. But Reed's undercover meeting with the guy, planned for the next day, barely enters into their conversation—it's almost too routine a meeting for Reed to even bring up.

From his mother's house, Jonathan Cramer calls his father. He's excited about the day he had at work: The chef asked him to make a dish on his own, and it turned out great. "No one came over to check on me!" Jonathan enthuses. It's good to hear Jon so happy, his father thinks. He's been down so long. Hopefully, things are starting to turn around for him.

The next day is March 22nd, Friday. Chuck and Sue Reed wake at their usual 5:30. Neither has to be at work for hours, but they savor their mornings together, sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee, reading the paper and quietly discussing the day ahead. It's been a busy week, and they're looking forward to the weekend. At 7, Kelley stumbles into the hallway, heading toward the bathroom. "Good morning, Kelley Reed!" Chuck booms as he passes. "Morning," Kelley manages to return sleepily.

Sue is first to leave. The mousse she put in her hair has dried in white flecks, and Chuck follows her around the house, picking them out. He walks her to the front door.

"Now, pay attention to your driving," he says in a kind voice. This is a joke. Sue has gotten a nursing job just minutes away, and Chuck is glad for it; she's not the best driver.

"Now, don't get shot today," Susan returns. It is a flip comment, also part of their routine.

"We'll do something special tonight," Chuck tells her. "I'll get some wine today, you pick up some steaks. We'll have a date."

And with a kiss, Susan Reed puts on her coat and leaves. Already it is turning out to be a cool, beautiful day.

Chuck Reed stops in at the Lansdale office before meeting up with his partner Jack O'Doherty, who will be in the backup car with Leo Pedrotty. Because no deal is due to go down, they will be the only backup today. The office secretary wishes Reed luck. "We'll see you later," Reed calls to her.

"Be careful," she calls back, a routine warning she gives every time they go to one of these things. She turns back to her work.

At his mother's house, Jonathan Cramer asks his mom if she can lend him a few bucks. He's going to lunch with some people, he explains, and doesn't know who's paying. His mother looks at him tenderly. She knows what a rough time he is having, how degrading it must be for a grown man to have to move back in with his mother, have to ask for money. But she's also pleased that he is able to ask for help and that she is able to offer it. She gives him $100, just in case they go somewhere nice.

In front of the deli on 2nd and Arch, Jonathan Cramer slides into the passenger seat of the faded silver Mercedes-Benz. "I'm so hungry!" he exclaims. "Where are we gonna eat?" Cohen cringes; because the meeting is to be a short one, the FBI agents decided there would be no lunch. "Why don't we just go and park, and talk for a few minutes," he suggests. They join the midday traffic down to Delaware Avenue, where the air is filled with the drone of jackhammers. Cramer complains about how hungry he is; at a South Street bar the night before, he tells them, someone gave him half a gram of coke, and he hasn't eaten anything all morning.

Cohen pulls in among the empty cars in the Comfort Inn parking lot. He takes out a nail file and a newspaper, and opens to an article about Tammy Baker. A hundred yards away on the north side of the building, O'Doherty and Pedrotty sit parked in a white Jeep Cherokee listening intently to the conversation over their radio, Reed and Cramer's voices fading in and out through the static and background noise. The dialogue between the front and back seat of the Benz has a slight edge to it—pretty normal for two near-strangers discussing a drug deal.

Cramer is twisted around to peer at Reed through the bucket seats. "How do I know you're not a cop?" he challenges.

"How do I know *you're* not a cop?"

For a few minutes they seem to make some progress. Reed proved the last time he could fulfill his end of the bargain, and now that the ball is in Cramer's court, he's telling Reed about the drugs he can produce, how the price will come down after they do a certain number of deals. Still,

"We'll do something special tonight," Chuck Reed tells his wife. "I'll get some wine, you pick up some steaks. We'll have a date."

Cramer won't let go of his mistrust.

"Do you have your driver's license on you?" he asks.

Reed is casual. "Yeah."

"Does it say Virginia?"

"No, it doesn't say Virginia."

Cohen tries to intervene: "Listen, what's the difference," he cuts in. "His driver's license has got nothing to do with what we're doing in this car."

If Cramer is irked by the refusal, he doesn't show it; but a few minutes later, his attention is attracted by the briefcase Reed is carrying, the same one as last time.

"What's in the briefcase?" Cramer abruptly asks.

"There's nothing in there."

"Can I see?"

Behind the wheel, Cohen's eyes remain glued on the newspaper. O'Doherty and Pedrotty listen as Reed's big fingers fumble with the briefcase lock. The car is quiet but for its click-click-click.

Suddenly, Reed is shouting: "Hold it,

hold it! You're under arrest." Cohen throws open the door.

"Hold it! Hold it! Get your hands up or I'll shoot you, you son of a bitch!" Cohen takes one step, two...

The crackle of gunfire sounds like popcorn in a microwave. One bullet whistles into Cramer's left shoulder, another into his upper arm, punching through both lungs. A shot pierces through Reed's heart, another into his spine, and a third bullet buries itself in his thigh. With each shot, Reed tries to slide out of reach; instead of sliding behind Cramer's seat, however, where he might have created a more difficult angle for Cramer to shoot from, Reed moves to his left, becoming an increasingly open target—but also giving himself a more direct line of fire. Despite his massive injuries, Reed manages to squeeze off three more shots to Cramer's head.

Blood is everywhere: On the sheepskin seats, splattered against the windows. Cramer is crumpled in the front, falling into the space between the seats, head loosely hanging. Reed is slumped behind the driver's seat. Beside him lies the briefcase, empty. In the suspended silence, a piece of lint drifts slowly down, a stray fiber torn from the sheepskin.

Now, Jack O'Doherty is pulling open the rear door. "Chuck, you all right?!" he screams, choking back a sob. "Chuck, hang on!"

A few feet away, Alan Cohen stares at the scene, at the bloody windows, the body contorted in the front seat, the hysterical FBI agent in the back cradling his limp partner, and is struck by an odd thought even for him: *Now how am I gonna get home tonight?*

What happened in the span of those few fatal seconds in the Mercedes-Benz remains a mystery. What caused Chuck Reed to skip ahead to an arrest without any drugs present? Who fired first? Did Reed think Jonathan Cramer was about to rob him? Was Cramer suddenly afraid for his safety? Given the limitations imposed by the tape recording and Alan Cohen's preoccupation with his own skin, the only two people who might have been able to answer those questions definitively were pronounced dead on arrival at Hahnemann and Jefferson hospitals. Only the grisly details revealed in the autopsy and toxology reports (revealing recently ingested heroin and cocaine in Cramer's system) are clear.

And there are other questions: Who were Jonathan Cramer's "friends" in the bar? Was one of them the unidentified student he'd mentioned in passing to Cohen? Or were they somehow connected to the mob? And perhaps most vexing: Could Jonathan Cramer really get his hands on a kilo of cocaine? The FBI may know some of these answers, but if so, it isn't saying, hamstrung by the privacy laws protecting suspects, even dead ones, who have not been convicted, and by the policies governing ongoing investigations. There is still a chance, after all, that even now, through the leads generated by this case, Chuck Reed's work isn't quite done.

As for Alan Cohen, who was facing ten to 40 years before he ever uttered Jonathan Cramer's name to the FBI, the government felt obligated to file for leniency in his sentence, but at the hearing made its reservations known. "There's no 'A' for effort," the federal prosecutor said of Cohen's cooperation. "Results count." It didn't help Cohen's cause that after the shooting he failed another drug test. He received 67 months.

Cohen remains untouched by real atonement, yet, at night in the confines of his jail cell, his subconscious appears to recognize his role in the tragedy. In one nightmare, Jonathan's mother Marlyn chases him down South Street with a scythe. In another, Chuck Reed's wife and

sons are having a barbecue, waiting for Cohen to take Chuck's place in the family. "I need these kids in my life? I need Marlyn every night in my dreams?" Cohen asks angrily. "I don't want them in my life, but they're there every night." It is hot in the glassed-in room, and his face has the sheen of sweat.

"Am I sorry I helped the government?" Alan Cohen considers this for a long moment, pulling on the collar of his prison shirt. "I was looking at 40 years. You have to understand, I'm 55 years old. That means I'd die in jail. Am I sorry I cooperated with the government?" he

Jonathan Cramer asks his mom if she can lend him a few bucks. She gives him $100, just in case he and his new friends are going somewhere nice.

repeats. The shallow lines around his mouth deepen as he frowns, perhaps as he considers the two lives lost, then shakes his head resolutely from side to side and lowers his voice to a whisper: "You know what 40 years is like in one of these zoos?"

Jonathan Cramer's funeral in West Oak Lane was small, with only his family and a handful of friends in attendance. More than 300 people, mostly those who knew him when he was the confident wrestling captain and student-body president, showed up at his memorial service a month later, then got back to the process of disassociating themselves from his name. The Cramers plan to sprinkle Jonathan's ashes over the ocean.

Chuck Reed became the 46th FBI agent killed in the line of duty—the fourth in the past two years, and the first ever in Philadelphia. In the Lansdale office where he worked, and where his son Josh now works as an FBI financial analyst, a black wreath was hung in Chuck's memory. Reed was buried in his beloved Vermont. At his memorial service in Philadelphia, there was not the "couple of pews" he had predicted, but rather an 800-car parade, a 21-gun salute and 4,000 mourners. ■■