Tegan Broadwater, a white Fort Worth police officer, went undercover and infiltrated the Texas Crips. After putting away 51 of them, 41 federally, he now turns his attention to the innocent children left behind by incarcerated parents.
The “Fish Bowl” was a small neighborhood less than three miles southeast of downtown Fort Worth, also known as the Poly area, with only two entrances that were well guarded and were considered impenetrable to surprise raids by police. What once had been a block made up of working-class families had shifted into a dangerous area of gang killings and crack sales.

“Fish bowl was a common term that we all used in law enforcement for that area for some time. The way it was set up, there was one entrance and one exit with lookouts set up at both. Basically, if you were inside that perimeter, you were being seen,” Broadwater says.

“The problem in that area had garnered the attention of the City Council. They got the chief of police to approve an overtime detail that allowed the narcotics unit andgang unit to engage in a high-visibility detail where they did vehicle jump outs, ran search warrants and performed traffic stops when possible. None of it was succeeding. Ultimately, I found out there was a source inside the police department that was sharing information about our activity with those in that area. That is why I felt we weren’t having an effect.”

During Broadwater’s more than decade-long career, he had hoped to work a significant undercover assignment. He was inspired by the likes of Joseph Pistone (a.k.a. Donnie Brasco) and William Queen, who both infiltrated and helped take down major crime organizations.

Broadwater began his career in 1996 with the Fort Worth Police Department. During his time in law enforcement, he was assigned to three narcotics units, the gang unit, the homicide cold case unit and the F.B.I. Gang and Violent Crimes Task Force. He has received dozens of recognitions including a Certificate of Merit for going undercover to locate and seize C-4 explosives from a gang planning retaliation, two awards for his protection detail work at Ground Zero during the 9-11 tragedy and was nominated four times for the Fort Worth Police Department’s Officer of the Year.

Despite his impressive performance, it took four attempts for Broadwater to gain acceptance into the narcotics unit. “First of all, I think it is understandable that it took that long. Narcotics is one of those units where they have a specific need for a specific demographic. It’s not a profiling issue. It’s based on nothing more than it’s easier to integrate someone with a similar demographic into a particular neighborhood that shares that demographic.

Broadwater was able to slowly work his way up to the highest ranks of the Texas Crips and ultimately take down the kingpin.
to really like some of the guys he was spending time with (aside from the illegal activity of course). Under different circumstances, he even said that they may have been friends. "I could tell he really started to like these guys. One of the things that attracted me to Tegan was how he treated people when he was on duty... He treated everyone he came across (good or bad) with respect. He tried to help them and mentor them into wanting better for themselves," says Broadwater's wife, Holli.

As part of the undercover persona, Broadwater acquired from the police department a Mercedes E-Class that had been seized from a local meth dealer, arrested because he ran from the police in the car filled with meth and guns wearing nothing but a leopard Speedo.

To cover all bases, Broadwater had scoped out a wealthy neighborhood off Hulen Street and found a home that was for sale without the sign in the yard. There was an instance where Broadwater needed to spontaneously go by the home with someone in the car. He walked around to the back of the home, waited outside the back door for a few minutes and then went to get back in the vehicle with the person affiliated to the gang.

Broadwater credits the support of fellow officers and then supervisor, Sgt. David Wilson, for the success of the operation. "I would check in with him [Sgt. Wilson] regularly and let him know what was happening. He had my back within the department. When fellow officers wondered where I was and thought that maybe I was somewhere just screwin’ around, Wilson covered for me," Broadwater says.

"I had become as close to deep cover as one could get in this modern-day finger-screw everybody-has-to-know-everything world. Even my coworkers had absolutely no clue what I was doing on a daily basis by this point. So much of my time was off the books, no one would know the enormous amount of time that I had dumped into this except maybe my wife, Holli."

"I was also making so many transactions that I was using more than the whole team would spend in a month, and I wasn't making any arrests. I had the full trust of Sgt. Wilson."

"I relied exclusively on my teammates. I may have been rogue in a lot of people's eyes, but when I went out, I called guys that I had worked with before and trusted them wholly with my life. I could call them and not give them too much information, and they would be there for me," Broadwater says. During the operation, Broadwater would have them listen to the transactions over cell phones. If they heard the distress signal, they were just a few streets over and could help. "I didn't want to have some crazy signal. My key phrase was, 'That's what I'm talking about.' "

Holli was comfortable with his decision to further his goals within the police department. There were times during the operation that it was challenging and put a strain on their relationship.

"He would be really stressed, which made him irritable and inattentive at times. He was so preoccupied and trying to juggle so many things that he would forget things. He forgot our anniversary, which made me very sad."

"There were times he came home and had obviously been in a fight," Holli says. "We made a pact early on that I would not ask a lot of questions. He knew that it would only
“I knew I could stop kids from going into prison. It’s easier to prepare than it is to repair,” Randle says. “Boys go into gangs because they want to belong. They want a relationship. Even if it is a negative relationship, it is still a relationship. Gangs are a perverted concept of family.”

make me worry more. He never told me about the dangerous things. I did not find those things out until I read the book,” she says.

Some moments of Broadwater’s assignment were scarier than others. Besides having a gun pulled on him and pointed in his face, he describes one of his most intense moments of panic. “I entered this house and looked around to see piles of crack cocaine and some guns. There was a television in the corner, and suddenly I recognized the voices on the TV. It was an episode of Cops that I had appeared in back when I was in patrol. I positioned myself in front of the TV and proceeded to filibuster to keep anyone from recognizing me. After the episode finished, I did the deal that I was there to do and left as quickly as I could. Nobody had noticed.”

There was another situation where a dealer put a jacket on him. A jacket means that you are labeled as a snitch and are put in danger of being killed by someone who gave him the jacket collected his money and kissed his sleeping wife before heading early the next morning, had a bowl of cereal to have to take drastic action. He woke up severely before asking that he take the jacket off him. It was effective because the jacket was removed.

There was only so far that Broadwater could go with the FWPD budget. He had been taking a roll of ones and wrapping them with a few $20 bills to look the part, but it couldn’t sustain the kind of business he needed to be doing to get closer to the kingpin.

He presented his case to the Drug Enforcement Administration, but he didn’t enlist their help because they wanted to take over and kick Broadwater off the case. In his book, Broadwater says, “Undercover operators rarely get credit. That’s okay with me; it’s just part of working under the radar. But some new entity moving forward on a huge case without utilizing the only guy who’d been directly involved in the inner workings of the conspiracy from the very beginning seemed irresponsible.”

Another supervisor at the time, President of the Fort Worth Police Officers’ Association and Sgt. Steve Hall, knew of Broadwater’s previous performance in the department and was comfortable with him handling such an operation due to his work in east Fort Worth, self-driven motivation and willingness to commit to a project. Sgt. Hall suggested that he call Special Agent Jennifer Coffindaffer with the F.B.I. Violent Crimes Task Force. “Tegan and I talked almost daily about different funding sources,” Sgt. Hall says.

In his book, Broadwater reflects on how important Sgt. Wilson’s support was in moving forward. “Not many supervisors in his position would have gone half this far out of their way to accommodate an old-school, long-term, undercover operation like this. Not to mention, after he’d battled upper management to this point, he would now miss the reward of seeing the project through to the end.”

Agent Coffindaffer was happy to allow Broadwater to continue as the sole undercover officer in the operation. With the F.B.I.’s involvement came perks. Within a few days, Broadwater was approved for government overtime pay, a Land Rover with audio/video surveillance equipment and access to thousands of dollars.

It would be several months undercover before Broadwater was presented with the perfect opportunity to take down the kingpin and end Operation Fish Bowl. On April 3, 2005, Broadwater attended the self-proclaimed “4x3 Day,” an annual party the Crips held in the park bordering the Fish Bowl. The plan was to force a deal during the party that would include the kingpin in the transaction process.

It worked. The kingpin pulled a small bag of cocaine out of his pocket and passed it off in front of Broadwater, which ultimately led to his demise. “It was surreal… slow motion and…confetti,” Broadwater says. “It was a culmination of so much work, and the emotional value of something like that is indescribable. It solidified the end of the entire process.”

In May of 2006, the Grand Jury indicted 38 federally charged suspects with three more remaining. May 17 was the round-up date, and the preparation was grueling. Time was of the essence for safety reasons because Broadwater’s true identity had been revealed.

Holli says that her husband did receive death threats, which made it scary to be home alone. “We got a PO Box when he started working undercover and used that as our address. We got permission to take our house off the county records, and we both changed our driver’s licenses to PO Box,” she says.

Precautions were taken to keep Broadwater and his wife and son safe during this time. On many occasions, they would all pile in the truck with sleeping bags and a DVD player while Broadwater did his routine police work.

Broadwater and Agent Coffindaffer were responsible for interviewing many of the arrestees to try to get cooperation, information or a plea. “Some of the guys
A total of 104 children were left without a parent resulting from Operation Fish Bowl. 

The true story of how a white cop infiltrated and took down 41 of the nation’s most notorious Crips.

Proceeds benefit charities that mentor children with incarcerated parents. Books are available on Amazon.com and can be found at area Barnes & Noble bookstores. For more information, visit fishbowl41.com.