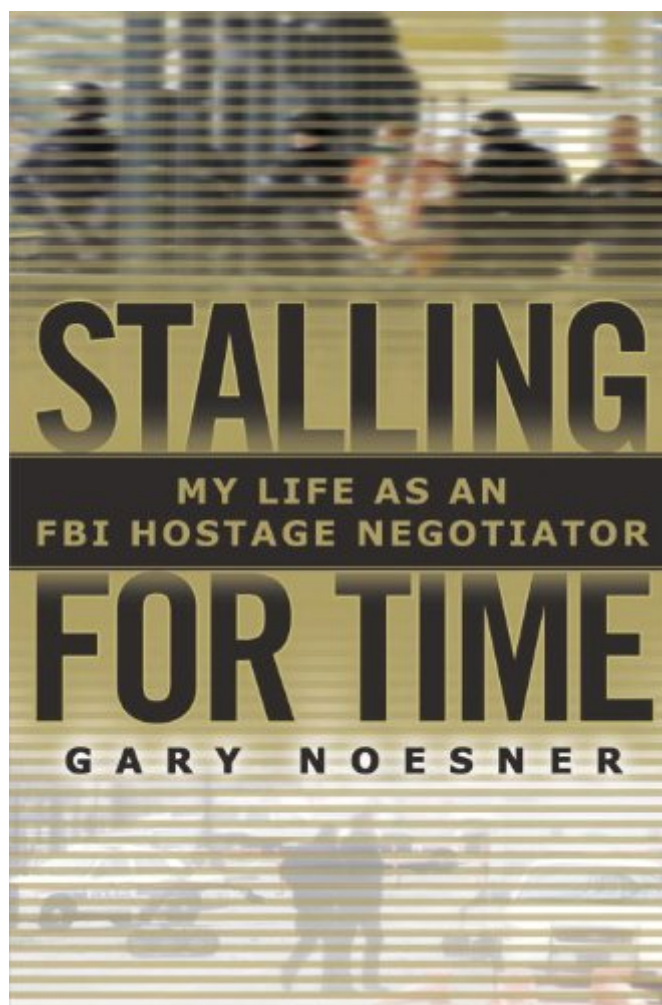


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Stalling For Time: My Life As An FBI Hostage Negotiator



Synopsis

An enraged man abducts his estranged wife and child, holes up in a secluded mountain cabin, threatening to kill them both. A right wing survivalist amasses a cache of weapons and resists calls to surrender. A drug trafficker barricades himself and his family in a railroad car, and begins shooting. A cult leader in Waco, Texas faces the FBI in an armed stand-off that leaves many dead in a fiery blaze. A sniper, claiming to be God, terrorizes the DC metropolitan area. For most of us, these are events we hear about on the news. For Gary Noesner, head of the FBI's groundbreaking Crisis Negotiation Unit, it was just another day on the job. In *Stalling for Time*, Noesner takes readers on a heart-pounding tour through many of the most famous hostage crises of the past thirty years. Specially trained in non-violent confrontation and communication techniques, Noesner's unit successfully defused many potentially volatile standoffs, but perhaps their most hard-won victory was earning the recognition and respect of their law enforcement peers. Noesner pursued his dream of joining the FBI all the way to Quantico, where he not only became a Special Agent, but also "in the course of a distinguished thirty-year career" the FBI's Chief Negotiator. Gaining respect for the fledgling art of crisis negotiation in the hard-boiled culture of The Bureau, where the shadow of J. Edgar Hoover still loomed large, was an uphill battle, educating FBI and law enforcement leaders on the job at an incident, and advocating the use of psychology rather than force whenever possible. Noesner's many bloodless victories rarely garnered as much media attention as the notorious incident management blunders like the Branch Davidian disaster in Waco and the Ruby Ridge tragedy. Noesner offers a candid as well as fascinating look back at his years as a rebel in the ranks and a pioneer on the front lines. Whether vividly recounting showdowns with the radical Republic of Texas militia, the terrorist hijackers of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro*, and self-styled messiah David Koresh, or clashes with colleagues and superiors that expose the internal politics and power-plays of America's premier law enforcement agency, *Stalling for Time* crackles with breathtaking suspense and insight in equal measure. Case by case, minute by minute, it's a behind the scenes view of a visionary crime-fighter in action. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

"Stalling for Time" is fascinating, but not at all in the way I expected. There are firsthand accounts of some of the major hostage incidents of modern times - in particular Waco and Ruby Ridge - which add to the historical record. But the tone throughout the incident stories is very much "just the facts ma'am" -- by which I mean that the stories are not played up for emotion, or even for drama. The amazing thing the author has done is to make "head FBI hostage negotiator" come across as - well - just another corporate job. The main point that comes across from this book is the deep philosophical division within the FBI - and presumably, across the law enforcement community - between those who favor negotiation as a way to end hostage situations, and those who want to go in with guns blazing. The author is a passionate advocate of the negotiation approach, sometimes in support of tactical action, often as a solution in itself. He cites a number of examples where his advice was not followed, and he complains about the shortsightedness of his bosses in Washington and in various field situations. What was most surprising, and frankly scary, about this book is how little science, or even modern management practice, appears to be involved in making such critical life-and-death policy decisions. The author refers to 2-week training courses for example as the entry into hostage negotiation; it takes 6 months to become a massage therapist, and 3 or 4 years to become a firefighter. And his arguments about the best approach to various situations are based on his experience, which is considerable, but he doesn't offer data to support his conclusions.

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