



It Never Happened: FBI Duplicity and Negligence Revealed from the Inside Out

Barbara Van Driel

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It Never Happened is a thrilling takedown of an elite institution.

Barbara Van Driel's memoir *It Never Happened* is full of tragedy, and is nothing less than a shocking indictment of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Van Driel characterizes her eight years with the agency as one long nightmare.

In 1983, Van Driel, a hardworking and idealistic college graduate in Kansas, was brought into the FBI fold as one of their top candidates. By 1991, she had resigned from her dream career in disgust. In the interim, Van Driel worked in Houston, New York City, and Salt Lake City, and saw endemic corruption in all three offices. The most common form of delinquency was that special agents would “bang the book” in order to work less and make more money. In New York, Van Driel worked under Robert Hanssen, the counterintelligence agent who was ultimately unmasked as a Soviet spy.

In between passages about bureaucratic incompetency, Van Driel details instances of sexual harassment and assault at the hands of other agents. Some practiced juvenile obscenity; others, like one senior agent in Salt Lake City, drunkenly groped and propositioned her. In sum, the book paints the FBI under presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush as a misogynistic cabal of lazy functionaries concerned only with protecting their pensions.

Van Driel's story is not told in a linear fashion, but through short vignettes, most of which are undated. Time flies throughout the narrative, which becomes a veritable tidal wave of rage and rejection. Stories do not repeat, but they do fit together. It can be hard to believe all of the accounts, though the dispassionate tone helps to build credibility.

Although the book does not cover the present, it is the perfect encapsulation of the current popular distrust of the FBI and all federal institutions; it is so readable and relatable that it will speak to the average US citizen. Accounts of the agency's flaws are conveyed without malice, and the text goes out of its way to talk about all of the good special agents that were working there, too. Still, the impression lingers that corruption is innate within any bureaucracy—as no bureaucracy acts against its own interests.

It Never Happened is a thrilling takedown of an elite institution that should be read by anyone puzzled about why distrust in the American government and its agencies is on the rise.

BENJAMIN WELTON (September 5, 2018)

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