

THINGS TO DO ▸ COAST MAGAZINE

# Adventures in Private Investigating



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By **COASTMAG** |  
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Like most retired federal agents, Thomas Martin wears a navy blue suit.

“It’s what we sleep in,” he says.

Old habits can die hard and after a career as an agent, the crisp suit is just one throwback. The other is salty vocabulary that I can tell he’s doing his best to restrain.

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Visit his website for a full list of services and Martin’s Best of OC List, which gives contact info for Orange County’s best personal injury lawyers, private security guards, questioned document examiners, and more, all personally backed by Martin himself. :: [martinpi.com](http://martinpi.com)

Martin didn’t always plan on being a man of navy blue cloth, in fact he was all set to be a man of the cloth – a priest. But a volunteer stint in Harlem while on sabbatical from St. John’s Seminary in Camarillo, California in the mid-1960s convinced him he was needed elsewhere.

He joined the United States Department of Justice as a federal agent with the Bureau of Narcotics in Washington, D.C. in 1969 and so began a long and successful career. Martin was part of a small crew of seven agents that launched the International Training Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration and became an instructor at the Department of Justice’s Advanced International Drug Enforcement School, where some of his lesson plans are still used to this day. He even served as head of Los Angeles International Airport’s drug enforcement agency until an injury on the job forced him into retirement. Since Martin already had his master’s degree and a teaching credential, the bureau suggested he become a teacher, a lawyer or go for his doctorate. But Martin wasn’t interested.

“None of those three options appealed to me,” says Martin. “The only thing I really knew and I was halfway good at was doing investigations.”

His interview and interrogation skills were and still are his greatest strength.

“If I were to interview you today about your role in a crime, you’d probably be peeing your pants,” he says. “And that’s not something you can learn in three months in the academy. That’s something you get a basis for and then you learn it on the job training, and I think it takes at least 10 years to be one of the best.”

In the 1980s he got his private investigator license and launched Martin Investigative Services, Inc. in Newport Beach. When he began the business, he focused mainly on criminal and civil cases that required interviewing, where maybe it was one person’s word against another. He eventually became a full-service agency and today offers services from background checks and security consulting to surveillance, counter-surveillance and locating missing persons.

Which has lead to some incredibly fascinating cases.

One of his earliest cases was a man accused of molesting his 16-year-old stepdaughter – but the case turned out not to be so clear-cut.

“I found one witness and then another witness and another who all said it was a conspiracy between the daughter and [her mother] to get him arrested so they would get all the proceeds from the subsequent divorce,” Martin says.

It could have ended there, with the case most likely overturned without question, he says. But then Martin found out that the case’s prosecutor was also dating the victim. After taking the information to the district attorney’s office and hearing nothing for about four weeks, Martin called a press conference of his own. The prosecutor was subsequently fired and Martin’s client’s name was cleared.

“To this day he sends me Christmas cards,” he says with a smile.

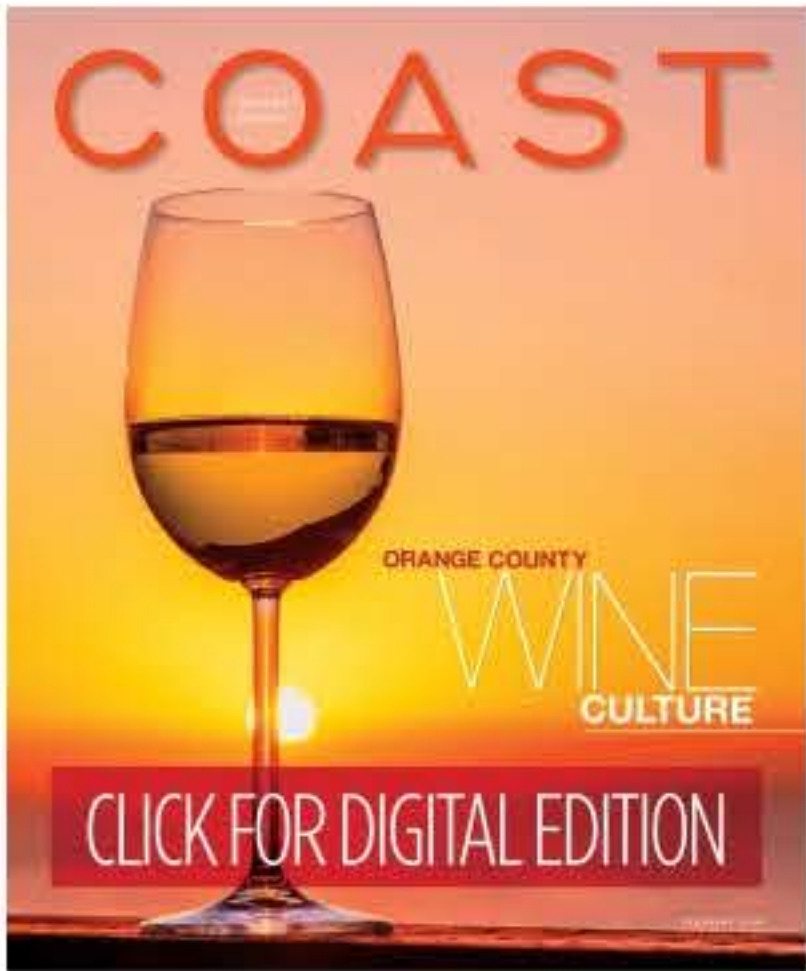
Martin Investigative Services has even had success with cases south of the border.

“We had a number of cases in Mexico, but over the last 10 years it has become more and more difficult to do,” he says, referring to our neighbor’s current dangerous climate. So he developed the Boots on the Ground program with former agents stationed in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, and Mazatlan. In 2011, Martin Investigative Services recovered four people missing or kidnapped in Mexico.

“We are not inexpensive, but we hit the ball out of the park,” he says.

Martin doesn’t have his boots on the ground so much these days, mainly electing to delegate jobs and use his connections to put the clients in touch with the right people. Though he doesn’t think he’ll quit the business anytime soon.

“I still get up every morning and I still like it,” he says. “I still have fire in my belly for it.”



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