

Wasting More Police Time

Policing is all about people – strange, unpleasant, sad, lonely, depressed, violent and troubled people.

I'd sum it up like this: we deal with very nasty people, and try to keep a lid on them, stop them getting too close to the rest of the public. That's all I can really say. I've removed toddlers and babies from houses where there was excrement – cat, dog, human and lizard, they *love* their lizards – encrusted in the carpets, wiped on the walls, where the kids are crawling around in this eating their food, with maggots crawling on *them*. Where the stench stays on your nose and in your uniform for days afterwards.

I went to a house with a team on a pre-planned job to arrest a man who was handling stolen goods, the proceeds of burglaries in the nice part of town. We found him in bed with his 14-year-old granddaughter, with a 50-inch telly playing hardcore porn at the end of the bed. The telly had been stolen from the house of a doctor, and that was where it ended up.

I sat with an old lady of 90 who had been beaten so badly by a burglar that her own daughter, who was herself nearly 70, didn't recognise her at the hospital. Broken cheekbone, broken ribs, a broken arm, two black eyes, part of her scalp ripped out. We deal with the people who do things like that.

PC, 30, Northern force

As a PC, I arrested a man who was beating and raping his girlfriend and forcing her to eat his faeces. She did it because she was in mortal fear of him. Can you imagine that? He had himself been the victim of horrific abuse, in that he had been raped repeatedly by his own father from the age of five until he was big enough to fight back. It doesn't justify what he was doing to the girlfriend, but it does sort of explain it a bit. The idea that you can be treated like that as a child and then not turn out weird is unlikely.

Sergeant, 43, Midlands force

I think the public should be frightened by how crap things are. In my last role, it was my job to manage a team set up to monitor sex

Wasting More Police Time

offenders on release from prison. Most of it was visiting them in their bail hostel or suchlike to ask them if they're hanging around schools, or attending partner agency meetings to talk about them. The whole thing is a joke – we don't 'monitor' them in any real sense. How could we? I had four officers under me, sharing one clapped-out Ford Mondeo. The Superintendent has a gold 5 Series BMW to drive to his meetings, of course. The bloody civilian *managers* have company BMWs, complete with blue lights and sirens ... It would be illegal for them to ever switch the bloody things on! Anyway, these vile creatures are released, and it's my old team's job to go and visit them so the force can tick the box that says they're being monitored.

To give just one case, I dealt with a paedophile who was, in my opinion, probably working his way up to kidnapping and murdering a child. He had very serious images of child rape on his computer, and he was clearly a very dangerous man. It so happened that I had originally arrested this guy. He laughed in my face when I cautioned him. He was jailed for under three years and not much more than a year later he was given parole. A week or so later, I saw him hanging around Claire's Accessories on a parade of shops near where he was staying. He was trying to talk to the young girls going in and out, in breach of his parole conditions which included that he was not to approach children. I went over to him, arrested him and took him back to the nick, but the probation service felt that a warning was sufficient. He laughed at me again when I let him go. It was very frustrating.

Inspector, 44, Northern force

A lot of domestics we get called to are pants. They're both pissed, they might have slapped each other, who knows who did it first this time, it's really a case of who gets to the phone first. You'll probably nick the male just to get him away from the address for the night, but the female – if she doesn't switch sides and leap on you to stop you taking him away there and then – will never make a statement the next day, so it all goes nowhere. I know it sounds cynical, but it's the truth. A lot of the people we deal with are pissheads and they get bored and they enjoy knocking lumps out of each other.

Wasting More Police Time

However, there *are* serious domestics. For instance, my colleague and I attended reports of a female screaming in a house. We could hear the racket almost before we got out of the car. We couldn't get any response from knocking, so we decided to put the door in. Ideally, we would all carry an Enforcer [*a heavy metal tool used to effect entry*] but our health and safety policy was recently updated so as to disallow it from being carried in standard patrol vehicles, in case we crash and this thing damages us as it flies out of the boot. Plus it weighs a tonne and that adds to the petrol bill. Anyway, we put the window in and reached in to click the Yale. Inside was a woman, about 50, 5ft 2in tall, cowering on the floor with a 16-stone bloke standing over her with a belt, buckle end down. He was roaring and spitting, she was screaming and begging to be left alone. He threatened us with the belt, but my colleague, who is TASER-trained, quickly won that one. TASER is a Godsend, by the way. [*TASER – Thomas A Swift's Electric Rifle – is a (usually) pistol-style electronic weapon designed to incapacitate but not permanently injure assailants.*]

He was arrested, and we got the woman to a place of safety. Although she was too scared to make a statement, there are provisions for us to proceed without the victim making a statement and in this case he was bang to rights and was charged.

I spent quite a bit of time getting to know that lady over the next few months, and the story she told was horrific. She had been threatened and bullied and beaten all her marriage, but she had never contacted us and I guess the neighbours hadn't previously got involved. On this occasion, she had been unable to explain one of the numbers on their itemised phone bill, and he'd gone berserk. Like a lot of womanisers, he was madly jealous himself. She showed us marks on her back where he had burned her with the iron on other occasions. One of his favourite tactics was to sodomise her while pushing her head down the toilet. She had never told anyone about any of this, just suffered in silence. As a woman, I almost cried listening to her. She never went back to him, and he was convicted and given a jail term, and on the day he went down I met her for a coffee and she looked 20 years younger. I thought, *That is why I joined the police.*

PC, 30, Northern force

Wasting More Police Time

We arrested a mid-level drug dealer and all-round unpleasant character who kept his customers and slingers honest by injecting urine into their buttocks if they didn't pay their debts, or got creative with his gear. He thought this was highly amusing. It was like a perk of the job. I don't know whether he was a sadist, clinically-speaking, but he certainly had no compunction whatsoever about causing pain to others if it got him what he wanted.

A regular earner for him was to rob other drug dealers or general crims. A lot of them are into this now. The old cash-in-transit Securicor robberies of yesteryear, they are less common because the vans are better, the comms are better, the money cartridges all have DNA dye in them. There are ways around the dye, which I won't go into, but it makes it a bit harder for them. You can buy trackers from spy shops or online which will track vehicles, so they follow their targets until the point when they know they've got a decent stash of either drugs or money on board, and then they have them. They are certainly not averse to torturing people to get the intel they need. 'Where's Dave gonna be with his gear?' Meanwhile, the guy's tied to a chair with his feet in a bucket of petrol, or they're threatening to snip his fingers off with bolt-cutters.

We took this particular chap off the streets and he went away for a decent bit, but there is, unfortunately, an endless supply of amoral scum champing at the bit to step up a level. In one sense, people like this are no threat to honest people, but every now and then the law-abiding public get involved through no fault of their own. We had a guy turned over who ran a chain of takeaways. If you run kebab shops, most of your take is in cash. It's not hard to siphon off 20 percent of your monthly take and keep it. The downside of this is that people are after you. One lot is the Inland Revenue, but there's also criminals. They know you've a load of wedge stashed away, they know you're unlikely to come running to us, you're not a hard case, you're just dodging a bit of tax. It's easy money. So what this particular crew did was they hard-stopped the takeaway owner in his car – 9am, broad daylight, in a residential street – dragged him out, bundled him into their car and away they went. The only problem was, a woman saw it happen, wrote down a few details as an *aide memoire* and called us. The result is that she is a witness, she's

Wasting More Police Time

under grave threat from some very nasty people, she's had to move home, move the kids from school, her life is changed beyond all recognition.

DC, 40, Southern force

People are strange, no doubt about it. Out and about one night, call to a guy bleeding in the street, we pitch up and there is claret everywhere, the guy is bleeding from the head from multiple stab wounds, but he's still conscious and breathing. *What happened, fella?* 'I was robbed coming out of the bookies round the corner.'

Ambulance are on scene and dealing, so me and a mate leave him with colleagues and go looking for the blood trail. Nothing to be found, but we'll get the CCTV so not really bothered, we head back to set up crime scenes and whatnot. As our vic is being loaded into the ambulance, his wife, who has been beside her husband's side the whole time, suddenly says, 'All right, I confess, he was ignoring me so I stabbed him in the head whilst he was asleep.'

Me and three other officers, one of which was an area car driver, just stood, gobsmacked. Then she asked if she could go to the hospital with her husband. Oh, how we laughed. We got a QSR [*quality service report – a kind of commendation*] out of that one.

PC, 35, Southern force

The people we deal with, you don't know what they're like. No commentator or reporter or politician really knows. Only the police know, and only frontline police. Maybe, I suppose, the paramedics, the nurses and the screws [*prison officers*] have an idea. But no-one else. The media and the politicians, the bleeding hearts, they think these people are all hard done-by, struggling valiantly against the system, but the vast majority of them are taking the absolute piss. I could give thousands of examples.

They're short of cash for the kids' clothes, but there's money for fags, booze, drugs, big tellies, iPhones, PlayStations, the heating's on full-bore all year round... I arrested a woman on a Tuesday night who'd abandoned her two children, aged three and five, in her flat while she went out on the razz. The kids were crying, we had an anonymous call, we found them malnourished, filthy, covered in fleas

Wasting More Police Time

and lice, all scabby. The flat stank to high heaven and was full of dirty nappies and soiled clothes. The kids were taken into care on the spot and the woman was nicked when she came back to the flat at 7am the next morning, off her face on vodka and cocaine. She kicked off like a harpy when she found the kids had been taken away.

It was handed over to the Child Protection Unit, who are quite proactive in our force, and that was pretty much the end of it for me. But I heard later that obviously her solicitor tried to claim that she was a victim of the system, a struggling single mum, no cash. But if that's the case, how can she afford to get blinding pissed? How can she afford coke and fags and a taxi back? Her hair was styled and properly coloured – that costs at least £60, I can't afford it myself! Coming in at 7am on a Wednesday, you're not looking for work, are you?

The annoying thing is, we spend all our lives running round after people like this. I'm forever attending council houses where they've got a bigger telly than me, a bigger car than me, several kids – when me and my husband have decided we can't afford them yet – where you need breathing apparatus to survive the fag smoke and you're tripping over the empties and pizza boxes, and where they all think they know better than I do how to do my job, despite the fact they've never had a job themselves. We're told these people are 'vulnerable'. My arse. We're round their places all the time. Last week we're going round to sort out their domestic troubles or investigate their stolen Giro-stroke-attempt fraud, this week we're arresting them for whatever it is. Meanwhile, we can't offer a decent service to ordinary people, and they are rightly mithered by that.

PC, 30, Northern force

There's good and bad things in the Job. Personally, I find some of the worst areas to work are the middle class places, where the people look down on you as though you're a servant or something. We got a call from a posh part of our city about a man acting suspiciously one evening. OK, fair enough, we're always going to sus calls. I stick the blob [*blue light*] on and several of us race over there. I get there first. There's this young black guy sitting on a wall minding his own business, smoking a fag. It's immediately clear he's doing nothing – as the car pulled up, he didn't even realise we'd come for him.

Wasting More Police Time

I said, 'I'm sorry, mate, but do you mind me asking what you're doing? Only we've had a call about someone acting suspiciously?'

He said, 'Yeah, I'm waiting for my mum.'

And basically, what it was, he hadn't got a job and his mum worked as a cleaner or something in this building nearby, so every night he would walk over to walk his mum back home. I immediately cancelled the job and apologised to him for bothering him. The only reason they had called us was because he was black. It's terrible, really. He's coming over every night to walk his mum back home to make sure she's safe... *I've* never done that for *my* mum. Who's the better person here, me or him?

Sergeant, 43, Midlands force

I was working a night shift, teamed up with a rather naïve Geordie officer. We were asked to attend at a report of an assault which had taken place inside one of our local brothels, such-and-such a 'Health Studio'.

When we arrived we were led inside by the very friendly if somewhat haggard mistress to find a sheepish-looking young man in his 20s whose amorous intentions had apparently been squashed – along with his nose, which was splattered, along with a fair amount of claret, across his face.

I asked him what had happened and he told me he had been beaten up outside and had run inside the 'health studio' to escape, not actually knowing what the place was. I found this version of events a bit lacking, as the entrance to the studio is down a dark alley around the back, and is not well-advertised. I spent some time trying to convince him I was more interested in him being assaulted than what he was doing in a brothel.

Meanwhile, my colleague had struck up a rapport with the mistress, and while I was trying to give the victim a dose of sympathy I could see my colleague looking around and questioning her.

'So, do you have a gym in here, then?'

'Er... No, we're not that sort of health studio.'

'Swimming pool?'

'No, we haven't got a pool... We do massages, and stuff.'

'You're open late, for a physio...'

Wasting More Police Time

My colleague's eyes then drifted to a bumper box of 100 Durex, and, after turning a fetching shade of crimson, he said, 'Oh.'

At which point, the mistress, me and indeed the victim threw back our heads and laughed like musketeers, while he wandered outside muttering.

PC, 24, Northern force

I arrested and interviewed a chap who was forging pound coins. The guy worked as a toolmaker, so he had the skills and equipment to make very good copies – they wouldn't pass inspection, but his plan was to use them in vending machines. He'd bought some metal sheet of the precise thickness of a £1 coin – I forget the metal exactly, but it needed to be almost the exact weight also, and wasn't cheap. He'd only pressed a few in his shed before the offence had come to light.

So, I sat in the interview listening to my mate interview him, with his solicitor there, and he's admitting to all this. And he tells us how much the metal cost, and it starts nagging at me, so I do a few quick sums on a bit of paper and then I pass it to my mate. Who starts giggling.

'What's funny?' says the crim.

I said, 'It's just that the cost of the metal you bought is greater than the amount of pound coins you could have made with it. It was costing you money to make them.'

The solicitor twigged and began laughing, most unprofessionally, while his client sat there, saying, 'What? What?', over and over.

DC, 40, Southern force

There was a report of a woman threatening to kill herself at a hostel in the town centre. I was only just out of probation. I went with a colleague who I didn't know very well and, from what I did know, didn't particularly like. Been in years, a real 'the Job's fucked' type. Not very friendly, always moaning, always running down recent joiners, always away from work as close to bang on time as possible. And extremely cynical. All the way there he was, 'This is a load of bollocks. This is a waste of time. What about doing some real police work? Blah blah.'

Wasting More Police Time

Anyway, we gets there and the manager of the hostel is outside and she says, '[Name] is in her room, the door's locked, it's on the top floor and she's threatening to jump.'

The room looks onto an inner courtyard, so I go up the stairs, my colleague goes through to the courtyard, shaking his head and chuntering to himself. Get to the top floor, the manager shows me her room.

I say, 'Can you unlock the door please?'

Manager says, 'Oh no, we can't do that, it's her room, it would be an invasion of her privacy.'

We get this nonsense all the time. I say, 'But *you* called us... How am I supposed to stop her jumping if I can't even *see* her?'

Basically, it turns out that's *my* problem. I start shouting through the door, '[Name], come on, let me in, we can talk about this... This is silly, you don't want to hurt yourself.'

She's shouting at me to go away. I can hear my colleague shouting stuff at her, too, and she's basically telling him to fuck off as well. This goes on for a few minutes. I say to the manager, how serious does she think this girl is? She doesn't know. She's not long out of prison, but she seems very depressed, is all she can say. The girl has markers [*warning notes on the police computer*] for drugs, depression, alcohol, violence and a previous semi-serious suicide attempt with pills where she ended up in hospital. We get *so* many people threatening to kill themselves that even if you've not been in long you do become blasé if you're not careful, but maybe she's serious? I dunno. I carry on talking to the girl, but now she's not replying. I start thinking about trying again to convince the manager to unlock the door, then whether I can put the door in, when there's this shout from down below from my colleague. Then about 15 seconds later, he comes charging up the stairs, runs straight past me and the manager, shoulders the door straight in, falls through into the girl's room and is up again in about a second-and-a-half, and dives for her. He grabs her round the neck, and sort of by the scruff of her top, just as she slides from the windowsill where she was sitting.

She was dangling fully out of the window, gurgling and spitting as he was holding her by the chin and under one armpit, and he was himself leaning half way out of the window. Looking back, he could

Wasting More Police Time

easily have over-balanced and gone with her. I got across the room as quick as I could, grabbed him round the waist with my right arm and got my left hand wrapped round her left arm, and, gradually, we managed to stabilise both her and my colleague and pull her back in. We all then collapsed onto the floor. The girl started crying, and my colleague just sort of cuddled her and stroked her head for a while. Going, ‘There, there, love, you’re OK now.’ Turned out he wasn’t such a cynic after all.

She was detained under the Mental Health Act. I’d love to say there’s some sort of happy ending, where we saved her life and she went on to make something of herself, but last I heard she was in prison for handling stolen goods, various assaults and kiting [*cheque fraud*].

PC, 28, Southern force

Police officers are regularly called upon to deal with death.

Very early in my service, I was sent to a house where the occupant hadn’t been seen for a few days. I spoke to the neighbour who’d called us. She said he was a single bloke in his mid-20s, kept himself to himself but always asked her to keep his key for him if he went away so she could feed his cat. She thought he might have gone away and she was more worried about the cat. I mooched around for a bit but couldn’t see anything through the nets and there wasn’t a letterbox you could look through, so I was a bit stumped.

I thought about kicking the door in, then thought I’d try the handle first – not sure why I hadn’t done that already, actually – and it was unlocked. As soon as I entered I knew. His cat shot out of there at a rate of knots. It was the height of summer, the smell was terrible and the place was full of flies. The guy was sitting on his sofa with a needle in his arm and the telly on, muted. I remember there was a big Clash *London Calling* poster on the wall. He’s got home from scoring, turned the TV on, sat down, stuck the needle in and just died. The thing I remember most was that the sofa was crawling with maggots and heavily stained, from where he had voided himself and then sort of melted as he decomposed. The oddest thing about this for me at the time, I now understand why, is that the control room skipper [*sergeant*]

Wasting More Police Time

wouldn't take my word for it that he was dead. I had to wait for a doctor to come and certify life extinct. I was like, 'I'm pretty fucking sure life's extinct, sarge... He's got maggots in his eyeballs.'

I wasn't bothered about it, other than it was a sad way for anyone to go, especially at that age, though these are the risks you take if you're on the brown, of course. That and the fact that I couldn't get the smell out of my clothes for ages.

Sergeant, 43, Welsh force

I've been to a lot of dead bodies. They never really bothered me – young, old they're still dead. In my area, a lot of them are ODs, suicides or just old people. Went to one, though. Her workmates called us on a Monday morning at 0930. She hadn't shown up for work. This lady, it seems, was as regular as clockwork and well-liked in her office, so her mates decided to pop round. They were outside her front door.

I went in, and there she was on the floor of her bathroom, bottom stuck up in the air, face first on the floor, having come off the toilet – note to self: don't strain.

We did the usual, I went outside to inform her friends, then went back inside to finish off the bits I needed to do. What struck me, and still does, is from what I could tell she was a nice, ordinary, well-liked woman who just went home one night, made her microwave dinner and her cup of tea, popped on her favourite TV show, went to the toilet and died, at the age of 42. And because of the position she was in, my mates made the usual joke about bike racks, and I wanted to deck them. I went home and sunk into a bottle of whisky. You never know which one is going to get you, and it's illogical that that was the one, but it did and it still does. The sadness of that lonely death.

PC, 35, Southern force

I went to a cot death. The little boy who had died had been born the day before my own son, and after that I spent more money than any sane man should on baby monitoring equipment, listening devices, mattress sensors. I would wake up in the middle of the night and go in to check my son was still breathing. Having seen what the parents had gone through, I was seized with an almost supernatural dread of it happening to us. Whenever I hear people bitching about us because

Wasting More Police Time

we give out too many tickets or murder people at riots, I always think, 'You only see about two percent of what we do, you have absolutely no fucking idea. Or if you *do* have an idea then you're a moron. I wonder how you'd cope with a cold house and a dead one-year-old?'

PC, 36, Midlands force

I thought I was lucky, in that I'd never been badly affected by any of the things I have seen in my 20-plus years of service. I thought I had this sort of ability to zone it out. Suicides, road traffic collisions, accidents in the workplace, sudden deaths, like most police officers I've had my share of all of them.

Some years ago, I went to a house fire where a toddler was burned alive, and we physically had to hold the father back from going into the burning house to save his child. Same thing – no real effect on me. I don't mean I didn't care, just that I was able to think, *This is a job of work and I'm really just at the office*. I felt very sorry for the father, as I've always felt for the relatives of people who have died before their time, but it didn't play on my mind.

Or so I thought. A long time after that house fire, I found myself driving down the street where it had happened on the way to some bullshit call, and for some reason I looked at the house. I must have driven down there many times before in the intervening years but, for some reason, this time it caught my eye. It had obviously been repaired and renovated and sold on, and there was a little girl of about six or seven playing on a swing in the front garden. And, I don't know why, I just crumpled. I actually had to pull the car over to the side of the road and I got my notebook out and a pen and I buried my head down, like I was writing, but really it was so no-one could see me having a good little weep to myself.

I sat there for probably five minutes, just down the road from the house, and then I wiped my eyes and blew my nose and sorted myself out and then I was off. Never happened before or since, but I have lost that hard shell I thought I had. Intellectually, I know that whatever happens to a person, life moves on for the rest of us. Emotionally, however, I find it much harder now. I haven't told anyone about it before this, actually.

Sergeant, 44, Eastern force

Wasting More Police Time

Fires to me are the worst. We like to have a laugh at Trumpton [*the fire brigade*], the world's best-paid landscape gardeners, but I couldn't do their job. There's something about the smell of a burned body, be it from a car or a house or whatever. I know it's a cliché, but the first time I smelled it was in the summer, and it was a hot summer with lots of people having barbecues. Spare ribs... The smell of accelerant and burning flesh... I spent most of July and August retching.

PC, 30, Southern force

If anyone dies unexpectedly, we need to attend to establish whether it's a suspicious death or not. Quite often, we have also been the ones to break the news to the parents, or children, or husband or wife that they are never going to see their loved one again. For me it is the worst part of the Job by a long way, and I would be lying if I said I didn't dread having to do a death knock after all these years.

It makes me sick when I hear people running down the police service as just a bunch of thugs, as fitting people up, as being racist and this that and the other. They have no idea what we do. The bloke in riot gear who you called a 'scumbag' because he was supposedly 'kettling' you to stop you rampaging round the streets, yesterday he was telling a mum that her 10-year-old son had just been squashed under a bus. The Stephen Lawrence report comes out and says we're all racists... A couple of weeks ago I spent half an hour hugging a black lady who was sobbing in my arms because I'd just had to tell her that her son had been killed in an accident at work. *She* didn't think I was a racist.

PC, 42, Southern force

I've been to a couple of blokes who've shot themselves. One guy whose haulage business was in trouble, he planned it to the nth degree. Sent his wife and kids away to the seaside for the weekend, and did it in his garage with the doors open. He'd worked it out so that he was sitting on a chair in the middle of the garage, he'd got the shotgun under his chin and... The garage opened out onto the drive, which was quite long but gave out onto the pavement. I think he wanted to make sure someone other than his wife and kids found him. Which I suppose is good of him, in a way, but *someone* had to find him.

Wasting More Police Time

He must have stayed up all night drinking because he had a lot of alcohol in his bloodstream, and he did it at about 5am on the Saturday. You'd think in a quiet residential street, someone would hear a gunshot, but no-one did. One of the neighbours thought it was a crow scarer or a car backfiring. It was the postman who actually found him. As luck would have it, he was a former soldier who had served in the first Gulf War and had seen a few dead bodies, so he wasn't as fazed by it as the Avon lady might have been. The guy had used both barrels under his chin and the whole top and back of his head was missing, and his face was attached to the front of his neck like a rubber mask. One of the most bizarre things I've ever seen, and sometimes I still see it in my mind's eye now.

I watched the undertakers load him up and I wondered how and why a bloke in his 40s, basically my age, with two young kids, a lovely wife, a nice house and everything to live for... How does he do something like this? It turned out later that the business was on the brink. He was living above his means, he thought he'd lose his BMW and the house and that his wife wouldn't have stayed with him. She said, 'I'd have stayed with him if we lived on a park bench.'

The lesson I took from that, which I have always tried to pass on to people, when they're threatening to do this and that to themselves, is there's *always* a way out. You might have to trade down to a smaller house and car, but to do that to your kids... Unthinkable. The irony was that at the inquest his wife said that on the Monday a letter had arrived asking him to tender for some work, which he might well have won and which would have lifted him out of the hole he was in.

PC, 43, Northern force

I've seen lots of terrible things. In Northern Ireland, when I was in the Army, I saw a guy who had been machine-gunned in the face, so that there was nothing left of his head but a stump. In the police, I've seen a family minced in a car. But for some reason, none of it really bothered me. I can remember it, in the way that you would remember anything significant – I can't remember the last time I stopped a vehicle, because I do that all the time, but you do remember unpleasant things. I just don't dwell on them, and it doesn't affect me like it does some people.

Wasting More Police Time

The one and only time I've been affected on the job, I had been working a day shift and we were short-handed and they asked me to stay on. I ended up working 16 hours solid. Towards the end of the second shift, I was basically shattered. I didn't have my radio ears on, and a call came through, 'Go to such-and-such an address and...' And I sort of half-caught it, it was something like, someone has fallen down the stairs or something. So, OK, didn't think much of it, off we go to the address.

When we got there, it was actually a toddler who had been killed by his father. He had been beaten by the man, and had died from a ruptured stomach. That is one of the most painful deaths possible – I know, again from my time in the Army, that a stomach wound is terrible, the worst place to get shot. And the thing that got me was, when I saw the little boy's body he was lying in exactly the same position as my own baby son had been when he had died a few years earlier. I came out of the hospital later, and I remember I just stood there and beat the crap out of a road sign. When I got home after work, I just burst into tears. And later on that evening, I went out for dinner with my wife, and I started crying in the restaurant. She was like, 'What's the matter?' It was just the way the poor little lad had been lying, it reminded me of my own son.

PC, 30, Southern force

I absolutely love my job, but I do hate dealing with death. I know it's just part of it, but especially if it involves kids, probably because I have children of my own, that destroys me.

The worst day of my policing career has also been one of the worst days of my life to date. I attended an incident outside a school at going-home time where a young lad had been knocked down by a boy racer, who had then made off from the scene. There was a crowd of people gathered around the lad, who was unconscious and bleeding heavily from the head. He was nine or so years old, I won't be specific. It looked very bad. As the first member of the emergency services on scene, people looked to me. What could I do? Response officers do get *some* first aid training, but it's at about St John Ambulance level, if that. We carry a few items in the car, but realistically I could only get the control room to hurry up the ambo as much as possible

Wasting More Police Time

and try to staunch the bleeding. I don't want to make this a political point, but with the mania for centralisation over the last decade or so, which has affected the police just as much, they had closed the local ambulance station. The idea is that they would have their vehicles plotted up and waiting up in various locations, but if they are all in use or whatever then they have to send from some distance away. To be fair, as it turned out, it could have been parked up across the road, and I'm not sure that it would have made much difference.

Anyway, I knelt there actually in this boy's blood, talking to him, trying to get some sort of response, and I sort of became aware of a little girl looking at me, and crying. It was his sister, who was six or so years old. Basically, she watched her big brother die in the road, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Eventually, the paramedics arrived, pronounced life extinct and that was that. I couldn't do the death message because I had the lad's blood all over me, which was a 'be grateful for small mercies' moment, though I felt very guilty feeling that. My guv'nor [*inspector*] sent me home to clean myself up and I stood at my kitchen sink, trying to scrub this brown, coagulated blood from under my fingernails, and I just started sobbing. Luckily, my own kids were still at school, and my wife was at work. I try to keep this sort of thing from them. It can wreck your home life. Most of the people on my shift have broken marriages.

I couldn't get the image of that little girl looking at me and crying out of my head for a long, long time. For quite a while after that, I dreaded calls to incidents near schools and I would avoid driving past that particular spot if I could.

Again, not to make this a political issue, but what really pisses me off is we spend very little time learning how to deal more effectively with serious injury, and next to no money on equipment, yet we spend days and days in courses learning not to be rude about travellers and gays. Which, I'm like, 'Fair enough, I understand that's important, but which should we spend three *days* on and which should we spend three *hours* on? Which is our priority?' I could not have saved that little boy, I don't even think HEMS [*Helicopter Emergency Medical Service*] could have if they'd been across the road when it happened, but that's not the point.

Wasting More Police Time

The other thing... Speeding drivers. *Slow down*. It's not hard. Lift your right foot half an inch, for fuck's sake.

PC, 36, Southern force

The worst death I have ever attended was that of a seven-month-old baby girl whose mum had found her blue in the cot in the morning. Obviously, we have to attend to make sure the woman hasn't killed the child, but in this case there was absolutely no suspicion of this, the doctor on scene was very happy that it was just a tragic cot death. A nice couple, nice house, nice people, no previous history, just a terrible tragedy.

The father was out at work, he was a dry-stone-waller, and he was out of mobile range up in the middle of nowhere, so we sent someone over to roughly where he was, looking for him, while myself and a WPC sat with the mum until he arrived. We asked the undertakers to wait outside, and this poor woman just collapsed, sobbing, into my arms. I mean, her whole body was heaving with it, she was utterly incoherent with grief. I didn't know a human being could be so – bereft, is the only word that comes close. She howled like a wounded animal. We sat with her for two hours until they found the father, who was just as inconsolable; as we were leaving, he managed to tell me that they'd been trying for a child for eight years.

I went from there to a report of a shoplifter stealing bacon from Morrison's. When I got there, the bloke had been detained by the store security guards but he wouldn't come quietly, would he, so I spent a few minutes wrestling him to the ground to get the cuffs on him, while he spat at me and tried to gouge my eyes out, and his mate shouted at me that I was pig scum from across the car park. I remember my top was still wet where the woman had cried on my shoulder.

That bloke had four children by four different women. He'd never worked, they'd never worked, and it crossed my mind that the other poor guy is going to be out in the wet and the cold all winter to earn the money to pay the tax to keep thieving scum like this in their beer and fags. And I'm ashamed to say that it also crossed my mind that I would like to take our shoplifter friend up on the moors, have him dig his own grave and then put him in it. That feeling eventually went

Wasting More Police Time

away, but the lingering sense of, how can life be *so* cruel and *so* unfair, has never left me.

Sergeant, 40, Northern force

There was a woman on top of a multi-storey car park opposite the old cinema threatening to throw herself off. Most people accept the road's closed, there must be a sensible reason, but there's always someone who insists on trying to get through – usually either a scrote with an exaggerated sense of his own importance, or, at the other end of the scale, a bloke in an expensive suit who just won't accept that you can possibly 'bar the public highway' to him. And sure enough, one of the latter type appeared. He started complaining that he was late for a business meeting and did all that, 'I want your name and number!' stuff. So I gave him those and said, 'Nothing's changed, except now you know my name and number... You still can't go down there.'

He wouldn't have it, he kept moaning and muttering. Eventually, he said, 'Can't you just tell her to jump and get it over with?'

I said, 'You've never seen someone jump from six storeys up, have you?'

He goes, 'No.'

I said, 'I have. I've seen their arms and legs come off when they hit things on the way down, I've seen their brains splattered in a 15 foot arc on the pavement, I've seen them lying there blinking after impact, with their brain still working but nothing else, and you can see they're slowly realising that they've actually done it this time, and, whether they really want to or not now, they are going to die in that ambulance before they get to hospital. So please don't say things like that.'

PC, 30, Midlands force

We had a guy hang himself by means of a thin nylon rope which he had tied round a branch high up on a tall tree. Must have taken him some time to climb up there. It wasn't a cry for help, put it that way. He put the noose around his neck and jumped off, and the length of the drop pulled his head off. Imagine seeing that on early turn on an empty stomach. That afternoon I'd been booked in to give a talk about policing to the sixth formers at the college and one of them put his hand up and said, 'What have you done today, then?'

Wasting More Police Time

I looked at them and thought, ‘Shall I tell them?’ But I thought, *One of them might have known the guy and, anyway, it would be just for shock value.* So I said, ‘I attended a sudden death, and then I patrolled.’

Probably not the most exciting talk they ever had.

Sergeant, 36, Welsh force

Death knocks are the worst part of the Job for me. That said, I had one where a bloke was killed in a car crash and I had to break the news to the widow. I hadn’t been to the scene and was just sent round there. She opened the door and said, ‘Yes, can I help?’

I said, ‘I wonder if I can just come in for a moment, I’ve got some bad news.’

She said, ‘No, tell me now.’

I told her, and she said, ‘Good. I hate the bastard.’

She started going on about the insurance payout she was in line for, and it was so odd I actually radioed the officers at the scene and asked if there was any sign of interference with the vehicle, but he’d been hit by a lorry which had crossed the white line. Couldn’t pin that on her!

PC, 36, Midlands force

I was less than a fortnight on the Job, it was about 4pm, we got a call to a little old lady, a widow who hadn’t been seen for a couple of days. She lived in the middle of a row of terraces round the back of the Spar shop, so once we couldn’t get any response from the front door we nipped round to the Spar car park, counted along to her house, then over the wall into her back garden. I looked in through the window. It was dusty, it’s a busy road beyond the Spar, lots of traffic, and she had nets up, but I wiped the dirt a bit and there was a gap in the nets. I could see her sitting in her chair, watching the telly. I knocked on the back door, no reply. Knocked again. No reply. Then I knocked on the window and shouted ‘Hello! Police!’

It was the first time I’d shouted ‘Police!’ to anyone, and it felt really weird. I thought, ‘She’s going to have a heart attack when she turns round and sees me here through the window.’

Of course, she didn’t turn round. I don’t know whether I was just not sparking, or I didn’t want to think about it, but I think I said, ‘She must be deaf, we’ll have to knock a bit louder.’

Wasting More Police Time

The guy I was with, who's sadly since passed away himself, he was an old sweat, he said, 'I don't think she's deaf. Change a consonant.'

I couldn't work out what a consonant was for a moment, so that threw me, but then I twigged and my stomach started lurching. He was trying the windows and looking at the back of the house, and he said to me, 'We're going to have to break the door down.'

That's another thing I remember. Most of us, again, have never broken into a house... How do you do it? You don't get taught at police school, at least, I didn't. I said, 'How?'

He said, 'Break the glass in the door with your truncheon.'

It was one of those half-glass doors, with an orange nylon curtain, about 30 years old, on the inside. I started tapping it gingerly. By this time, my colleague didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I remember it felt very odd. Took me three or four goes, I think psychologically I didn't really want to go into the house. But I broke the glass. Reached in to see if there was a key in the lock. No key. Looked at my colleague, he said, 'Climb in, then.'

I pushed all the glass out, got my leg up and over the door, got myself inside. I remember the crunch of the glass on the floor under my boots. And immediately it was obvious something was not right because of the smell. It's a smell I now recognise as that of a healthily decomposing body of about four days' vintage. Hard to describe. Leave a raw chicken out on the side in your kitchen in July, it's a bit like that.

I walked into the living room, virtually gagging, and the little old lady was sitting in her chair, just staring at *Countdown* or whatever was on. On the mantelpiece, pictures of her grandchildren in their school uniforms and one of the old lady on holiday with what was obviously her late husband in Spain or somewhere. The chap I was with, he was a pretty sensitive bloke. He just said, 'She's gone to be with the old man now, that's all.'

It was actually very affecting. Maybe because she looked a bit like my granny. I don't know. In parts of the world, you might unfortunately expect to see dead bodies occasionally; Western society is very good at sweeping all that away, so that only a few of us actually have to see it and deal with it.

PC, 34, Midlands force