Appendix A

Police stories[1]

Joining up

How I came to join the police is a strange story in its own right. I had no family connections, no previous contact with the police and no idea what I wanted to do for a living. When I was twenty one I lived with an older woman - Poppy. It was 1970/71 and, as a proto-hippy and temporary "toyboy" I had dropped out of university after my second year. Poppy was a stabilising influence. She talked about achievement, career and success as essential to a man's attractiveness (her previous lover had been a millionaire businessman) and she encouraged me to resume my studies to complete my degree. Unknown to me, she had sent for an information pack about the police graduate entry scheme. "I think this might suit you" she said, handing me the folder. I thought "Why not?" and completed the application form. The sheer perversity of it appealed to me. There I was, a long-haired, dope-smoking dropout applying to join the police. It was done half in jest.

A few months later (after our relationship had ended and I had begun to go out with my future wife Sara) I went off to a three day "country house" extended interview. I had absolutely nothing to lose and steamed through all the tests and interviews. Lo and behold, within three weeks I had a letter offering me a place in the Hertfordshire Constabulary under the "Special Course" accelerated promotion scheme, subject to passing my finals which, in due course, I did. A lower second BA in mediaeval history does not make one an obvious candidate for academic or commercial stardom and I accepted the offer to join the police. It is the only job application I have ever made!

After graduation I took a short holiday, cut off about six inches of hair and reported for duty (another grand phrase) at Hertfordshire Police Headquarters. For two weeks, before being sent off for basic recruit training, I was shown the ropes by various

[1] A reflection on my thirty-year police career written July-August 1998, updated December 2001

constables and sergeants. It soon became clear that I was an oddity. “Why do you want to join the police if you’ve got a degree?”. I would answer defensively that if the job was good enough for them, it was good enough for me - and we got on pretty well. I’m glad that I had that time rubbing shoulders with my future colleagues (all men as I remember - we had a separate specialist policewomen’s department for dealing with sexual offences, children and young persons) because I would not have survived basic training without that glimpse of a real world to return to as a touchstone.

Basic training was a fourteen week residential course living in barracks on an old RAF station on the Yorkshire moors. I felt as though I had landed on another planet. After four years away from home doing pretty much what I liked, when I liked, I entered a world in which I was shouted at from dawn to dusk, marched round a freezing parade ground at the double and obliged to spend hours bulling boots and pressing trousers. Classroom instruction was equally primitive - rote learning of legal definitions and “points to prove”, weekly tick-box tests and a complete lack of appreciation for the intellectual sensibilities of a young graduate (ha ha).

For the first few weeks it was only pride and a stubborn determination not to be beaten that kept me there. Gradually however, something shifted inside me. I began to enjoy the companionship of the dozen or so young men in my syndicate. We helped each other. One or two who had been cadets taught me the tricks required for a smart turnout on parade and I would explain some of the more obscure points of legal jargon. At some point we collectively decided that we would all survive the experience and I determined to excel.

What had been marching out of step round the parade ground became “drill” - and we loved it. The crisp, synchronised steps, the rhythmic swinging of arms and legs in unison, the precision of ..... “Squad ... halt .. two ... three... stamp” became a kind of dance to which the key was co-operation - a surrendering of the self to the whole. I am smiling with pleasure now as I recall the joy of getting it right on our pass out parade. I was top of the class, and awarded the Police Mutual Assurance Society book prize - a blue leather-bound Chambers Dictionary which I still use.

Basic training was not an experience I would willingly repeat and I am rather ashamed now at the ease with which I allowed myself to be assimilated into what was then an anti-

intellectual culture full of sexist and racist behaviour, but -and there is a but - I was accepted. I had joined the club, I was a new member of the police family. I returned to Hertfordshire eager to get down to some real policework. For the next two years I walked the beat and drove Panda cars in my hometown, St Albans.

My memories of that time are mixed. I can still taste the fear of being sent to pub fights and violent domestic incidents. I encountered death for the first time. I experienced the changing face of the town throughout the days and nights. I walked down lonely alleys at four in the morning, heart in mouth as a cat screeched in the darkness inches from my ear. I enjoyed the warm hospitality of nightworkers in hotel kitchens, hospital emergency rooms and what were then called mental homes and asylums. I met people in great distress who needed my help and I met people who wanted to harm me. Despite the self-conscious jocularity of colleagues I became a sort of mascot "This is Geoff, he's our graduate entrant you know" - said with a sort of awkward pride reminiscent of showing off a slightly eccentric offspring.

Although I always based my social life outside the police, I formed some friendships among my fellow constables that have lasted twenty five years to the present day. We had fun, we looked after each other and we did our best to catch the bad guys and look after the good guys (including, and especially, women and children). We were knights errant charging around with "blues and twos" from incident to incident. On the whole, they were good years. I came across some resentment and prejudice against fast-trackers, though generally I think that I gained the respect of my peers and the good opinion of the bosses. Our universe was small - it was hard to see further than the shift sergeant. What he (sic) said, went. Inspectors hove into view on rare occasions and were to be avoided if possible. Superintendents were semi-divine beings who lived on the top floor where they wrote letters and checked registers. The Chief Constable was God. Women were not much in evidence - they did not do patrol work ("too dangerous"). It was rumoured that there was a WPC on our division but I never believed it.

I was determined to make it on "their" terms, as a practical copper and did all I could to play down my graduate entry status. After two years I was rewarded by a posting to CID at Hemel Hempstead ..... another new world. Actually, if anything, I had stepped back in time to an older world. Like the Great Hall in Titus Groan, CID had been undisturbed for decades. It was a closed world with its own rules and a smug belief in its own

superiority. The prevailing mythology was of "cracking cases" and "meeting snouts", of "getting a cough". Best of all, we got to wear suits and drive plain cars. We had all watched too much "Sweeney" on television!

The reality was very different. Heavy drinking, hours and hours of hanging around (CID officers never went home), incessant paperwork, flimsy cases put together with scant regard for procedure and with a rudimentary knowledge of the law. Of course, I willingly allowed myself to get sucked in. By that time, I was married with our first child on the way .... but I was more married to CID. I bought it lock, stock and barrel. Sara hated it, and the person I was becoming - loutish, selfish and superior. Fortunately it was only a year. I think I got out in time to avoid permanent damage - perhaps somewhere, deep down, I knew it was not how I wanted to be.

Getting on

With three and a half year's service, I left Hemel Hempstead on temporary promotion to sergeant to go to the Police Staff College at Bramshill for the year long "Special Course" - the start of my accelerated promotion. It was ghastly - one of the worst periods of my life. We had been promised the world; the finest tutors, leadership development, stimulation, learning. Instead we got a year of hot-house competition, being treated like children, separation from our families, mind-numbing lectures from second rate academics, and an endless procession of senior police officers telling us "Be like me, my boy. That's how to succeed". At the end of the course I swore never to return to Bramshill under any circumstances (in the event it was to be eight years before I crossed its threshold again). My only good memory is of proposing the motion "This house believes in Santa Claus" at the end of year debate and discovering that I have the capacity to hold an audience and to make people laugh.

Our intake of about forty has since produced three or four chief constables, the chief executive of a privatised water authority, a good number of superintendents and above, some who never progressed beyond inspector, several mental breakdowns, one suicide and one criminal (imprisoned for perjury). There were two women on the course who were generally treated as a bit of a joke and one excellent woman chief inspector on the staff. As far as I know they resisted all our attempts to "get inside their knickers". As a group of young men - average age twenty six - our behaviour was pretty appalling. My

neighbour introduced himself to me by coming unannounced into my room and pissing in the sink. I was profoundly disillusioned. If we were "the best" - God help us.

There followed a year as a uniformed sergeant at Watford - a busy and quite violent town. Again I had to steel myself to deal with the drunks and punch-ups, armed robberies, accidents and murder. This time I was also responsible for leading others. I remembered some of the ways I had been treated, both positive and negative, and tried to model myself on the best of what I had seen. I did not have an original thought in my head. I succeeded by finding out what was expected of me and learning quickly how to "perform". I survived the year, more by luck than judgement, without any great mishap and was deemed suitable to continue on the accelerated promotion track to Inspector.

The circumstances of my promotion proved to be somewhat bizarre. I had arranged to work half-nights so as to get some sleep and freshen up before seeing the Chief Constable mid morning. In the event, I had to deal with a sudden death and a police vehicle accident so I worked all night and arrived tired and bedraggled at headquarters the next morning. After an interminable delay I was called in to the Chief's office - as I thought, to be promoted. In my weariness I clearly said something that upset him (to this day I have no idea what). He shouted at me and, literally, jumped up and down behind his desk. "Don't you think, Mr Mead, that you are just a little bit too casual?" ... "Who? Me sir? No sir" .. "Well, I do.. get out".

I was stunned. Here was the Chief Constable ranting at me like a playground bully. I knew that I had to stand up to him. I had been bullied for years at boarding school until I learned to stand up for myself. I refused to leave the room. Pandemonium. More shouting. I explained that, far from being casual, I was exhausted because I had been working all night and it was now 11.00 am. Suddenly, he subsided, smiled at me and within a few minutes clapped me on the back and promoted me to Inspector. I shook for the rest of the day, in shock. It occurred to me that we were lead by a madman - and nobody could blow the whistle.

The next two years as a uniformed inspector were generally uneventful. I spent most of them catching up on the things I should have learned as a sergeant. Then, for the following two and a half years I languished in the backwaters of the recruiting department. It was there that my mentor Trefor Morris came on the scene. He was the

new Deputy Chief Constable and had come down from Manchester. Until his family could join him, he lived in a flat on the headquarters site. That summer I often worked late giving careers talks and would sometimes spend an hour or two in the early evening practising golf shots on the playing field. Trefor Morris (who was an excellent golfer) strolled over one evening and introduced himself. We chatted briefly and I thought how lonely he must be living alone on campus so I invited him to join me in a round of golf.

I knew at the time that I was running the risk of being seen as a creep, but I was satisfied that my motive was altruistic. He accepted with obvious pleasure. It was a good start to our relationship - we had met "person to person" - and although we were never close, we continue to have a mutual regard and affection. I bumped into him at a police exhibition last week, now Sir Trefor Morris, retired Chief Inspector of Constabulary and enjoyed a brief reunion.

Testing time

A few months after our first meeting Trefor Morris phoned to ask me if I would like to be a Detective Inspector. I gulped and said "Yes, please" before he could change his mind. It was absolutely unheard of for anyone to become a Detective Inspector who had not spent many years in CID. In hindsight, I can see that he was using me to break that pattern - as well as provide me with an opportunity to prove myself and move on.

This was the hardest move I ever made professionally. I did not have the credibility or experience to be an old-fashioned DI. I could no longer simply fulfil other peoples expectations. I had to look inside myself to shape a useful contribution. It took some months before I began to find a way. I had two useful skills - I could think my way out of a paper bag and I could talk to people. So I relied on my Detective Sergeants to do their job and looked to add value by managing the complex enquiries and by patiently interrogating stubborn or recalcitrant prisoners.

It was, without doubt, a turning point. Once I had looked inside myself for purpose and direction, there was no going back. For the first time in my life I began to seriously question who I was and what I was about. Terrifyingly, I also discovered a great void and heard the laughing echoes of the long-silenced demons of my childhood. I had no idea what to do about such things and tried to ignore them.

Within twelve months I was promoted again, to Chief Inspector and put in temporary charge of a small sub-division. I emptied my in-tray each day, making decisions on the prosecution of various petty offences, and wondered what else I should be doing. It seemed to me that the more I got promoted, the more trivial the work. I had no conception of leadership other than occasionally to go out in front in public order situations. I tried to deal with people and problems humanely and with a sense of humour but that was about as far as it went.

Soon I was moved sideways to become Detective Chief Inspector in charge of a divisional CID unit. Again the work was mostly routine - huge piles of paper to read and initial. All I achieved was to ameliorate the drinking culture somewhat by personal example and setting clear expectations. I was supported by two good, old-school Detective Inspectors. I made it clear that I respected their experience and, in turn they were both loyal and supportive. I stayed in this post for a year, during which I established some credibility as a senior detective although there was some scepticism and resentment from those who saw me as taking their "rightful" place.
I am enjoying writing this narrative. I feel that I am (re)connecting with my own (his)story. In doing so, I can see how much I have been shaped by the very culture I now challenge and seek to change. I guess I have a love-hate relationship with the police service. I sometimes wonder what on earth I am doing as a policeman at all. Yet, it has become my second family - with all the ambivalence that brings - and I care deeply about its people and its place in society.

In recent years I have been a self-appointed change agent, quick to criticise and find fault, but I see now that I need to engage my love for the service and my compassion for its members (especially those I want to change) if I am to be truly effective. I have to acknowledge my portion of responsibility for how things are and not blame "them". I am hardly an unwilling victim of the system - "them" includes me! I have to reframe my conception that the service has simply robbed me of something. It has also been the vessel within which I have struggled and grown for nearly all my adult life. In it I have found the will and created the space for some kind of personal transformation. It has been both demanding and nurturing - in story terms its energy is more like that of the great mother than the tyrannical father. This reflection has rather shaken my simplistic

thesis that the ills of the service can be laid solely at the door of oppressive masculinity - but it has also provided an additional and fascinating layer of complexity to be explored.

I notice also how little I have mentioned marriage and family life in the preceding pages. In fact, Sara and I married a year after I joined the police and had four children during the period I have described - however, my life was dominated by work. I saw little of my children and, although I like to think I was close and loving when I was around, they would probably describe me as an absent father for most of their childhood. Sara and I were both emotionally illiterate and our relationship was heading towards the rocks.

Opening up

At the end of 1984 I was called up to headquarters to see the Assistant Chief Constable, David Bayliss. He told me that it was in my best interest to accept a staff job as Chief Inspector, Research and Planning. I disagreed vehemently. I was still convinced that I had to acquire impeccable operational credentials - that's what real (police)men did, after all. But he was equally adamant that I would be transferred. It still goes against the grain to acknowledge that he knew better than me - but he did.

For the first few weeks I kept looking at my empty in-tray, thinking that I did not have a proper job. Then, one day the penny dropped. It was up to me to create my own work. I could go anywhere in the organisation, I had access to everyone, I could get involved and initiate all manner of projects - and I did! I felt as though I had suddenly grown up. My job was no longer to fulfil other people's expectations. It was to decide how best I could contribute to the good of the organisation. What a sense of liberation and excitement. I worked prodigiously hard - 12,14,16 hour days - getting involved in anything that moved; Home Office Circular 114/83 (Effectiveness, Efficiency and Economy), Police and Criminal Evidence Act, computerised Burglary Pattern Analysis, evaluating policing systems, secretary to four or five working parties. I was a one man "think tank" and I became the confidante of the chief officers who fed off my efforts.

My intellectual curiosity was reawakened. I became more reflective in my practice and hungry to learn. In particular, I was frustrated that my attempts to bring about change by memorandum seemed to have no effect on the ground. This was puzzling and I began to explore notions of change management, process consultancy and organisation

development for the first time. I was asked to mentor a Special Course student (Peter Fahy who, to my delight, has just become Assistant Chief Constable in Surrey) and I attended a week long mentoring skills programme at Bramshill. The prospect of actually helping someone through the process I had endured alone was the only thing powerful enough to make me go back to Bramshill.

It was a revelation. The course tutors declined to give us the answers - we had to work things out for ourselves, from our own resources. Some of the delegates got tremendously angry about this, demanding to be told what to do. Towards the end of the week, the facilitator asked for a couple of delegates to lead the next morning's "learning review" and I volunteered with one other. The two of us talked until two or three in the morning, trying to work out how to handle this task and eventually we decided that we would, metaphorically, go naked into the room
with no other plan than to ask the group "What did you learn yesterday?" Uproar! We had been expected to turn the tables on the facilitators - instead we had "sold out". Tempers flared, voices raised. "Emote away" sneered one delegate. "Damn you" I yelled back.

We moved into chaos and out the other side. One particular delegate who had been amongst the most intractable sat with tears in his eyes, telling us that he felt he had nothing to offer and that, actually, he was scared that he would not be able to discharge the responsibility of helping someone else learn and develop. His contribution was crucial. For the first time in my life, I sat in a room full of (police)men speaking from the heart. It was very moving, though I did not have any idea how it had come about. "At least", I thought, "there is a better way".

I wanted more of this and got myself invited onto a five day residential consultancy skills course run by the County Council. Within a few hours we were laughing and crying and sharing our deepest secrets. I got hooked on personal development and I fell in love ..... with one of the trainers. She personified this wonderful new world in which feelings were welcomed and which offered completely new ways of thinking and behaving in organisations. Our illicit relationship lasted two years and we were as much in love the day we parted as when we met - but that is another story.

Coming into my own

Fired with enthusiasm, I was selected for a three month course at the FBI Academy in Virginia, USA. I had a lot of time there to reflect, study, research and travel. I wrote a paper on organisational development in law enforcement agencies and began to think about how I wanted to be different as a leader. Instead of telling people what to do I would facilitate them, instead of having all the answers I would admit my ignorance, instead of feeding off people I would nurture and develop them. Big ideas - and on my return I had the chance to put them to the test because Trefor Morris promoted me to Superintendent and put me in charge of Watford - the biggest and busiest sub-division in the force.

When I arrived morale was at rock bottom. Within the first few weeks I had, to my astonishment, a succession of desperate men and women coming to my office, sometimes in tears, telling me that things could not go on as they had been. I decided that I wanted the place to feel different. I wanted people to feel trusted and valued. I expected managers to take responsibility and to care for their people.

I stayed two and a half years, resisting the offer of a career move after eighteen months. In the early days I was regarded as a lunatic. "What shall we do?" I was asked. "What do you want to do?" I would reply. I once overhead myself described as "That pratt who can't make a decision". However, I persisted. A station sergeant came into my office one day and said "I've got a prisoner in and I'm not sure what to charge him with. What shall I do?". My response was to ask "What options do you have, what are the pros and cons of each?" He told me and I said "OK - you seem to have a pretty good grasp of the possibilities - what is your decision?" He said "I don't know the answer" to which I replied "It is your job to decide, even when you don't know the answer. It is my job to help you consider the possibilities, then to back you - right or wrong. You do your job and I'll do mine".

I will try not to turn this into a "victory narrative" but it was the most intoxicatingly exciting time. I made many mistakes. In the early days I tried to do everything myself which nearly killed me. Whilst on sick leave I realised that I had to work with and through my line managers. After that we began to make real progress. In the mid 1980's, ten years before their time, we espoused Quality of Service, turning the control pyramid

Δ into a support pyramid ∇, and creating openness at all levels within the organisation and with the community. There were many doubters and attempts to sabotage our efforts but we did make an impression.

My team of Inspectors took on responsibility for geographical areas, not just for eight hour shifts. They dealt direct with their local communities and were expected to solve problems not simply "satisfice" the system. Morale improved. Our strategic plan - the first of its kind - secured additional resources on the basis of carefully calculated workloads. Our performance figures improved. Gradually, others noticed the changes and colleagues from other divisions discreetly visited to ask me what we were doing. Our reputation changed from "Fort Apache" to the most innovative and progressive sub-division in the force and I was invited to speak to command courses at Bramshill about our approach. My own learning curve during this period was well-nigh vertical.

I was also experimenting with allowing more of myself to appear at work. Several examples come to mind. I answered the phone with my name ("Geoff Mead, Good afternoon") rather than the customary bark ("Superintendent here"). This may not sound revolutionary but it was intended to break the old pattern and it really freaked some people out. In the spring and summer months I put fresh flowers on my desk and I both coined and espoused the aphorism "Ideas and feelings don't wear epaulettes". I was on a roll, committed to personal and professional transformation and I was prepared to put my career on the line to achieve them.

Looking back I see that period as the beginning of my awakening and of the continuing search for "the path with heart" (Castenada). I feel blessed to have experienced it and remember it with pride and joy. I believed that I had found both the lever and the fulcrum with which to move the world. Lack of grandiosity was not one of my faults. Today I am more modest in my aims and sadder for that, though living a healthier and more personally fulfilling life. At the very least, it was when I first consciously stepped outside conventional police culture, when I first explicitly rejected the mould into which I had fallen. It was a struggle for personal and organisational liberation and I know from comments I still receive from colleagues who shared that time that it was a period of tremendous learning and growth for many of them too.

In a sense of course, what I have just told is another "heroic myth". How deep this goes. What a delicious irony. Even in the manner of my rejection of the old hierarchical model of leadership I subtly reproduced it. I moved from one right way (authoritarian) to another right way (facilitative) - still an essentially male, positivist, linear and instrumental world view. It would be years before this dialectic resolved to find a more open, creative and inclusive third position (authoritative) in which I both claim my own power and allow others theirs. In the words of Marianne Williamson (used by Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech as President of South Africa):

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

Doing what comes naturally

Because of my work at Watford and my continuing commitment to the mentoring role, I came to the notice of Des Ladd, Director of the Special Course - the national high-potential development programme for outstanding young police officers. He had a vision for the creation of a genuine learning community and asked me if I would be interested in succeeding him (the only time in my life that I have ever been "head hunted") and I jumped at the chance. It took us a year to manage the politics, to persuade both the head of higher police training and my chief constable, Trefor Morris. The latter (I notice that I am avoiding calling him Trefor) made it clear that, whilst he would support me, it was not a good career move - "too far out of the mainstream". I was adamant that this was what I wanted and he was as good as his word, promoting me to substantive chief superintendent at the age of thirty nine (one of the youngest in the country) and offering to take me back into Hertfordshire in my new rank if things did not work out.

So, I spent the next three and a quarter years (October 1988 - January 1992) at Bramshill as Director of the Special Course - which I later renamed the Accelerated Promotion Scheme - determined to influence the development of the future leadership of the police service for the better. I had come to believe that real leadership requires a commitment to something greater than one's own career. In the words of Antoine de St Exupery, "He who bears in his (sic) heart a cathedral to be built is already victorious. He who seeks to become sexton of a finished cathedral is already defeated. Victory is the fruit of love".

That distinction still encapsulates for me the crucial difference, the passion and surrender of self to something greater that leadership demands. My "cathedral in the heart" was the creation of a programme that would help the future leaders of the service develop their self-awareness, clarify their values and give them the skills to challenge the prevailing organisational culture effectively and appropriately.

After some months knocking my head against the brick wall of a Bramshill hierarchy that had no conception of personal development, a new arrival on the staff Commander John Townsend took me under his wing. "Do you always want to be seen to be right.. Or do you actually want to get things done?", he challenged me. When I replied that I wanted to make a difference he offered to teach me the art of organisational politics - how to lobby and build consensus, how to present arguments in language that others can understand, how to achieve my ends by addressing their concerns. I am still grateful to John for these valuable lessons.

Over the next two years, the course intake doubled in size and we attracted a highly skilled and committed staff group. Together, we firmly established a new style of working and created a space within the Bramshill environment which enabled participants to engage in what John Heron calls "manifold learning". I wrote about some aspects of the programme in *Management Education and Development (Vol 21 Part 5, Winter 1990 pp 406-414)* but in hindsight I believe that the most important facet was the creation of a climate in which we genuinely valued, nurtured and supported each other and rose daily to the challenge of breaking new ground in police training and development.

This period was my professional Camelot - a golden time when I was the right person in the right place at the right time. It was what I was born to do and I knew that the rest of my police career would be an anti-climax. All this at a time when my personal life was in turmoil. I had told my wife Sara about my affair and we were trying to face up to the difficulties and deficiencies in our relationship. After a period in joint marriage guidance counselling, I entered a process of individual gestalt therapy which was to last five years.

Maybe this conjunction is not so strange. In both professional and personal spheres I was slowly undergoing a metanoia, a profound radical shift in orientation from outer to inner directed. This continuing journey, begun ten years ago, has become a life-long commitment to live out, so far as I can, the values of authenticity and integrity. Like Bill

Torbert, I walk purposefully but with a stumbling gait and there continue to be many misadventures and blind-alleys on the way.

Falling down

Despite six months notice and a well planned leave-taking, I wept when I left Bramshill. How could they take all this away from me? I was angry, too, that I had been forced to return to Hertfordshire six months before my family could join me and, in an attempt to prolong my stay at Bramshill, I had applied - against my better judgement - for the Senior Command Course (a requirement for promotion to chief officer ranks). All my instincts said "No, you do not want this. You do not want to trade your freedom for the illusion of power" but I allowed my head to rule my heart and I duly went off for the three day extended interview process ..... and failed spectacularly.

For nearly twenty years I had cleared every hurdle with ease, had acquired the reputation of someone who could be a chief constable if he wanted, and I found failure a bitter pill to swallow. Yet, now I can see that I could not expect to ignore my daimon with impunity. To protect me from myself it demanded that I underwent a time of ashes.

As I sat down for the first test I went completely blank. All I could think was "What on earth are you doing here?" I tried to push these doubts out of my mind and get on with it but I could not read the script. My eyes swam, my chest tightened and my breath shortened. I called for Apollo but Pan entered the room. After two hours of misery I handed in a blank paper. "I'm afraid I haven't written anything" I said to the invigilators, though what I meant was "I'm afraid. I haven't written anything".

Their immediate reaction was generous and humane. "The main thing now is you" said one of the selectors. He took me for a walk to calm down (I was crying) and asked me what I wanted to do. "You could leave now and start afresh next time , or you could go on". I knew that I would never come back and decided, for the sake of my own self-esteem, to stay and continue with the process. Knowing that I could not pass freed me from the possibility of getting what I did not want and I scored top marks in every other test. The feedback described me as .. "one of the most able and accomplished candidates" they had ever seen - which softened the blow a little.

I was forced to look anew at my place in the organisation. At a stroke, I had removed myself from the line of succession. I stopped feeling like one of "them" a long time before but now I could not even maintain the pretence. Suddenly I was "other", marginal and an object of pity and ridicule rather than curiosity and envy. At the time I tried to talk down the significance of what had occurred but actually the consequences were huge and - ultimately - beneficial. Unknowingly, I was at crossroads in my professional life. Had I not stumbled, I would probably have been a chief constable by now but I would have been walking on a famished road not a path with heart. I think of Robert Frost's wonderful poem *The Road Not Taken*

> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
> I took the one less travelled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

Fighting back

I returned to Hertfordshire as Head of Management and Policy Supports (MAPS), a new department encompassing all of corporate services; Communications and IT, Press and Public Relations, Complaints and Discipline, Research and Monitoring, Quality Assurance, Corporate Planning and Executive Support. Also as a member of the Force Policy Group (FPG), the senior management team of the force - roughly equivalent to a board of directors. Trefor Morris had gone on to join Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and had been replaced by Bill Skitt as Chief Constable.

The contrast with Bramshill could not have been sharper. If Bramshill had been my playground, joining FPG was like falling into a pit of velociraptors (a particularly savage breed of carnivorous dinosaur). Having become used to honest and open relationships with my colleagues at Bramshill, I got savaged in FPG when I expressed doubts or uncertainty ("an obvious sign of weakness"), or challenged the effectiveness of our group process ("don't come back here with your fancy ideas"). I could not believe that we were expected to put our hands up to speak in meetings and I told Bill Skitt that the last time I had to do that was in primary school and I didn't much like it then.

I had a running battle with one colleague who was responsible for appointing an Equal Opportunities Officer and implementing a new Equal Opportunities Policy - both of which he fundamentally opposed as a matter of principle. As Head of MAPS I had been tasked with arranging a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) for Equal Opportunities, work which I had combined with an embryonic plan to introduce Total Quality Management into the organisation. About a year into this process a letter arrived from HMIC querying our progress. It was routed to the chief constable via this colleague who endorsed it to the effect that nothing had happened because I had failed in my duty to complete the TNA.

This accusation was a clear attempt to torpedo me - I have rarely been so angry. I received a summons to see Bill Skitt, but before doing so I wrote a six page report detailing the work I had done to take these policies forward, concluding with a retaliatory depth charge “It may interest you to know how often the person who is responsible for implementing Equal Opportunities has spoken to me on this matter in the last year ..... NONE!”

Life at the top. Pretty picture isn’t it? What a way for grown men to act - boys wrangling outside the headmaster’s office. I hated it. Often I would sit in my office sunk in gloom. Once I sent for a computer printout of the age and length of service of all the senior officers in the force to see how long I would have to survive to outlast them - too long for comfort. Since I was having no apparent effect by challenging the situation head on I decided on two long term courses of action.

First - organisation development by subversion. Under the guise of Total Quality Management we trained 40-50 facilitators and offered their services at meetings and conferences. They were used because they got results. Meetings made decisions. Problems got solved not shelved. But their real impact was subliminal. We had deliberately trained a wide cross section of the organisation; police and civilian, men and women, senior and junior. The effect was to cut across the prevailing culture, both hierarchy and patriarchy. A young woman traffic warden facilitating a group of male police superintendents changes the whole dynamic and begins to open up new possibilities.

Second - I wanted out. I did not like how I had to behave in order to survive and I needed some respite. Drawing on a contact I had made with a management consultant I introduced myself to Greg Parston the Chief Executive of the Office for Public Management (OPM), an independent consultancy and centre for the development of public sector management and persuaded him that it would be an excellent idea for me to come and work for them. Armed with his enthusiastic support I went to see Bill Skitt to negotiate a secondment. "They want me for a year", I said. "Quite impossible. I need you here". "What about six months?" "No, Can't be done". "Well", I insisted. "If I reapplied for the Senior Command Course I would be gone for six months anyway". "Mmmmmm" After a few minutes he warmed to the idea, even agreeing that he would persuade the Police Authority to pay my salary for the duration of my secondment.

Stepping out

By this time (May 1994) I had established strong connections with the world outside policing. From 1987 to 1991 I did a part time MBA at Henley Management College with 30-40 other experienced managers, which gave me an insight into their worlds as well as some of the tools and techniques that are commonplace in business. Much more significantly, I had also been training for three years in gestalt and organisational consulting at **metanioa**, a West London institute for psychotherapy. Founded and run by two powerful women it was my first experience of an environment not dominated by men. Furthermore, all sexual orientations were welcomed and evident. As if that weren't enough there were black, asian and oriental faces among the trainees. It quite blew my mind. I was terrified at first and held on to my professional identity like a guilty secret. During one memorable workshop, one participant came out as a lesbian and I came out as a policeman. Swapping notes afterwards about our parallel outings, it was hard to tell which had been the most traumatic. Despite this rocky start, I came to love the people and the place where I spent hundreds of hours and thousands of pounds over a five year period.

The six months at OPM greatly increased my confidence. I worked as a jobbing consultant in a wide range of public sector organisations, charged out at £1,000 per day. I discovered that I could make the grade in the outside world. Better than that - I was good. Clients asked me back for repeat work and when the six months was up, I was offered a full time job if I wanted to stay there. I decided against staying for several

reasons; financial (I would have had to defer my police pension for ten years), personal (I loved consulting but not the daily grind of commuting to London) and professional (I wanted to put what I had learned back into the police service). Greg accepted my decision graciously and appointed me a Visiting Fellow to OPM for the following three years.

A bonus of my time at OPM was meeting Ian Gee whose interest in men's development stimulated my own. I had already experienced a number of men's groups and events and we co-founded an eighteen month co-operative inquiry on the theme of men's development in organisations which has indirectly lead me to my own inquiry into masculinities in the police service.

Absent friends

Overnight, I have realised that I have not mentioned three important friendships with fellow (police)men. I am quite shocked by my omission and I want to put it right straight away.

As I climbed the ranks from Inspector to Superintendent, my progress was matched by two contemporaries, John Harris and Mick Barrett. We were of an age and potential rivals yet we became friends. Mick and I worked together at Hertford where we were known (affectionately, I like to think) as "the fat Chief Inspectors" - our enthusiastic, if unathletic, lunchtime runs being the subject of some amusement. Mick was streetwise and shrewd. John was a fellow graduate of the Special Course, local boy made good, hard driving and ambitious. I was the dreamer and innovator. We sometimes referred to ourselves as "The Three Musketeers" and made a point of supporting each other (one for all) and celebrating each others' successes (all for one).

Tragically, John died of a heart attack, aged forty one, whilst I was away at Bramshill. Mick followed him five years later, struck down by liver cancer. I went to both funerals - hundreds of uniformed police officers, men and women, some weeping openly, expressing their grief and affection for these two good men. So much for the stiff upper lip! I still think of them both fondly and, sometimes, when out running or when I am tempted to overwork, they remind me to look after myself. How strange that they are both gone and I remain.

I met my best friend Chris when he came to work for me at Bramshill. He is lively, intelligent, attractive and funny, his quick, bright, solar energy contrasting with my slower, deeper, lunar nature. When I returned to Hertfordshire, I missed him dreadfully and we made a pact to spend time together - evenings, odd days, weekends and several week-long holidays sailing in the Greek Islands. It has been the closest male relationship I have ever had, a kind of falling in love - like Rumi and Shams - a connection of heart, mind and soul. Even so, at some point we descended from the mountain top and, today, our friendship is more distant and prosaic. I don't know quite how this happened and I feel saddened and puzzled by the loss of something precious.

These friendships have been great and unexpected gifts. That they have been possible in the police culture sustains my belief that it is possible for (police)men to be more fully themselves and to relate more authentically with each other.

Working on the edge

The combination of long term therapy, gestalt and consultancy training and exposure to the outside world has renewed and reinforced my determination to be a different kind of policeman. I can sometimes see myself as an organisational shaman, moving between these worlds at will and letting a little of each spill over into the other. These outside connections are also a vital source of support and nourishment for me in my work as an internal consultant, seeking to use the margin as a ground for radical action.

As my secondment at OPM was coming to an end I arranged a meeting with Peter Sharpe, the new Chief Constable of Hertfordshire and Greg Parston. We went for dinner at a fashionable London restaurant and I broached the subject of what I could do on my return to force. With Greg's encouragement Peter agreed that I would "work in circles around the boxes". That is, I would look at the organisation and management development needs of the force and recommend both what needed to be done and what role I could play in doing it.

In effect, I became a freelance internal consultant asking lots of awkward questions about the state of the organisation. After six weeks I presented my findings to Force Policy Group. The result was a small budget and a remit to design and implement management development programmes for middle and senior managers. The former (MDP) involved over one hundred police and civilian managers working together in learning sets supported by external facilitators and in-house mentors. The latter (SMDP) provided individual confidential executive coaching for more than forty senior police and civilian managers - up to, and including, the chief constable.
I shall resist the temptation to go into the details of each programme. The important thing to say is that I believe that both programmes challenged and shifted some of the cultural norms and assumptions of the organisations by such features as:

- police and civilian staff working together
- a fairly even balance of men and women

- taking responsibility for their own learning
- an atmosphere of mutual support and care
- integrating personal and professional development
- acknowledging that senior managers need help too

I think I made a useful contribution in other areas too, with work on Investors in People, stress management and strategy development. I was a bit isolated - generally working on my own - but enjoyed Peter Sharpe's confidence to the point where he occasionally used me as a confidante and sounding board.

I relished the position. The only fly in the ointment was my relationship with the Deputy Chief Constable, my immediate boss. Chalk and cheese: me soft-focused, holistic and "synthetic", him hard-edged, atomistic and intensely analytical. We struggled to find any common ground on which to communicate, coming at virtually every issue from opposite ends of the philosophical and intellectual spectrum. It was a constant battle of competing epistemologies.

Yet, on two occasions, he made a determined effort to bring me back into the fold. He realised that, following my time at OPM, my centre of gravity had shifted outside the police service. "You are like an egg", he said, "whose yolk lies outside the boundary of the organisation. It must be very uncomfortable". True. And painful. Whilst I continued to value my contact with police colleagues, I had emotionally detached myself from the police organisation of which I was a senior and long standing member.

"Love the people, hate the job" would be an exaggeration. I still believe that excellent policing is crucial to the quality of life we enjoy as democratic citizens. It is just that my passion has shifted from helping society to helping those who help society. "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" - Who shall guard the guardians?- runs an old Latin tag. But I want to ask "Quis amabat ipsos custodes?" - Who shall love/ care for the guardians? Surely this is every bit as important? Unless we have compassion for each other (and I mean healthy, agapean, tough love not complacent, collusive, mutual self-regard) it becomes impossible to fully exercise our duty of care towards the public. The shortcomings and lack of awareness made evident by the Stephen Lawrence inquiry stem from a police culture deficient in the kind of compassion I want to promote. Remedying

that deficiency will require new forms of leadership that transcend the tired old hegemonic masculine model that Amanda Sinclair describes so well in *Doing Leadership Differently*.

Leaving home

During the months at OPM and the succeeding years back in Hertfordshire, my interest in men and men's development deepened and, as I followed my own "path with heart", I embarked on the series of events that ultimately lead to the break-up of my marriage. How I was treated during that period has done much to restore my faith in the underlying benevolence of the police organisation - though I imagine it could be read differently, as (police)men closing ranks.

Early last year (1997) I told Peter Sharpe about my predicament and my overwhelming need to get away from home. He was immensely sympathetic and agreed that I could go to Bramsill for six months "on loan" (i.e. Hertfordshire would continue to pay my salary during that period). This made it possible for them to accept me as a temporary member of staff. I was allocated a beautiful two-bedroomed flat, which makes it easy for my children to come and stay, and given an undemanding job with flexible hours for six months. It was exactly what I needed to come through my personal ordeal and I am enormously grateful that colleagues were prepared to make such allowances. Without them I would undoubtedly have been off work for several months, unable to cope with the stress I was experiencing.

At the same time, I also encountered the shadow side of the organisation - precipitated it seems by my dramatic change of lifestyle. One day, several weeks after coming to Bramshill, I received a telephone call from Gary, an old friend and colleague back in Hertfordshire. After some hesitation and an embarrassed silence he finally told me that rumour and gossip about me were rife in the Constabulary. I responded with the telephonic equivalent of a shrug. After another long pause he continued ..... "I don't quite know how to tell you this Geoff ..... the story is that, after twenty five years, you have finally decided to come out of the closet as a homosexual".

I roared with laughter. "Pretty funny", I thought, given the way my life had actually been moving. Gary seemed shocked by my laughter. "What are you going to do about it?" he

asked. "I think I'll enjoy the joke" I said. We left it at that and our talk turned to other matters. Afterwards, I reflected on this extraordinary occurrence. Apart from a gloriously ironic joke, what else was going on? Perhaps, at a systemic level, the organisation was seeking to marginalise and exclude me - for that would surely be the effect of being labelled gay. What an exquisite double-bind! I could not deny the allegation without compromising my values. I did not consider the accusation to be a slur. If I denied it, people could say "You see. You are not really liberal and open- minded, as you claim. You are just like us" If I did not deny it, they could say "You see. We told you so. This explains why he is so different." I decided to do nothing and let it ride.

It is often the fate of those who are different to be (r)ejected by the dominant group. Rosabeth Moss Kanter brilliantly fictionalises this phenomenon as the story of "O" in Men and Women of the Corporation. My own ambivalence about membership of the police organisation seems to be reflected in the paradox of being both included (cared for during my lowest ebb) and excluded (being labelled "gay" and therefore "other"). Fascinating.

Getting it together

In the interim I successfully applied for my present job, a three year contract as Senior Field Officer at Bramshill, working directly to Peter Hermitage, the Director of National Police Training (NPT) and I joined the CARPP programme at Bath. I am happy. I have come through the worst storms of my separation and have regained my energy and focus. Having spent the first year of CARPP concentrating on my own process, I am now looking outside - keen to make a significant contribution to the service in the four years I have left before retirement (or, better, change of career).

I want to embody the values of authenticity, integrity and compassion more explicitly in my practice; as an adviser and confidante of Peter Hermitage, as a manager, as a researcher, father, lover and friend. Am I asking too much of myself? No. I recognise that I often fall short of my aspiration and it is that "living contradiction" that fuels my determination to go on. I am seeking to bring together my passion for menswork, my frustration and my affection for the police service, my excitement at the possibilities of action research, my belief in the need for new forms of leadership development, and my influence at the heart of NPT at this uniquely ripe moment in the history of British policing to effect positive change.

Currently, my efforts are channelled through my relationship with Peter Hermitage (and the opportunity that presents to influence the national debate on police leadership) and my research programme *Policemen: Being and becoming men in the police service,* the importance of which has, at long last, been recognised by the award of a Bramshill Fellowship, and which I am beginning to move out into the public domain by holding one-to-one interviews ("conversations with cops") with the intention of organising some group activities in Hertfordshire in the Autumn.

If we achieve only a fraction of what needs to be done, I shall be able to leave the service, after thirty years, with a sense of satisfaction and completion. I know, from regular jogging, that it is important at this stage of the "race" to run with style, grace and pace. It is too soon to sprint for the line and I have come much too far to give up now.

The last lap

It feels very important, as I approach the end of my career, to bring these *Police Stories* up to date, to acknowledge that I am more at peace with the institution in which I have flourished professionally and yet from which I have so often felt alienated. I concluded the previous section in August 1998 and it is now December 2001, three years later and a mere six months before I leave the police force after thirty years' service.

During those three years I have remained on the staff of National Police Training, steadily expanding my role to encompass all aspects of Business and Performance Development for the organisation. I continued to support Peter Hermitage during his tenure as Director, then developed a similarly close relationship with his immediate successor. In recent months I have been co-opted onto the Senior Management Team and assumed responsibility for a wide range of projects in preparation for NPT's change of status to a Non-Departmental Public Body in April 2002. I have been exposed to an equally wide range of issues: Branding and Image, Intellectual Property Rights, Marketing, Media Management, and Business Planning. The work is important and brings a certain satisfaction in its achievement and in the opportunity to recruit and manage some very good people, but I have had to create other opportunities to satisfy my passion for developing my educational practice in a police context.

As described in *Chapter Five: Reshaping my Professional Identity*, I relinquished my plans to research masculinities in the police service in favour of a broader, more inclusive focus on the practice of police leadership. To this end, in 1999 I established and facilitated a fifteen-month long action inquiry group, *Developing Ourselves as Leaders*, with a dozen managers in the Hertfordshire Constabulary. I wanted to give something back to the organisation that had nurtured me and supported my development in so many ways. What better way could there be than to share what I was learning at CARPP about the potential of collaborative inquiry to empower people to take charge of their own learning? I was delighted when the claims made by group members to have improved their leadership practice in particular ways were subsequently confirmed by an independent Home Office evaluation.

Building on this experience, I offered a short case study about our experience in the action inquiry group to the Cabinet Office as part of their research into public sector leadership. This clearly intrigued several members of the project's steering group who invited me, on behalf of NPT, to design an action inquiry programme for a new Public

Sector Leaders Scheme to be offered each year to a hundred potential top leaders in the Civil Service, the National Health Service, Local Government, the Police, and Voluntary Organisations.

The scheme commenced in July 2001 and I now oversee and support a team facilitating eight parallel action inquiry groups with the promise of further similar-sized intakes in 2002 and 2003. Several groups have already taken up the challenge of addressing significant crosscutting service delivery problems. Although it is far too early to judge the impact of these groups on the quality of public sector leadership, I am optimistic that they will prove to be of some value in the long run. Over the next few months, I hope to involve other members of the CARPP community in developing and delivering the programme. Above all, I am very excited to have been instrumental in creating the opportunity for us to contribute at this level to such important national issues.

In the past three years I have also put a considerable amount of time and energy into researching and writing this PhD thesis. I have been fortunate to enjoy the financial support of a Bramshill Fellowship and time away from work to attend workshops and, in the latter stages, for writing up. Undertaking the CARPP programme has provided a vehicle to develop my educational practice and to reflect upon my life of inquiry. It has helped to maintain my motivation during the last five years of my police service when I could so easily have lost my sense of purpose. Despite my career-long concerns about the potential constraints of a uniformed and disciplined environment, there can be few employers who would in fact have so generously supported such challenging research – or such a renegade researcher!

Now that I am getting ready to leave my "second family" I am beginning to realise how much I will miss it. Rather like the last few hundred feet of a parachute jump, I am experiencing the ground-rush of my fast-approaching departure. I have seen so many colleagues leave, looking over their shoulders at what might have been and I determined many years ago that I would leave without regret, walking towards new challenges and opportunities. I am planning to take a few weeks holiday, go house hunting and, from September to December 2002, to complete a full-time residential storytelling course at Emerson College, Sussex. Later I hope to develop my practice as an organisational consultant and educator through the Public Service Leaders Scheme and elsewhere. I also want to go on writing and to base some of my work in an academic setting. Despite

such clear plans, I am aware that the transition will not be easy and that I will need the support of my family, erstwhile colleagues and loving friends to move successfully into these new spaces.

There is always more to be said, but I want to close these reflections with two images. One of them is the first photograph taken of me in police uniform when I joined the Hertfordshire Constabulary as an earnest young graduate entrant. The other picture – of me as a rather tired looking Chief Superintendent – was taken a few days ago and will almost certainly be the last photograph of me in police uniform. They are separated in time by nearly thirty years of personal and professional experience – the alpha and omega of my police career. Save to say how different they both are from the joyful image of the storyteller in *Healing Journeys*, I will let them speak for themselves.