

Crossing the Line: Lessons from a Life on Duty – book review

Published on 19 May 2021 Written by Detective Inspector Krista Thompson, Thames Valley Police

John Sutherland's latest book is the natural successor to his Sunday Times bestseller, Blue

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Crossing the Line: Lessons from a Life on Duty is divided into 10 chapters, each of which provides an insight into a key area of modern policing and holds up a mirror to society itself.

The author's experiences will be familiar to those involved in policing and fascinating to those who are not. Themes throughout the book include frustration with society's response, the need for long-term partnership solutions and the devastating psychological impact of these issues on the public and the police.

At the core of the book is the idea that 'we need to ask what we actually want the police service to be' (p 253). As the author explores the 10 key issues, he challenges the reader to consider this in light of finite police resources. How do the police deal with knife crime when they are abstracted to police protests and demonstrations? What takes priority? How do we move forwards?

In response, the book engages with these issues in relation to society and, through Peelian principles, the police. After all, 'The police are the public and the public are the police' (p 124). The narrative on the responsibility of individuals, politicians, partner agencies and the police to tackle these issues via a long-term holistic plan is re-enforced in the accounts of the lives of Erwin James and Victoria Climbié. In each case, a number of agencies failed to provide a joined-up response that could have set both children's futures on different courses.

In Blue, the author explored the personal psychological toll of policing. In Crossing the Line, the emotional impact is ever present, from the author's first arrest of the 'man who had fallen out of the bottom of life' (p 7), to the stories of PC James Seymour, who was shot on duty, and Eleanor, a repeat victim of horrifying domestic abuse who was too frightened to sign an evidential statement.

Readers new to policing will be enlightened, while those with experience will recognise the cumulative toll of exposure to a life on duty.

Crossing the Line provides a clear account of modern policing, the key challenges, our responsibility to address these issues and the need for a long-term, independent partnership approach to policing and reform unencumbered by politics. The lessons are clear – we can only hope that they are heard and learned from.

Crossing the Line: Lessons from a Life on Duty by John Sutherland is now available to in the [**National Police Library**](#) and can be purchased from booksellers.

- This article was peer reviewed by Acting/Sergeant Steve Sweeney, Metropolitan Police Service

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