

Running the gauntlet

The son of a police officer, controversial TalkSPORT radio presenter, Jon Gaunt, tells Carol Jenkins what he thinks about senior officers, accelerated promotion, PCSOs and latte-drinking Liberals.

TalkSPORT radio presenter Jon Gaunt was given one piece of advice that has helped him carve out a career for himself as one of the country's most popular and outspoken media personalities.

'Every time you open your mouth – say the first thing that comes into your head and never lie.'

The advice, passed on by a fellow colleague has inspired Jon, first through his column in *The Sun* and then his radio show, to voice his controversial comments about a huge array of issues – one of them policing.

Jon has views on most areas of policing from the merits or otherwise of PCSOs and senior officers to what he describes as the politically-correct 'latte-drinking Liberal elite' who he says have turned the 'force into a service' and made officers too frightened to do their jobs for fear their actions will be criticised.

Speaking to *Police*, Jon says: "I am a great believer in law and order. The job of the police should be to take criminals off the streets. It's not their job to understand them. I want coppers to catch baddies not attend courses in how to be politically correct. To be honest, I think if you asked most members of the public they would say the same."

Jon doesn't just shoot from the hip and his comments, while thought-provoking aren't made just purely to be controversial. He knows at first hand the challenges and pressures that frontline officers face as his father was a police officer for his entire career.

"My dad was a career copper who made DCI Gene Hunt from *Life on Mars* look politically correct. He was a thief taker and not a course taker and had a very strong sense of duty and a passion to always do the right thing by the law."

Despite the fact that Jon and his father, who died recently, shared a close relationship in the latter stages of his life, this wasn't always the case. Jon is brutally honest about their tumultuous relationship that deteriorated when he was 12 and his mother died of a brain haemorrhage – leaving his father heartbroken and so desperately depressed

that he turned to drink. Jon's father's death has prompted him to attempt to make sense of his traumatic childhood by writing a frank account of his experiences in his biography *Undaunted* that has been published recently.

"I knew that I wanted to write an account of my life but I couldn't write it before my dad died as it would have upset him and we became best mates towards the end. I loved him to bits in adulthood but when I was a kid I'm not afraid to admit that he was a total bastard."

Writing his biography has been an 'incredible journey' for John and helped him forgive his father.

He explains: "I had what could be described as the perfect childhood up until the age of 12. My two brothers and I lived with my mum and dad in a police house in a close knit community in Coventry. We lived in a working class community with only four houses in the road at a time when the police lived in the communities they served and really felt part of the day-to-day life of that community. My mum and the other mothers were proper working class mothers and looked out for us all and made sure we were alright."

This idyllic childhood was shattered when his mother died unexpectedly and unable to cope; his dad met a woman, turned to drink and shunned the family.

Jon describes his dad as a 'hard drinking, hard smoking copper and admits he was "very bitter that he appeared to have chosen another woman over his kids."

"It's only when I got married and had kids that I understand why he did what he did. He was a bloke who had no support and he couldn't cope."

While his dad went off the rails, Jon and his brothers were forced to fend for themselves and he even spent a few weeks in a children's home.

Jon then spent the next year-and-a-half with an aunt before returning to live with his dad in another police house.

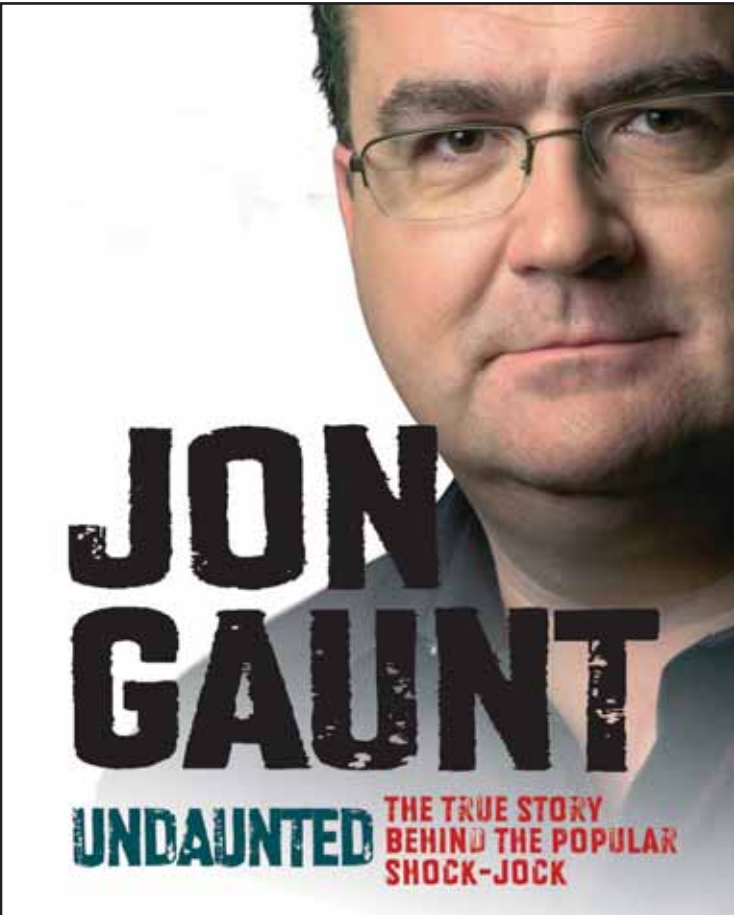
"I then became the mother figure to my younger brother as my dad had another breakdown and fell to pieces. He just couldn't look after us."

This all changed when he met another woman who made him happy and helped him turn his life around.

Despite the fact his early years were defined by appalling neglect, what did help define him and shape his views was the fact he was brought up in an atmosphere that he describes as 'steeped in police culture.'

"I can remember when police officers had no money and struggled to bring up their families. Despite the fact they did an important job they really did find it tough to make ends meet. Then in 1979 they started earning proper money again and that enabled my dad to buy his own flat for the first time in his life."

He believes this has now gone full circle and that police officers who he describes as "doing one of the most



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valuable jobs in society are on the breadline.”

“The fact my dad was a police officer had a massive influence on me and it gave me a real sense of duty and responsibility.

He recalls one incident that had a lasting impression on him that occurred when his dad was giving him a lift and they saw somebody who had been knocked off his bike.

“I can remember being in a real hurry to get somewhere and wanted my dad to carry on but he insisted that he was going to stop and that it was his duty as a police officer and an integral part of the community to stop and help.”

His father spent his career giving help and advice to others, including family members, to join the police. This changed during his later life. When asked by John’s brother-in-law what advice he would give him about joining the police, he said ‘don’t do it.’ This was the subject of much debate and feedback among other officers and readers when John

wrote about this in his column in *The Sun*.

“My dad said that although he knew the force had to change that it had changed for the worst. *Life on Mars* was his favourite show. When people say they are laughing at DCI Gene Hunt, the truth is the majority of people are laughing at him because they want to see it return to those days. The pendulum has swung too far the other way and now what we see is that police officers are lions who are led by donkeys.”

Despite his strong views on the decline of the force, he still believes that policing can offer a great career for young people.

“Even though I think it is still a good career, it must be hard to be a police officer and be scared to speak for fear of reprisals. And the sad thing is that very often members of the public only come into contact with the police when they get a speeding tickets. This causes resentment and a breakdown in policing by consent.”

His views on PCSOs are indeed controversial as he describes them as “an absolute disgrace.”

“They have got no powers, which isn’t any good to anyone because you need proper warranted officers to uphold the law and not glorified parking attendants. In fact, parking attendants have more power. It’s policing on the cheap and I and the majority of the public don’t like it.”

In another controversial outburst he describes ACPO officers as having been “beamed down by Zanussi.” He is also less than complimentary about the Home Office and the Labour government in general who he believes “despises the police in the same way that they despise the armed forces.”

He is particularly critical about moves to fast track senior officers through the service.

“My dad always said that the probation period doesn’t teach you to become a police officer and that it’s the next ten years that really teach you how to be a police officer. So how can people be inspectors for two years and then get promoted? You need people with experience. Despite the influence his father and policing has had on his life, Jon said he was “never tempted” to be a police officer.

“I don’t have the balls, the tact or the diplomacy. I couldn’t do it. But that doesn’t stop me taking an interest in policing and in supporting the officers on the frontline. I totally reject the suggestion that there is an anti-police feeling in society. It’s only among the Liberal elite sitting in London drinking their Lattes. The nearest thing they ever got to duty was going into an army surplus store and buying a jacket to wear. What would they know about having to deal with some of the situations policing officers up and down the country regularly have to deal with?”

*Reader offer - courtesy of Virgin Books we have copies to give away to the first 6 names picked on 12 January 2008. Send details to:
Jon Gaunt offer, Police magazine, Police Federation,
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