

The Dog Days of the Police

by Fergus Downie



I have always been a man of action, but almost 30 years ago I added memory loss to my list of virtues. I lived in Whitley Bay back then, and my parents owned a fine black Labrador unimaginatively named Ben who, like so many of his breed, was so stupid (or cunning) that he affected confusion whilst he broke wind. In between eating and farting his life was bliss and until senility later unleashed a passion for attacking poodles, he was an incredibly clubbable canine and I always stepped out with pride when taking him for his constitutional. Most of the time it was uneventful but one day, whilst taking him for a walk to a local quarry, an unlikely looking jogger sauntered towards me, sweating profusely and vaguely distressed. This was not Islington, and he did not look like a man who bought organic tofu or fair trade coffee. The mind took some time to process it all but seconds later the mystery was cleared up. An overweight police officer rounded the corner in hot (if lumbering) pursuit shrieking at me to trip him up. I hesitated initially and as if to emphasise the gravity of the situation the panting officer added 'for fucks sake' and 'armed robber' to his exhortations. I didn't yet have a humanities degree and formed a vague idea that a choice

was thrust upon me. I didn't disappoint. Lying in til midday as a teenage parasite at my parent's expense steeled me for the challenge and I promptly raced after the miscreant with stern resolve. I fled only from dishonour and soon the unequal contest was over. I would readily have disarmed him, but my heavy footsteps were enough in the event to demoralise the exhausted morlock, and after running him into a side street he tamely surrendered to the (by now teeming) horde of Northumbria constabulary's finest. He instinctively knew what was coming and starting simpering to his captors as they promptly laid on him the heavy hand of the law. All in all, I saw quite a few punches landed on him and they were all combined with those self-satisfied commentaries rough men are wont to utter when dispensing rough justice (one of them rhymes with 'runt')

Ben, witless and excited as always, made friends with the officers and in the ultimate coup de grace lifted his leg on the hapless felon. A careless act but a civilisational metaphor worth savouring. Soaked in a golden shower and with reddened eyes the yob who had held up our local off license was carted off whilst uniformed men huddled round Ben with childlike elation. It was a deeply moving if comical sight and I thought it was justice served, if a tad roughly. Of heroic endeavours little remained for me bar a little tact. When a tattooed sergeant came round the next morning to take a statement we knowingly skated over the uncomfortable sequel to the arrest. I must have been in shock as I couldn't remember the officers assaulting him and was in any case too excited at the prospect of the Threshers voucher (it never came) that had been promised by the shop manager. It never taxed my conscience then and I haven't lost much sleep since. North Tyneside was a rough place (full of vulpine strides and garish tracksuits) in the nineties and when fighting a counter insurgency, you have to occasionally 'light them up' .They were guarding us whilst I slept (not that well it should be said, we were burgled twice) and one should not be too

squeamish about the means if you will the end. It's what cops are supposed to do, at least some of the time, and looking back I feel an incredible sense of nostalgia for seeing honest men do their job as citizens in uniform. They did what all of us in a moment's honest reflection thought they should do. Marx was right, the police are the higher lumpen proletariat-they were never supposed to be 'representative' , as not everyone can bear the dirty hands that come with it. The object of their attention may not have deserved it but Dreyfus he wasn't. He had it coming. Most of us know this instinctively which is why in Britain, even reactionaries like me don't like them up close and personal. A certain obnoxiousness goes with the territory and this used to be to their credit. Palmerston said women of the night were necessary so that ladies wouldn't be plagued by undesirable suitors – we at least should expect some men to land a punch on degenerates even if we're to prim to do so ourselves. The police for their part are entitled to the odd memory lapse on our part if civilisation is in peril. At that time, I thought discretion was valour. Looking at their lazy sense of arrogant entitlement now I can guarantee my recall would have been total.

The self-important officiousness of the British police has come on leaps and bounds since the desecration of that miserly liquor store, and they have conducted themselves during this phoney war with an ill-mannered efficiency they could not put to use on real criminals. Whilst the metropolitan police can still act with elan when a machete wielding jihadi needs to be briskly martyred (I have friendly acquaintances in the Met who did their obligatory community engagement and 'problem solving' before rushing back to real police work and exempt them from the following remarks) much of its rank and file has been ominously diverted into 'partnership' roles, like the ones at my local authority who wear their backsides out mentoring young offenders and 'breaking down barriers ' with the 'community'. Their efforts are greeted with sullen

sniggers by the kids, but they at least are spared having their fragile linguistic skills further harmed by an audience with their superiors. To that mighty end a whole cadre of senior police officers has sprung up and they reserve their best efforts for the pointless liaison and 'community cohesion' meetings where Chief Inspectors wage unrelenting war against the English language. ('Impactive' is a favourite, if all else fails 'resilience' is a word which will meet any occasion). Of the police officers who are crippled by back problems as severe as those endured by benefits claimants in Liverpool and parked in front of local authority computers running 'checks' the less said the better. They're punctual at least – they come in when no one is about and leave when we arrive(we are never that early) They still have a bit of an aura as us civilians tend to subconsciously assume the lethargy conceals dormant energies but anyone like me, a past master at developing IT problems to escape the listless boredom of a working day can see the pointlessness of it all. [check his thinking](#)' by a police officer in Humberside who would doubtless have struggled to form words other than 'impactive' and 'prejudice'. A lot of it about and it is beyond my powers to forget it. As to those fine officers in Whitley Bay I hope their pensions are fat and their retirements happy.



Note— Upon returning home in 1993 during a campus reprieve I was met with eerie silence and discovered Ben had vanished. My ageing parents had tired of walking him and given him to a farmer. The noble and entirely useless beast (he patiently witnessed the burglaries) passed on his senile affections to another loving family and died peacefully a year later. Those of you with flatulent canines in your care will recognise the tell-tale look of guilt on his face. The felon pleaded guilty in court to armed robbery and the public spirited actions of a member of the public were praised in Newcastle Crown court. The commendation by the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police was used as a character reference in a job application for a caravan cleaning job and I am no longer able to sport this garland of quiet heroism.