

John Murphy

Okay, I'm Happy



artillerybrand.com

The day I changed my life wasn't the same day that my life changed. The sun wasn't even over the yardarm as I wandered in to my favourite Soho bar. It was a tiny, secret place at the bottom of a tiny iron stairs. The owner was becoming a friend, we became firmer friends since then.

I was the first customer of the day. I chose a stool and called my pint of Guinness. As I took my first sip I told him that I had just quit my job after nearly 18 years as a Detective in the London Metropolitan Police. I thought the news would warrant a bigger reaction than I got. He just sort of shrugged and murmured "Oh yeah". I wanted more from the first person I had broken the news to, so I persevered. I asked him if he was surprised. This time I got an answer that I loved. "What? That you left? No, I've always been surprised that you joined."

I had first stepped through the gates of the Police training school in 1978. Jobs for an 18 year-old lad who hadn't overburdened the education system were tough to find in the seventies. So far I had worked nights in an icecream factory and on building sites where anything to do with health and safety was considered to be science fiction. We got paid in cash on the lump, but the risk of losing a limb on a blunt two-handed saw or breaking my neck on a dodgy homemade ladder wasn't worth the money. So, the prospect of free accommodation, a thirty-year career, a pension and a very silly-shaped helmet had its appeal. Off I went to Paddington Green where I was interviewed by three senior Johnnies who kept referring to me as 'Paddy' and that was that.



At first it looked very promising. I was as fit as a butcher's dog (to quote the Cockneys), devoid of any meaningful life experience, complicit to following orders with unquestioning obedience and easily moved to violence at the slightest suggestion of official validation. With qualities like that I expected to make it to at least Chief Superintendent before I was thirty.

By the time I took my place on that barstool in Soho, things had changed. I was divorced, overweight, as poor as a church mouse and drinking enough to scare off Richard Harris.

It would be fair to say that I was primarily a street cop at heart. I'd kicked in a lot of doors, fought with a lot of people and terrified witnesses and suspects alike. I knew every racist piece of law enforcement jargon not in the book and could make a tasteless joke about anything from a murder to, well, a serial killer. At one point I was the go-to on my unit for attending post mortems because I had a strong stomach and a burnt out numbness beating in my chest.

The body of an infant, the depravity of a sex crime or the slaughter of an entire family are things that most people will never see, nor should they. But I have. Someone who did trouble the education system more than I did once said that it is the darkness inside of us that enables us to deal with the darkness inside of others.

I once worked in a part of London called Harlesden, a poor relation of Kilburn in the 70s and 80s. I was once the first Detective to arrive at the scene of the double murder of two children. The killer was their grandmother, who was mentally ill. It was not a tidy crime scene.



At the morgue I assisted the mortician by carrying one of the small body bags in from the van, draped over my shoulder in a fireman's lift. A few years later when I was working in south London I was at the scene where a three year-old girl called Stephanie had been killed by her mother's boyfriend. At the post mortem the coroner documented over 70 separate injuries on the body. At the time my oldest daughter was the same age.

I didn't hug my children any tighter on those evenings. I didn't do anything. It was work and the only thing I was concerned about was bagging and tagging the evidence properly. Nobody asked if I was okay. I thought I was. I just went to the pub after work with my mates and probably for an Indian meal at closing time. I can honestly say I felt nothing.

That mindset sustained me for a long time until one evening I went with a colleague to the scene of a cot death. It quickly became clear that there was no evidence of a crime and our role was to sign it off and free the body so that the distraught relatives could get on with the tragic aftermath. The other detective made an examination of the body and then looked across at me and, without a second thought, proclaimed far too loudly "Okay Murph, I'm happy". He meant of course that he was professionally satisfied with the scene but in that moment, in front of the grieving parents, he actually said "Okay Murph, I'm happy".

It was the beginning of the end. I never went to the pub that night and the next time I saw them I did hug my kids a little tighter. It finally began to dawn on me just how lost I had become.



It's so easy to see in a rear view mirror but I've learned that our humanity doesn't disappear overnight; it's a gradual erosion. I also learned that retrieving it can also require the passing of time. I suppose all I can say in closing is that if you can't see the wood for the trees, then you're not looking hard enough. I lasted another couple of years before making the most unlikely of career changes.

As I sat on the bar stool in Soho my friend asked what I was going to do next? I told him I was booked to do MC and stand-up the following week at a rugby club on the Scottish borders. I was opening for the strippers.

Since my sense of humour was released from that two-decade quarantine, I have amassed more than 1500 transmitted TV and radio credits as a scriptwriter. I should be quick to admit that I may not always have left the world of TV better than I found it, but it's been a good life and I've been very lucky.

Now I'm happy. And if you meet me, be warned, I'm a hugger.



.....
*A former London Metropolitan Police Detective, John took an unlikely career change following his investigation into the theft of some joke books from British comedy legend Bob Monkhouse. Honing his new craft in Britain's more colourful comedy venues, he has written over 1500 transmitted radio and TV shows, specializing in mainstream Light Entertainment. He is founder of the **Happy Bag Theatre Company** bringing his original plays to the **Olympia Theatre** and national tours.*
.....

© John Murphy 2020

Chops was conceived by Eoghan Nolan.

Designed and typeset by Gerry McCloskey

© Eoghan Nolan & Gerry McCloskey 2020

© Artillery Brand 2020

© Brand Artillery 2020

© Chops 2020

No part of this PDF may be reproduced without the written permission of both the author and Chops, the publisher.

If you know someone who would like a copy, please encourage them to download their own, free of charge, from artillerybrand.com

NB: There is no connection between Chops and Triumph motorcycles and use of a form of the Triumph logo is a homage only, our salute to a great brand. Respect.



artillerybrand.com