



# Top Cop Talk



Elliot Tyler

Keith Fraser (above), Chair of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, is somebody I am keen to meet as, despite his Wikipedia page revealing little, I'm familiar with his reputation and description by the country's media as a 'top cop'. From the outset of my conversation with him, I can see why he was successful in the Police

Service - he is warm and un-hostile, possessing a visible aura of equanimity.

After exchanging greetings, he and I get straight down to business. I'd like to begin by finding out some specifics of his career, I say, and he willingly obliges. He started his lengthy policing career in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, a deprived area with a high crime rate. 'It was what I always wanted to do,' he tells me, 'So I applied to the Metropolitan Police and

went from there.' He held a multitude of responsibilities in The Met, I learn, including neighbourhood policing and criminal investigation roles. 'I finished at New Scotland Yard, where I created the Cultural and Communities Resource Unit, which utilises the diverse life skills of officers for a whole range of policing activities.' I am particularly interested to learn that he worked in Havering Borough, where I trained as a police cadet for two years. 'I was a CID officer in Havering,' he tells me enthusiastically.

Keith transferred to West Midlands Police and became an

operations superintendent responsible for hundreds of staff and a multi-million-pound budget. He was open-minded when it came to anti-crime education, taking on the role of Strategic Lead for the Prince's Trust. Through this role, he provided aspiration to young people, some of whom had been involved with the criminal justice system. 'This had fantastic results in turning lives around,' he tells me. He wrote, in conjunction with others, Wolverhampton's strategy on preventing gang involvement and youth violence. 'I retired as a superintendent a couple of years ago,' he concludes.

I ask him about his current role at the Youth Justice Board, responsible for overseeing the youth justice system. He was appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor, the Rt. Hon. Robert Buckland QC MP, in April this year, as the successor to Charlie Taylor. 'The YJB fulfils some statutory functions,' he informs me, 'ranging from advising ministers about the youth justice sector to providing youth offending teams across the country with databases.'

The non-departmental public body is known for monitoring

the provision of youth justice services, reviewing evidence to establish the optimal outcomes for children who offend, and commissioning research in connection with good practice.

I ask him about the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, amended by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. He is, of course, familiar with the Act, and is prepared to share his criticisms of it with me. 'The Act is complex and hard to understand,' he states. 'The number of unnecessary checks being performed, as well as the length of time an offence stays on a person's record, is totally disproportionate.' He believes that more advice should be given to employers for when they consider applicants with criminal records, echoing calls made by British businessman Sir John Timpson. 'Over eleven million people in the UK have a criminal record,' he observes. 'That's a significant part of society that cannot simply be written off.'

He recalls a 'truly poignant' event, one that occurred during his 32-year police career, confirming his belief in the presence of, in most cases, a potential for change. 'I was

running this sporting project in the West Midlands,' he says, 'and I had my photograph taken with a black teenager, who put his arm around me while I was wearing full uniform.' He explains the significance of this to me. 'Nine months ago, I was told, I would have been chasing this person, who had been involved in an awful lot of crime.' A drastic change in circumstances had clearly occurred in this instance. 'I frequently look at that photograph, which reminds me that people really can change.'

The Government has pledged to improve the criminal justice system, including making commitments to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers at an estimated cost of £1.1 billion per year. However, their commitments currently appear, to some, to be empty promises. 'My early feelings are positive,' he says. 'I have met with Justice Minister Lucy Frazer QC MP and the Lord Chancellor on a number of occasions, and they seem to be listening and taking a key interest.'

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# Amazing Grace

Many people are familiar with the hymn, Amazing Grace.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind but now I see.<sup>1</sup>*

But what exactly is 'grace'?

It is undeserved kindness. The Bible tells us that we can only be saved by God's grace: there is nothing we can do to earn His favour and merit our salvation. It is His free gift to us, reflecting His kindness and love.

If we have made a really big mess of our lives, we may think that we have 'blown it' as far as God is concerned. But that is not true.

<sup>1</sup> Written by John Newton, 1725-1807

Or we may think that we can 'turn over a new leaf' and really make an effort to live a good life and then God will forget about our past. But that is not true either.

God says to every one of us:

*'You have offended me by your sin. And I cannot ignore it because I am holy and I demand justice. You deserve to be punished and there is nothing you can do to redeem yourself - to make up for the wrong you have done.'*

Then out of His kindness He says:

*'But I love you and I do not want to punish you, even though you deserve it. That is why I sent my Son, Jesus, to die on the cross. He did that to take your punishment. This is my gift to you. Will you accept it?'*

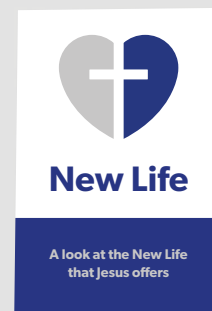
Will you? Your sin has to be punished but you have a choice. You can take the punishment yourself, which will mean being separated from God forever (which the Bible speaks of as hell).

Or, if you believe that Jesus has taken the punishment in your place, you can ask God to forgive you and receive you as His child. You will be safe from His wrath and will live with Him forever.

*“ God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2 Corinthians 5:21

*”*



If you are ready to receive God's free gift of salvation or if you would like to know more, please write to us and request a copy of our **New Life** booklet.