

INTRODUCTION

My name is Ronnie Thompson, I'm twenty-seven years old. Being a Prison Officer for Her Majesty's Prison Service was something that I used to be proud to do. I soon realised the truth of what it's like working as a screw. A fucking headache. The pressures, duties, life-wrecking conditions, corruption, danger – none of this is known to the public, but all of it makes up a day in the life of a Prison Officer.

There are many misconceptions of the job. People think that Officers are bully-boy meat heads who unlock and lock doors. I have seen a lot of bullies in the Service and I've seen many abuse their authority – but that's not what we are all like, and that is not exclusive to the Prison Service; there are those types of people in every walk of life. The role of a Prison Officer is the unspoken job, the unspoken service. We continually hear reports

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of every other service within the public sector: the Fire Service, Police, Nurses and the Armed Forces. We hear of underpayment and overworked staff – all valid and things should be changed. For members of the Prison Service, it is different: always bad reports and never any recognition of the jobs they do. The general understanding is that if a con pisses off a screw, then the Officer will give him a good kicking. Not always the case, and I do stress *not always* the case. I will explain what goes on, the times when force is necessary and used, and when it is unnecessary but still used. Likewise, I will express my downright disgust at Officers with no bollocks, who would rather walk the other way when some poor cunt is getting the shit kicked out of them. These cowards look out for no one.

I will show the underworld of bent screws, the drugs they traffic, the firms they work for and what they get paid for their sins. These screws will traffic anything for the right price, not giving a fuck about the safety of the cons or of the other Officers. Scumbags, the lot of them. The pathetic punishment they get for these activities is something that you have a right to know about.

A dangerous and violent member of the public gets sentenced ‘five to ten’ (years) on a GBH or attempted-murder conviction. When he’s inside, if he seriously assaults another prisoner or puts some screw in hospital, all he gets as punishment is fourteen days’ loss of canteen! Get that? The cons get LESS for breaking the law inside than they do on the outside. What is that all about? Some poor bastard screw goes to work on an early shift, with his six-month-old baby and wife at home, and a junkie, fucked out of his head, tears into him. What kind of job is this?

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Not only, as Officers, do we have to deal with the prisoners, which is what we are paid to do: we have to deal with another type of Prison Service species – the Governor. These people are the bosses who are supposed to know what is going on. They are employed to manage the prison, to make it a safe environment, to deal with serious issues, AND to ensure that their staff's wellbeing is a priority. Bollocks! The overall management that I have been accustomed to is corrupt. I've seen Governors cover up the most outrageous incidents while, on the other hand, using a decent Officer as a scapegoat to further themselves.

Being a good screw doesn't mean always sticking to the rules. If we were to stick to the fluffy human-rights crap we deal with now, then there would be riots every other day. The rules have to be bent to get the job done effectively. You have to give the prisoner the odd extra, allowing that bonus phone call etc, to ensure good rapport, so the environment stays stable. Give that little bit 'over and above' and then the con will trust you. When he trusts you he will give you Intel – insider info, covert security intelligence – which helps to fry the bigger fish, the dealer, the bully or, if you are lucky, the scumbag bent screw.

I'm not going to claim to be whiter than white. I've bent the rules and done shitloads that I shouldn't have, but I am one of the good guys who takes pride in being a screw and who does the job well. I do give my extras, I do favours; but, if any fucker takes liberties with me, I'll go to their cell to have a 'career chat'. I don't condone bully-boy tactics. I always deal with things alone: stopping the problem and educating the dickhead. Of course, this is bending the rules but, nine times out of ten, without an audience the problem can be sorted. If that means a slap, so be it; but most of the time, once they are on their own, they are

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sound. I'll never forget a prisoner called Ali telling another new con what I was like.

He said, 'Mr Thompson, he's sound, don't fuck him about, do as he asks and you will get your touches. Fuck him about and he will destroy you, simple as that; you will be fucked.'

Violence, corruption. Welcome to my world.

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My alarm went at 04.45 hrs that morning, the same as every morning that I was on duty. I've never got used to getting up at that unearthly hour. I always have to drag my arse out of my warm bed. I had a large mug of coffee, like I always do, contemplating the two-hour drive I had to negotiate before my day's graft at the prison. Putting on the uniform is never nice first thing in the morning. Itchiest fucking trousers ever known to man. You'd think they would be nice and comfortable, considering the job I was doing. Not a chance; fucking horrible. That, followed by a starchy shitty shirt, epaulettes, clip-on tie, keychain and stave, and I was ready to head to work. The drive always gives me the chance to wake up before I get to the nick. The last thing you want is to be half asleep when you're walking on one of the Wings. That's

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when things go wrong; someone gets hurt.

The drive in was normal: long and boring, but normal. Roads are always quiet until I get close to the city which is always busy with traffic whatever the time you get there. I pulled into HMP Romwell – known to all as ‘The Well’ – at 07.05 hrs, just as I do everyday. The car park was busy as always; screws flooding in to face the day’s work. I headed to the staff mess for my breakfast. Fucking horrible; it is everyday. Little did I know it was going to be a day that would turn my life upside down.

I’d settled in nicely. I knew all the screws who were geezers and the Officers who did the job well. I had made some really good mates, lads that I could trust with my life. There weren’t many of them, but we surrounded ourselves with each other so we could get on with the job – do it well and safely. I knew exactly who the wankers were; I knew who I could trust and who I couldn’t. That goes all the way through the ranks. There were a few good Governors but, to be fair, not many. Most of them were out to get you in order to further their own career. But I was in the know; I knew who was good and who was bad. That went for the cons as well. I knew the dealers, the grasses, the gang leaders, the gang followers, the first timers, and the old lags.

There wasn’t much that I didn’t know. I had become a good screw. I’d found my strengths. I was good at getting the job done efficiently. I was fair, firm and was able to talk to people. Ninety per cent of the job is the ability to communicate. If you can’t do that then life is very hard as a Prison Officer. You’ve got to learn the rules fast because, if you don’t know them, the cons will be all over you. Most of them know the rules far better than you do. I was in my early twenties when I joined, and some of the cons I

was looking after had been going in and out of prison longer than I'd been alive. Learning quick is a must if you are going to get on. Judging a situation and being aware is the only way. You have to recognise the dangers and have to be able to switch it on instantly. No time for complacency. Thankfully I had my wits about me; I was able to react within a split second and I was good at putting them under restraint, bending them up, if I needed to.

After I'd finished my horrible breakfast, I headed to the Wing for the morning briefing, which is held in the Wing's staff room before duty commences. So, whatever Wing or group you work on, the Senior Officer (SO) conducts a briefing, running through the detail, where you are ordered to work, what activities are due to happen and any intelligence. The Intel for the day could be anything from a prisoner refusing transfer to information suggesting there could be a riot.

The briefing was a formality as usual – except that morning I was detailed to work in the Visits Hall. I was being cross-deployed. That happens when an area of the nick is short of Officers; they then pinch some from a better-staffed area. I say 'better staffed' not 'fully staffed' for a reason. The jail was in shit state, as always. The fucking idiots at the top had no idea. They never employed enough staff. It was bollocks. Fucking dangerous.

I was quite happy to be cross-deployed to the Visits Hall, though. It was normally a nice little number, off the Wing for the day – where you don't even get a chance to shit in peace. Everything there is constant; suffocating. The cons are round you like flies round shit. Don't blame them. There are hundreds of them, with fuck-all staff. All of them wanting a piece of you.

Visits was a nice break. You didn't get any grief. They were on

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their visits; happy with their visitor but, more often than not, trying to smuggle crack and smack into the place. Drugs do get into the prison through these visits and over the wall. When I say 'over the wall', I mean it literally. But the main way drugs got in was through bent screws. Simple as that.

Your duties, in Visits, are to police the Hall and make sure that no trafficking is going on. You have to stay alert, looking around, keeping your wits about you. Drugs will always get through, that's a fact, but you have to do your best to catch them at it.

The prisoners that have visits are collected from their Wing locations and taken to the holding room next to the Visits Hall. It is one room that all the cons have to wait in before entering the main hall for their visit. They wait there until they are called, one by one, to go through to the search room to be rub-down searched, like you get at a nightclub or an airport. You can have fifty or sixty cons waiting in a room that's not very big at all. Fuck me, does it stink! It's disgusting! The dirty bastards piss in there, spit, smoke (I've even found a turd before now; fucking animal!) It's cramped and hot with scum in the corners of every dirty magnolia wall. There are pieces of broken lino, exposing the concrete underneath. There is one small window, about seven feet up, with bars running down it. The one light it has is useless.

Sometimes tensions can run high in there. When scraps break out, it can be a fucking nightmare. You have to get in there and drag them out, delaying the start of their visits. You rely on the good will of the other cons. A lot of them don't want to scrap in there. They want to have their visit. Some cunt delaying that isn't good; the rest fucking hate it. Assisting the screws happens more often than not in that situation. Saying that, it's also the perfect opportunity for an Officer to be taken hostage. A small

room . . . sixty cons . . . a couple of screws; would be easy, but it ain't happened yet. Yet.

One at a time and by name they leave the holding room to go into the search room. Two Officers are there waiting to perform the rub-down search and take away any property, as nothing is allowed in the Hall. They don't need anything other than themselves. The prop (property) they hand over is kept until after the visit. The con is then given a bib to wear to make it easier to identify the prisoner. You'd be surprised how many cons try to get out with their visitors. Some of them are on remand, you see, so they are wearing their own clothes. Even the convicted ones do, most of the time. Rules are lax.

Once they have been searched, prop taken and bib put on, they go up the stairs opposite the search room into the Visits Hall. They are told by a waiting Officer where to sit. This process should take a couple of minutes, at least, per prisoner. Does it fuck, though. You would have a fucking riot if it took that long. Two hours for sixty cons? Yeah right! You are taught one thing on basic training, but expected to do another by the jail's Governors. They don't tell you to break the rules but, if there was a riot, you would be in for it, so they rely on you to speed things up accordingly. When there's an audit, marks could be deducted on the grounds that the searching is taking too long – or that it's not being done correctly. You were in for it, whichever way you looked. The sneaky cunts would cover their arses from the start while the screws take the shit. Once the cons are all in the Hall and seated, the visitors are sent up.

The visitors come in at the front of the prison, through the main gate – the same gate that is used every day by the Prison Officers. Whoever walks in will see, in front of them, the gate

Officers. They deal with visitors, hold the keys for the screws and other members of staff, answer the phone etc. They are behind thick glass, as you would expect at a bank. On entering the prison, Officers go through a door to the left, visitors go though on the right. OK, they are different entries but, fucking hell, it's still security at its poorest. Any visitor can observe the whole process of an Officer going into the establishment. Loads of ex-cons, criminals and all sorts turn up for visits, and it's a fact that prisoners try to escape – and sometimes succeed. So the last thing you want is their fucking visitors seeing exactly how members of staff manoeuvre in and out of the nick, thus giving them the perfect intelligence to plot an escape. The solution? Simply use another entrance for the visitors. Hardly rocket science. It still astounds me that this simple yet critical procedure is so cocked up. Typical Prison Service bollocks.

The visitor has to show the Visiting Order (VO) and identification to the sweaty old Prison Officer sitting at the gate. 'VO? ID?' – moody, rude, not giving you the time of day. They are always miserable old cunts at the gate, coming to the end of their career. They are angry at having spent thirty years working in a prison, angry that their wives are fat old bitches that don't want sex anymore, angry at the world, and angry to still be fucking breathing. It can be intimidating for someone that has not been inside a nick before; the surroundings of the place, and the moody bastard they are greeted with. I've yet to find a nick with a happy young gate screw!

Once the visitor has shown their ID, they go through the security doors to the locker and search room. Every visitor has a locker into which they must put all their belongings. Beverages can be purchased up there from machines which, might I add,

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don't work half the fucking time; another thing that causes unnecessary arguments. In the search room there are Operational Support Grade staff (OSGs) and Officers waiting to search them: if a visitor has decided to plug drugs up their arse to smuggle them in, they would already have done that. Some of the lowlife cunts have been known to stuff gear in a baby's nappy. Fucking dirty lowlife. The visitor goes through a metal detector as well as having a rub-down search. It's at this point that, if a visitor appears to be pissed out of his or her head, or heavily under the influence of drugs, they are refused a visit. That can result in a kick off and the visitor getting bent up, cautioned and the police called. Providing that doesn't happen, the visitors go up to Hall to their waiting inmates and they have their visits.

Once all the cons and visitors have been searched, and everyone is seated, the screws then patrol the Hall, watching for any drug passes and keeping control of the area. Sometimes fights and arguments start up between visitors and prisoners. That has to be controlled. Most of the lazy screw fuckers just sit there and go to sleep. They can't be arsed to do fuck all. They see working on Visits as a day off, not giving a fuck what comes in. Some see it as 'The security is shit, why the fuck should I bother?' But I always wanted to do the job correctly and catch the drug-passers at it. It was a job to do, something that had to be done. A game. Cat and mouse. I would have a laugh with the cons during their visit, always polite, joking that I would catch them. I would get introduced to the inmate's families, if it was a con I got on with – which I did with quite a few. I'm a normal bloke, with normal values. Besides, it was fucking boring sitting there scratching my bollocks, clock-watching. The day would have dragged on and on. I enjoyed doing the job right, so I was

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cutting about the Hall, watching them all like a hawk.

If you see a pass, or a potential pass, you attend the table as quick as you can. You terminate the visit instantly – no questions – doing it as quickly and politely as you can. You take the con downstairs to perform a strip-search on him, always watching him closely on the way down to make sure that he doesn't try to plug the gear he has been passed. If he does, or tries to put it in his mouth, you drop him and wrap him up (put him under restraint). If you get him to the strip-search room and he refuses to comply with the search, you drop him. If he doesn't carry out the instructions correctly, you drop him. If he shows any form of aggression or moves when he hasn't been told to, you drop him. It's as simple as that. This is when you adhere to strict guidelines because you have to stop smack and crack getting in the nick through visits. The visitor is held in a holding room outside the Hall, until the prisoner has been searched. If he has contraband on him, the visitor will be cautioned by a Prison Officer and the police called. As a Prison Officer, you have the powers of arrest while you are in the prison. If the visitor kicks off, they get bent up, just as a con would.

After the morning briefing, I attended the Visits Hall. The SO in charge detailed me as a Searcher. That job IDs exactly what it says it is. It was my job to rub them down on their way in, and do the random or targeted (Intelligence-based) strip-searches on their way out. Obviously this would be very confrontational, especially if they had a little present that they didn't want finding. Also, if anyone's visit was terminated, then I would be the one performing the strip-search on the inmate, so it was inevitable that I was going to end up rolling around on the floor with some junkie or other.

I was patrolling the Visits Hall when I noticed a visitor pass something under the table. A pass! I had to get there quick. I ran over, terminated the visit and took the scroat downstairs to strip-search him. When you perform a strip-search, you always have two Officers in with you. This is to ensure the process is carried out correctly, to avoid allegations of sexual assault and to assist in wrapping him up if necessary. You'd be surprised how many cons would say they were touched up by the Officers. You also always have a third Officer standing outside the search room; that way, if you do bend anyone up, you have your third Officer there to confirm that the correct techniques have been used.

I took this con to the search room where I reeled off the speech I'd said a thousand times: 'I have brought you into this room to perform a strip-search as I have a strong suspicion that you may have something that you shouldn't have. I'm going to give you clear instructions from start to finish. I want you to face me and listen. If you raise your voice, look around, move or do anything whatsoever other than what I've asked you to do, I will drop you to the floor and place you under restraint. Do you understand what I've told you?'

'Yes Guv, I'm sweet, I know how it works,' he replied in a nervous voice.

How clear were the instructions? He had just told me he understands but, before I'd even given him his first order, he blasted, 'This is a fucking stitch up, you screw cunt!'

At the same time, he was putting his hands down his pants. So everything that he could do wrong, he did! Bang! I grabbed his head and dropped him to the floor, like a man-sized lead weight. The other screw in there with me grabbed his arm and pulled it out of his pants. He had a fucking huge bag of smack

which he was trying to shove up his arse. We radioed through and told them to nick the visitor. We got a pat on the back, and were told it was a good job well done.

It was more of the same in the afternoon. I was patrolling the Visits Hall when I saw an Officer called Bob arguing with a con and calling for assistance. I ran over as quickly as I could. Bob joined the job just before me. He was at Wakey (Prison Service College Wakefield) doing his basic training when I was there. I knew him, but not that well. He was a big unit, a sturdy geezer. Not fat – a solid short and stocky fella in his early thirties. He was a gobby fucker but, nonetheless, he did the job right. He did it well – but he was a little thick. If he got backed into a corner, he would just shout; and, my God, when he did, it was like a fucking foghorn!

I got there and said, ‘What’s the problem?’

‘He’s been passed gear, get the little bastard out of here!’

This was not the best way of dealing with it; he could have used more tact but, still, everyone knew where they stood. The con was mouthing his head off. It was plain as day why he was.

Frankie was the other Officer that came to assist. Now, this fella was absolutely bonkers. He had been in the job for fifteen years. He was one of the brutal old school and one of those that the Prison Service wanted rid of. He had joined a very different Service. When he joined, screws got pissed together every day, at lunch and at night, and they brutalised the inmates. If a con looked at them the wrong way, he got bashed up. I disagree with this, but that is how it was.

He didn’t look like I would have expected. He was a short man of average appearance, in his late thirties or early forties, who was very well spoken (he spoke the Queen’s English perfectly)

and was always smartly dressed. But this was a great disguise; he was pissed ninety per cent of the time he was awake. He hated cons and despised how soft the Service had become. That wasn't his fault; the art of being a screw was very different when he was taught it. He had left loads of prisons with trails of allegations and investigations for pissing management off for one reason or another, or for simply being Frankie. But he was a man very much liked by both the screws and the cons (surprising as it may seem). He had a wicked sense of humour that was appreciated by all and the cons knew exactly where they stood with him; he was the boss, they were the prisoners. They respected him. They liked his methods. He would always be fair. But on your head be it if you fucked him off. The management hated him. Fucking despised him.

Bob had made the call; he had seen the drugs being passed to the con. The con was being an abusive little cunt and we had to get him out of there. Aggressive behaviour by a con can sometimes encourage other cons to jump on the bandwagon. Frankie, Bob and I escorted him to the strip-search room. He wouldn't shut up, gobbing off like fuck on the way down. I told him to calm down and, with that, he punched Bob. Just like that, the crazy fucker. No warning, just bang. He was mouthing off before he belted him, but I thought I recognised it as bravado, a show to hide the fear. We all thought that, but sometimes you get it wrong. We got it wrong. Bob went flying; he didn't know what had hit him. I was on him in a flash; I dropped the piece of shit straight to the deck. He was eating the concrete before he had the chance to blink. Frankie dived on an arm like a shot, controlling his violence. There was another screw, called AJ, at the top of the stairs who saw Bob being knocked out so he jumped in quickly

to assist, as. It was correct procedure; correct techniques. We got hold of the con and restrained him as we had been taught and had done time and time before. It was second nature, our job, our profession.

AJ was an Officer who had thirteen years in the job and he hated everything about it. He was the most cynical man that I have ever met. He was a tall fella, six foot two in height, and a lump. Like Frankie, he hated the way the Prison Service now operated; he hated what it had become.

Anyway, we bent this wanker up, the alarm was raised and the troops arrived, as they do. Every screw goes running to an alarm because it means an area has lost control and everyone available needs to attend until it is announced over the radio net, 'No further staff required.' Plus everyone wants some action. One of the first people to attend this incident was SO Neil. I had the utmost respect for her; she was good at the job. We had the scroat under restraint, but he was still trying to fight. He was not being compliant on any level.

'Anyone injured?' Neil asked.

'May I get relieved Miss Neil? I have this creature's saliva all over my face,' Frankie answered in his silky smooth tones.

Miss Neil took over from Frankie, relieving him as requested, but the con refused to be compliant to any orders that Neil was giving him. She wasn't shy about getting hands on. She was one of the few females who were actually competent at it. The cuffs were applied and one more compliance opportunity was given. No joy, this idiot wouldn't even walk. Neil, now in charge, said we had no alternative other than cuff-carry him. You only do this to the severely non-compliant prisoner because carrying a cuffed prisoner is extremely hard work for the Officers and painful for

the con. It was a good call, though, and the only way. This piece of shit had knocked out a screw and was still giving it. We got him down The Seg (The Segregation Unit – for dangerous or disruptive prisoners), kicking and screaming all the way. We handed him over, and the searches were carried out.

Bob was very shaken up. It didn't last for long, though; he was as tough as old boots.

The con was down The Seg in a strip cell (strip-conditions cell – no furniture or clothes, just a gown to wear). This is for extremely non-compliant cons and avoids self harm and the harming of staff. He was still being aggressive. In his eyes, everyone was wrong except him.

A bald ex-TA cunt went down there to speak to him. This prick was behaving like he was ex-SAS trooper Andy McNab, but we knew the truth – weekend-warrior fuckwit. You might guess that I don't like this bloke. Oh, and he was a Governor. He went into his cell and filled him full of fags and promises. He was keen to point out to him that being mistreated or assaulted by an Officer was serious. The lad looked confused, but the Governor explained that he could get a decent pay-out from the Prison Service, if it was proved that an Officer assaulted him. That was the magic word, pay-out. What junkie wouldn't say they got assaulted by an Officer, especially when a Governor tells them the benefits and politely points out to him that Frankie was a menace and known for assaulting cons.

Frankie had pissed off so many Governors over the years. The TA cunt was just doing the donkey-work. It wasn't long before the con made an allegation against Frankie, saying that Frankie had been punching the shit out of him while he was under restraint. I do not tolerate bully-boy screws who abuse cons

when they are under restraint. I deal with these cowards in my own way. But Frankie did fuck all except his duties, using force correctly. He did nothing wrong, no shadow of a doubt. I initiated the force, Frankie assisted. It was done as it should be. This allegation was a joke from the outset.

All of this was going on unbeknown to Bob, AJ, Frankie and me. We didn't have a fucking clue. As far as we were concerned, it was a good job well done. It was a fucking good job well done. We'd done what we were paid to do, and fucking well.

The rest of the afternoon ran smoothly. No more incidents; plain sailing. I was keeping an eye on my watch, waiting for 16.00 hrs. That was the time the visitors left. The group of screws who worked on Visits pissed off home at 16.10 hrs. Wing Officers, like myself, had to stay on the Wing until 18.00 hrs. The Visits staff had it fucking easy. Normally, I found it unfair but, on that day, I was chuffed to fuck: I could piss off early, too. It was Thursday, and I was off after that shift. I could taste the Stella and the vindaloo already. I couldn't wait to get home and relax.

When 16.00 hrs came, we jogged on the visitors and cons in double time. I practically legged it to the gate, threw my keys at the ugly old cunt working there, and sprinted to my motor. It was always amazing when you had a couple of days off, away from the prison.

The journey in sometimes flashes by too quickly. The journey home is a fucker. You get your civvy head on. You want to be home with your family.

That evening, I chilled out with beers and a curry. Handsome. I had a good lay-in the next morning. Always did on my first day off. Gave me a chance to get out of prison mode and back into civvy mode. I had just risen, made a brew and filled a bowl with

porridge when my mobile started to ring. It was the Well. I thought to myself, 'What the fuck do they want? Why are they ringing me? They never ring you at home. Not unless there is something wrong.'

'Mr Thompson, we have a problem,' said the gravelly voice at the other end of the phone. It was the Principal Officer (PO) in charge of the Prison Officer's Association (POA). I was fucking worried. There must have been a huge problem if it couldn't wait until I was next on duty.

'Just hello would be nice! Problem with what?' I mumbled in a nervous way, trying to keep my confidence intact.

'That wrap you had yesterday has gone tits up. The con has made an allegation that he was bashed by Frankie, and Frankie's been suspended.'

'Fuck off! Never! He did fuck all! We bent him up textbook!' I shouted defensively. You see, I thought nothing of that incident; there was no abuse of force, nothing. It was just a straightforward wrap-up of a trafficking junkie who belted a screw.

'All you've got to do is tell the truth. Don't lie about anything, or you will be fucked. I will leave you the weekend to think about what happened and what is important to you. I'm in Monday.' With that, he hung up.

I had the whole weekend to let the seriousness of my situation sink in. Surely nothing could come of it?

My girlfriend Danielle asked me what was wrong. She knew that something was bothering me. She knew that I had a secret. I wasn't up to sharing it so I told her nothing. Simple; not having to answer to anyone. I had got the PO's call at midday on the Thursday. I called my pal Jim at 12.30 pm and was in the pub half an hour later. Jim was, and still is, a mentalist. The man is a

fucking Duracell. He can party for a week straight without sleep. His heart is in the right place, too. I grew up with him, so I knew that I could trust him – and that he was a sure thing for a top night; someone I can let my hair down with. That’s what I needed, something to take my mind off it. I needed a laugh, friends to piss it up with. Jim and I got bang on it straight away: a pint and double-vodka Red Bull. He asked me what the problem was. I told him that it was a work issue and could be serious. So he did what any good mate would do: rang the rest of the lads and organised a three-day bender! We got on it big time. Danielle was ringing me, concerned, worried. I couldn’t face telling her. I didn’t want to explain it – didn’t have the energy to do it. I needed to survive till Monday and then deal with my fate. I spent the rest of the weekend in a pissed haze, not really sleeping, just ending up back at one of the lad’s places, getting minging. Sunday came and I had to go home. I had to face Danielle. Quite rightly, she wanted to smash my head in. She asked me again what was wrong, but I didn’t tell her anything; just that I would sort it. I knew that I’d done fuck-all wrong but I didn’t trust anyone. I knew how a lot of them stitch-up cunts operated.

Monday came round quicker than I thought. It could have been a nightmare, but as I was pissed the whole weekend, I felt no pain. I got into work and went straight to the mess for my normal bacon sandwich and mug of coffee. Today, I needed the coffee more than normal. My head was banging, my mouth dry and chin unshaven. When I got there, I felt everyone’s eyes burning into me. I could feel the whispers. I tried to ignore it, ordering my breakfast. I was shitting it big time. The rumours were spreading like wildfire, with my mates telling me what they’d heard and offering advice. Frankie had been suspended

already, that was true. Then there were all the people 'in the know' coming up to me telling me that I was going to be suspended. I couldn't believe it. I'd done fuck-all wrong, none of us had. The rumours were suggesting that we were all fucked. 'How could that be?' I thought to myself. I wanted to see the union. I wanted to know what the fuck was going on.

I was sitting there eating my bacon sandwich when Mike Thurston came and spoke to me. He was a Union rep. He was also a Control & Restraint (C&R) instructor. He taught Officers the techniques used for self-defence and for placing an inmate under restraint. He was a popular guy with both screws and the management. He told me that Frankie had been suspended and that I wouldn't be, but he did say that was subject to change. I never knew where I stood. The Governors had permanent PMT: indecisive, moody and always fucking wrong! This was all at seven in the morning. I had my sandwich, downed my coffee, put on my brave face and headed for the Wing. Mike was great at calming nerves, but my anxiety was still burning a hole in the pit of my stomach. I carried on hearing rumours of what was going to happen. Some said I was going to be suspended, some said I wasn't. I tried not to listen to anyone. My mask was slipping, though: I was struggling to protect my fear from everyone and was only just managing to hold it all together. I desperately wanted this feeling to pass; I was in despair. Mike came up to me and said that he needed a chat. I knew what was coming. He told me that I was going to be suspended.

Some more evidence had come to light. SO Neil had put forward a statement saying that, when she arrived on the scene of the incident, Frankie was punching the con repeatedly in the face.

That did not fucking happen. I don't know what she thought she saw, but that certainly didn't happen. I wouldn't have tolerated it. A con held under restraint, while another one bashes him – not where I was fucking working. This SO, who I used to look up to, had turned into a horrible piece of shit, as far as I was concerned. It did not happen. If it did I would have sorted Frankie out. And if Frankie had been punching the con directly in the face while he was under restraint, then why weren't there any injuries to his face? There was fuck-all. 'A joke – it must be,' I thought to myself. She was saying she'd seen the inmate seriously assaulted – but in that case, cuff carrying was surely the last thing that should have been ordered; but that's exactly what she did. Something didn't ring right. And why didn't she put her statement in on the day of the incident?

The Governors had made their decision. I was to be removed from the premises and suspended from duty, from the job I was proud to do. My livelihood . . . mortgage . . . family . . . thoughts were blasting around my head like a hurricane. All this and we had done nothing wrong. We were just doing our fucking jobs. What we were paid to do.

I told Mike everything about the incident and he believed me. I went from start to finish, detailing it all. It was still fresh in my mind. It was all so quick. *They* knew I wasn't covering for him; they knew I was telling the truth. Mike spoke to me about the terms of my suspension and how I should conduct myself. He was giving me sound advice. He told me that there could be a chance of media coverage, and that I should keep a low profile when I left the prison. Talk about extra pressure. Not only was this corrupt and wrong, but the media could get hold of it. I tried to be every inch the man I was brought up to be. I stayed

confident and strong. I looked everyone in the eye and kept my handshake firm. I was staying proud. But on the inside, I was dying.

Accompanied by Mike, I was taken to Governor Keenan's office for him to issue my suspension papers. When I entered his office, he was clearly uncomfortable. Looking at him, deep in his eyes, I sat down. I didn't take my eyes off him for a second, staring into the back of his head. He couldn't look at me. Fucking spineless cunt. He then read my suspension papers. I was being suspended on allegations of assault and conspiring to assault a prisoner. Fucking hell. One minute I'm doing my job, the next I'm being suspended for assault. This was serious; this was bad. I was told that the matter had been handed over to the police and they would be in touch with me to carry out a full investigation. I was then told to hand over my ID card, keychain and key tally. At this point, I felt my world had caved in. I was being stripped of my integrity, my pride, and the job I was proud to do. He told me that Frankie was a menace, and that 'He no longer had a place in the Service.' Keenan had it in for him and he wanted him out. This wasn't fair. Frankie had done fuck all, but he was condemned by reputation. Keenan then explained my terms of suspension. I had to ring in at 09.00 hrs every Monday. I had to say that I was ready for duty. Provided I rang in, and co-operated with the investigation, I would receive full pay. The internal investigation would be placed on hold until the criminal investigation had finished. That's right, two investigations, one charge. Dangerous, very dangerous indeed. I signed the papers and received my copy.

After the suspension speech, and telling me that Frankie was a wrong'un, he said I should go home and enjoy my garden. The

wanker. I was then given the number of the solicitor who was going to represent me. That was provided by the POA. A fucking solicitor? Mike was straight with me. He said that if getting Frankie meant getting me and the others, then so be it; that's what they would do.

I'm not in the business of wallowing in self-pity or telling tales of woe about how hard my life is. I have lived a life that many would envy but, at that point, I was about to go through a whole load of shit that I wouldn't wish on a mongrel.

AJ and Bob had suffered the same fate. Bob gets knocked out, then suspended. Fucking bastards. Mike walked me to the gate. He shook my hand and said, 'Chin up! Keep yourself occupied and try not to worry.' But it was impossible.

I phoned my solicitor and had a brief chat. He wouldn't go into too much detail; he wanted a meeting first. I dragged out of him what the worse-case scenario was for me. If charged, a prison sentence. A fucking prison sentence. It was a nightmare. It had to be. My world had crumbled before my eyes. 'Gutted' was an understatement. I'd never felt so low. How was I going to tell my family? How the fuck did it get to this?