

**BLUE: A MEMOIR by John Sutherland**  
*Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson*

Non-fiction books are not usually on my list of preferred reading material. However, *Blue: A Memoir* by John Sutherland – which catalogues his life and career as a police officer – proved to be a welcome break from the norm. It is a gripping and frank account, eloquently told by a man who obviously cares passionately about people.

**MY REVIEW**

It is all too easy to take our police force for granted. With most of what they do on a daily basis unpublicised by the media, the difficult and dangerous situations they perpetually have to deal with quite often go unnoticed. It is this simple fact that makes John Sutherland's memoir such an important book to read.

Written in chronological order, every chapter is broken up into a series of individual blocks of text. Each depicts a different incident in the author's life and career, and together they read like diary entries. This device gives the book a sense of urgency, as well as making it easier to read. As it is not always convenient to read a book all in one sitting, it also allows the reader to occasionally pause, without spoiling the impact.

Unlike a lot of autobiographies, this one is far from mundane. It is compelling reading and moves at an incredibly fast pace. Throughout the book, Sutherland is completely honest, cataloguing not only his successes but also his failures.

Given his background, and non-aggressive personality, policing seems at first to be a strange vocation for Sutherland to have chosen. However, the more you read, the more obvious it becomes it is his deep religious faith – together with the love and support of his wife and children – that provide the strength for him to do the job. It is also evident he is a person of high morals, with a strong sense of justice and genuine desire to help people.

His amusing accounts of mistakes made as a rookie copper will make you laugh. Equally, however, his heartfelt despair at the death of a man on his watch – while working as a hostage negotiator – will just as easily pull at your heartstrings. However, one thing it will not do is bore you.

From the moment Sutherland joined the police force, his rise through the ranks was somewhat meteoric, but it did not come without its fair share of heartache and, at times, life-threatening incidents. However, far from over-dramatising the part he played, he relates each episode with a quiet modesty that underplays the immense bravery required to do the job.

But everyone has their limits, and the effects of all the trauma and daily encounters with the underbelly of human life, finally took their toll. As with many police officers and emergency servicemen and women, it eventually became too much to cope with and depression claimed him. As a result, he was reluctantly forced to re-evaluate his career.

Churchill used to refer to his depression as his 'Black Dog', while Spike Milligan maintained it was like trying to unsuccessfully struggle your way out from beneath an enormously heavy duvet. Whichever way you look at it, it is all-consuming and devastating.

Unlike physical wounds, psychological illnesses are far harder to deal with, and depression is no exception. John's open and honest account of his particular emotional battle – and the effect it had on those closest to him – pulls no punches. Those readers who have also suffered from this hidden monster will empathise with how he felt, while those who have not will benefit from the insight into this debilitating illness.

Sutherland's book is powerful and informative without resorting to sensationalism. Coinciding with the recent wave of terrorist attacks, it is a poignant reminder of how reliant we are on the police.

## **THE AUTHOR**

John Sutherland lives with his wife and three children in south London. For the best part of 25 years, he has served as a Metropolitan Police officer. He won the Baton of Honour as the outstanding recruit in his training school intake, rising through the ranks to become a highly respected senior officer.

Over the course of his career – during which he was awarded several commendations – he has worked in seven different London boroughs, performing a variety of different ranks and roles – including being posted to Scotland Yard on three separate occasions. His most recent operational job was as the Borough Commander for Southwark. He is also an experienced Hostage & Crisis Negotiator.

His regular blog about policing – which he has been writing since 2015 – can be found at: <https://policecommander.wordpress.com> You can also follow him on Twitter: @policecommander

***Blue: A Memoir is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson and is available in eBook and paperback format. It can be purchased from Amazon, Waterstones, W H Smith and other leading bookshops.***