

Fears and Motivations in Lives

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The life of Police Sergeant Matiu Ratana can be an inspiration to us all. He was known and admired by friends across the world and in many communities in England.

One of the warm tributes came from London Irish, a club that epitomises the hosts of former players and of parents who get together to introduce the game of rugby to countless young people.

I was closely involved after the tragic death of Stephen Lawrence. One police inspector told me that Stephen and he trained together in athletics. The motivation of volunteers matters though I guess less than the fact that they give of themselves in consistent reliable ways.

A favourite priest was in charge of a community church for many years. She was voluntary chaplain to other retired police officers. Another retired Sussex officer is my closest friend, never holding back his views of my errors, whether on kitchen improvements or on the overall competence of parliament.

Many households include a worker in a public or private sector role, going out at night or day on a job that carries danger. The greatest common risk is probably on our roads, even though the number of deaths has fallen in recent decades. There are bad, sometimes fatal, attacks on police, on social workers, on small shopkeepers and on others too.

My parents, like many others, had fears after I passed the driving test. I did not drive at pub closing time on Friday or Saturday nights.

In my working life, I was responsible for the team who changed neon lights outside theatres and cinemas in London's West End. We cleared up the IRA bomb at Selfridges.

As local MP, I have been moved and impressed by hospital clinicians who plan to eliminate as many as possible of the mistakes that can lead to patient harm.

My ministerial responsibilities at Employment had included the Health & Safety tripartite system: trade union safety representatives cooperated with employers and with outside experts. Though still too high, our levels of serious injury and death were low compared with other European countries. At transport, we set out to achieve a one third drop in serious and fatal road injuries. The result? Two thirds lower.

The bad, the sad and the mad are capable of life-threatening attacks. The partners of victims live with the consequences. We rely on police officers throughout the country to keep down the levels of crime, to investigate and to bring to justice the wrongdoers and to accept uncertainties and real dangers when attending blue-light calls.

In the debate last week, colleagues with military experience spoke deeply about taking the responsibility of preparing for death in action. Police and prison officers can do likewise.

Why do some kill? Why do many more willingly sign on for the role of a police constable? The motivations will overlap with those applying to teach, to be a social worker, to join a clinical profession. I commend the College of Policing website with its description of the responsibilities and range of activities included in the life of a police constable.

Fear may deter some criminals. I guess that growing up helps more and that being brought up well is best. I worked with NACRO, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. Worthwhile activity could displace pointless crime. We wanted to reduce the numbers of victims.

Let us pause, reflect and honour those who do their duty for us, amongst us and who may have to suffer for us.