

# The Police – Looking After Our Community

by Community Constable Noel Surrey



One thing I believe few recruits think about when preparing to join the Police is the job we often have of informing relatives when a sudden death has occurred. It is a job all Police Officers get to do. It is never an experience to look forward to. No one is ever satisfied afterwards that they have done it well but it is very easy to make a mess of it.

Sometimes it involves people we know and events that we were personally involved in. But often it involves people that we have never met or events that have happened in another part of the country (or the world). It is not done over the telephone. The local Police get to pass on the sad news and deal with the initial reaction face to face. How people react when they receive the news of the death of a loved one is variable. It ranges from no apparent reaction to resignation; disbelief to hysteria. I have seen mothers recoil in horror at the mere sight of a uniformed Police Officer on the doorstep because their child was not home. They were expecting the worst. Sometimes our visit was not about anything like that and it was not hard to calm them down.


My reason for beginning with this very Police perspective is that while death is ultimately unavoidable for us all it is easier for the survivors to accept if every precaution has been taken to avoid stupid risks when outdoors. I am aiming this article at the people who might be thinking such thoughts as: "She'll be right." "It will be okay just this once" or "I haven't got time to prepare more thoroughly." The silliest one is, "It won't happen to me." What makes you so special?

You are the ones who have actual control over whether or not things go badly wrong when you are holidaying or enjoying your favourite recreation. The people waiting at home for you to return do not have that control. All they can do is give good safety advice (sometimes called nagging) like, "Don't forget to wear your life jacket" and ask searching questions like, "Have you checked the weather report?"


The people at home who are sometimes accused of nagging need to be listened to even when they don't get their tone of voice quite right. They will say that alcohol and other drugs do not mix well with many things; such as swimming, boating, shooting or driving/riding anything with a motor. Experience has proved them to be correct.

If you are going to play hard, leave the relaxing with a beer for after all the toys have been put away and there is no more travel planned until tomorrow. Good recreation shouldn't need enhancing with alcohol. It can be best savoured with a clear head and a body still capable of feeling pain.

Do have all the fun you can handle but know when to stop (or not start) so that you will be around next year and still in one piece. There will usually be another time if you plan well and handle things right. ■



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