



# Facing the FRONTLINE

Speaker and author Carl Jones is a retired police detective with a personal story to tell about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

AUTHOR: **Carl Jones**, speaker and author.

**“Joining the Force** was the job of my dreams. There I was in 2000, standing in a uniform for the first time, taking an oath. I was the proudest man alive; at 24 years old, as much of a man as I could be.

It just got better over the years. The more I immersed myself in the grimy and dark world of crime and criminals, the more I wanted to get involved in the bigger, dangerous problems. Driving on blue lights and sirens, vehicle pursuits, chasing and fighting wanted people, all added to the buzz of the job.

But it wasn't all physical, it was balanced with the mental challenges of having to out-think the criminals, the liars and the cheats. I enjoyed gathering evidence and finding that golden nugget to keep tucked away, ready to use in an interview. Being able to blow wide-

open their story was more than satisfying. Writing reports and charge files added to the skills I needed.

## Experienced and effective

Landing a massive crime, solving it and sending someone to court not only gave me kudos, it gave me the biggest self-justification in doing the job. It was a job not everyone wanted, or was capable of doing, but I was doing it: and getting great results.

I became a chemical biological radioactive nuclear officer and a licenced counter terrorist search officer, and gained other police specialist skills, like riot control. I was part of an upper support team the Force needed. I enjoyed operations, deployed as part of a mutual aid contingent around the country. ➤



Carl's proud moments in the Force.

Eleven years in I was top of my game. Nothing scared me, no criminal was going to get away. I dealt with threats and jumped on those who wanted to do me or others harm. If needed I always walked away with someone in handcuffs.

I knew enough about policing that I could play the game. A game that criminals all wanted to play, but they had a good chance of losing against me. Those that needed to be punished were sent to court, and those that needed support were delivered to the right people.

**In January 2011, something happened to change my career for nine years - and my life forever.**

One night shift, at a routine domestic incident, someone needed to be arrested. Arresting him in his own home did not phase me, even with his drunk mate standing by. I knew the drill and started the process. What he did next ripped my life apart.

From under a sofa cushion the suspect pulled a gun. Black, sleek, and only three feet away. His partner, with a black eye, stood right behind me, and a three-month-old baby was asleep upstairs.

The muzzle was pointed at my chest and his hysterical drunken rants made my pulse rise. My vision turned hyper-sharp. He fired three shots. All I had was my

pepper spray, so I emptied the can. He went down but was up again shooting off three more rounds. I fought for my life. I believed I was breathing my last breaths, but I kept going. Five minutes later I was marching the suspect out of the house in handcuffs, with his gun in my hand.

The feeling of achievement was huge as the following day I completed my paperwork for CID to take over. A firearms unit confirmed it was very realistic but was a BB gun. To me it was real. My employers carried on, business as usual, with no personal input. There was no military-based trauma risk management (TRIM) assessment and no follow-up welfare check.

**Strange emotions**

The suspect pleaded guilty to a number of offences and was sentenced to three- and-a-half years. It was over, but my life had started to slip sideways. I felt different but could not describe what I was feeling.

A year later I was sent to London to receive a Police Bravery Award. I felt pride but there was another

feeling, a negative one. I could not tell anyone what it was. I had no idea how to read this strange emotion.

The job was my life and I had to keep going. But I started to feel tired all the time. I had no interest in life outside of the job. I had

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## Carl's advice on PTSD recovery:

- There is not a one size fits all therapy.
- Early support is key to preventing long-term issues.
- Most sufferers will cover up mental health issues.
- Everyone needs to feel valued and useful.
- Don't discipline mental health sufferers for non-criminal matters.

very little to do with my entire family and cut contact completely.

I thought I was acting as a professional police officer, but people at work started commenting about my personality changes. I developed a reputation for showing no fear. My ability to handle myself in fights and confrontations started to overtake my status as a good all-round cop. I was seen as a brute.

Three years later, for the first time since the incident, I attended a job in the same street. Things got weird. I had two mental layers; a tougher outer shell and an inner one made of glass. I felt this shatter. I froze, I could not even get out of the car. Hours later, I could not think straight or manage a work conversation without panicking.

The following day I could not get out of bed. Calling in sick, I was subjected to the wrath of management: I had left them short, I needed to pull myself

together to help out the team. I felt worse.

I had no idea what was happening and could not start to fix myself. Three months later, (with some therapy I paid for personally) I rebuilt the tough outer shell of myself. I returned to work on the local crime team, no longer on the frontline.

## A great distraction

I tried to make my personal life more interesting. I wrote a book, a fun self-help book called *The Caveman Principles*. I did everything right. I got authorisation from my job to start a business, and I got a publisher. Following great reviews of my book I was interviewed by radio stations around the world, which was a great distraction. I started to enjoy my own life once more.

At work I showed my new strong and professional exterior. I achieved a high turnover of crime files, coupled with a first-class admissions rate in interviews. My employer, however, did not recognise this. My sergeant would never acknowledge my work. I was losing my love of the job, and things still felt odd.

I moved to CID and became a detective, dealing with robberies, rapes and serious crimes, but it failed to ignite my passion. Things continued to feel odd. Not being on the frontline was hard, I attended an armed ▶

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**Carl was passionate about being part of the frontline team.**

robbery as a detective. My life split open again. The outer shell once again broke, exposing my fragility.

Concern was not shown at work. My sergeant told me I was being moved off the department. It was away from my home station where I knew everyone. As a parting gift, I was handed some disciplinary paperwork.

The only source of joy in my life - my book and business - was being investigated. I was told I was not authorised to run a business and was breaching police regulations. It was gross misconduct and my job was in jeopardy.

The first disciplinary was unfounded, but the organisation came after me another three times for the same business concerns. All of which went nowhere, but the pressure was constant.

Over the next two years I experienced troubling triggers at work and was moved around. I was constantly given new roles and managers in different locations.

Therapies and therapists were not able to help shift the damage inside me, and no-one knew why. A psychologist diagnosed me with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the gun incident in 2011. My diagnosis was ignored at work. I was told the Force was not funding any more therapies.

Managers grew tired of me not being able to remain in the workplace. My triggers were set off easily. As there was no certainty in my work my anxiety went through the roof. My drinking got out of control and I became depressed.

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It wasn't only my work; my personal life was going south as well. My wife walked out. I cannot blame her; who would want to be with a depressed, useless cop? I considered

ending it all but managed to hold it together.

The ill health retirement doctor assessed that I was not permanently broken, and my federation rep made me appeal. I could not do anything for myself and relied on everyone's advice.

I suffered in the job another six months while they deliberated whether I could return to frontline operational policing. My mental health was ruined and the last round of disciplinary was still hanging over me.

My life was over, there was no chance of returning to my career, my home life was gone, my business was destroyed, and I thought I had no future. I told no-one of the thoughts in my head.

In November 2019, the Force finally retired me. My house had been sold and I faced being homeless as well as jobless. I was alone. I had a choice; end it all or find a new direction.

### **New direction**

By complete luck I found a new partner who was willing to accept my PTSD. I then spent time writing a new book and working out a new business.



Now my life direction is to help others. I am focusing on using my personal experiences and knowledge to explain a very misunderstood condition with many misconceptions.

I support as many organisations as I can, providing talks and posts. I give guidance to better manage people in the workplace and to try to prevent further damage to an employee's mental health.

I have secured speaking engagements and have gained recognition for my passion as a mental health champion. This has given me purpose again. This new business is growing. More paid speaker bookings and a new book will secure my future.

PTSD is an awful condition. Others have trodden this path before me and sadly some did not make it. All these people are my reason for doing what I am doing now. I hope my story helps. I want to give people hope and assure them they are not alone." ●

**Carl Jones** ([carl@carljones.org](mailto:carl@carljones.org)) is a speaker and author. A retired police detective, Carl now speaks and writes about his personal experiences of PTSD and stress. Carl is working on a new book called *Fifteen-fifty-four*.

Carljones.org supports blue light workers on the frontline coping with mental health issues.

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