

... and the author behind the book

Carsten Stroud, author of *The Blue Wall* reviewed on the opposite page, was interviewed by the Gateway.

Your book got mostly good reviews. Were there any unfavorable reviews of it?

Well, do you know John Sewell at all? Ex-mayor of Toronto. He hated it; absolutely loathed it.

It's kind of a hot-blooded book. There's not a great deal of detachment in it. Also, he thought it was favorable to the police, and he didn't like that. He didn't think policemen would talk like that, so he didn't like that either.

He just hated everything about it.

Out of touch or something...

Well, I don't know. He has his own view. As ex-mayor of Toronto he didn't get along too well with the Metro Police. Apparently he now has a book out on the stands with his view of the police.

In your book you said you've always been fascinated by policemen. What finally prompted you to take a whole year off and write the book?

I'm a freelance journalist, so work for a magazine or work on a book is still work. I have no other source of income. So the calculation was two-fold: I knew I could do the book, and I had a publisher willing to buy it.

But also, on a more fundamental level, I was involved in an investigation of Mafia activities in Hamilton and Wentworth. While I was doing that I developed fairly good contacts with some members of the Metro Police. I got to know them better than I had known police before, and I decided that they were sort of interesting. It would be interesting to see what it was that made them do that job.

The book consists basically of just a few very detailed cases. Did you come across any other interesting stories, like the Hamilton thing, that didn't get included in the book?

Any time you spend around a police department is going to open up several avenues of enquiry. I had to leave a lot of things alone simply because they didn't connect with street cops.

Special squad operations in various police

departments tend to be sort of vertical. They go straight up into government or straight down into the sewers. Either way it's hard to follow. So I stayed with the street cops.

You mentioned in the book that police often seem to adapt their behavior to the fact that a reporter is present. For instance, there was the policeman who was chasing a speeding car, and originally he told the driver he had clocked him at some speed, but he apparently didn't have any radar. Then he looked back at you and he didn't mention it a second time. How much...

A more clear example was in Vancouver when they were trying to arrest a man as wanted on an RCMP warrant for aggravated assault. A lawyer in the restaurant objected to the procedure and was quite obstructive about it. I think the two officers I was with wouldn't have tolerated that obstruction for as long as they had, if it weren't for the fact that they wanted to appear reasonable to a member of the press.

Did they loosen up after a while?

I wrote about the ones who did loosen up.

The ones who didn't loosen up — I wasn't able to get anything out of them. So I guess it's a natural selection going on there.

If they didn't loosen up, and I didn't have the feeling that they were being natural with me, and what was happening was what would have happened if I weren't there, then I went on to another team, because I wasn't interested in getting the standard public relations act.

What sort of rules did you work under when you were out in the street? You said you weren't allowed to cover policewomen while they were on the job.

I still haven't figured out why they wouldn't let me do that. I suspect it's because the policewomen would have complained a lot. I think policewomen are still having a pretty tough time in the forces.

And although administration had a lot of ... what sounded like good reasons for not letting me go out with policewomen, the main thing they were concerned about was they didn't want negative information put out about police forces.

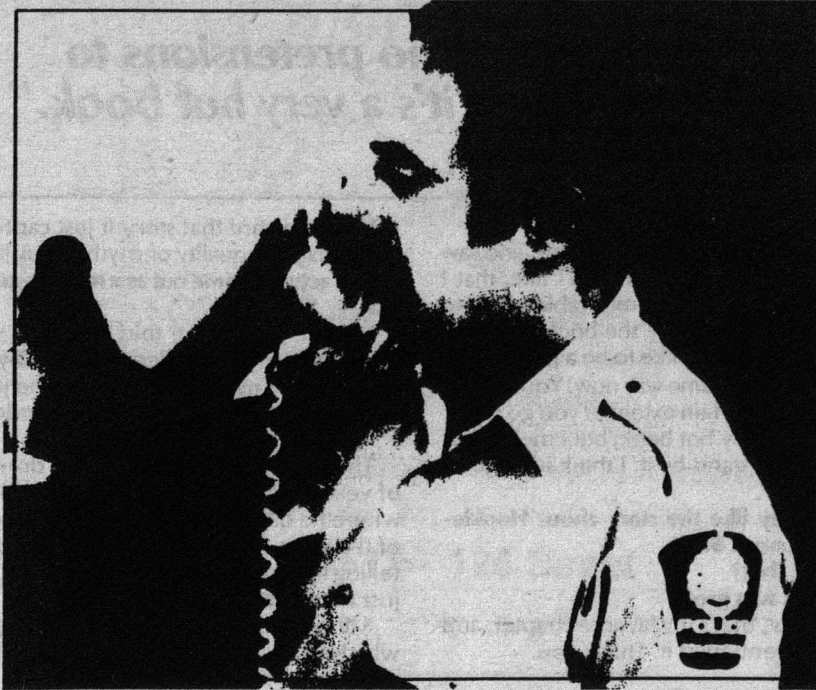


Photo Tim Kubash

A lot of policewomen I spoke to anyway. They had a number of fairly considerable problems with being policewomen, but they were doing it regardless.

Other restrictions I had ... well, I was responsible for my own safety. And there was no legal obligation on the part of any police department if I was killed in any accident or accidentally shot or something. That's my problem, not theirs.

Also, I couldn't actively interfere in any investigation, or in the enforcement of any law or bylaw.

You mention that cops are most hated by the upper classes. Then you had a women — apparently some sort of campus radical from Dalhousie — who was saying that, of course, they are ruled by the upper classes. Did you actually get any feeling from the policemen themselves that they were being used by anybody? Most of their complaints were against upper-level cops.

Well, I tell you: I have some problems with the way we use our policemen, for instance on strike lines.

But do the cops themselves feel that?

Yeah. There are such things as police unions. No thoughtful policeman can act as a strikebreaker, or even as someone who enforces a breach in a picket line, and not be mindful of what happens when his union goes out. They are aware of that. But generally policemen do what they're told and bitch about it later.

So if they are being used, it's only in the sense that any police function is capable of misuse.

What I meant by hostility from the upper classes is: it just seemed that any time we went into a bar or nightclub that was particularly patronized by people with a fair amount of money, they were far less accepting of a uniformed presence.

Many times it was said to us: well, why aren't you out on the streets doing something far more important than hassling good people in here?

If people are not used to seeing or dealing with policemen, as generally members of the middle and upper classes are not, then they react with hostility when confronted with

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