

In It**Jonathan Robinson**

Kindle Books

available at Amazon £2.99



This is the first time Helicopter Life has done a review on a Kindle Book, which reflects the slow but steady change of publishing and even the helicopter industry. It is also, as far as I know, the first time we have reviewed a book which is not strictly speaking about helicopters but is by a helicopter pilot about his time in gaol.

What surprises me about the latter is that more helicopter instructors are not tempted to steal from their employers. But perhaps they are, and simply resist the temptation. What I mean (in advance of a deluge of letters suggesting I am advocating criminal behaviour) is that very often helicopter pilots are well educated but poorly paid. When travelling with their employer they live a good life, yachts, jets, good hotels, lovely destinations and so forth. But the money they earn is relatively low, consequently when they stop earning they have no safety net, a small, if any, pension (unless they are ex-military which many are not). As they get towards the end of their career (Jonathan Robinson was 48) they, presumably, become more aware of their incipient decrease in living standards.

In It is Robinson's book about someone, himself, who did not resist the temptation and who consequently suffered very greatly. It is in many respects a cautionary tale. He loses his wife, his friends, his job (obviously) and he suffers a lifestyle quite the opposite end of the spectrum from the one he was hoping to achieve when he stole £80,000 (over four years) from his employer. While £80,000 would not actually change his lifestyle very much (he incidentally meets men in gaol who have tax evasion for over £100 million) it might well have been simply a stepping stone to higher amounts.

I liked the book. There are moments when I think he is determined we shall see just how boring it is being in prison as he tells us yet again the food was disgusting, or they are 'Locked up' at 17.30. But he writes wittily, the text is full of puns such as "our goal was gaol," and he clearly wants to deter anyone (not just helicopter pilots) from committing any crime that could land them where he is and often berates himself for his behaviour.

The book is also rather sad, not only because he is clearly devastated by the loss of his wife, but also because of the state of the two prisons, Bedford and Hollesley Bay, in which he is placed. Both the inmates and the staff appear to be totally demoralised by the system in which they work and the staff appear to spend more time playing unkind tricks on the prisoners than trying to regulate the service.

In Hollesley Bay, which is an open prison, he tries to help in the education department and is not only discouraged from doing so but actively reprimanded. He makes it clear that showing any initiative in prisons only makes your own situation and those of the other prisoners worse.

Robinson is now out of prison and is trying to interest Chris Grayling, the Justice Secretary, in his plea for reform. However, we are told the reply from the ministry was: "The government remains committed to making prisons places of hard work and activity giving offenders the opportunity to turn away from crime and live purposeful and productive lives."

In other words: MYOB.

Illustrations in the book show prison paperwork and I noticed from one that his date of birth is April Fool's Day. "Where Angels fear to Tread?" Innit.

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