

John Gallagher

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John Gallagher was called to the bar in 1974 having also considered a career in the British Army. He said, "It's hard for teachers to give children a real idea about careers choices. In my mind, there was something about being independent with a career in the law and it's completely different from being in the Army."

Initially specialising in criminal law mainly in Sussex and Kent,

John remembers the camaraderie with great affection. He said, "Everyone knew each other. I did quite a bit of family and civil law and over the years I stopped doing crime and then re-started it when I became a Recorder.* I sat as a Criminal Judge before Christmas 2014. I don't think you can call yourself a barrister until you have sat in front of a jury and had the corners rubbed off. You learn to think on your feet and fight; it fashions your approach."

Over time, John developed an interest in ecclesiastical and sports law. He said, "I'm crazy

about cricket and became the International Cricket Council (ICC) drugs administrator for a year and I also chaired the appeals board."

Marrying very young when his wife was a teenager and he was working as a self-employed barrister, John also lectured in law at the London Polytechnic and marked papers for the College of Law. He said, "The reality is that if no-one instructs you, you need to find income elsewhere. Independence comes at a price!"

He describes the single most formative event in his married life as the death of his baby daughter Charlotte, who lived for just six weeks. He said, "My wife Gillian almost died giving birth to our fourth child. The birth of each of our children was something magical and Charlotte's death completely redirected our lives. I was just 30. Then another baby came along so we have two girls and three boys. I think you look back and realise that you have lost all that might have been. It's maybe not as bad as someone losing a teenage child. I can empathise with people who talk of the physical pain of losing a child. Charlotte's death altered every single facet of my life. I was on the Parliamentary list to become an MP in Swindon and I dropped out after that. I had no interest in it. I wanted to look after my family and to work for them."



When I was working in the family court or prosecuting I could relate much more to an individual than to an institution. I also joined the Territorial Army for six years instead of joining the regular service."

Most people now would recognise that solicitors and barristers in the UK can earn a substantial salary. John said, "I don't like the move now towards more and more money. I know that sounds hypocritical because I am fortunate; very blessed. I have a nice house in London and have educated the children, but the professions are becoming more and more earnings obsessed. We are losing our degree of altruism. It's all about income. People are less inclined to sit as Deputies because they can earn more in private practice."

I have never felt the presence of God more than when Charlotte died. Years later someone said 'you will never know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.'

It was a cot death and I would swap everything I have just to have her back.

We were shown wonderful kindness by our Jewish neighbours. They sat holding Gilly's hand for four hours; there are times when that's what you need. Love. Someone to be with you and an act of love. Sitting there, just holding her hand. The other three children kept us going. They were aged 2,3 and 5. I was relieved of the responsibility because (my daughter) Amanda just came right out and told people. She would say, "Our baby died" and

I was constantly amazed by people. People I hardly knew felt moved to do something for us. Some maintained a stiff upper lip and some crossed the road to say something kind to us." Advocacy requires specific skills in addition to a thorough understanding of the law. John said, "It's about mastering your nerves. There are certain tricks that are transferrable, for example, knowing not to speak too quickly, using silence, and using notes as a trigger rather than using a script. Eye contact is important, and you can sometimes soften people up with a joke. You must grab people's attention. First impressions count. It's funny how your preliminary view is often right. Things happen which make you think 'Wow! What he's telling me could just be true.'

John is at his best when working with people. He said, "I never felt truly happy when I was working with Local Authorities."

We have a two tier bar now. Criminal barristers can be shockingly badly paid. The recent changes to legal aid have made this worse. Too much money was given to the family courts in the past, but the barrister stands between the criminal and the state in a civilised society.

If you don't pay a reasonable rate, you won't get the job done. It's even harder for youngsters to get started now."

Some time ago, John helped run an Alpha Course. He said, "I met a chap who said he prayed when he went into court. I thought I would use that same talent when I have to represent my clients."

I pray for the right outcome for my client and I pray, "Thy will be done."

Conscious of his faith in action, John said, "I think about faith very much before a trial. I was brought up in a Christian home. I hadn't wandered far away and Charlotte's death brought me up short. I was a classic Church of England member. The Rector at St Bartholomew's Church in London was wonderfully supportive at the time but we eventually moved for the children. I was on the PCC for a number of years and now my grandchildren come to church with us. They are not dissimilar to me at that same age."

John met the Rev George Cassidy at All Souls' Church, London and George went on to become Archdeacon of London.

John said, "I knew him because he was from Northern Ireland and my father was from Northern Ireland. We watched the rugby together! George asked me if I would be interested in becoming Chancellor about fifteen years ago. He put my name down in the list and nothing happened for years. Eventually, I received an invitation to apply for the Chancellor of Rochester because the last one retired. I thought it was a pointless exercise, but I applied and was interviewed by the (then) Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali. I felt lucky enough to have been invited to make up the numbers."

To John's surprise and delight, he was appointed in what he describes as, "a very grand service." He said, "It was great fun; I'm very keen on ceremonial occasions. Bishop Michael turned to the congregation and said

"You probably want to know why I have appointed this man. You may have thought it was because of his sporting interests or because he knows Pakistan; but it was because he was a Sunday school teacher. Someone who knows what it's like at the coal face."

That wasn't on my CV, we must have talked about it in passing. I felt really pleased; I am honoured."

Recorder Legal Definition: An ancient judicial position in the legal history of England and Wales, now mostly a part-time judicial appointment given to practising barristers or solicitors in England and Wales.