



A slaughterman's story

Gordon Nixon saw enormous suffering caused by foot-and-mouth when he was a slaughterman in the north-east of England during the 2001 epidemic.

Mr Nixon, from Cleveland, told the BBC News website how all the horrors he saw have come flooding back with the news of the Surrey outbreak.

“I have seen first-hand the heartbreak and devastation caused by foot-and-mouth disease. I now receive treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder as well as taking anti-depressants.



Gordon Nixon is on anti-depressants (Pic: Gordon Nixon)

I was just beginning to make progress, I have been seeing a counsellor for the past few months.

I was good at my job and I was compassionate. This meant I quickly earned myself a reputation as one of the good guys. As a result, I was sent to more farms than any of my colleagues.

“ The farmer begged me not to kill him, but I had to ”

I culled 53 farms and put 48,000 carcasses into Tow Law burial site.

I've been physically attacked by a female farmer, I've witnessed grown men break down, I've broken down myself.

On one occasion, I had just finished a cull. I went into the barn and then I heard something rustling. I looked up and saw a terrified calf in front of me.



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The farmer begged me not to kill him, but I had to. I reported it to the vet and then I had to shoot him.

That calf haunts me every night.

Another time, I could tell a farmer was about to lose control, he was standing in front of me actually stroking a bumblebee.



I went over to him and suggested he go and get a cup of tea.

This calf escaped the cull, but still had to be shot (Pic: Gordon Nixon)

"Cup of tea?", he said to me. "I haven't eaten for three days".

Later that day, he put a shotgun to his head. I had to call the police to have him restrained.

'Not just tough guys'

Seeing the pictures on television has brought it all flooding back. I haven't been able to watch today. I can't even try to explain the suffering this is going to cause.

There would be eight or nine trailers piled high with sheep and cattle. It was my job to physically check them for signs of life.

Once I found a sheep that I knew was part of my cull from the night before. He had come back to life and been at the bottom of a pile of 300 carcasses.

People think slaughtermen are big tough guys, we're not. I'm 6ft 2in and 17 stone but I'm still human and I care.

“ People who say foot-and-mouth disease doesn't affect humans have no idea ”



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The thing that hurts me most is that farmers were just beginning to rebuild their lives.

The people who say foot-and-mouth disease doesn't affect humans have no idea what they are talking about.

It's ruined my life. I don't live anymore, I exist. ”

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/talking_point/6931324.stm