



# SPIES LIKE US

Gangsters, football hooligans, drug dealers and pimps are all in a day's work for investigative journalist, Donal MacIntyre. So, why is he hooked on dangerous situations?



**W**hat would compel someone to seek out and join the ranks of the worst elements on Europe's football terraces? Or to risk life and limb on an estate renowned for its violence and terrorising drug barons? The same type of person who chooses to tackle child cruelty in homes bearing the name of the late Mother Teresa. Donal MacIntyre just can't leave the more unpleasant side of life alone. While many of us would choose not to get involved, to ignore the seedy side of modern life, he fearlessly faces it head-on. His latest venture offers a spot of light relief then, an examination of other tribes in a tentative move to the explorer role, usually associated with Bruce Parry or Ray Mears.

Airing on channel Five, *Return of the Tribes*, provided a chance for MacIntyre to experience something entirely different: "I got to travel around the world and visit tribespeople to find out how they live and how their societies fit in with the world as it's changing. One of the best behind-the-scenes parts was bringing tribespeople over from Papua New Guinea to the UK. My wife was seven months pregnant when we were filming, and I'd promised her that I wouldn't be doing anything that would put our lives in danger. Instead, I brought Papua New Guineans home to stay, so that was interesting! It was an unusual series to make and the best aspect for me was seeing how putting people into a new context can reflect back on our own vision of our society. Seeing the UK through different eyes was utterly amazing."

Despite his best intentions, MacIntyre can't help the lure of an adrenalin-inducing brush with the underworld and has recently followed up his award-winning *World in Action* programme on crime families: "Ten years ago, I filmed the Hardy brothers, Wayne and Dean, for BBC's *World in Action*. They are one of Nottingham's major crime families and the first programme was an undercover current affairs programme. It won many awards and was the first long-term infiltration investigative film in British television.

"It was an exposé and fairly reckless of my employers in retrospect to put me into that position. It was also probably the most dangerous thing I've ever done. The first time we filmed undercover was an investigation into a way of life – drug deals, illegal cigarette deals and the like. This time, the documentary-style is much more about a 'people trail' rather than a 'crime trail'.

"Wayne Hardy is undeniably dangerous but he is also a father, a brother and he has had a series of tragedies in his personal life. The programmes look at the big question of whether crime pays? In my work, I'm looking at society in its wider context rather than just one person. Most social ethnographers will tell you that people don't become criminals because it's 'in-built'. They become criminals because they have experienced severe violence and disruption from an early age.

### Monster's ball

"Really, society creates them. We are all a bit damaged in our different ways. Why do you think people like crime series like *CSI*? In my work, it's just that I experience the real thing." (Incidentally, Kia is now sponsoring *CSI* and other channel Five crime dramas. See the news section for more information.)

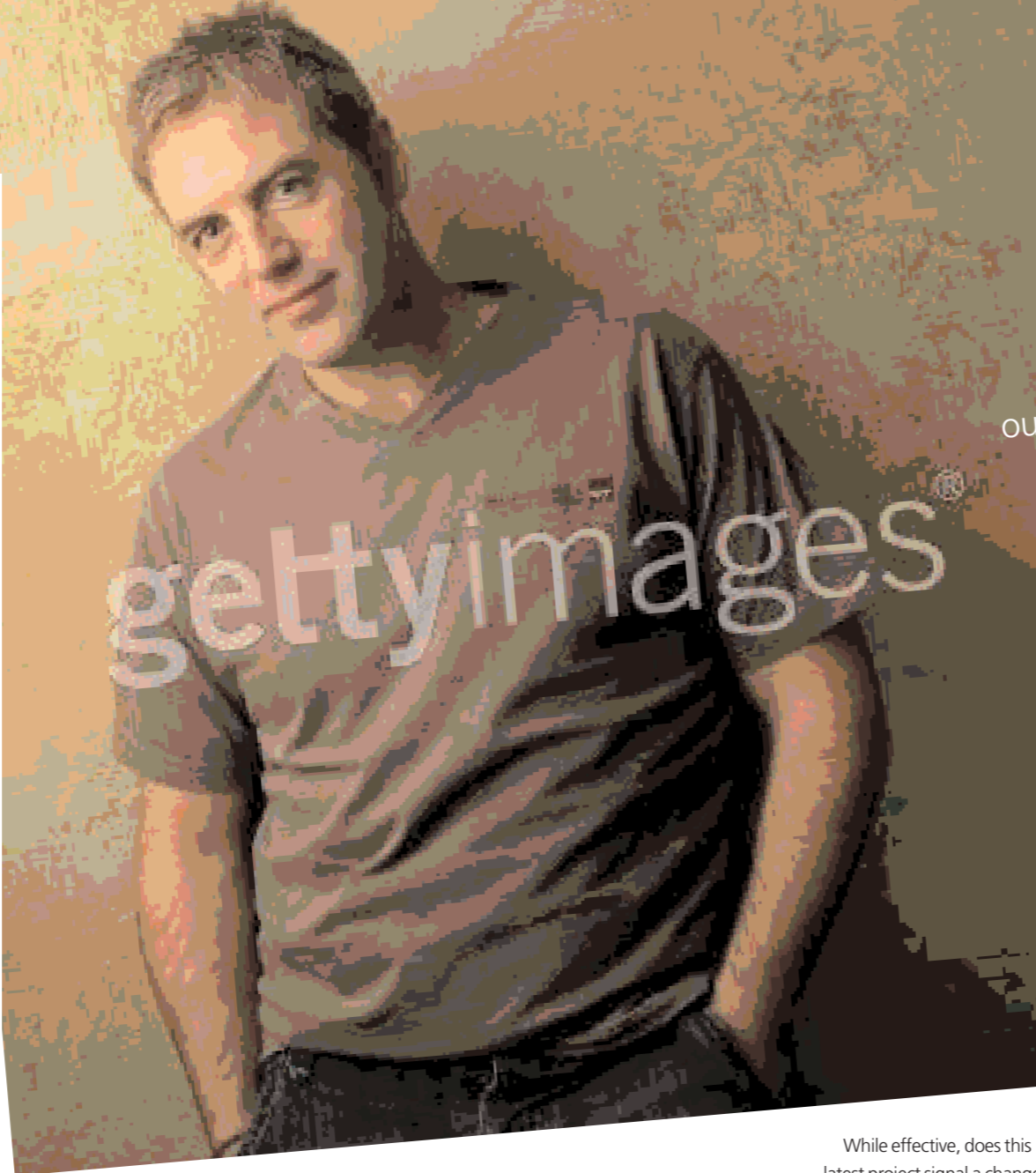
Undeniably, MacIntyre has earned the public's trust and, from the return to the Nottingham underworld, the respect of those he profiles too. The critics too have lauded MacIntyre's work, leading to a mantelpiece full of accolades and awards. How does he think he has achieved this unique position?

"People who have films made about them are always people of note or of interest. The documentary is about more than the person involved – it's about their background and the people and property around them. In this documentary, you can see the clear link between property and crime.

You are seeing a slice of time that will hold true for 30 years. That's how I justify my programme making. Not only are they popular with audiences – they double the audience channel Five expects – but they also receive critical acclaim, for example, being nominated at the Sundance Film Festival in America. *A Very British Gangster* was my first director's piece, so it was amazing to be nominated. We are winning awards in Ireland, Germany and one of the films is due for cinema release in the US. That doesn't happen to every journalist and it shows we're hitting a mark with audiences and critics."

It would be easy to get hooked on dangerous situations, and the temptation to go further and deeper each time must be something MacIntyre has had to resist. So, do the ideas come from MacIntyre himself, or pushy production companies, keen to place him in increasingly risky situations?

"It's a bit of both. Sometimes we are given a commission, but we'll always turn it on its head somehow. I don't like to do things the same way that another journalist might be able to do it. In fact, I'm not very good at doing straight journalistic pieces and so I'll leave that to others far more capable.



"If you've got a personal bugbear and you have the opportunity to go out and get the story and get it onto television, it's the perfect antidote to being angry about something that you feel is wrong"

"Something we've been working on this year is a series of anti-smoking adverts, commissioned by Cancer Research UK and the Department of Health. They have won more awards than any of my journalism in fact! The British public doesn't like preachy forms of advertising so, with the anti-smoking adverts, we interviewed specialists in their fields in a slightly covert way – we told people they were being filmed for a safety film but then we revealed that this was actually about anti-smoking. The people's reactions were caught on camera and the results are a very hard-hitting, truthful campaign just showing people's reactions to the chemicals in cigarettes.

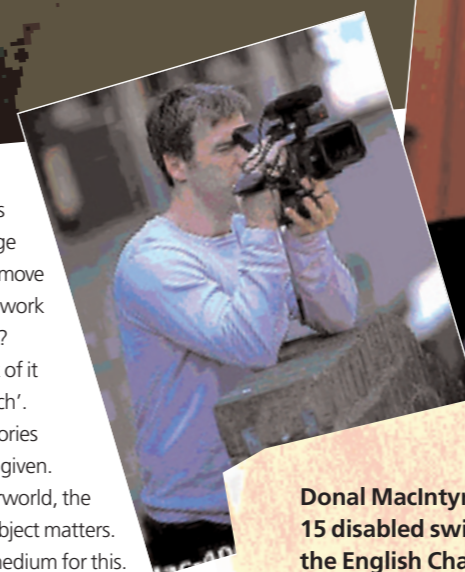
"You can read about this elsewhere but, in fact, one of the adverts has been banned because it mentions how cigarettes contain polonium 210, the drug that killed Alexander Litvinenko. It was felt that it would be 'inappropriate' to air a TV commercial that reveals cigarettes contain polonium. I'm hoping they may see the light of day fairly soon though."

While effective, does this latest project signal a change of direction for MacIntyre, a move away from the undercover work that we associate him with?

"Not really. I like to think of it (my work) as a 'broad church'. As I've said, I like to twist stories from commissions that are given.

I'm fascinated by the underworld, the underdog and revealing subject matters.

"Television is a perfect medium for this. If you've got a personal bugbear and you have the opportunity to go out and get the story and get it onto television, it's the perfect antidote to being angry about something that you feel is wrong.



There's no point in me sending out the same stories that other people do because I won't have the drive, I always work better on the margins.

### The sky's the limit

"The other great thing about television is the opportunities it presents. With *Wild Weather*, we ended up filming under the ice in the Arctic with world-renowned underwater cameraman, Doug Allan. It was the most extraordinary experience. In fact, I nearly killed him, which wasn't so good. You usually go under the ice with a rope so that you can find your way out but, because of the cameras, they wanted us untethered. I hadn't done much diving before and apparently I swam away too fast, which meant we nearly lost the hole to get back out. That was a pretty dangerous experience but that's what television can do – it puts you in places that you never thought you'd end up.

"There's an incredible diversity to the work that I get and that's just brilliant. I work extremely hard and I don't take much time off, but if I can make films that intrigue me and audiences, that's the work that I want to do."

MacIntyre has made a career of breaking boundaries, and the results have been breathtaking and challenging for audiences. Indeed, his work has paved the way for many wannabe MacIntyre's. His advice is simple: "There's never been a better time to get involved with filming. The costs have come right down and you can now make a movie on your mobile phone and broadcast it on YouTube. The only thing stopping people is confidence. You need to have determination and

be able to tell a good story. Don't be afraid, start by writing about what you know."

And, with a few more following in MacIntyre's footsteps, uncovering hidden lives, the world might just be a better place to be.

**Donal MacIntyre is putting together a team of 15 disabled swimmers interested in swimming the English Channel, to raise money for MENCAP and for their own personal achievement. If you or someone you know might be interested in part-swimming the Channel with Donal, write to: PO Box 50368, London W4 4XW**