

Our battle to take down The Beast

THE three women standing shoulder to shoulder have 14 children between them. Some of those sons and daughters have seen more than any child should.

‘On the night I thought he was going to kill me, my daughter was asleep in her bed,’ says 37-year-old Siobhan McTaggart, the smallest of the women and the one who is most nervous about being here today.

‘She was six at the time,’ she continues. ‘He was on top of me, hands around my neck, strangling me. I couldn’t breathe or shout. I could feel myself going, losing consciousness. All I could think was: “She’s going to come in here in the morning and I’ll be dead in my bed. And what will he do with her?”’

Neither of the other two women is remotely shocked by this. They simply nod and share their own stories of the things that somehow became ‘normal’ in their homes, at the hands of their same tormentor, Mark McMillan.

Screaming. Swearing. Blood. Walls punched in. Bruises. Rape. Strangulation. Drugging. Financial exploitation. Sexually explicit pictures taken without consent, even without the women’s knowledge, and uploaded to the internet for the world to see.

Think that the sort of depravity that was evidenced in France during the shocking case of Gisele Pelicot couldn’t happen in the UK? Think again, because there are parallels here.

‘I’d often pass out when he was strangling me and wake up in a completely different position, up against the wall or on the floor,’ says Lynne-Marie Hand, 39.

Lynne’s older children, she says, had some understanding of what was going on, ‘but as a mother you try to say, “Oh, I’m fine. Nothing to worry about”,’ she says.

There was a lot to worry about. ‘I’m just surprised he didn’t kill one of us. It was the only thing left for him to do, really.

‘He told me exactly how he was going to kill me, too. He said it would be the perfect crime.’

Astonishingly these three women, meeting me in an Ayrshire hotel and bravely waiving their legal right to anonymity, were victims of the same man, repeatedly violated by him over the same period. None of them knew of the others’ existence and thought they were suffering alone, and in silence.

AND the only reason McMillan is behind bars today – after being jailed on Thursday for 11 years at the High Court in Kilmarnock and placed on the sex offenders register for life – is because, having learned of each others’ existence, they got in touch and joined forces to bring their attacker to justice.

Lynne was in court to see The Beast (the women’s agreed name for him) sentenced.

She explains: ‘I wanted to look him right in the eyes and say, “This is what happens when you tell women you will kill them if they speak out.”’

The Beast is an 18-stone former bodybuilder who specialised in, as Siobhan puts it, ‘helping himself to women’s bodies’.

Between January 2022 and July 2023, he raped and sexually abused all three women.

After his release, he will be monitored for three years. Judge Lord Harrower told him: ‘You treated

EXCLUSIVE
by Jenny Johnston



Depraved: Mark McMillan told Lynne he was going to kill her – that it would be the perfect crime

Each had suffered in silence at the merciless hands of an 18-stone body-building brute. And only when they joined forces were they finally able to confront the monster who’d made their lives a misery...

he was doing, about the fact that I thought he was going to kill me?’

It is a surreal experience to sit against the law, but McMillan was a serial abuser too, and a sexual deviant who was active on swinging websites.

Siobhan claims she found out through a neighbour that he had been showing around intimate pictures of her, taken during forced sex – ones she had not been aware he had taken.

Charmaine discovered worse. Her images had been uploaded to a website. ‘It was Lynne who

on end. I know now he was with either Lynne or Charmaine.’

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found them,’ she says. ‘They have been taken down now, but it’s the most vile thing in the world to think that pictures of you are out there.’

All claim McMillan – very active on dating sites which allowed him to hook up with local women – asked them to have sex with other men while he watched. None would agree.

‘But we know that he had sex with other men because he had reviews from men on that swingers’ site, so my theory now is that he actually just hates women.



Battling back (from left to right): Victims Siobhan McTaggart, Lynne-Marie Hand and Charmaine Walker

ager but it was only when she started talking to him again at a bus stop in January 2023 that she accepted his offer of a drink. ‘I suppose I didn’t see him as a threat because I’d known him.’

She thought he was fun and attractive. She also knew he was taking cocaine (and would later discover that he had drug-related debts) but ‘at the start he was love-bombing me’.

She let him move in because he was having a ‘bit of bother’ with his own house.

The first hint that she was involved with a dangerous man came within weeks – and in front of a friend.

‘We were just sitting having a few drinks at home. I thought he was fooling around, going to tickle my toes and I said I hated my toes being tickled.

‘But he just grabbed my ankles and pulled me off the sofa. I landed on my knees and he booted me up the backside and I hit my face off my friend’s knee.’

‘My nose just went “bang” – blood everywhere. My friend said, “What the...” and he said, “She needs to learn to take a joke”.’

BY the February, Lynne was walking on eggshells around this man. She says: ‘He had always been a bit possessive but he started to ask who I was messaging. He was paranoid I was with other men, yet he’d be the one messaging in the middle of the night.’

Then the rapes started. She believes he gave her a date rape drug for the first attack. ‘He just laughed afterwards and said I’d had a good time.’

The beatings were frequent, too. ‘He’d bang my head off the wall, throw trainers at me. If he was in a rage he was out of control.’

Often, her children were witness to this. ‘They knew exactly what he was like.’

There was police involvement. In the April, Lynne dialled 999. McMillan was arrested but he returned to her home. She let him in, ‘which I should not have done, but you believe these men when they say they are sorry, it should not have happened’.

All this is where things became much darker. On his return, McMillan told Lynne that he would kill her if she made a further complaint.

She recalls: ‘He told me exactly how he’d do it, how he’d dress himself in a protective suit, cover me in cling-film, stab me through it, then wrap me in a tarpaulin.’

‘It was so detailed, even down to the fact he’d put a dead dog in the grave with me, to deter any police dogs. He said it would be the perfect crime.’

‘By now he was stealing from her. I gave him money at first. People were after him for drug money. I wanted to help. But then I was buying him clothes, a phone.’

‘One night I discovered that he was pressing my finger to my

phone when I was asleep and transferring money to his own account. He took £4,000 over a few months.’

The rapes got worse. We can’t actually go into what he did to Lynne but suffice to say this wasn’t ‘just’ rape, it was sadistic torture.

‘He made a game out of it. I had to count along,’ she says. ‘If I didn’t let him do it he’d say we’d have to start all over again.’

‘I’m a strong person but I was sobbing in the bed and he’d tell me to shut up or he’d put a pillow over my head. I tried to cry quietly, but that’s hard.’

IN July 2023 there was yet another row – this one witnessed by one of her sons – and Lynne finally asked him to leave.

He’d punched her and pushed her against a shelf, splitting her head open. Again she called the police ‘and they took him away’.

The next day she retrieved his phone and sent that fateful message to Charmaine, asking who she was.

Over the next weeks all three women swapped stories – discovering eerily parallel lives. The frequencies of the attacks on the others were not quite at the level that Lynne had suffered, but the modus operandi was identical.

‘He gets inside your head,’ says Charmaine. ‘He made me feel worthless, like nobody else would want me.’

‘He’d go through my phone. I’d be saying, “That’s my daughter’s ice dance teacher”. He’d go mad, accusing me of going with other men, and I wasn’t.’

Siobhan nods. ‘He’d call me a dirty slut, a whore. I was only texting my mum.’

If there is any hope to be gained from these women’s stories it is that they were believed as soon as they went to the police.

‘I can’t fault the police,’ says Siobhan. ‘Especially the female officers,’ adds Lynne.

Yet what a world they were plunged into and still inhabit.

Siobhan – who spent time in a women’s refuge – had to be rehoused because of McMillan’s attacks.

All three now live in houses with panic alarms.

‘I love my new place because there’s cameras everywhere,’ Siobhan tells the others cheerily. ‘I feel safe.’

But why, why, why did they all stay with this man for as long as they did? It’s a question mostly asked by those who have never been in abusive relationships, says Lynne.

‘His defence lawyer said, “Well, it can’t have been that bad if you stayed with him”, but it’s not that easy. People like him get into your head, mess with it. He thought he could do what he liked, because men like that do.’

Until women like these speak up, it seems.

‘If I could send one message to other women it would be: “Speak up”,’ says Charmaine, as the women leave, in time for the school run.

‘You won’t be alone.’