

The Case of T's Sister

T's sister was killed by her husband in September 1996. He then continued to forge his wife's signature on cards to her own mother for two years.

T was told on 27 November 1998 (two years later) that her sister had left her husband and daughter. She knew that her sister would never have left her daughter under any circumstances, as she loved her too much. After one week of intensive searching, T's family reported their concerns for the victim to the Police, who told them there was nothing wrong, as they had seen the husband and been assured by him that his wife had just walked out. Despite T's protestation about her sister's devotion to her daughter, the Police would not take further action. They said that wives were always leaving their husbands, and T should not worry. T and her husband then spent two weeks finding evidence before finally convincing the Police that they weren't time-wasters.

The killer was arrested on 16 December 1998. T and her husband spent the next ten days trying to find out where their niece was, and having to listen to a social worker telling them that she hadn't got a Mummy, only a Daddy, and he decided what happened to her. When T pointed out the reason why this situation had arisen, she was told that this didn't matter. T also had to deal with explaining to her elderly mother - who had been receiving birthday, Mother's Day and Christmas cards - that her daughter was dead, and had in fact been so for two years, whilst she had continued to entertain her daughter's killer. T also had to undergo the indignity of getting the killer's permission to hold a funeral, and all of the necessary arrangements, totally without help from any authorised organisation. T says that, at least, she felt that the law would now take over and the victim would be laid to rest in peace.

In the one hour trial the killer was charged with manslaughter (despite several assurances from the CPS that, because a minor was involved, the charge of murder would not be downgraded). At the trial, T says the defence vilified her sister, lying about the relationship she had had with her daughter. After the trial, T had to face an appeal by the aggressor against the six year sentence. T and her family were informed - by the press - that the sentence had been reduced to four years, this despite the fact that T had written to the Judges pointing out evidence that had been ignored at the trial. She was told that new evidence could not be taken into consideration at an appeal - although this was the evidence T had been talking to Police about before the trial. T says that when the family objected, the CPS said that her human rights had not been violated, like the murderer's, because he had been deprived of his liberty and was in prison! T says it seems that her sister - the victim - had no human rights. **Hopefully, an advocate will alleviate this type of suffering.**

When the killer was due to be released, after just two years, the victim's family went to Downing Street to hand in a letter to the Prime Minister. It was at this point that T met one of the founder's of Victims' Voice, and learnt - for the first time - about the Home Office Homicide Pack and Family Liaison Officers.

After a struggle, the victim's family achieved a complete reinvestigation of the case, through the Police Complaints Authority. This resulted in all their complaints, but one,

being upheld. T's MP received a letter of apology from the then Director of Public Prosecutions, about the way the victim had been lied about in court.

The local Assistant Chief Constable visited the family to apologise for what his officers had put them through. He finished his apology, however, by adding that he had the victim's diary with him, but had decided not to give it to them - even though he knew the victim's family had been allowed no belongings of hers apart from a wedding dress and an out of date passport. T's family were also told that the killer was allowed to have the diary (as next of kin) and could, if he so wished, burn it. T says she and her family then realized that the apology was not sincere.

Possessions: Too often, all memorabilia and property - sentimental or otherwise - will belong to the (husband/partner) killer. We seek to change this situation through the law.

T says that she has not seen her niece since the perpetrator was released from prison. The reason she was given for not being allowed to know her niece's whereabouts was to protect the killer from any possible attack by T. T maintains she had never been violent in her life - but observes there is blatant evidence that the killer has - and yet this does not preclude him from having a teenage girl in his "care".

T concludes by remarking that no one seemed to want to listen to the concerns of the victim's family - they were too busy listening to a known killer, whom they didn't seem to think might also be capable of lying.

T's niece was present at the time her father killed her mother. The procedure after the death of a wife/partner by a husband/partner is to remove the child to foster care, in order to attempt to rehabilitate the killer. The grandparents have no say in the matter - unless they have the knowledge/strength/money to fight a lengthy legal battle. It should be highlighted that the grandparents • where a grandchild is involved - have thereby lost not only their child, but also a much-loved grandchild.

It should be recommended that when a child has lost one parent through homicide by the other parent, it must be paramount that grandparents have contact with that child, rather than enforced separation, which sometimes results in the child suffering a guilt complex and will cause post traumatic stress disorder in the grandparents. Instead of the application of draconian methods, there is a debt of compassion owed to the families of homicide victims.