

Prologue

Tuesday 15 August 2017

I don't know why I am here. I have rarely courted the media. Mum and Terry Kilbride took that on – an unstoppable machine that they fought, spent years correcting and finally when they had the strength attempting to shape their own agenda.

Mum is not here anymore. Terry keeps fighting. Ian Brady's death in May 2017 has opened a new can of worms. It brings it all back. None of it went away.

I have a choice. Do I shun the circus or join its merry dance. For years, this story has been a currency that fuels newspaper sales and fills TV airtimes. And people use that word story as though it is that. Today, they would call it a 'journey'.

I can tell you. I am now in my 70 s and this is neither a journey nor a story. It is real life. My life. And of course, those who walked into my genetics, preceded them and will stick up the pieces after I am gone.

I don't know why I am here.

I am invited to participate in a TV show. I am not media friendly. I say little. I lock it all on. It plays in my mind over and over but I can't provide the soundtrack. It is a silent movie. For most people, it is simply that three months have passed and the producers are probably thinking they will sell this for the first anniversary of his death. They come in at this point. They join the 'story' now.

But I have lived with it. For a very long time. It has defined my life. The choices I have made and the decisions I have taken all fundamentally stem from the day my choice was to make the wrong decision.

And now I am talking about it.

I don't know why I am here. Today, they would call it Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and there is counselling. In 1964, they did not have such a name or help. I was just a fourteen-year-old boy who did not go the fair with his sister. In 2017, that post trauma stress is the only constant I have known in my life. I live with it still and it is the norm.

I see today as I see every day and every day is *that* day.

I do know why I am here. Maybe I realise that my own time is running out and that, as horrific as the crimes committed were, other atrocities are sadly more front of

mind now. I feel too, that, if somebody helps me offload even if coerced through the medium of a TV debate then I will take that.

I have it here locked in my heart and my head and always will do. I am not used to the media, and apart from Mum, nobody has really ever got under my skin about the effects of that day. I do not feel safe here on recorded television but Terry Kilbride gives me confidence. Once, I get over the dynamics of the medium, I realise I have nothing to lose. There is, after all, no moral high ground for a counter point of view to assume – as is often the way with these set-up jobs. You can't put anybody up with an opposing opinion and expect the public to side with them in a case such of ours. As media-unsavvy as I was, I got that at least.

Naïve perhaps, I had not legislated for the unknown. I am in the Green Room waiting when Bernard comes over to me and says he saw them at the fair. I knew Bernard before this happened and I have known him on and off since. But I have never heard him say this before.

'I used to go to school with your Les,' he told me.

I stare him blankly in the face. I only knew him as a good footballer. I didn't for one moment realise that in fact they were on the same team sheet. And I only find out a quarter of a century later.

He tells me of two mutual acquaintances who also played football. Some had been in the same class at Miles Platting just under a couple of miles outside Manchester City centre and I did not even know. I had no idea he would be on this show. I assumed it was for family members but his knowledge reminded me he was genuine. It also of course flagged up that there were people in our Lesley's world who were not in mine. I thought I knew my kid sister inside out and I never had considered her sphere of influence or those who had brushed past the family and had their own story to tell.

Enter Tommy Rhattigan. I had learned he had published a book called *A Slice of Bread and Jam* but apart from that I had never heard of him. This also contributed to my fear as to why I was here. I meet a Gorton priest too who claimed he had a narrow escape. There were enough people immediate to the 'story' who could produce hours of footage to add to the hours that already existed. I was sure that we didn't need any 'hangers on'.

I understood that 'near-misses' painted a picture for the police especially and I realised, of course, that with any serial criminal, there would be people who with time felt they had been close but had somehow escaped but half a century later what was the point in them airing in the same documentary as those who had lost and been scarred for life?

I did not doubt the sincerity of these individuals but I was also aware that people liked to dine out on anecdotes. I was acutely conscious too that some serial

killers attracted fantasists. This would come to haunt the family in time. In time I see him on *Loose Women* on ITV and refuse to watch.

I am still nervous after the filming. Bernard tells me that he had four sisters and would feel exactly as I did. Suddenly I begin to open up to him and start to say things that stop me in my tracks because I know I do not open up like this. The meeting of the eras does this. I feel a connection with Bernard because of his to Lesley. It is a long time since I have met someone outside of the family who has wandered back into my life who can give me this perspective. We hug. I don't do hugs.

Tommy Rhattigan announces that none of us should leave. He has something for us. He produces copies of his book for each of us. He seems a decent enough person but it juts goes to show that however sensitive, or well-meaning you are, only few very few have lived this story. Others have dipped in and out it and have different reasons for being here. The point is that you either carry this around every hour of every day or you don't.

Across the room, I see Terry who is here because he is often so. He had always been the one who took on the mantle from my mother to deal with the media. For the families, he more than anyone had entertained them. Often the choice was simple: if you participate you at least have a say. If you don't they can run what they like. It was unthinkable to think they could ever air any show without one of us participating but every single time required the maximum effort to relive the minimum of the pain and accommodate the needs of the media.

And even then you could only give them a snapshot. The experience has scrambled my mind – a mixture of having so much to say but being unable to express it and certainly not within the constraints of a time-restricted TV programme. Yet, for the first time a real desire to attempt to put down on a paper what I saw and felt, what I lived through and which parts of life passed me by – all of course with the knowledge that I still retain the gift of life, something which was taken away from my beautiful little sister.

I know why I am here. For the first time, it is right to tell *my* story.

Chapter 1 – Christmas Day, 1964

I was fourteen years old. My brothers Tommy and Brett were eight and four. Lesley Ann came in between at ten. My mum Ann West worked in the canteen at Express Newspapers; my father Terry Downey was an engineer near Trafford Park, Manchester. Alan, a long distance lorry driver lived with Mum and us kids when he wasn't on the road at our maisonette in Charnley Walk off Varley Street near Ancoats.

For once, the previous six months had been the calmest, most stable that any of us had known. Life consisted of lots of family trips to Wales or maybe Scotland in the back of Alan's van with all the sofa beds he was meant to be delivering, each of us always winding each other up every single day followed by endless trips to the chip shop at night for the scrapings.

Our lot was simple and we were broke but we had finally stopped being shunted from one council house to another, often squatting – at one point for several months in an empty house. Mum would go into the housing office and pull some sort of stunt and we were moving again, always climbing some sort of housing ladder. She had been self sufficient all her life, and in this it showed, barely knowing her own father who became a Prisoner of War in Germany – and now divorced herself, for a couple of years.

But it was Alan's arrival that brought her happiness after splitting from my birth Dad. They had met by chance in the pub. She seemed genuinely happy for the first time I could remember. He shifted furniture around the country and everyone in the family remembers how he once sent a telegram from Leek in Staffordshire to say he was on his way to ours!

After years of struggle, surviving day to day without real prospects and living off scraps, we at least had stability. It was a different era. You didn't worry about work. There was lots of it – from apprenticeships to jobs of life. You didn't worry about leaving school with nothing. Of course, all the lads wanted to be footballers. Everybody wanted to be George Best but when that dream crashed you knew that you would get paid enough to manage on at the end of the week in whatever path you followed. As soon as you could get out of school, you did. There was little long-term strategy like university. You lived on hand-me-downs, leftovers and shared bathwater. There was the radio and a little television. You might have a car if you were lucky. You could play out in the street with no fear and be home for dark. She loved her roller-skates and Rebel, the family dog. The summers were longer and hotter – possibly. You knew the name of your next-door neighbour and Sundays were sacred. We were happy. We had nothing but we had each other.

Part of that home life meant Sunday School. My sister Lesley was always there – the apple in my Mum's eye, nurturing this little girl into this beautiful young lady. Quite loveable, she would do anything for you and thrived in that sense of

belonging that the church brought, and even though my Mum went on to have a love-hate relationship with religion for obvious reasons, there was no doubt that Sundays were special and the community came together. It was unthinkable to miss service and people would hang around forever afterwards. Everybody had time that they do not today and that facilitated the endless but fearless playing out. Lesley, at ten, was just like every other child at that age and you thought nothing of it.

There had not been a story in Great Britain like the one she was tragically about to walk into; nor were the modern day distractions and non-stop news to report it. You felt safe, and even though, there were some bad types about, largely, you were safe.

If you asked me what Lesley would have become in life, I have no idea. It was way too early to know her ambitions. She was just living and loving life – happy just being, which even today seems hard to achieve. That innocence that she was robbed of, is often lost nowadays anyway because of *life*.

My little sis always had friends around. With her curly hair, she was shy but gaining confidence all the time and from a very early age had a strong sense of right and wrong, more so than any child I had met. She got this from Mum of course and that very value at such a young age naturally makes her fate even worse – at the hands of people who had no boundaries or defining lines.

Occasionally, she would have a little cob on – perhaps as a result of being sandwiched in amongst her three brothers – and she always had an air of mischief about her. If I brought a girlfriend home, she would remain seated at the top of the stairs having a nose.

But she was happy and beautiful. Together, Christmas Day 1964 could not have been more perfect. In our world, we had arrived. In your world, there may seem nothing to be envious of. Five of us were living in a two bedroomed council house, from which we were not about to be moved on anytime soon, and this year we had a tree bigger than we had ever had before.

It had stood tall all week in the run up to the big day. It represented so much more than Christmas. It stood for peace in our family. We would never have money. We couldn't even spell materialism. It didn't matter. Christmas Day 1964 glowed and as dawn broke on that morning, you would not find a happier household.

Mum had an early sherry. The TV was on in the background from early morning Christmas Services to Leslie Crowther and Julie Andrews, to documentaries on the Great War and Billy Smart's Circus and by evening *Christmas With The Stars* with Roy Castle, Benny Hill, Billy Cotton, Dick Emery and The Black and White Minstrels.

The atmosphere in the house was crazy – a frenzy of excitement. Everyone was a child. Even the children! Mum was so relaxed, happy that Alan had come down from London. It stands as a moment in time.

When it came to open the presents, Lesley received a sewing machine; Tommy got a record player. I don't even remember what I found under the tree. I was coming down with a heavy cough and cold and with it, fell a curtain in all our lives that defines us all ever since.

It was a perfect day but very soon it was to become the last one. The saddest of days was about to begin. And from that moment, all the days rolled into one.

It stands as a moment in time because it is the only marker to before and after. Time was about to stop.

Forever.

Chapter 2 – Boxing Day, 1964

The fire was on, Mince Pies were in the oven again and *White Christmas* was on the telly. Again. Boxing Day afternoon always meant football or the Silcock Wonder Fair in Ancoats. It had never been any different and despite us moving around, Hulme Hall Lane Red Rec was a fixture in the calendar. Just a stone's throw from my school, it had rolled into town for as long as I could remember. After largely home-based family festivities, everyone I knew looked forward to getting out around teatime on the day after Christmas and meeting up the fair. If it turned up today, people would probably snub it. But it looked massive back then. Waltzers, dodgems, Coconut Shy, and Win A Goldfish were standard. They had everyone eating out of their hand.

Except me on that day. For the first time in years, it didn't look like I would be going. That Christmas Day flu lingered and as the sniffles wore on, I told Lesley that if I was any better I would take her to the fair but I really could not face going out. My nose was runny and my legs were heavy. I just wanted to stay in, be warm and give it a miss this year. There would be other Christmases and other fairs.

Except there were to be no more.

Lesley left without me. In her blue coat and blue shoes.

'Enjoy yourself,' I said as she parted. 'I'm sorry I can't come'.

'Don't worry, I understand,' she replied.

These were the last words I spoke to her and she to me. This was the final time I saw her.

The fair was ten minutes away. I shut the door and thought nothing more of it.

I went to bed just glad she was going to go with a friend.

If I could turn back the clock, I would have wrapped up warm and found a way to go for an hour. As poorly as I felt, I so wish I could have summoned up the strength, got dressed and just get through it.

I have replayed this moment to eternity.

Instead, Tommy and Lesley left together and my little sister went to Mrs Clark's, a neighbour of my Mum's.

Lesley was due home for tea at 5pm. No more than an hour, Mum had said, as she had done so many times. She never made it back.

Tommy had come back to the house before home time. I remember him having that red-cheeked winter look of warmth but clearly cold – the type where you talk and see your breath in front of you. He was confused as to why he was not the last one in.

He had last seen Lesley on The Wall of Death and had assumed she had gone on ahead of him. He returned alone. Mum and Alan had been preparing snowballs outside for the idyllic Christmas scene. I had finally succumbed and as I hit the pillow, I did not know at first that Lesley had not come home.

Ahead, lay only the nightmare.

Tommy froze as Mum and Alan looked at each other. Surely there was an innocent explanation. The first obvious port of call was downstairs to Mrs Clark's. She was clearly there with her daughter Linda. I was in a half sleep as my brother slammed the door on his way out and Mum momentarily carried on beavering about, carrying on as normal still expecting relatives to turn up. That's how it was in an extended family. Buses would run infrequently and unpredictably. Aunties and Uncles would arrive when they did and there would always be a brew on and something in the oven. Lesley, in particular was very fond of Auntie Elsie. She would race home to see her. We were waiting on both.

But she hadn't. Tommy rushed back in a good quarter of an hour later – perhaps it was longer. It seemed an eternity. He was out of breath and broke the news to the family that Mrs Clark *hadn't* gone to the fair.

'What?' someone exclaimed after a jaw-dropping silence.

We all stopped. Froze. Then went into overdrive.

None of us had ever been late except for Tommy once when he had been playing out roller-skating. The rollicking he received ensured none of us would ever run that risk again – even on Boxing Day.

By this point, I am off the couch and at the entrance to the kitchen. I am white-faced from my fever. I am also white-faced and fever pitch. I am shaking inside. The illness and panic met each other half way so I could not really differentiate. My younger brother was the messenger. It should have been me. Except there shouldn't have been a messenger. Even at this early stage, I feared the worst. But I couldn't say it out loud. I was mute, tongue-tied, transfixed like a statue in fear. And there was a hierarchy or respect in our house. Mum and Alan called the tune.

Tommy managed to blurt it out. Mrs Clark was tired and didn't feel like going. Linda and Lesley had gone alone. Normally, you wouldn't think too much of that in 1964. But now, with no Lesley it consumed our thoughts.

Tommy explained why he had been so long. He had run all the way back to the fair in the dark of night, guided only by street lights and the tacky signs of the fair. It was the coldest, blackest time of the year – always dark by half past three.

I was shivering – Mum urging me towards the fire. Nothing could warm my heart.

Mum's contentment was now at the brink of despair. Back then home time meant home time and you would give a child a few minutes and on Boxing Day, perhaps a few minutes more. You wouldn't want to be anything other than relaxed at Christmas Time but soon five minutes become ten and then an hour has passed and you start roaming the streets calling Lesley's name, all the time wondering if she has gone back whilst you are searching.

Mum and Alan began an agonising few hours. It was the night that never ended. Across the street decorations shone forth from faceless council flats that at no other time of year came to life. Their joy clung to the spirit of the season. Ours was drowning in the distant drone of the fair. We didn't see those lights any more. Ours were going out fast.

They made for Lesley's school friends' houses. Everybody lived within a few doors of each other back then. Mum told me that when she went up a garden path, her heart missed a beat with hope as she knocked on the door, only for it to skip a beat and race at the twice the speed as the answer kept coming back as rejection. Lesley was not at any of her mates.

Of course, all roads let back to the Rec. Spinning before Mum and Alan were hundreds of people oblivious to atrocity and on this of all days. The hope that knocking on individual doors gave so many times in such quick succession, and the comfort that Mum knew those people was dashed as she walked onto the field – a sea of fun and laughter and so many people she didn't know. Something that had always been part of our Christmas now took her out of her comfort zone, approaching complete strangers if they seen this little girl in a blue dress 'about this high, maybe an hour before'.

I can't say that people did not want to know but if they hadn't spotted Leslie then they just wanted to get on the next ride. It was Boxing Day after all.

I waited and waited for Mum and Alan to come home. As I waited for Lesley. I didn't hear the Christmas music. I couldn't tell you what was on the TV now. I was cold from the warmest of fires. In short, I was terrified and my parents' return just made it worse. I looked at them hopefully, on the brink of tears. They said nothing and nor did I.

It was the silence that said everything.

I ran upstairs to my room sobbing my heart out. I knew. I just knew.

Mum and Alan tore downstairs and *tore* into Mrs Clark. Linda was there but no Lesley. I couldn't understand it. They had got separated and she had come home alone. I am sure the whole neighbourhood heard Mum's wrath. She was now in overdrive and had to be restrained by Alan. Looking for blame got confused with looking for Lesley.

Each false lead and every cry of dismay got us nowhere. They ate up time and we were running that gauntlet again of time stopping and then going at twice the speed. For all the time that we knew nothing, it slept in the sub-conscience that Our Les would just turn up yet also you could rant and rave at Mrs Clark but you would have to cut it short because the voice in your head said that you were wasting time and running out of it. Lesley was out there and we had to find her tonight.

I couldn't stay inside any longer. If only I had found this physical strength earlier, none of us would be in this position. My mind had left my body. The aches and pains of flu were nothing now compared to how my heart was being ripped apart. To be full of cold and yet immune to the crackles of the fire meant that my sensitivities had left me. Numb in all ways possible, I begged Mum to let me look with her and Alan. Her instinct was no, but her instinct was yes. We needed to cling. It was time to stay together. Even though we were ripped apart.

I grabbed Mum's arm. There was no second movement. We locked together. Adult holding child. Child holding adult. My tears imprisoned inside. They can't get out. And if they rolled down my cheek they would have fallen like icicles. I wouldn't have known. I just held Mum and wanted it over. I said nothing. The words were incarcerated too. I was trapped in my soul.

Mum could see it and knew even at this early stage that I was wrapped in guilt. I was beyond panic. She told me not to blame myself even though nobody had said as such. Maternal instinct had kicked in. I had none. Not a drop of it. No hunch. Just certainty. Just cold hard facts. Lesley was gone. It was my fault.

Mum hugged me without words. That told me I was to blame but she was not blaming me.

We made for the fair again. It is what you did. You retraced your steps. With blind hope and a permanent sinking feeling. Mum shouted Lesley's name, occasionally spotting what she thought was a blue coat.

There were now a few of us. Word had spread and we split up with some people going to check the stream and the derelict mill nearby which felt more haunted than ever. As I clung to Mum's arms, I knew that the river meant bad gut feeling but also that we had to cover all bases. Mum was just adamant that we didn't stand still.

We had to scour every blade of grass however long the night lasted. The funfair all around me was a blurred headlight in the distance. The screams of terror on The Wall of Death resonated throughout the Rec. Our own walls were coming crashing down, yet nobody could hear our wails of pain. Nor more importantly, Lesley's.

Chapter 3 – Boxing Day Night, 1964

By the stream, Mum could hear Chris Montez *Let's Dance* from the fair. Lesley loved that song. Mum thought it might be a sign. I realised already by this point that you clung to anything. Any song. Any clue.

It was neither. It was an emotion. A reaction. A desperation. The first of many.

We headed home and I flung the door open, searching through the maisonette shouting Lesley's name at every twist and turn. Then, nobody said anything.

There were almost no words.

I could see Mum talking to Alan and they clearly looked as though they had made a decision. They did not want to stand still and settled us all down, turning their back once again to walk the streets. This time, they were not chasing the lights, sounds and smells of the fairground. They knew it was serious. They were walking to the nearest police station at Mill Street. Lesley could have been dead by now.

We were all frightened now – and I mean terrified in a way that few people experience in life. Even Mum, and I suspect an outwardly calm Alan too. Most people experience fear at points in life but it usually subsides. This was an uncontrollable panic cast across every one of us, regardless of age and life experience. The stillness of the Christmas nights and the emptiness of the roads with so little traffic and almost no public transport echoed that hollow emotion. It was beyond late and therefore hope too, and as it seemed initially at the police station, reason too.

Mum was pretty much dismissed by the front desk, suggesting that these things happen and they might want to give it another hour or so. When Mum said Lesley had been to the fair, he barely stirred as though he had heard it all before. I do not know the name of the police officer and I doubt now that he could have changed history, but I am sure he has had plenty of time to reflect on his indifference that night.

He, of course, picked the wrong person to agitate. Mum was furious as he rejected her on the one hand with kids coming home late all the time, and on the other with Christmas leave meaning staff were few and far between.

On Alan's intervention they compromised an unhappy standoff, notionally taking their bare details and offering 11 pm as a time when he might seriously take a look at it. Yes, in his job there would be often false alarms, but on Boxing Day evening in the completely different world of 1964, did the officer truly have anything else to do? Mum and Alan were without choice. They returned home briefly filling a small void in time that would become an enormous one in all of our lives.

Our neighbour Margaret was left at home with the kids. We all waited every long second for Mum to burst through the door with Lesley. And when only Mum and Alan emerged, it was obvious in seconds that the worst was still to come. No screams of joy, no relief, no words at all. In short, no Lesley. The atmosphere spoke the words.

Even Brett realised that something was going on. All of us sensed that doing nothing contributed to the crime. Alan got that more than anyone. Mum had barely taken her coat off when their nervous energy – or determined focus – told them that the children would wait and that being in the house was futile.

That meant scrambling the brain to places Lesley might have been. We have all in life retraced our steps and second-guessed where we could have misplaced something trivial. You explore likely scenarios and hopeful places. You clutch at straws until one of them comes good for you. When you reflect, most of what you seek is replaceable. This was totally different in that we were looking everywhere for something – *someone* – for which there was no substitute. The only parallel is that we were clutching ...at straws.

Alan suggested heading for the derelict mill. Mum didn't even know where he meant. The North West was littered with them. He meant Butler Street and the old cotton mill. There was no way Lesley would have gone there. We all knew that. But there was also no way Lesley would have not come home. Every suggestion, however much a wildcard felt like they were doing something. Idle, like the policeman, was betrayal. For your own nervous energy in the moment, and I suppose in the years after, you wanted to look yourself in the mirror and say that you did everything you could. The inactions of the police station single-handedly triggered that rear-guard action.

But just like the stream before, they got no response other than the echo of their own voices and they returned home to all of us sobbing. My brothers were taken up to bed but I was now wide awake, immune to illness but telling Mum that nobody would hurt our Les.

I don't know what I truly believed. I am not sure if I really understood what hurt meant. I cannot comprehend why I was trying to re-assure Mum. My own guilt just kept me talking. I knew something was horribly wrong and I was responsible.

Mum pacified me – a sort of reflex reaction for her and for me. People were beginning to say the right things believing that helped too. I was disbelieving and knew nothing was helping. I know she was caught in the crossfire of having to deal with three confused children when the reality was that Lesley's fate, at the most magical time of year, had imposed tragedy on us for an eternity.

Mum made provisions for the next day asking Margaret if she might be on standby. That did not sound re-assuring to anybody however young you were. Then

she remembered that Auntie Elsie and Uncle John had not turned up and this gave her hope too, believing that Lesley might have gone there on the bus.

Off they went again, in search of a bus to make the seven-mile trip to our relatives who could only apologise for their no-show at ours. And no, they didn't have Lesley. They were stunned to see Mum and Alan show up. The level of concern was now such that Elsie and John came back to ours but with them, came the sort of optimistic hope that we had all clung to like Alan and the mill in that they brought new ideas, and with that fresh promise and renewed energy. A new person, a new location, a new thought – it felt like you were doing something.

They killed time – ‘chainsmoking’ coffee. There was almost none left by the moment Alan rose to announce that they were going back to the police station. I don't know what time it was because there was no sense of it any more – the remnants of Christmas stood frozen and silent like statues, with food untouched, television unwatched and presents so lovingly cherished 24 hours before now abandoned. The stillness of the festive materialism ran headlong into the agitation in the dialogue. It added to the notion that we were culpable by doing nothing. The world had stopped in every sense and Alan wanted to counter that.

Outside, the joy of revellers exiting pubs broke the Christmas trance. Even at my age then, drunkenness had never seemed so pointless as that night. We were the only people in a hurry who had nothing to laugh about.

At the station, Mum and Alan's re-appearance brought the desk sergeant back to life. I suspect he didn't think he would see them again but a second showing within the time frame he had outlined meant that this now was escalating. Nobody can ever be certain if this delay was significant. Police will often cite that first 60 minutes as being key in a missing persons case. You like to think it might have made a difference but you can't know that. You run that line through your head to have someone to blame. I only felt that I had myself to do so.

Finally now, Mum and Alan were given an audience but it was already too much. The delay and the initial visit to the station were tearing her apart and going through the rigmarole of the basics about Lesley's appearance, movements and friends delayed a search further, whilst obviously vital to any such operation. From those details, one of the biggest manhunts in British criminal history began. It went from almost dismissive to full-on overdrive and when Mum walked back into the house, clearly still without my sister, I was still waiting for her on the couch distraught. Only on her say so did I go to bed and then just lay there long into the night against a backdrop of raised voices and sobbing, doors opening occasionally offering false hope, and Mum climbing the stairs to my sister's room to leave a light on and open the curtains. Symbolic gestures, I now understand were open signs of grief and false strength when to others they looked like you were just going through the motions.

In the silences from downstairs when nobody knew what to say, the void where you imagine you have heard Lesley coming home as your mind plays tricks deafens you as you try to sleep.

It was too late. She was never coming back.

Chapter 4

It is now 27 December. I only know that because it is the first day after Boxing Day. Stress and fatigue equal exhaustion. I know I slept a little because naturally you awake with almost Christmas Day nerves to sneak downstairs to see if Lesley is home. It is the same sensation of expectation and the unknown but at different ends of the anxiety scale.

Mum was in a state. Worse than I remember when I went to bed. She looked like she hadn't gone to bed at all. It was clear too from the smell that the world would soon run out of tobacco. A minor kerfuffle of hope had woken me – any noise offered that.

There was only despair.

'Why hasn't Les come home?' she sobbed and screamed.

'What has happened to Lesley?'

These were the only two questions from now on and we never stopped repeating them as though we had never uttered these words before. A new person would walk in and this same short despairing conversation would begin again. I was up before Brett and Tommy so I got it first. They were only the questions that I was asking too.

It was never a dialogue. I would say the same even if I was just repeating Mum.

'Where has she gone?' I asked, knowing that evil had been bestowed upon her but probably too young to fully grasp the concept of kidnap, abduction and murder.

'We don't know, she's not come home,' Mum answered staring into space.

And that told you one thing – that the second visit to the police station had brought nothing so far.

By the time I went downstairs, Mum and Alan had already been down to the paper shop on Bradford Road. They were almost lone figures in the street as they had been the previous evening but in the queue there were plenty all asking the same question – had people heard about the little girl who had gone missing from the fairground the previous night?

And there it was – the headlines were confirming it. Lesley was front page news. Somehow while we were giving details and being questioned ourselves, the 'story' gathered legs and the grapevine began. Never in a million years would anyone in our family be newsworthy. Now, the process began which would never leave us. On that particular day in 1964, I could have no idea that I would still have the media in my life in 2017 and how that media would then be. For Mum, it was the beginning

of a love-hate relationship which she understood for the need for awareness of Lesley's disappearance but over time would prove to be testing and unpredictable too.

At home, they read the articles. I saw it on the TV news too. They were just words and it was just noise. I could not really understand that the box in the corner that had been a world of magic and mystery was now bringing us the news that my sister was missing. They were talking and writing about my Lesley but she was ours and not theirs. She belonged in this room and not on the news. They spoke of her as if they knew her. The only hope that Mum took was learning from the media that all police leave had now been recalled – a massive contrast from the indifference of the first time they called at the station. We began to detest having the TV on at all. Firstly, it was our lives in public. Secondly, there was nothing new. So, hope was fading. It condemned us further, haunting us like Lesley's room.

Alan was holding it together. He had to. Nobody else had any sense of rationale – mood swings were constant and the persistent knocking at the door from well-wishers, police, nosey-parkers and close friends and family meant that the only consistency to the atmosphere was its inconsistency. Every new arrival meant those same two questions again and the process re-started. The continual flow through the front door meant appeared as though it was support and kind-hearted people willing to help but of course, it added to the nervous tension and stress which were the seeds of what then became a lifetime of anxiety for my Mum.

In between the arrivals, Mum would sit down and sometimes go back up to Lesley's room. What was meant as a positive message of hope in leaving Lesley's bedroom ready for her return began to haunt. The open curtains and made-up bed that were to welcome her back began to underline the point more that she hadn't been home at all. The room began to stare back at us. Lesley's sewing machine, which was a gift from our real Dad, just sat there downstairs. In her excitement, she had used it just once believing there were plenty more happy weekends and holidays to wile away the time on it. It was never turned on again.

I was feeling stronger physically but had never felt worse mentally. I understand today this is the beginning of delayed shock. I was drawn to returning to the fair.

There was little point. Lesley was not ever going to be there and I couldn't retrace our steps as I hadn't gone with her the previous night. It was a desperate lonely miserable exercise. Placing yourself at the scene might help deal with it. It didn't. It made it worse. Years later, when I was a delivery driver, I had to go past the parkland area every single day. Every time I did it was also still Boxing Day 1964 as I did so.

At home, Tommy and Brett remained clueless to the detail of what was going on but the atmosphere of sobbing and screaming hid them from nothing else. My youngest brother still played with his toys – the only semblance of normality in a

home where normal would never come again. I know Tommy too felt that silent guilt. He just assumed she had gone ahead of him.

Word was clearly spreading. Somehow my real Dad had known straightaway and we didn't have a phone to call him. But still, there were no sightings, no clothing and no timings. As I reflect years later with a greater understanding of the world and with much more experience of watching crime being reported, the fact that nobody could say they had seen Lesley *and* without any certainty of a timeline was staggering. This was Boxing Day and a busy place where everybody went each and every year. To this day, it has bugged me. How many times do you think I have asked 'Surely, somebody must have seen something?' But there was nothing. In a more innocent time, hiding in broad daylight looks to have been very easy to do.

Mum was losing it increasingly, convinced that Lesley was still alive – or at least she told us that was her belief. At fourteen, it was hard to contemplate death. 'Not home' was sufficiently distressing because of the worry. Death, at least, was finite. Despite saying this, I remember Mum changing clothes on that first afternoon. She came downstairs in black as though already acknowledging the worst.

Alan could see her slipping away – us three boys just existed. We were almost parentless. Late in the afternoon, that became a reality with on hefty knock on the door.