

'Mum's murder tore us apart, but now we're reunited'

Fifty years after a family tragedy split them up, Theresa Fazzani, 59, and her sister Janet are finally back together

It was 1973 and eight-year-old Theresa Fazzani was feeling excited. Christmas was just around the corner and she knew her mum Helen would make sure it was perfect. 'Mum was full of life,' Theresa recalls. 'I'd often find her boogying to Elvis in the kitchen – she was always singing and dancing.'

Helen, a 30-year-old mum of four, worked in a local pub. Their dad, Malcolm, was out of work so she often took on extra shifts to make sure the family never went without.

As predicted, Christmas was wonderful. 'We awoke to presents under the tree,' Theresa recalls. 'Mum cooked us a lovely dinner and then we spent the afternoon playing with our new toys.'

But two days later, their world was shattered. Theresa awoke in the early hours of 27 December and headed to her parents' room. 'It wasn't something I'd normally do, so maybe something woke me up,' she says. 'I gingerly peered around the door and found Mum lying on the bed in her underwear.'

Malcolm ushered her out of the room and said, 'Your mum's just sleeping. Get ready with your sisters, we're going out.' Then he quickly bundled the four children into the car and started to drive.

For the next five days, he just kept driving without any stops for food or breaks. 'We knew something wasn't right,' Theresa says. 'We missed Mum and didn't even get to say goodbye.'

Eventually Malcolm pulled up to a hotel in John O'Groats and was arrested by police. Totally bewildered, the girls were taken to a police station where they were given some terrible news.

'We were taken to a room where a female police officer explained that Dad had murdered our mum and was now under arrest. I was so confused, and my sisters were certainly too young to understand,

so I hugged them and told them it was going to be OK,' says Theresa.

The sisters were immediately placed in foster care, with Theresa taking on the role of mother over Janet, then five, and the two youngest. 'I did my best to protect them, especially Janet, who clung to my side,' she says.

Weeks later, Theresa received more bombshell news when she was told that Malcolm was not her real dad. Her biological father had been found and she was going to be living with him and a stepmum in London. Without her sisters.

The other three girls were adopted by a local family. 'My new dad told me I wasn't to even mention them. It was like a knife to my heart,' she says.

Soon, she realised her dad was a cruel man. 'But my stepmum was kind and loving and took care of me along with her dad, who became my new grandad,' Theresa says.

However, she never stopped missing her sisters. 'I wondered where they were and if they were happy. I'd think about Mum too, but I kept it all inside because I was scared of dad,' she adds.

Later, Theresa trained as a mental health counsellor and moved to the Isle of Wight to settle down. 'I often thought about finding my sisters, but worried they wouldn't remember me or want anything to do with

'It was like a knife to my heart'



me so I didn't pursue it,' she says. 'However, the older I got, the bigger that missing part of my life felt.'

Eventually, as her 60th birthday approached, Theresa realised she had to find them. After discovering a long-lost family group on Facebook, she gave the researchers all the details she had. 'Within 48 hours, one of them said they thought they'd found my sisters,' she says.

Nervous, Theresa waited two weeks before dialling Janet's number. 'When she picked up the phone, she said she'd spent

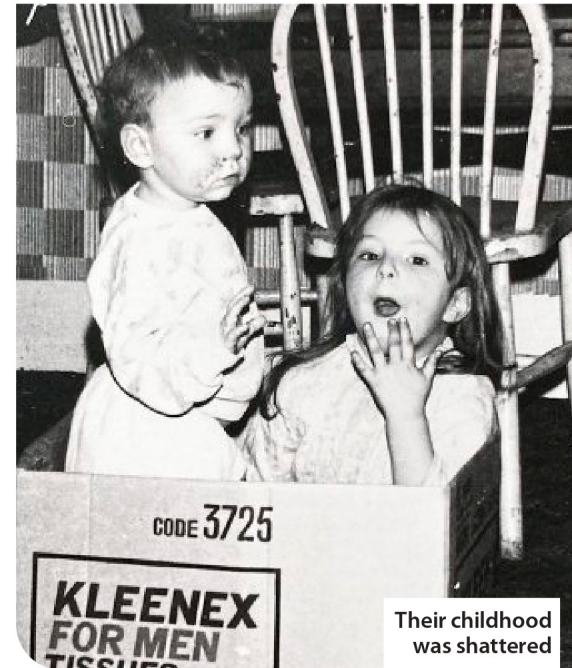
years agonising about whether she was going to hear from me again,' she says.

The women then spent hours talking about what happened the night their mum was killed.

Janet admitted that her adoption hadn't been a happy one either and had also wanted to contact Theresa, but she'd been worried her big sister might not want that.

Two weeks later, Theresa travelled to Cardiff for a face-to-face reunion with her sister. 'Over the next few hours, we barely

'We barely paused for breath'



paused for breath as we caught up on the last 50 years of our lives,' she says.

Janet knew where their mum's grave was and took Theresa to it. 'We hadn't been allowed to go to Mum's funeral, so now I could finally say goodbye,' she says. Sadly, Helen had been buried in an unmarked grave.

They also looked through old newspaper archives to piece together exactly what had happened to their poor mum. They discovered Malcolm had bludgeoned Helen to death with a hammer because she was going to leave with the girls.

He'd been jailed for 23 years after admitting murder, but was released after serving only nine. He'd died in 2023 without ever seeing his daughters again.

In time, Theresa and Janet were also reunited with their two younger sisters. The pair now want to campaign to combat violence against women and girls.

'We want to use our story to encourage other women to speak out. It will also keep our wonderful mum's memory alive,' Theresa says.

'Malcolm's act of violence all those years ago didn't just take Mum from us, it tore our family apart. But after reuniting, we're determined to make up for all that lost time.'

