

# Walking into a NIGHTMARE



Mum

**Seeing her mum lying lifeless on the floor, Roann tried to reason with her attacker. Then he came at her with a knife...**

both down.

'Girls, I've got exciting news,' she said. 'We're moving!'

We were leaving Swindon to go and live in Benjamin's house, which was miles away in Cumbria.

'It will be a fresh start,'

Mum added.

I didn't want to leave my school and friends, but I had no choice. And I wanted Mum to be happy.

Only as time went on, I noticed that Benjamin didn't make any of us happy.

He was strict with me and my sister, never showing either of us affection.

It was like he was just tolerating us for Mum's sake.

Meanwhile, he stopped Mum seeing her family and friends. Far away from home, he became

Mum's whole world. In time, they had a baby together, Shannon.

But instead of love, the house was filled with tension and anger. I'd often fall asleep to the sound of Mum and Benjamin arguing.

One morning, I found her

with a black eye.

'How did you get that?' I asked her, shocked.

'Silly Mum walked into a door,' she smiled sadly.

I was only eight, but could see through her fib.

Not long after, I woke to an ear-piercing scream.

Leaping out of bed, I found Mum crawling up the stairs.

Benjamin was behind her, wielding a knife.

'I'm going to kill you,' he snarled.

Then he clocked me, and it was as though I'd brought him to his senses.

'Don't worry,' he said, 'we're just practising for Halloween.'

But I was utterly terrified. We were all constantly walking on eggshells around him.

A few months later, I went on a school trip to France. When I returned, I was so

excited to tell Mum about it.

But she didn't seem herself. 'Are you OK?' I asked.

'I've left Benjamin,' she said quietly.

I felt a pang of relief. Later, I found out that Mum and Benjamin had fought one night, and he'd thrown her out of the house in just her dressing gown.

She'd stayed out the whole night, before going to Gerald's house in the morning.

Gerald was Benjamin's stepdad, and he and Mum were close.

We moved out of Benjamin's and in with Gerald temporarily.

I dared to hope it was finally a new beginning for us all. Mum got a



Me with a photo of Mum and Dad



She was beautiful



Benjamin Cooper

was spurting everywhere.

I quickly realised he must have stabbed her.

Mum and Shannon screamed as I ran for help.

I found a repair man who was working next door, and he came back with me.

Next, I grabbed Shannon and took her outside.

Moments later, the repair man came out the

house. He was on the phone and white as a sheet.

'I need an ambulance,' I heard him say.

Fearing the worst, I went back inside.

'Mum!' I called.

First, I saw Benjamin – now holding a large kitchen knife – drenched in blood.

Mum was lying on the living room floor, lifeless.

In a panic, I tried to calm Benjamin down. Part of me thought it would save Mum.

'Why are you doing this?' I asked.

But there was no reasoning with him.

Benjamin was a man possessed and came at me, brandishing the knife.

Then I heard Mum stir. She looked at me and managed, 'Look after my girls, I love you always.'

I prayed they wouldn't be the last words I heard her say.

Somehow I managed to escape, racing to my neighbour's house where Shannon was.

Thankfully, Rebecca was away and so not in danger.

Please pull through Mum, I

learnt that after attacking Mum, Benjamin had gone to Gerald's house, covered in blood.

'I've been doing a bit of butchery,' he'd said.

Then he proceeded to attack Gerald with a meat cleaver.

Gerald's right ear was almost severed and he had deep cuts to his skull, shoulder, chest and back.

But thankfully, doctors saved him. While Benjamin was apprehended, I was taken to the station to give a statement.

After that, time passed in a nightmarish blur.

Our grandparents tried to make life as normal as possible. But we all knew nothing would ever be the same again.

In time, Benjamin Cooper stood trial for my mum's murder at Manchester Crown Court.

The court heard how, in a brutal and relentless attack, he slit Mum's throat with a pen knife, before attempting to sever her head with a cleaver.

Her entire body was covered in wounds.

Pathologist Dr Brian Rogers said, 'I can think of no explanation other than the offender was trying to cut off Claire Marshall's head.'

Cooper was found guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility.

He was also convicted of the attempted murder

prayed as emergency services showed up.

But I'd seen how much blood she'd lost and feared the worst.

'Where's Mummy?' Shannon asked.

'She's just getting some help,' I told her.

For hours, we anxiously waited.

Then officers came with the news we had all dreaded.

Mum had died, aged just 35.

Later we

of his stepdad.

The court accepted that Cooper was suffering from severe psychosis at the time of the attacks, reportedly triggered by his delusional belief that Mum and Gerald were conspiring to kill him.

He was sent to a secure hospital for a minimum of six years for public protection – with the caveat that if he was deemed well enough, he'd be sent to prison.

It didn't feel like justice to me. Years went by, and I got married and had two children. But with every milestone, I missed my lovely mum even more.

Then, after being in a secure hospital for six years, Cooper was released on parole.

'I'm the one living a life sentence, not him,' I told my husband, dumbfounded.

That was 16 years ago, and I've lived in a constant state of fear ever since. I triple-lock my doors, and I'm always looking over my shoulder to see if he's following me and my two boys.

But I refuse to let Mum's death be in vain. Since she was killed, I've been determined to honour her memory.

I've worked with a number of domestic violence charities, helped shape the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and assisted the Probation Service on how better to support victims' families.

Mum doesn't have a voice, so I'm going to continue to speak up for her.

Roann Court, 32, Swindon, Wilts



I'm honouring her memory

By Danielle Lett. Pictures: Mirrorpix. Shannon's name has been changed