

THE Real STORY



It's the most heinous crime imaginable – a father, supposed to love and protect his children, kills them in cold blood. David Cass, 33, (left) smothered daughters, Ellie, three, and Isobel, 12 months, this September.

He then rang his ex, Kerry Hughes, 20, and told her, 'The children have gone to sleep forever, and now I'm going to hang myself.'

Sadly, Cass is one of a growing number of fathers who murder their kids. NSPCC statistics reveal that 35 children are killed by a parent every year in England and Wales. A large percentage are fathers unable to cope with a relationship break-up.

Psychologist Dr Kevin Browne told Real People: 'These men are often depressed, controlling, jealous types, who will do anything to prevent being abandoned.' In most cases, they are unhappy with their wife or ex-girlfriend.

June Thomson, 47, understands Kerry Hughes's pain. Her estranged husband, Rab, 49, killed their children, Michelle, 25, and Ryan, seven, in May. She told Real People's Louise Ward her tragic story...



Cass murdered little Ellie (left) and Isobel



Rab Thomson in custody, and (right) with kids Michelle and Ryan



Beyond Evil

PROFILE OF A KILLER DAD

- Experts say that there are two types: those who act out of revenge to spite an ex, and those who murder out of misplaced love – perhaps because of financial ruin – and don't want to leave their children behind.
- An insecure relationship with a man's own parents can lead to dysfunctional

- adult relationships.
- Many – out of hatred or love – plan to kill themselves, too, but some can't manage it.
- Types include controlling men, often depressive and unhappy with their partner or ex, who fear abandonment, and those who are violent towards their partner and, in some cases, their kids.

and insults, I realised she was right, and moved into a B&B. But because of my accommodation, Rab got custody of the kids.

I had no job and no home – the cottage was in both our names, but child benefit and Michelle's disability allowance was paid to him. My choice? Go back or give up my kids. So I moved back in.

Then in 2000, I fell pregnant. It was unplanned, but my love for children outweighed my loathing for Rab. I was delighted when Ryan was born in April 2001.

Although Ryan brought joy to my life, the problems with Rab continued. 'You've got to leave,' Shaun pleaded, after I suffered another beating. Shaun was on leave from the Army – it was his way of escaping home.

So, while Rab was at work, I packed our bags and took the kids to another women's refuge. But, feeling guilty again, I let him take them to Ireland on a trip. When he refused to return the kids to me, I moved back in.

Amazingly, this time, the violence stopped. Rab even let me volunteer for a local charity. But in March this year, Rab was accused of sexually assaulting one of Michelle's carers. Rab denied it, and nothing came of the accusation, but I was disgusted. This time, I left for good.

Me and the kids got a place with Linda and her children, Abbi, five, and Bess, three.

Ross, 20, who adored Rab, stayed with his dad. On Ryan's seventh birthday, we celebrated as a family. But as divorce proceedings started, Rab became vicious. 'What will you do when you're all alone and you've got no kids?' he sneered. 'You're going to destroy your whole family.'

On Friday 2 May 2008, my solicitor told me I'd been awarded custody. Rab had weekend visitation rights.

Linda and me were moving into a new flat the next day, a Saturday, so I took Michelle and Ryan to see their dad. When I went to collect them at about 7pm, Rab's Jeep and Ross's car were in the drive. But the back door, normally open, was locked...

'Strange,' I thought, unlocking it and stepping into an eerily silent house. *Where was everyone?* Ryan was lying in his bed, but something was wrong... His eyes were open, staring blankly ahead, and his face pale. His blue sheets were stained with blood...

'No!' I screamed, stumbling to Michelle's room.

Her walls and duvet were smeared with blood. 'He's killed my children!' I screamed, knees buckling. Shaking, I ran into Rab's room. He was lying on his side, motionless, blood running from his wrist, which was next to a kitchen knife.

Suddenly, I heard Ross from the hallway. 'What's wrong, Mum?' he called. 'Oh, God!' he reeled, taking in the carnage. 'I've been in my room, I didn't hear a thing.'

Fumbling, I dialled 999. 'He's killed my kids...' I wailed. The operator kept me talking until police and paramedics arrived.

Within minutes, Linda was by my side. 'Are you sure the children are dead?' she asked. 'Yes,' I wept. 'Rab, too.' 'I saw him on a stretcher,' Linda faltered. 'He wasn't dead. He looked straight at me...'

Slipping on my lacy wedding dress, my fairy tale was about to come true. At 19, I was marrying my childhood sweetheart, Rab Thomson.

I'd met Rab, 21, a construction worker, three years earlier at a disco. I'd been bowled over by his muscly body and confidence. Rab had left home at 15 and was no one's fool. To my unworried eyes, he seemed strong and invincible. Not everyone agreed, though.

'He's arrogant,' my sister, Linda, 19, told me. But I thought I knew better. I fell pregnant and quit my factory job shortly after our wedding. Life seemed complete.

But my happiness was shattered when, at four months' gone, Rab came home drunk. 'You're useless!' he raged. I gasped as he stormed towards me, as I stood on the stairs. 'Aaargh!' I screamed, tumbling down. I landed with a thud on my bottom, my arms cradling my tiny bump.

'I'm so sorry,' Rab cried, running down to me. 'Are you OK?' As I took in his teary eyes, I ignored the warning bells in my head. I told myself it had been the drink talking.

'I'd never hurt you or the baby,' Rab sobbed. Believing him was my first big mistake. Luckily, I only had a few bruises. But I kept my 'fall' a secret...

Rab was by my side when I gave birth to our daughter, Michelle, in May 1982. 'She's amazing,' he beamed.

Thank goodness. Everything

was going to be fine...

'My baby's got blue eyes,' I sang, rocking her to sleep. Motherhood was wonderful, but Rab's violence escalated.

'Ugly, stupid and lazy!' he screamed at me one night, his fist cracking against my jaw.

Frightened of annoying him, I became more like his slave than his wife. When our son, Shaun, was born in 1983, I could have left. But with young kids to care for, I couldn't get a job. What would their lives be like if I was a struggling single mother?

Besides, Rab was a good father and never shouted at the children.

Sadly, Michelle was diagnosed with severe learning difficulties at four. Determined she'd have the best chances in life, Rab moved us 90 miles away so she could go to a special school. By then, we had a one-year-old son, Ross. We had a pretty cottage with a big garden – but I wasn't allowed to go out alone or

make new friends.

Then one night, after he'd dragged me around the house by my hair, drunk, I'd had enough. I waited until he went out, threw some clothes in a bag and took the kids to a Women's Aid hostel.

As the weeks passed, I felt bad for depriving Rab of the kids. So I caved in, dropping them off for a visit. But he refused to give them back. 'They're staying with me,' he growled.

I went wild, screaming and battering the locked front door. Rab called the police, and I was arrested for breach of the peace. I told them what had happened – including the violence – but they just referred me to a family lawyer.

Fearing I'd lose the kids, I moved back in. Crazy? Maybe... But I had to sacrifice myself to be with them. Knowing how defenceless I was changed Rab – for the worse. He'd order me to cook for him at all hours, and make love whenever he wanted to.

'You need to leave,' Linda told me. After three years of beatings



Left: Our wedding day. Right: Michelle and Rab

Deadly dads

ROLL-CALL OF HORROR

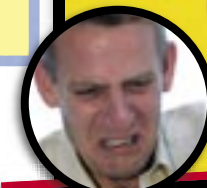
Gavin Hall, 35

Killed his daughter, Amelia, three, in 2005, using chloroform then strangling her, in revenge for his wife's affair. He tried to kill himself while her mother, Joanne, and sister, Lucy, slept upstairs, in Irchester, Northants.



John Hogan, 33

Leapt off a balcony during a holiday in Crete in 2006, with his six-year-old son, Liam, and daughter, Mia, then two, in August 2006, after his wife, Natasha, 35, threatened to leave him. Liam was killed, but Hogan and Mia both survived.



Brian Philcox, 52

Drove his daughter, Amy, seven, and son, Owen, three, to a secluded spot in North Wales on Father's Day 2008, before fixing a pipe to the exhaust of his car and gassing all three of them to death. He feared losing custody and his life savings in his bitter split from wife, Lyn, 38.



Christopher Foster, 50

The millionaire shot his wife, Jill, 49, and 15-year-old daughter, Kirstie, before shooting their pets dead this August. Foster, who faced financial ruin, set fire to the family's mansion, then shot himself.



June was desperate for answers...

Photos: Claran Donnelly, Jim McEwan, PA, Rex Features, Solent News

Crime & Punishment

▶ CONTINUED

Imagining Rab playing dead as he listened to my tortuous screams drove me mad.

'He deserved to die!' I raged, punching a wall. 'Not my poor, innocent babies!'

God knows how I survived the hours of questioning at the police station. The following days passed in a blur. Shaun arrived and my family rallied round. *But what had made Rab do such a thing?*

To my horror, Ross blamed me. 'If you hadn't left my dad, this would never have happened,' he sobbed. I tried reasoning with him, but he refused to listen.

Rab's evil had robbed me of another child. The pain was indescribable. My only comfort was that Rab had spared him.

Two weeks later, Michelle and Ryan were cremated together at Kirkcaldy Crematorium. Michelle loved anything pink, so we spray-painted her coffin fuchsia pink, and decorated Ryan's white coffin with Power Rangers stickers. We played the Power Rangers theme tune for Ryan, and Elton John's *Blue Eyes* for Michelle.

After the funeral, the police rang to say that Rab had left a note for me at the cottage. Trembling, I opened the crumpled piece of paper. *Don't blame yourself. I will look after them... Move on alone. Love Rab xxx,* it read.

Anger coursed through me. Rab had been desperate to stop me having a happy, carefree life without him. And he'd clearly killed our children to make me suffer. It was the most vile

L-R: Me, Michelle, Shaun, Ross, Rab and little Ryan. This is the last shot of us all together...



WARNING SIGNS

Dr Kevin Browne, Professor in Forensic and Family Psychology at the University of Birmingham, tells you what to look out for:

- There's always a trigger – often custody arrangements, separation, or work problems,

- such as sacking or redundancy. Watch out if he seems particularly depressed.
- Violence – especially associated with jealousy. If you fear any risk factors, stop contact immediately.

punishment. A few weeks later, the police gave back the keys to the cottage. It had been cleaned, and items had been removed for evidence. But reminders of my children were everywhere.

Michelle's favourite doll was still resting on top of her laundry basket, and Ryan's toys were scattered around the living room. I remembered their laughing faces. *And then the blood...*

But somehow, in that empty house, I felt close to them. I started visiting there regularly. I'd go and do some gardening, pretending I'd have to leave soon to collect Ryan from school. 'It's not real,' I'd tell myself. 'They'll be home soon.'

My life was so full of pain and darkness that pretending everything was fine was the only way of coping.

In September this year, I went to the High Court in Edinburgh for Rab's trial. Before the hearing, the prosecutor took me aside and told me that Rab had stabbed little Ryan 14 times, and Michelle 12 times. Imagining their pain and fear was unbearable. 'I can't do this,' I wept,

breaking down. 'Take me home.' Fortunately, my brother, Jim, 42, urged, 'You need to go through with this.' He was right. *I had to face the monster who had slaughtered my children.*

When I saw Rab, he was wearing a suit, his shoulders slumped, tears streaming down his face. He didn't look at me once. I felt completely numb.

The court heard that, although Rab had shown signs of strain since I'd left, he'd seemed perfectly normal on the day of the murders.

That afternoon, he'd taken the kids to McDonald's, and later neighbours saw him in the garden, pushing them on the swings. When Ross got home that afternoon, Rab asked him to nip to Asda. He returned over an hour later, and Rab told him I'd already collected Michelle and Ryan. So Ross went to his room to watch DVDs, totally unaware of the carnage – until I arrived.

Rab pleaded guilty to murdering our children. He'd spent some time in custody at a psychiatric hospital, but doctors found no evidence of mental illness. 'He's bad, not mad,' I thought, numbly. Sitting in the courtroom was surreal. It felt like this nightmare was happening to someone else.

Adjourning the case for sentencing, Judge Lord Menzies told Rab, 'What you have done and

what you have pleaded guilty to is indescribably awful.'

Rab sat in the dock, weeping. Afterwards, I went home with Jim, feeling hollow. I long for my children every day.

Hopefully, Rab will rot in jail, but my sentence is worse. I face a lifetime of grief and emptiness.

I blame myself for not leaving him for good the first time he hit me. But while I suffered in my marriage, Rab was kind and patient with the kids in a way he never was with me. I never for a second imagined that he'd do anything to hurt them.

But you can never trust a man who hits you. If he can hurt you, he can do it to others, too...

June Thomson, 47, Markinch, Fife

LEAVING A VIOLENT MAN

- Find a good solicitor.
- If concerns about kids' safety aren't taken seriously by the family court when a violent partner applies for contact, tick the 'yes' box about domestic abuse on his application for contact.
- If yours is a 'high risk' case, with a serious risk of kids being abused or abducted while with their father, your solicitor should ask for supervised contact.
- For help and information, visit www.womensaid.org.uk and read the Survivor's Handbook.
- For information on children and domestic violence, visit www.thehideout.org.uk
- Call the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (run by Women's Aid and Refuge) on 0808 200 0247.

I'm left to a life of grief and emptiness

