

# MUM SUFFERS 20 YEARS OF HELL

## My heart stopped when I saw photo of Nigella's abuse .. it brought back horror of my own domestic ordeal

### EXCLUSIVE

By **ADELINA CAMPOS**  
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**WHEN** Lurleen Hilliard saw the pictures of Nigella Lawson being choked by her husband, it sent a chill down her spine.

Multi-millionaire art collector Charles Saatchi may have dismissed the whole incident as a "playful tiff", but to Lurleen it brought back memories of her traumatic past.

The Irish mum knows only too well what it's like to be the victim of domestic abuse.

For over 20 years she was mentally, physically and sexually abused, and she felt too powerless to escape.

Last night the brave mother of four revealed how she freed herself from her violent husband, and how she came to help adult survivors of child abuse.

Lurleen said: "When I saw the picture of Saatchi with his hands around Nigella's throat, my heart stopped. It brought back so many bad memories.

"I just didn't expect to see this, for him to do something like that in public.

"Certainly we don't know exactly what happened, but I can't help but wonder what happened later when they got home."

The 44-year-old told the Irish Sunday Mirror she completely fell for her husband's act when she first met him.

She explained: "I was 20 years old

**'He punched me so badly that my eyebrow burst'**

when we met. I wasn't very confident at the time - I was a chubby kid.

"He was good looking, he paid me a lot of attention and I fell for it hook, line and sinker.

"I didn't know it then but it was a game from the start.

"I was very quiet, I didn't go out or spend time with boys, and he had a bet with his friend about who could get me in bed first."

Lurleen said her parents hated her future husband from day one.

She said: "I think a part of me was rebellious. He made me think that they were in the wrong, and my relationship with my parents changed.

"They didn't speak to me for quite a while. In fact, it wasn't until I had my own children that they came back into my life."

Dubliner Lurleen said it took her years to realise she had married an abuser because the violence increased gradually.

"It was more about control at first. He would do what he wanted, he was having affairs, and he would lie to my face about it even after being caught in the act.

"He would insult me and there was mental abuse right from the very start

but it was only after several years together that he started pushing and shoving me."

In the last 10 years of the marriage, the violence became horrific, according to Lurleen.

She said: "Anything would set him off. He would hit me where people wouldn't see. He would rape me.

"I ended up sleeping with two knives, one in each hand underneath the pillow, and I would have a bottle of spray bleach under the bed.

"I'm not sure what I would have done had he attacked me in the night, but that's just the way it was. I literally

slept with one eye open all the time." Her husband also became abusive towards one of their children, the second of their four sons.

"On one occasion he put my son's head through a wardrobe. My son was a young teen at the time.

"He saw his dad open a can of beer at around 8.30am,

Couple... Nigella and Charles



and he said something to him about it, but that got my husband angry.

"On another occasion I didn't have the dinner out so he got angry.

"He punched me in the eye so badly that my eyebrow burst open. I told people that I had been mugged on my way to see my mother at the hospital and he got away with it." The Glasnevin

woman tried to find help, and even contacted the gardai, but she felt so threatened she dropped charges.

She said: "I only went to the gardai two or three times during our marriage.

"I never went through with charges. Once I initially did and he was told not to come back to the house, but he showed up in the middle of the night and disconnected all the phone lines.

"The message was pretty clear. I knew what was going to happen if I tried anything else.

"Another time he threatened to bring me up the Dublin Mountains to gang

rape me with his friends. I would shake just looking at him."

It wasn't until two years ago, when her husband left the country to find work after losing his well-paid job, that Lurleen finally managed to escape.

While this brought her immense relief, it was not the end of her troubles. She has been forced to live in hiding with two of her sons to make sure her husband does not find her again.

She explained: "The problem is that the minute he left the country, the authorities here could do nothing

"The gardai couldn't charge him for anything, not for assault. I had no

protection order, no safety order, no barring order.

"I can't get a divorce or sole custody of my children because he's not here to appear in court.

"He can come and go in Ireland whenever he wants because he is an Irish passport holder."

Lurleen, who is planning to move to the US to get away from her ex, has written a book about her shocking life called Survivors Not Statistics which will be released in two months' time through Xlibris Publishing.

She said: "The reason I am vocal about this is to stop him controlling me."



Help... Martin of Women's Aid

**'Beaten, raped and trapped at home'**

DOMESTIC abuse is widespread in the country, the director of the Women's Aid charity has warned.

Margaret Martin said: "Every day in Ireland women are emotionally, physically, sexually and financially abused.

"They are beaten, raped and trapped in their own homes by those closest to them - their husbands, partners and boyfriends.

"One in five Irish women experience domestic violence and it can affect every woman regardless of age, marital status, class or cultural background."

She said victims could be "your friend, your sister, your mother".

And she added: "Without exception a woman's greatest risk of violence is from someone she knows.

"Living with domestic violence is like living in a horrific trap.

"But thousands of women do find support from Women's Aid."



Speaking out... Lurleen Hilliard has been forced to live in hiding

## Pay heed to warning signs

THE Women's Aid charity has listed some warning signs to help women in particular make sense of their situation.

It says any one of the following signs is serious - and you do not need to experience several, or all, of them for your relationship to be abusive:

- ▶ YOU are afraid of your partner.
- ▶ YOU are constantly "walking on

eggshells" because of his mood swings.

▶ YOU spend your time working out what kind of mood he is in and the focus is always on his needs.

▶ HE loses his temper easily and over minor things.

▶ HE has hit you or almost hit you and/or your children. He has threatened you/your kids.

▶ YOUR partner has been abusive in a previous relationship.

▶ HE criticises your family and friends and/or makes it difficult for you to see them or talk to them on your own.

▶ HE calls you names and mocks you and/or your children.

▶ HE is jealous and accuses you of flirting and having affairs.

## CASE STUDY: JANE RUFFINO, 37

A DOMESTIC violence victim has hit out at the lax attitude towards abusers that prevents victims from coming forward.

Jane Ruffino, whose abuser escaped jail last winter, told the Irish Sunday Mirror communities should condemn these monsters as much as the laws do.

The 37-year-old was left with horrendous injuries after her boyfriend Mark Jordan punched her repeatedly in the face until he broke his hand.

Jordan, 39, was found guilty of assault last November. He was told to pay €5,000 compensation for the vicious attack but his jail sentence was suspended.

Tech worker Jane said: "I can understand why people do not come forward. For me the fact there



there is no such thing as an isolated incident."

She believes Irish society as a whole needs to fully condemn the abusers.

Jane added: "Why is it that rapists and murderers go into hiding and domestic violence is the only situation where the victim is the one who goes into hiding?"

"Nobody ever wants to get involved because it can be challenging.

"It can mean admitting that someone you thought was a decent person actually beats their partner.

"And people would rather turn their back on the victim than be unpopular by condemning someone they have known perhaps all their lives."

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