

'My daughter was murdered on our doorstep'

Two years after seven-year-old Mary Shipstone was gunned down by her father, her mum Lyndsey opens up about the tragedy...

September 11, 2014, is a day Lyndsey Shipstone will never forget. That was the day her daughter Mary, seven, was shot twice in the head by her own father – Lyndsey's estranged husband Yasser Alromisse. While the couple were embroiled in a bitter custody battle, Alromisse



Alromisse shot himself after killing his daughter

went to Lyndsey's home and launched his fatal attack. After shooting Mary, he turned the gun on himself. Here, stay-at-home mum Lyndsey, 45, from Northiam, East Sussex, remembers that awful day and tells new! how welcoming a daughter with her new fiancé Jason has finally given her a reason to smile again...

That terrible day started like any other. After my daughter Mary, seven, went to school I spent time redecorating her bedroom. When I picked her up that afternoon, she was excited after her first violin lesson. "I'll play for you!" she grinned.

When we got home, I noticed a silver car in our shared driveway and assumed it was someone visiting a neighbour. But as we reached our front door, I heard a horrific bang. Turning around, I saw a devastating scene. Mary was on the ground and my estranged husband – her father, Yasser – was leaning out of the silver car holding a gun. With a jolt I realised he'd shot my darling daughter in the head.

I met Yasser in 2005, when I was 34, on a matrimonial

site for Muslims. Three years earlier, I'd lost my eight-month-old daughter Yasmin to cancer. I'd converted to Islam soon after, looking for solace.

Born in Egypt, Yasser worked in HR and lived in Swansea. After we chatted for a month, he visited me in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, and took me out for pizza. He was charming and within a month we were married. My family were shocked but, wanting me to be happy, they gave me their blessing.

But things soon turned sour. Yasser was always telling me how to dress and behave, using religion to justify everything. I felt like I was losing my identity, but was desperate

to please him. When I told him I was pregnant in January 2006, he flipped. "I want a divorce," he snarled, before grabbing a fork and stabbing me in the arm. Vulnerable and blinded by love, I told myself he'd just got cold feet. But in fact it marked the start of years of emotional and physical abuse.

LIVING IN FEAR

Later that year we moved to Brighton so Yasser could look for a job. Mary was born on September 18, 2006, and I was elated. But Yasser left us to start a graduate training scheme in Wigan. He didn't want us with him but I wanted to work things out so I visited as often as I could, but he wasn't interested in Mary. He sometimes played with her like a doll, but he never listened when I explained how to look after her.

Once, when she was 18 months old, after she'd been with Yasser, I realised from the contents of her nappy that she'd eaten chewing gum. I was horrified, but he was defiant. "I'll do as I like," he said.

As Mary got older, Yasser wanted to see more of her and we moved back in together in 2010. But I quickly realised he hadn't changed. Social services got

involved because they were worried about our welfare. In May 2011, he was ordered to leave but he just came back again.

That month, he arranged for Mary and me to go on holiday with his family in Egypt. However, once we were there I realised he had no intention of letting Mary leave. I contacted social services back home and they arranged for air tickets to be left at the airport in my name. A shopkeeper I'd befriended smuggled us to the flight.

I vowed I'd never go back to Yasser. Social services found us a refuge in East Sussex, and that November we got a house nearby.

In March 2012, I met Jason Deane, 47, a plumber, at a friend's barbecue. He was kind and won Mary over. We'd go for picnics and we taught Mary to swim together. She was a joy – strong-willed, but a happy soul. One day she whispered in my ear, "Can I call Jason Daddy?" "Of course, darling," I replied, feeling absolutely thrilled.

In the summer of 2013, we moved to Northiam, a pretty village in East Sussex, and Jason spent lots of time with us. Yasser was still allowed to see Mary periodically while the custody battle was going on, but our address was a secret,



Mary was just seven when her father shot her



Lyndsey says she's glad her ex-husband killed himself

hundreds of people filled the church. Mary was buried with her favourite teddy and I felt like my heart had broken in two. In that time of dark despair, Jason was a ray of light. Soon afterwards, he proposed. I knew I wanted to marry him.

I'll never understand why Yasser murdered Mary, but I think it was to punish me. People ask if I'd rather he'd been brought to justice but I'm glad he killed himself. I'm still tortured by questions. Did Mary see her father pointing the gun? Was she scared? Did she feel pain?

Photos of Mary on my walls help me remember her, and on her birthday I make her a cake, take it to her grave and sing to her.

In February last year, I fell pregnant. Jason and I were thrilled when our daughter Daisy was born in November 2015. As soon as she's old enough, I'll tell her all about her big sister. I'm so sad they'll never get to meet.

Every time I put my key in the door, memories of that horrific day come flooding back. Unfortunately it's a long process finding another council house, but I'm looking forward to getting a place with Jason and getting married one day – and I haven't ruled out having more children. But for now, we're enjoying our time with our daughter.

I've had counselling and I still take antidepressants to help with the trauma. I know the grief will never leave me, but I have to look to the future for Daisy.

Amy Maynard

Lyndsey has set up a fund in Mary's memory to offer music therapy from The Music Well to children living in difficult circumstances. To donate, visit Themusicwell.org.uk

so a social worker would take Mary to those visits. Afterwards she'd wet the bed and I'd feel so upset and guilty. I told Jason I was scared Yasser might try to abduct her, but I never imagined what he was really capable of.

I'd left my Islamic faith as I didn't want Yasser to be able to find me via the mosque, but tragically, he tracked us down. My solicitor unwittingly gave him my address during legal correspondence. And my worst nightmare then came true – he stole Mary away from me.

On that day, I remember Mary lying on her back. Yasser shot her again before calmly retreating back into the car without looking at me. One of the bullets had gone straight through her violin. Screaming for someone to call the police, I cradled her in my arms. She was barely breathing.

DEVASTATING NEWS

Desperate to get her to safety, I carried her into a neighbour's house and lay her on the sofa.

I felt a faint pulse. Realising she'd been eating a sweet, I took it out of her mouth so she wouldn't choke. Then, I went from being strangely calm and focused to being completely hysterical. Every moment seemed like a lifetime.

Paramedics arrived and the police sped me behind the ambulance to King's College Hospital, an hour away in London. Mary was put on life support, but doctors had devastating news. She wasn't going to pull through. I made the excruciating decision to donate her organs.

My brother and sister arrived to support me, but sitting by Mary's side and holding her hand was agony. Her face was swollen and she didn't look like herself. I didn't leave her as I couldn't bear the thought of her being alone.

The next day, the time came to switch off her life support. I was distraught but felt I had to stay strong. If

there was any chance Mary could hear me, I wanted to comfort her.

Afterwards, the doctors let me sit with her. We took imprints of her hands as a keepsake. That was the last time I saw my beautiful girl. I left the hospital in shock. The local vicar and his wife took me in – I couldn't go straight back to the house.

I've no idea how I got through that time. Although I hadn't heard any more shots, the police told me Yasser had killed himself in the car after he took Mary's life.

Eventually, somehow, I went home, and at my daughter's funeral on October 17, 2014,



Lyndsey's enjoying life with Jason and their one-year-old daughter Daisy

PHOTOS: David McHugh/UNIP, Rex Shutterstock



Mary aged six months



Mum Lyndsey says Mary was "a joy"