

GONE

The disappearance of Claudia Lawrence and
her father's desperate search for the truth

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GONE

The Disappearance of Claudia Lawrence
and Her Father's Desperate Search for the
Truth

Neil Root



EDINBURGH AND LONDON

FOR CLAUDIA

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Foreword

WHEN ANYONE DISAPPEARS UNEXPECTEDLY IT causes concern to all who knew them, but when the person is an attractive young woman the disappearance can easily become a national obsession. The resulting media and popular interest is a mixed blessing. The outpouring of suggestions from all those who think they may have seen something of relevance to offer opens up many lines of inquiry for finding the missing person but also generates an overpowering influx of possibilities. In addition, the mass media curiosity inevitably reveals aspects of the life of the missing person and those associated with them that complicate the public's understanding of who they are. Most people have aspects of their lives that they would rather keep secret, not least because without knowledge of the full details it is easy for prurient observers to form a mistaken impression. Yet that does not stop media speculation that can be as hurtful as it is inaccurate.

The popular attention on the disappearance also puts pressures on the police beyond those that come from having to manage complex inquiries: so much so that if the cause of the disappearance is not determined quickly there will inevitably be criticism of the police investigation and challenges to its effectiveness. This is all made worse by the understandable heartfelt distress felt by those close to the missing person. The desire for closure from the deeply stressful agony of not knowing what has happened to their loved one can split apart families, producing a sort of collateral damage in the community.

Sadly, most books on actual crimes focus on the criminals, exploring their inner lives and motivations. In contrast, crime fiction, especially the genre known as 'police procedurals', treats the solving of crimes, usually horrific murders, as a form of crossword puzzle in which anguish in the lives of the police officers often provides more emotional content than what the victims and those close to them suffer.

A detailed exploration of the disappearance of Claudia Lawrence is therefore to be welcomed in redressing the balance, by focusing on the missing person and the effect her disappearance has had on so many lives. The significance of the way the police investigation was actually carried out is made clear by framing it within the experiences of Claudia's family and friends. Fresh insights into Claudia's own character and activities also help us to understand the challenges that are faced by those seeking to understand what happened to her in March 2009.

This book is therefore important not only for those who want to understand more about the investigation into Claudia's disappearance, but also for all those who want to make sense of the challenges, complexities and emotions that erupt when a person disappears without explanation.

Professor David Canter
Emeritus Professor of the University of Liverpool
Professor of Psychology

CHAPTER ONE

SLEEPY SUBURBAN NIGHTMARE

THE PREVIOUS DAY, WEDNESDAY, 18 March 2009, had been like any other. That morning, Claudia Lawrence had an early shift in the kitchens at the University of York. Like any chef, Claudia Lawrence was rudely awoken by her alarm, and she knew from experience not to press the snooze button. It was straight up and into 'get ready' mode, a necessary function of anyone working shifts. Her rucksack was ready packed with her chef whites (white jacket, blue and white checked trousers and a hat) neatly folded inside, and as she closed the homely green door of her small terraced house in the even-more-than-usually sleepy York suburb of Heworth and stepped onto the narrow pavement, her only thoughts were to get to work and on with what she had to do.

In the almost silent early morning air, Claudia walked past the Nag's Head pub, her local, only four doors down on the same side, its John Smith's crest and B & B signs hanging above and creaking in the wind. Directly opposite the pub, the Embassy Racing betting office stood closed, hours before any horses would line up or hares start running, and Heworth Church of England Primary School was devoid of life too at that early hour. At the main junction at the end of Heworth Road, Claudia crossed over outside the parade of shops at Heworth's heart. Walking down Melrosegate, the

road that leads from Heworth out towards the University of York campus, Claudia knew if she was keeping good time or not judging from the pivotal points she passed on this 1.6-mile work route: the steps she would take were emblazoned in her mind and the remainder of her journey was mapped out on the very tarmac she walked.

Claudia walked past Tang Hall Lane on the left, then a park and a church on the same side. Another small parade of shops was on her right, namely Melrosegate post office and the York Mini-Market. Melrosegate then runs into Hull Park Road, and the junction just before the Shell petrol station on the right takes you to Hull on the left side and York city centre on the right. Going straight on, Claudia began to walk uphill as Hull Park Road became Green Dykes Lane. She carried on as the gradient got steeper, going with the road as it veered left towards Heslington village but coming off on a small byway on the right and onto University Way. The University of York campus is large and sprawling, and to get to the kitchens at the Roger Kirk Centre, where she worked, Claudia walked past woodland on her right. Ahead of her, 'Cyclist Slow Down' was blasted in white into the path. Also ahead were tall trees, not heavily wooded but sparsely laid out and partially shielding the numerous university blocks.

She made good time that morning, and a CCTV camera clocked her arrival at the university's Roger Kirk Centre at 5.57 a.m., three minutes before the start of her shift. It was a normal shift, as everyone in the kitchens remembered later. Again, at 2.31 p.m., the same camera recorded her leaving the college. But Claudia wouldn't walk home that day.

She hadn't gone far when a woman she worked with pulled up and offered her a lift home. Claudia gratefully accepted, and they chatted on the way back to Claudia's house in Heworth Road. They said goodbye until the next day. Claudia wasn't at home for long, however. She went out again, and as she was walking past the Nag's Head she

stopped to talk to a woman she knew: Linda Chapman, a child-minder aged 50, who was pushing a pram. Linda Chapman later said, 'She seemed her usual happy, cheery self.'

It's often said that it's a small world, but for those who have lived in Heworth for a significant length of time, it most certainly is. Claudia then walked part of her work route again down Melrosegate. At 3.05 p.m., after Claudia had posted a letter at Melrosegate post office, another CCTV camera picked her up walking past, heading back towards home. The image was grainy and blurred, but it showed Claudia relaxed and walking next to two freestanding advertising sandwich boards and the letterbox. After that, as far as we know, Claudia Lawrence faded from public view. But did anybody else see her that day?

Claudia's next known human contact was with her parents, Peter and Joan, who had divorced in 2000. At around 7.30 p.m., she had a conversation on the phone with her father, Peter, and between 8 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. with her mother. Joan Lawrence later remembered that both she and her daughter were watching the Channel 4 television property-finding programme presented by Phil Spencer and Kirstie Allsopp, *Location, Location, Location*, a firm favourite with them both. It was the kind of conversation mothers and daughters have every day all over Britain.

At 8.23 p.m., Claudia sent a text to a friend. The final known outside contact that evening was also on Claudia's mobile phone. The police reported that at 9.12 p.m. her phone received a text message from a man she knew who worked in a bar in Cyprus, but it has never been confirmed if she read the message or not. Claudia may have already gone to bed, anxious for some sleep before another early shift the next morning, her rucksack packed and ready again. In some ways her life was like the film *Groundhog Day*, where it seemed that the same day was being repeated over and over again. But the next day was

anything but routine: the camera at the Roger Kirk Centre never recorded Claudia just before 6 a.m., or at all, and neither did the camera at Melrosegate post office, which had recorded her the previous afternoon. Claudia Lawrence never arrived for work that morning of Thursday, 19 March 2009. Worse still, Claudia did not keep her appointment with one of her closest friends, Suzy Cooper, at the Nag's Head, where they often drank cider and chatted to the many regulars. Suzy called Claudia's mobile, which was either switched off or out of battery power, and left a series of messages, one jokingly thanking her for 'standing me up'.

By 10.30 a.m. on Friday, 20 March, there was still no reply from Claudia, and Suzy was getting very worried. When she called her best friend's phone, she only got an 'unavailable' message. She called the landlord of the Nag's Head, George Forman, a good friend of them both. In fact, the last time that Suzy Cooper had seen Claudia was in the Nag's Head on Cheltenham Gold Cup Day, a week earlier on 13 March. It was a major event in the horseracing calendar and also at the pub, with that year's race the first time that a horse had won the Cup for a second time, when Kauto Star romped home. Claudia had taken the day off from work for the occasion and had been drinking her favourite sweet draught cider in there for several hours when Suzy had arrived there in the late afternoon, Suzy recalling that Claudia had been very merry and that the pub had also had a great atmosphere. But when Suzy Cooper called George Forman that Friday morning, he hadn't seen Claudia either. Coming back from a shopping trip in York city centre, he walked four doors down from the pub and rapped on Claudia's front door, getting no reply, which he relayed to Suzy.

Really concerned now, Suzy called the local hospital, in case Claudia had been in an accident, but nobody of her name had been admitted. She then called Claudia's father, Peter Lawrence, at his home in the village of Slingsby, near York, telling him what had happened: nobody had seen

Claudia all of the previous day, and there was no reply from her Samsung phone or at her house. Peter Lawrence was very worried. Peter called the University of York kitchens, and they told him that she had not come into work the day before and that they had left a voicemail on her phone asking where she was. Speaking to the author, Peter recounted, 'Having checked with the university I was really worried, as it was not like Claudia at all to fail to turn up for work. She was ultra-conscientious in that respect.' Peter drove the 20 miles to Heworth.

Luckily, Peter had a set of keys to his daughter's house, and as he knew the Nag's Head landlord George Forman well, he collected George and they both made the very short walk to Claudia's. Peter Lawrence later said that his biggest fear was finding his younger daughter dead or incapacitated inside, and having George there was undoubtedly a support to him. That Friday, there was no sign of Claudia in her house, and it was just as she had left it, setting out for that early shift and never arriving at work or returning home. Peter told this author that although he had feared finding his daughter injured or dead, the normality he found made him more mixed up: 'The fact that everything was as it should be (and I did not find Claudia lying there) was a shock. I was immediately convinced she had been taken after leaving the house.'

Peter immediately contacted North Yorkshire Police. The Lawrence family's normality was now shattered. A nightmare was just beginning.

It's not really a village any more, but it has that feel, and is sometimes called Heworth Village. In reality, it lies a mile north-east of York city centre. The name Heworth pre-dates many of the striking medieval buildings of York and is actually Anglo-Saxon in origin, meaning a 'high enclosure', and the land on which it lies is higher than the famous North Yorkshire cathedral city of which it is an inner suburb. The second decade of the nineteenth century saw development

in Heworth, and the roomy Victorian villas still in evidence today began to be built. Another spurt of construction came in the 1930s, when Heworth was becoming a true suburb, housing some of York's workers, and the acclaimed actress Dame Judi Dench was born in the countrified space of Heworth Green in 1934. Many of the semi-detached houses to be found there today date from that decade, and after the Second World War Heworth's status as an inner suburb of York was firmly in place, although it retained some of the village aura of its past.

Today Heworth does not feel like an entity in itself geographically, so close is it to York city centre and the ring road roundabout leading into the city, but those who live there would disagree. Spending more than a few days in Heworth confirms the view of locals: there is a distinct neighbourly feel and people stop and talk in the street; the Nag's Head has devoted regulars, and any stranger who stops for a drink more than once is surely not a regular and may attract polite whisperings out of earshot as to who that person is and where they live.

Holy Trinity Church is the focal point of Heworth, its looming tower and spire zooming up and piercing the Yorkshire sky, just one reminder of the past in a small area steeped in historical atmosphere. Opposite that time-served gravitas is Sprays Hairdressing on the corner of Heworth Road where Claudia lived. Then, working to the right, there is an Independent Home Living office, Quartz Travel ('TailorMade for all your destinations' [*sic*]) and Frier Tuck's, a traditional fish 'n' chip shop, for that last-minute takeaway after a few at the Nag's Head or for the planned family fish supper, two local women serving with small talk and a smile. The Costcutter convenience store, so popular with locals for newspapers and other sundries, rounds off that stretch of the parade. On the other side of the narrow Dales Lane is Mair's Delicatessen, less 'Yorkshire' than continental in stylish frontage, counter and delicacies. Above the deli on

the first floor is Revive Hair & Design, and next door a small Boots pharmacy, where customers have friendly conversations with the lady serving.

Melrosegate begins on the other side of the crossroads, but by turning right down East Parade the quickest route into York city centre can be found, where the togetherness of 'the village' begins to give way quickly to a disjointed hybrid of different house styles and industrial units lying set back from the road. Past the park on the left and the small greengrocer's and NatWest bank on the right, then the Mazda car showroom, a garage, the tiny Hungry Horace café, Carpetright, Avis and then the medium-sized Asda that used to be a bargain Netto supermarket, and on to the ring road roundabout, so compressed are these changes in ambience amid the smoke fumes from this busy city artery and circular route that any feeling of quaintness or 'olde worlde' appeal is swiftly forgotten. This is in contrast to parts of York city centre, which has character and history not so much in spades as by the barrow, different once again from the carbon-copy high streets of almost every large town and city in Britain in the early twenty-first century.

It was in this close-knit village-suburb hybrid that Claudia Lawrence made her last walk to the University of York campus on that very early March morning in 2009. Claudia was not born in Heworth, but she was roundly considered a local, a true regular of the Nag's Head, and any walk she made through Heworth was quite likely to involve her bumping into someone she knew, just as she had on that last day she was seen. Unfortunately, between 5.30 and 6 a.m. on Thursday, 19 March 2009, there were not many people about.

The reaction of North Yorkshire Police to Claudia Lawrence's disappearance was not standard procedure in a missing-person case, and the speed with which a major search ensued showed just how grave was the concern. As

Peter Lawrence told this author, 'The response to my call was astounding: within two minutes there was a policeman and policewoman at the house, and they took it seriously!' Detective Chief Inspector Lucy Pope was in charge at the outset, and coincidentally she had gone to school with Claudia. DCI Pope immediately realised that this was potentially very serious. Claudia was no full-of-angst teenage runaway but an attractive and popular single woman with a responsible job and her own house. A search of Claudia's house was not reassuring: the only items missing were the rucksack that she took to work and her mobile phone, which, like most people, she always kept to hand. Claudia's passport and bank cards were present where they should be, immediately signalling that this was no stressed individual who had snapped and decided to escape her life. Peter Lawrence remembers how he felt, saying, 'First of all I could not believe it had happened, and particularly around Heworth or the university.'

Over that weekend of 21-22 March 2009, upwards of 40 detailed searches were made of the local area and the route that Claudia took to work down Melrosegate. She was a tiny blonde figure, a British size 8, walking along the Heworth Road very early in the morning, in the dusky dark. It might seem risky in retrospect, but Claudia had walked that route safely at least a score of times in the last three weeks, while her Vauxhall Corsa car was having a new engine installed. She had no reason to feel any fear, as far as anyone knows.

The fact that many university students had just gone home for the holidays also complicated matters, as trying to trace those students for questioning and possible witness sightings was an onerous task in these early days. The fact that Claudia worked on the university campus, may have been walking towards it when she vanished and that there is a university hall of residence almost directly behind her house made this an avenue that had to be explored, just one avenue among many.

Peter and Joan Lawrence had brought up Claudia and her older sister Ali in the market town of Malton, near York. They had relocated there from Darlington just after Ali was born. Formerly a solicitor dealing with criminal cases, which involves working long hours, Peter had switched to commercial law, which is generally more lucrative and has hours more conducive to family life, especially important when his daughters were growing up in the 1970s and '80s. His job gave Claudia and Ali a comfortable middle-class home, good prospects and much love. When Claudia disappeared, it was unfathomably life-changing for Peter, Joan and Ali, their world now lopsided, every new day a struggle to keep Claudia's flame of hope burning.

For Ali, Claudia's elder sister by almost three years, that Friday in March 2009 and the days immediately following will always be burnt painfully into her memory. Now living in Derbyshire with her husband Danny and two young sons Luke and Joshua (whom Claudia adored), that phone call from her father on that Friday evening was a profound shock. It was only hours after the police were first called and everything was still whirling in the air, with confusion for the whole family. Ali and Claudia had always been very different in personality, but they had a close bond and friendship. Ali and her family had not been able to go to see Claudia the previous Christmas of 2008, as Ali had had the flu, and the sisters had arranged another get-together only weeks before Claudia's disappearance, but this time Claudia had to cancel as one of her friends needed her support, which Claudia, as always, freely gave.

On Monday, 23 March 2009, just three days after he knew she was missing, Peter Lawrence gave a press conference at York's Fulford Road police station. The rawness of emotion got to him when he appealed for help in finding Claudia, and he burst into tears. Ali saw this on the Internet and, never having seen her strong father cry before, the initial shocked denial at her sister's vanishing hit home and she too

collapsed in tears and took refuge at the home of a friend. The sobs would continue for weeks, deep at night, when she would wake up from nightmares of her younger sister being grabbed from the street where she was walking to work. It was the same for Peter and Joan. At that press conference, Peter had called his daughter's disappearance 'a living nightmare'. DCI Lucy Pope of North Yorkshire Police added that the possibility that Claudia had been abducted could not be ruled out. Also on that day, Peter Lawrence asked his close friend Martin Dales, who already had much professional PR experience, to help with the campaign to find Claudia. Martin agreed.

The next day, Peter Lawrence walked some of his daughter's route to work, thought to be her final steps. On the way, he and Martin handed out to passers-by posters they had had printed, with Claudia's pretty face smiling out from them. Friends were saying that Claudia was a person of habit and routine and that this was completely uncharacteristic of her. This only served to make them more worried about her. This fear increased as the days passed, as it is widely known that the first 48 hours of a missing-person investigation are crucial and the most fertile time for clues leading to somebody's safe recovery.

Detective Superintendent Ray Galloway, an experienced and resourceful police officer, was soon put in charge of her case. Det. Supt Galloway has very distinctive red hair, is tall and lean and looks younger than his middle-aged years. Born in Merseyside, he has led a number of tricky murder investigations, but nothing compares to Claudia's case for him, and he would later say, 'I do have restless nights and I have thoughts about this investigation every day on a professional and personal basis.' He knew that if the worst-case scenario was true, that Claudia had been abducted and murdered (a view he would later reluctantly have to take), the odds were that it was by someone whom Claudia knew.

But there were no clues at the outset: it was as if Claudia had disappeared from the very face of the earth.

A man with a family himself, Galloway could understand the Lawrence family's great grief and trauma, or at least empathise with it. However, the task before him in the bracingly chilly early spring Yorkshire morning was not forgiving or sympathetic to him or his cause.

But by a week later, on Wednesday, 25 March, Det. Supt Ray Galloway announced that Claudia may have 'come to some harm' and the likelihood was that it was at the hands of somebody she knew. He added that approximately a hundred police officers were working on the case and that reinforcements would be drafted in from other forces too. Both the scale of the investigation and pressure on the police were growing.

The most feasible answer was that Claudia had disappeared on her way to work for her early shift between 5.30 a.m. and 6 a.m. on the morning of Thursday, 19 March 2009. But had she been dragged from the street into a vehicle by a predatory stranger, either randomly or by somebody who had seen her walking that route in the early morning before? Or did she willingly accept a lift on that cold morning from somebody she knew who had a secret terrible motive? Was it sexual? Could it be revenge of some sort? Or had Claudia simply had enough and decided to walk into oblivion and start a new life somewhere else? There was no evidence as to the latter in her recent behaviour or mood, but then there was no immediate evidence for the other theories either. It was a true enigma.

CHAPTER TWO

CLAUDIA, A MYSTERY COUPLE, MYSTERY MEN AND A BODY

CLAUDIA ELIZABETH LAWRENCE WAS BORN under Pisces on 27 February 1974. She came into the world in the North Yorkshire market town of Malton, an idyllic place for a child to grow up. Sixteen miles from York, it has a quaint and self-assured atmosphere, an identity only gained over centuries, and the remnants of Roman and medieval Malton are still evident. In the early fourteenth century, the town was visited by both Edward II and Robert the Bruce. Malton's Market Place, with its Norman church centrepiece, effortlessly evokes that sense of historical majesty to the visitor. In Victorian times, Charles Dickens also visited to see his friend Charles Smithson, and Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* there, thus establishing Malton's literary importance. In March 2009, the very month that talented chef Claudia disappeared, the town launched the 'We Love Malton' campaign to put it on the tourist map, including the Malton Food Lovers' Festival, which brought Michelin-starred celebrity chefs to her hometown. It has become an annual event she would have loved but one which, sadly, she has never been able to attend.

Today the town has a population of 4,000, but it was a little less when Claudia was growing up there. It is still a

traditional place (first Yorkshire and then English), personable and friendly, and long-time residents support each other in the community. The only black mark on Malton's history came in July 1982, when the SAS-trained military survivalist and electrician Barry Prudom shot himself there during an eight-hundred-man police siege comprising officers from twelve police forces at the culmination of a three-week police manhunt, the largest ever mounted in Britain at the time. This huge operation had been mobilised after Prudom had shot dead two policemen and a civilian in the previous month. He then went on the run and lived off the land in rural areas around Malton. Before his suicide, Prudom took three locals hostage for a short time. Any Malton native or resident who lived in the town at the time remembers this dark episode when their peace was shattered. Claudia was eight years old at the time.

Peter Lawrence recalls his daughter's childhood in Malton as a contented and happy one. He told this author that Claudia was a 'happy young girl at home and school. She had plenty of friends. No dolls, but teddies were tolerated [by Claudia]. Claudia far preferred horses and had her own pony at a relatively young age. She would spend hours with it. She was never without a pony/horse from then until the summer before she disappeared, when the last one died of very old age.'

Claudia also had a close relationship with her older sister Ali, who is almost three years older and always looked out for her. Claudia attended St Andrews School, Malton, and then the independent York College for Girls, both of which she enjoyed and was happy at. Claudia was always a good mixer and made friends easily. Peter spoke about the differences in character between Ali and Claudia. 'Ali was also into horses but not quite as keen. Still no dolls; she was more into books. Ali was more academic, but that was fine.'

In an interview with the *Daily Mirror*, Ali (now Sims) remembered her relationship with Claudia. 'We socialised together, going to parties, shopping, and went on our first "parent-free" holiday to Gran Canaria. I was 18 and Claudia 15. Mum and Dad trusted me to take care of her and I did. I was her big sister after all.' Ali describes Claudia as having 'a wicked sense of humour. We used to get the train to school in York and I loved those mornings with her, chatting and laughing. Claudia adored animals and horse-riding and we spent most weekends going for long rides and mucking out stables.'

Peter too remarked on Claudia's fun-loving nature. 'As she grew older she visited bars and restaurants in town with others and rarely ventured further afield, except for holidays.'

Claudia soon developed into a pretty young woman, her blonde hair and chocolate-brown eyes very attractive. When Claudia had left school and decided to do a catering course at York College, Peter was behind her: 'I am very much a believer in occupational qualifications being as good as academic ones, and better for some people.' This belief was soon to be vindicated, as Claudia soon proved herself to be a very creative and focused chef, holding a variety of posts, getting on well with kitchen colleagues and being well thought of and respected as a professional by the bosses she had in her career. In fact, Peter remembers that Claudia would often do much more than just cook, also dealing with supplies and other logistics, making her almost a catering manager as well as a chef. She did these tasks for no extra pay and really enjoyed her job.

When the author asked Peter if he thought that Claudia was happy with her life and in her job, he said, 'She very much gave that impression to everyone. I know she did not have ambitions to be a celebrity chef or anything like that. She loved being with colleagues and talking to customers. I know she was a very good chef - it's not just me saying

that, but previous managers still ask about her. She met colleagues out of work. Claudia seemed content with the rest of her life. She was not ready to settle down and get married, and liked being with friends.'

Ali recalled how she and Claudia were different. 'She used to tease me about being a goody two-shoes. I always did what my parents told me and worked hard at school, while Claudia was more of a free spirit, instead dreaming of a life travelling and not being tied down. I always knew I wanted to go to university and have a career. Claudia wanted to have fun and live life.' When Ali got married, Claudia was a bridesmaid, and when Ali's children were born she was a generous and doting auntie. The last time that Ali had seen Claudia was in the autumn of 2008, and Claudia had made her perfect Yorkshire puddings, one of her favourites, and then chased Luke around the garden having a water fight.

Claudia had always been a devotee of the late actor Patrick Swayze, especially for his role in *Dirty Dancing*, the 1980s film that made him the teenage crush of millions of bedroom-wall poster-gazing teenage girls who grew up in that era. Later on, Claudia was a huge fan of the singer Robbie Williams, formerly and now intermittently of Take That. Claudia was a very normal girl in her tastes and lifestyle. After leaving her catering course but before gaining her position at the Roger Kirk Centre, she had held positions in the kitchens of the Kings Head pub in her hometown of Malton and at the Gold Cup Inn in Low Catton, East Yorkshire. At the Kings Head, Claudia made friends with Liz Holder, who was working there as a waitress. Now a pharmacist, Liz kept in touch with Claudia and said of her in a press interview, 'She's quite timid until you get to know her. She seems very reserved and quiet, but once she's comfortable with you then she's a true friend.'

Claudia moved to York in 2005 and first worked at the Monkbar Hotel, where she made friends with Anthony Newby, a kitchen porter, with whom she would remain in

contact. In recent years, Claudia had holidayed in Cyprus and had planned a further trip there, where she had friends. But day to day, her job came first. Peter explains that 'her shifts were not always conducive to going too far for her social life'. Did Peter ever worry about Claudia before she disappeared, any more than any father normally does for a daughter? 'No. She had lived on her own for many years, in Norton, Old Malton and then York. She was generally in good health and seemed OK about living on her own.'

In fact, in the past Claudia had shared her house with her best friend Jennifer King - called 'Jen' by those who know her well - for about 11 months, before Jen found her own place. When Claudia bought the house in Heworth Road, her local pub the Nag's Head was just four doors down and she would go there to meet Jen or her other best friend, Suzy Cooper. Did Peter ever have any concerns about Claudia's social life, mainly centred on the Nag's Head? 'She was in her 30s and entitled to make her own life. She had good friends and happened to meet them often, but by no means exclusively, in the Nag's Head. She met other friends and in other places, including seeing Suzy and Jen in her own house for evenings, and quite often asked me to give her a lift when I was around!'

Claudia was very proud of her little terraced house, and it is very tastefully and stylishly furnished. Her job as a chef at the university allowed her to pay the mortgage on it, run her car and go on holidays, and life in Heworth seems to have been very comfortable, with a strong local community and friends around her. That was until 18-19 March 2009 ...

What were Peter's initial thoughts about where Claudia could be? 'I had no idea. We soon established she was not with any member of the family, or with any friends we knew about. After that we were at a loss.' How uncharacteristic of Claudia was it not to be in touch or answer her phone? 'Totally [uncharacteristic]. Especially to Suzy and Jen. She was always texting, and I think it was lack of response in

that form that made Suzy worry so quickly. I would not necessarily have expected to hear from Claudia after our Wednesday-evening conversation until I saw her on Friday, which we had arranged to do.' That was Friday, 20 March 2009, two days after Peter had last spoken to his daughter and two days after she was last seen.

The author then asked Peter how he felt after he had been into her house, and whether the fact that her phone and rucksack containing her work clothes were missing made him think that Claudia had disappeared on the way to work very early that morning, between 5.30 and 6 a.m. on 19 March 2009. 'As Claudia had not taken her handbag, jewellery or bank card, which as a young lady she always would do except for work, I was convinced that she had set out for work.' Was everything else completely untouched and normal? 'Her slippers were neatly near the door, and everything else was as it should be, including the previous night's dishes in the sink, because of the early start.'

When asked if he thinks he received enough care and support from the police in the first days, Peter said, 'Don't know about care and support!' He was, however, keen to stress how proactive the police had been. 'There was a massive search of the whole area involving police from several forces, and I went into Heworth to speak to them and thank them as they combed the area.'

A missing-person case, just like a murder case, has most chance of throwing up significant leads in the first 48 hours. That time soon passed, but the first leads would come, though almost a month after Claudia was last seen or anyone is known to have spoken to her.

At the end of March, around ten days after Claudia was last seen, Det. Supt Galloway appeared on the BBC's *Missing Live* programme. The programme's cameras had actually been following Peter Lawrence and Martin Dales around for a week, and the footage was included in the report.

Galloway said the next day that he had received some 'very interesting' calls from the public. 'We've had some calls regarding a previous relationship. That's a useful context to me, but my focus really lies on her current relationship. Who was she going out with? Who was she seeing? Who was her boyfriend? Who was showing her maybe some unhealthy interest?' Galloway assured callers that any clues would be treated in 'absolute confidence' and then appealed for more information.

The police were using the media as best they could. The focus was starting to shift to Claudia's love life, largely because there were no other strong leads. No witness had yet come forward saying they had seen anything strange on 18-19 March, particularly on Claudia's work route on the early morning of 19 March. It is a statistical fact that most murder victims know their killer, and as Claudia's friends and acquaintances had been and were being checked out, the focus was clearly moving to love interests. As far as anybody knew or had said, Claudia was single but had had relationships in the past, of course. The police were now probing for information about current romantic connections. Many murders and manslaughters occur by design or accident during an argument when emotions are heightened, and these almost always take place between family members, partners or very close friends. House of Commons research from the 1990s shows that in that decade 80 per cent of female murder victims in Britain knew their killer, compared to just over 50 per cent of male victims. A present or former partner or lover killed almost 50 per cent of British female murder victims in that period. We become impassioned by people close to us and physical altercations can take place when hackles are raised. So the police were pursuing a legitimate and credible line of inquiry.

That is, provided other areas were also being pursued. Could Claudia's abductor or killer have been a stranger?

Parts of the University of York campus were still under construction, and any worker on their way to the site could have been driving that route to start their shift. Could it have been a random sexual predator, a stranger who spotted a young woman walking alone in the very early morning and pounced? Or could it have been an acquaintance, somebody whom Claudia knew by sight but not well or perhaps even by name? These and other theories will be explored in this book. The point is that while it is statistically likely that Claudia was taken by somebody she knew, that doesn't mean that is the case. All avenues have to be pursued and all angles considered.

On the same day that the *Missing Live* appeal went out, Liz Holder, a friend of Claudia's from Malton, made an appeal for anyone with information to come forward. Liz made the appeal from the Spotted Cow pub in Malton, a pub where Claudia would sometimes go to catch up with old Malton friends. Liz broke down in tears as she spoke. 'I am constantly worrying. What the family must be going through I don't know. It's been horrendous ... Claudia is such a sweet, gentle person. She wouldn't harm anyone.'

The public's response to the search for Claudia had on the whole been very positive and heart-warming, but in recent days the first examples of negativity had crept in. Somebody had set up a website for the 'Claudia Lawrence Appeal'. This was not authorised by her family or friends. North Yorkshire Police strongly advised the public not to make donations to the website.

Another problem for the police was the sheer volume of information being posted on a Facebook page created by Claudia's friends to support the search for her. The police are now very aware of the potential of new technology to gather information on major live cases, and a missing-person case such as Claudia's is about as urgent and live as it gets. But Det. Supt Galloway outlined the pitfalls of filtering through this intelligence, however welcome it was.

‘There is a significant amount of people who have contributed to the site and some of them are posting what could potentially be information important to the investigation. Some of them are by nickname and some are completely anonymous. I would urge anyone who has any information that they are imparting on the Facebook site to please contact the police hotline to allow us to contextualise the information and to help take our investigation forward.’

It was on 15 April 2009, just a few days short of the one-month anniversary of Claudia’s disappearance, that the police were contacted by a witness. The narrow focus on the very early morning of 19 March was bound to mean a shortage of witnesses, as there are usually few people around on the streets at that time, especially on Claudia’s route from Heworth down Melrosegate towards the University of York campus, just before the village of Heslington. But somebody on the 1.6-mile route Claudia walked must have seen something of relevance that morning. When this lead came in, it was a much-needed morale booster for Det. Supt Ray Galloway and his team, who were now around a hundred strong, including reinforcements from other forces, and working obsessively to resolve Claudia’s disappearance.

A witness driving by that morning had seen a man and a woman arguing on a grass verge next to a parked vehicle on University Way, near to the University of York campus, and close to where Claudia would walk to work. Det. Supt Galloway announced to the media: ‘The man and woman appeared to be in some form of verbal altercation. We haven’t got any description of these two people, but we do know that the vehicle was parked on the nearside of the road and the passenger side door was open.’

The witness had looked into his mirror as he drove past the couple on the bank, and the man was standing slightly higher than the woman. Galloway said, ‘It is a significant

line of inquiry which we wish to pursue. Were you that person? Were you involved in that vehicle? It could have been someone who was just dropping off a friend, a partner, a son or daughter and an argument has taken place. There may be some innocent explanation.'

It was close to the University of York campus, so somebody could have been dropping off someone. But why would the argument take place on a raised bank, with the car pulled over and door still open? It seems like a very urgent altercation, and anyone going to the campus would likely have driven on to the usual place for dropping off in the parking area, which would seem to be the most likely place for such an argument.

Galloway stressed that 'I'd very much like to identify who these people were and I would appeal for anyone who has such information to come forward and help us out. We think this happened at about 6.10 a.m. on 19 March, which is a key morning for us, as that would be the time when Claudia was due to turn up for work at the university.'

Could Claudia have been the woman arguing with the man, close to her work destination? She was due to start her early shift at 6 a.m., so if Claudia was the woman she would have been late, and we know that she had arrived for work at the Roger Kirk Centre at 5.57 a.m. on the previous morning. But if she was in an argument, she could have been delayed. Could she have been walking along Melrosegate when someone she knew honked and pulled over, offering her a lift? Did an argument happen in the car, forcing the driver to pull over and thus explaining the open car door? Or could she have been approaching University Way when the car pulled over? It is doubtful that Claudia would have got into an argument with a complete stranger, and Peter Lawrence is sure that she would never have got into a car with a stranger willingly. After the argument, could the man have forced Claudia back into his car, driving her into thin air? It seems unlikely and out of character for

Claudia to have decided not to go to work and driven off with the man. But was it Claudia?

Nobody has ever come forward to identify themselves as the couple.

On the same day, Det. Supt Galloway spoke about a second line of inquiry for the first time. Another witness had recently come forward and stated that she had been driving past Claudia's green front door at 46 Heworth Road in slow-moving traffic on either 10 or 13 March 2009 and had seen two suspicious men. The end of Heworth Road coming out of Heworth leads to a small roundabout that links roads to York city centre on the left and Stockton Lane on the right. A third road heads towards Heworth Golf Club and links to the A1036, A1237 and A64. Due to this, at certain times of the day the traffic can become congested on Heworth Road. The female witness had been in such traffic and so had had time to see what she saw clearly.

Galloway pointed out that 'The dates are obviously at least five days before Claudia was last seen, but we have a situation of a lady passing by Claudia's home address in very slow-moving traffic who has actually seen two men at Claudia's front door. One of the men is described as Asian, but we don't know the racial origin of the other man.'

The description of the Asian man was approximately 5 ft 8 in. tall, in his early 20s, with a slim build, a thin, pointed nose and dark rings beneath his eyes. The witness thought that he had appeared nervous. The other man was said to be taller, with a heavier build and short, dark hair, and wearing a 'Crombie-style' coat, described as 'quite unusual'. But that was not all.

Galloway went on to say, 'They are stood at the door and one of the men, the Asian male, appears to try to open the door. Whether it was with a key or he was just trying the door handle, we are not absolutely certain ... and if anyone else knows if they knocked on any other doors elsewhere