

# The Dream Solution

The Murder of Alison Shaughnessy – and  
the Fight to Name Her Killer

Bernard O'Mahoney  
with Mick McGovern



Mainstream Publishing *ebooks*



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Epub ISBN: 9781780574486

Version 1.0

[www.mainstreampublishing.com](http://www.mainstreampublishing.com)

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First published in Great Britain in 2001 by  
MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING COMPANY (EDINBURGH) LTD

7 Albany Street  
Edinburgh EH1 3UG

ISBN 1 84018 593 7

This edition, 2002

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Library

## *Dedication*

I dedicate this book to Alison Shaughnessy.

I must not forget the others who have suffered, nor those to whom I owe apologies or thanks:

Alison's parents, Bobby and Breda Blackmore, and their children Susan, Richard and Robert, whose loss and pain I cannot comprehend.

Debra and our children, who endured years of misery caused by my wilful blindness in helping to free the Taylor sisters.

My solicitor Caroline Kean, formerly of Olswang, now of Wiggin and Company, who believed in me, understood my need to fight this fight and saw ways forward when others had given up hope.

Former Detective Superintendent Chris Burke and the other members of the murder squad (especially Gerry Gallagher, Angela Thomas Coren Smith, Trevor Heard, Sean Gleeson and Adrian Summers) whose integrity I helped publicly and falsely to cast doubt upon.

Mick McGovern, who endured my rantings, dodged flying objects, drowned my sorrows and celebrated each and every victory with me.

Thanks, too to the journalists who didn't believe the Taylors' lies: Gary Jones, Jo-Ann Goodwin, Peter Rose, Mike Sullivan, Marcus Powell and Claire Powell.

Thanks to Emma, Ian Mill QC, Gavin Millar QC, Michael Burton QC, Tom Beeton, and my publisher Bill Campbell, who all helped, advised or inspired me at various stages of the long struggle to tell this story.

Last, and certainly least, I'd like to give a special word of thanks to the Taylors' many friends in the media, especially Nick Davies of *The Guardian*, whose efforts to discredit me did so much to strengthen my resolve to continue. Without you, the truth might never have been told.

[www.bernardomahoney.com](http://www.bernardomahoney.com)

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# ONE

## *Freedom*

I parked my stolen vehicle in an underground car park before heading off on foot towards the Royal Courts of Justice. I'd bought the red Ford Sierra from a fellow doorman at the Essex nightclub where I was head of security. For a sum smaller than the list price, I now possessed – if not quite owned – an almost-new car. I could only hope its false number plates would withstand the scrutiny of PC Plod. I'd been working the night before until the early hours, but I'd still managed to get into central London and park the car by 8.30 a.m. I had more than an hour before I met up with the family of the two young sisters who were about to find out whether the Court of Appeal would quash their convictions for murder.

It was Friday, 11 June 1993. I walked into a newsagent's. The shopkeeper greeted me warmly as I brought to the till seven or eight newspapers – all the tabloids plus a few broadsheets. I felt sure they'd all contain reports from the first day of the appeal hearing. I found a café in Shaftesbury Avenue, about ten minutes' walk from the court complex. I ordered a mug of tea and a couple of slices of toast, then sat down at one of the few tables not occupied by a man in a suit. I flicked expectantly through the pile of newspapers in front of me. I made sure at a glance that each carried a story about the extraordinary revelations of the day before, then I settled down to read each article in full. Perhaps



because of my besuited company, I chose to start with *The Independent*. The headline shouted: POLICE 'HID FACTS' FROM SISTERS' MURDER TRIAL.

Police officers concealed evidence that could have pointed to the innocence of two sisters serving life sentences for the murder of Alison Shaughnessy, the Court of Appeal was told yesterday.

An acquittal appeared one step nearer for the sisters, Michelle and Lisa Taylor – who have spent nearly two years in jail.

I was pleased the writer agreed with my own optimistic view of the appeal's likely outcome. The sisters' parents had been a little gloomy when we'd said goodbye the day before. Although I'd confidently predicted their girls would soon be home, they weren't convinced. I read on with satisfaction. The article described how a witness whose evidence 'went to the core' of the convictions had changed his story. He had also sought a reward offered by the murdered woman's employers. Yet, as the article said, the police had not disclosed these facts to the defence at the time of the trial.

Mrs Shaughnessy, 21, died from 54 stab wounds after being attacked at her home in Vardens Road, Battersea, south London, in June 1991.

The prosecution alleged Michelle, who had once had an affair with Mrs Shaughnessy's husband, John, was motivated by jealousy and that her sister, Lisa, 19, had helped her.

Even now, almost a year after I'd first become familiar with the case, the words '54 stab wounds' still unnerved me. I knew what being stabbed felt like: in the past I'd had a knife rip into my own flesh. But I was a doorman, used to violence. For me, being attacked was an occupational hazard. I lived in a different world from that of the victim, who by all accounts had been a sweet and gentle bank clerk, recently married, struck down in the quiet of her own flat. I knew Michelle and Lisa couldn't have murdered her. The sisters I had grown to know and like over the last 11 months didn't seem capable of the freakish violence to

which Alison had been subjected. I felt certain the killer was a man – only a man could have done something like that. It was true, of course, that Michelle had been having an affair with Alison's husband, John, with whom she worked, but that affair, as Michelle had often told me, had dwindled to nothing by the time of the murder. Unfortunately for her though, seven months before the murder she'd written something in her diary which the prosecution used against her to devastating effect: 'I hate Alison, the unwashed bitch. My dream solution would be for Alison to disappear as if she never existed and then maybe I could give everything I want to the man I love.' The prosecution said this diary entry proved Michelle's mad obsession with the man who'd supposedly taken her virginity. In Michelle's twisted mind, it was alleged, Alison had been the interloper in Michelle's relationship with John. And, wanting to possess John for herself, she'd murdered Alison in a jealous rage. To me, that story was nothing but fevered nonsense concocted by the police.

The sisters were convicted in July last year, after the jury heard Dr Michael Unsworth-White's evidence that he saw two white girls – one of them with a blonde pony-tail – running from the murder house, carrying a laundry bag at around the time of the fatal attack.

What the jury hadn't been told was that almost a year earlier Dr Unsworth-White told the police that one of the girls 'may have been black'. But at the trial the doctor – a clean-cut, middle-class professional with no link to either party – had appeared very credible.

The court was told his account was crucial because it fitted what was otherwise a flimsy prosecution case. 'It is impossible to over-emphasise the evidence of this witness and the impact it would have on the jury.' Yet the defence was denied a chance to challenge the credibility of his evidence, nor to ask him about seeking a reward.

Although I'd led the campaign to free the sisters, I'd had nothing to do with the discovery of the crucial document that had exposed the police's shortcomings. I'd spent my time trying to discredit other witnesses and produce new evidence about the supposed identity of the real murderer. I'd come up with strands of new evidence which the defence had thought useful. However, I didn't tell the legal team that, despite the apparent plausibility of my new evidence, it consisted largely of fabrications I knew would collapse under serious prodding. Also, the methods I'd used to gather my material might well have landed me in prison if the police had discovered what I'd been up to. Still, I was pleased to read the article's last paragraph which referred to the fruits of my labour: 'They were told other grounds of appeal include fresh evidence "to suggest the murderer was someone other than the appellants".'

As I chewed my toast I couldn't help smiling. I read through the other newspapers' stories. They all said much the same. Certain sentences brought me back to the events of the day before. The oak-panelled court had been much smaller than I'd imagined it would be. I remembered how we, the sisters' supporters, had crammed ourselves onto the wooden benches. The parents had sat behind me with their eldest son. I had let their youngest daughter, 14-year-old Tracey, sit on my knee. We'd all sat silently in an air of tense expectancy. Suddenly the silence had been broken by noises from below: the jangling of keys, the slamming of a steel door, then footsteps on a wooden staircase. Michelle had entered the dock first, closely followed by Lisa. They looked startled to see so many people staring at them. I'd been pleased they'd followed my instructions about what to wear - smart but casual. There had been many discussions about the correct attire. At the time of their original trial Lisa's exercising of her right to remain silent had led to her being compared to a hard-faced IRA terrorist, while Michelle had been portrayed as a sex-crazed mistress capable of

frenzied murder. I'd suggested that for the appeal they needed to look like normal, girl-next-door types. We agreed they had to avoid wearing anything that might make them look hard (baggy street jeans and loud jewellery) or tarty (mini-skirts and low-cut tops). Moreover, the wrong sort of clothes might make them appear somehow disrespectful of the court. Everything had to be just so. As soon as they'd sat down I'd watched their eyes flashing around the court in search of familiar faces. Tracey had bounced on my knee as she'd waved frantically to catch their attention. They'd seen her and smiled. Michelle had caught my eyes and nudged Lisa, but before we could properly acknowledge one another the usher rose to his feet, tugged at his gown and announced solemnly: 'The court shall rise.'

Everyone stood as the three judges entered the room and took their places on the bench.

I may have had little respect for the justice system, but I'd certainly warmed to the appeals system. I knew from my own experience that it had little to do with justice and much to do with technicalities. To my cynical eye it seemed the system had been designed for the benefit of intelligent criminals and their wily lawyers. I'd told the Taylors from my very first dealings with them that in order to win an appeal they only had to remove one important brick from the wall of evidence to bring the whole construction crashing down. I'd said that, for example, if ten people testified to having witnessed a brutal murder, yet it was later discovered that one of them had lied, then theoretically the whole of the rest of the evidence, however otherwise indisputable, might be disregarded – and the convicted murderer might walk free. Obviously, I'd said, in their case they were innocent. But the principle was the same. I'd worked to find that brick, but with the discovery of the undisclosed police document the Taylors' legal team had pulled out their own brick – and now the wall was about to collapse. When the prosecution barrister had conceded that the police's failure to disclose

that document at the original trial had been a 'material irregularity' I had looked excitedly at Michelle and Lisa, but their faces hadn't seemed to register the significance of his words.

For the next hour I sat in the café reading the newspapers. Then at about 9.40 a.m. I packed them into a plastic carrier bag and set off on the short walk to the court. As I walked down The Strand I could see that a small crowd had already formed outside the Royal Courts of Justice. As I got nearer I saw several television crews and newspaper photographers – far more than the day before. Another good omen, I thought. I recognised a few faces in the gathering crowd. I didn't want to bump into any media people who might know something about my criminal background, so I wasn't pleased to see one particular photographer. Until then, I hadn't realised he had anything to do with the media: I'd known him as a tipper-truck driver. He saw me and said hello. He told me he was now taking photographs for one of the sisters' local papers. He asked me what I was doing there. I said I was just a friend of the family. I moved away from him and said hello to a few campaign supporters. I asked where the parents were. Someone said: 'Here they are now.' A mini-bus pulled up near us. The doors opened and members of the Taylor family started getting out. Their arrival provoked a frantic burst of activity from the waiting newspeople, who rushed to the assembling group. I started moving away, because I didn't want to be filmed with them, but the sisters' father, Derek, saw me. He waved me over. I embraced him and his wife, Ann. They looked nervous, but I felt their nervousness had more to do with the developing media scrum than any doubts about the appeal's outcome. In case I was wrong I said: 'Don't worry. They're going to walk.' I'd grown close to Ann and Derek over the previous 11 months while I'd sought out new evidence that might help free their girls. I'd been honest with them about my criminal background. They'd treated it as unimportant. It

had been agreed that my own experiences on the wrong side of the law would give me an edge in challenging the police's case against their daughters.

We didn't stand for long on the pavement. A group of about 12 of us moved as one towards the entrance. Reporters threw questions at the parents, but they said nothing. Within seconds we'd passed under the grey stone arch into the lobby. To get to our court we had to pass through an airport-style security barrier of metal detectors supplemented by hand-searches of bag and body. Once through, we swept down the length of the majestic great hall, passing black-gowned and bewigged barristers, their cargo-bearing clerks scurrying in their wake. We negotiated our way through the maze of corridors and stairs until we found our court. There seemed twice as many people as the day before trying to get in. Supporters of the Taylors had arrived early to try to save seats for family and friends. I filed in next to Ann Taylor as the public benches filled up. A whisper started going around that the family of the murdered woman had arrived to witness the judgment that would certainly be delivered that day. Ann turned to me and said angrily: 'What do they want? They've got no bloody business here.' I thought her comments were unnecessary, but I could understand her anger. The victim's family had always made plain they regarded the sisters as murderers. In our eyes this belief put them on the side of the police – the enemy who had conspired to lock up two innocent girls. We sat down and, as other people from our side joined us, we all spread out deliberately to give the usher the impression there was no more room. Outside, looking through a glass pane in the door, was Alison's mother. She was waiting for the usher to find her a seat, but we'd ensured she wouldn't get one. The door to the court was closed, leaving Alison's mother and family outside as the proceedings got underway once again.

Over the next few hours a fog of legal jargon filled the air and clouded understanding. Ann kept asking me to translate what was being said. I was often unsure myself, but one thing I could tell for sure was that the prosecution barrister, John Nutting, had about him an air of defeat. He seemed to be putting up little resistance to the defence's case. On the other side, Michelle's barrister, Richard Ferguson QC, seemed to be enjoying himself. An enjoyable moment for me came when a police officer connected with the investigation had to stand up and apologise for the document that hadn't been disclosed to the defence. I felt this was tantamount to the police acknowledging in public that they'd conceal evidence to obtain a conviction. I thought of the times when I had told magistrates and jurors the truth about how the police really went about their business – and had received in return only blank looks of disbelief. The officer who'd led the investigation, Detective Superintendent Chris Burke, was also in court. Ann had pointed him out to me the day before. Until then he'd only been a name that all the Taylors spat out with disgust. I could tell by his face that he was finding the proceedings difficult and painful. I loved every minute of them.

Soon after the detective sat down the senior judge, Lord Justice McCowan, began reading the bench's judgment. He started by saying that on 24 July 1992 at the Central Criminal Court before Mr Justice Blofeld a jury had unanimously convicted the sisters of murder: 'The appellant Michelle Ann Taylor was sentenced to life imprisonment and the appellant Lisa Jane Taylor was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure.' With a clear and measured delivery he outlined briefly the essence of the prosecution's case against the sisters. Then he seemed to spend a huge portion of time going through the tortuous ins and outs of the evidence given by the now-discredited witness. An air of barely stifled boredom filled the court. It only dissipated

when the judge moved to the second major ground for appeal – the media’s coverage of the original trial. He said:

In giving leave to appeal, the single judge described that coverage as ‘unremitting, extensive, sensational, inaccurate and misleading’. Having had the opportunity of reading a substantial selection of the newspaper reports in question, we see no reason to dissent from the view. Indeed, Mr Nutting has not sought to persuade us otherwise.

One notable characteristic is this. A video had been made of Mr Shaughnessy’s wedding to the deceased. It had no relevance to the trial and was not played at it. Somehow or other a copy fell into the hands of the media, and we are told that it was shown on television. Among other things it showed Michelle coming along the receiving line and kissing first the bride, and then the bridegroom. Her kiss of the latter was described to us as a ‘peck on the cheek’, such as any friend might give in those circumstances. What certain elements in the press did, however, was to show in their newspapers stills taken from the video, but in addition they froze a frame so that the peck on the cheek was made to appear a mouth-to-mouth kiss. This was accompanied in one newspaper by the headline, CHEATS KISS, and another by the headline, JUDAS KISS, and in another by the headline, TENDER EMBRACE – THE LOVERS SHARE A KISS JUST A FEW FEET FROM ALISON.

Nothing like any of that, of course, had been said in court. Indeed, the newspapers concerned did not limit themselves in any way to reporting what had been said in court. These are some of the headlines we have seen: TILL DEATH US DO PART, BUTCHERED BRIDE, and LOVE CRAZY MISTRESS BUTCHERED RIVAL WIFE, COURT TOLD. The court had been told no such thing.

All of this was being published as the trial proceeded. As Mr Ferguson put it – with considerable restraint – they do not appear to have appreciated that the issue at the trial was whether the appellants had killed the deceased.

What, in fact, they did was not reporting at all; it was comment, and comment which assumed guilt on the part of the girls in the dock. But the press is no more entitled to assume guilt in what it writes during the course of a trial, than a police officer is entitled to convince himself that a defendant is guilty and suppress evidence, the emergence of which he fears might lead to the defendant’s acquittal.

During the trial, defence counsel complained to the judge about the press coverage, although they were not, they tell us, aware of the extent of it. During the trial the judge gave several warnings to the jury to decide the case on the evidence alone, and he gave a further appropriate warning to them in the summing-up.

Mr Nutting points out that the jury did not deal with the case in a cavalier fashion. On the contrary, they took five hours to consider their verdicts. He points also to the fact that the jury at one stage returned to ask a question related to the possibility that the killer might have been an



intruder who had broken into the flat. He points this out, as showing that the jury had not approached the matter with closed minds.

But we find it quite impossible to say that the jury were not influenced in their decision by what they read in the press.

The principle is that, if the media coverage at trial has created a real risk of prejudice against the defendants, the convictions should be regarded as unsafe and unsatisfactory.

The court was filled with the silence of intense concentration. Everyone could tell the conclusion to which the judge's words were heading. He continued:

We were troubled, at one stage, by the fact that defence counsel did not, at trial, ask the judge to discharge the jury because of the press coverage. Mr Nutting has, however, with typical fairness, provided the answer. This is what he said: 'Asking for a retrial puts defence counsel in a hopeless situation, where young girls had spent considerable time in custody, and where to dispel the publicity, it would be necessary to postpone the trial for a further long period.'

We accept that. We are satisfied that the press coverage of this trial did create a real risk of prejudice against the defendants, and, for this second reason, as well as the first, the convictions are unsafe and unsatisfactory and must be quashed.

The word 'quashed' was the cue for an eruption of emotion. Everyone on the public benches began to cheer and clap; some stamped their feet. Lord Justice McCowan looked up sternly and called for order. He said he would clear the court if there were any further disruptions. Michelle straightened her back and stared straight ahead. She showed no emotion. Lisa's face, however, was full of excitement. She smiled broadly at the public gallery. Our only fear now was that the judge would order a retrial. I knew there was evidence against the sisters which was difficult to counter. Some of that evidence - which the appeal judges had seemed to glide over - had caused me at times to have doubts about the sisters' innocence, but I just couldn't believe they were capable of murder. In my mind I saw only the cynicism of police desperate to get a result in a high-profile case. That focus had distorted my approach to the case: I'd become so determined to prove the sisters'

innocence and the police's guilt that I'd stifled any niggling doubts. Behind me I could hear one of the sisters' friends whispering a prayer repeatedly: 'Please God, let them come home. Please God, let them come home.' Everyone settled down again and silence returned. Lord Justice McCowan continued: 'Moreover, by reason of the view we take of the way in which this case was reported, we do not think that a fair trial could now take place. Hence we do not order a retrial.'

The public benches erupted once again. This time we all stamped our feet on the wooden floors and clapped and cheered wildly, ignoring all calls for order. Michelle looked at Lisa, but neither of them showed any emotion. After what seemed like five minutes of uproar the court became silent once again to listen to the judge's final words: 'In allowing the appeal, we further order that the papers in the case be sent to the Attorney-General, for him to consider whether he thinks it appropriate to take any action in respect of the newspapers concerned.'

We all stood up and walked out of the court into the great hall. An official led us into an annexe. He pointed to a studded wooden door from which, he said, Lisa and Michelle would emerge. A peculiar-looking little man called Dick was sweating with excitement. He was flailing his arms around and loudly denouncing the police and press to anyone who would listen. Dick had not known the sisters before their trial, but had contacted the family and offered to assist them in getting people to sign petitions. At first, the Taylors had regarded him as a harmless but useful dogsbody. However, as the campaign progressed he proved himself an irritant and potential liability. He'd visited a witness in the case and asked her to sign his 'Free the Taylor Two' petition; and he'd pestered Ann with numerous unnecessary phone calls in which he'd made various half-baked suggestions and observations. Only recently Ann had said to me: 'That Dick is really starting to do my head in.' Now she took me to one

side. She said she was worried that Dick would emerge from the court to say something inappropriate to the press. She asked me if I'd have a word with him. I could understand her concern - one silly outburst might cast a shadow over everything we'd achieved. The Taylors were planning to criticise the press strongly for the way they'd reported the original trial; the press would be looking for someone gullible like Dick to provide material for a backlash. I walked over to him and said bluntly that when he got outside he was not to talk to any journalists. He looked puzzled. In case he hadn't properly registered what I'd said I repeated it more emphatically: 'Have you got me? If I catch you talking to any journalists I'm going to squeeze your head. D'you understand?' He looked hurt and bewildered. I suppose until that moment he'd assumed he was an asset to the campaign. Crestfallen, he nodded.

After a short while the studded door swung open. Michelle and Lisa walked out to more cheering and clapping. Michelle embraced her mother; Lisa her father. There was a flurry of other embraces before they gave a little speech of thanks. Michelle caught my eye and tugged at Lisa. The two of them came over to me. Michelle smiled warmly: 'Thanks for everything, Bernie.'

Lisa said: 'Yeh, we really appreciate everything you've done for us.'

Michelle asked me to keep an eye on Dick to make sure he didn't say anything to the press. I said: 'Don't worry about that. He won't be talking to anybody. I've already had a word.' Then Lisa took me by the arm and said she wanted me to meet somebody. She brought me over to a short Afro-Caribbean man whom she introduced as George. He was George Silcott, brother of the infamous Winston Silcott, a hate-figure for the tabloids since his conviction for the murder of PC Keith Blakelock during the riot on the Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham, north London, in October 1985. What had especially angered the tabloids

was that Winston had been on bail for another murder charge at the time of the riot. He'd subsequently been convicted of that murder as well. He had constantly claimed he was innocent of both, and there had been a long-running campaign to free him. Lisa had told me she'd been writing regularly to Winston from her own prison cell. She'd described him as 'sweet' and said he'd helped her through her darker moments. She claimed that on his letters he always put the stamp upside-down, leaving the Queen's head topsy-turvy. It was a small act of rebellion, his way of punishing Her Majesty for having prosecuted him. George was a quiet, polite man. He said he'd attended the hearing to show support and to thank the Taylors for supporting his brother. George had a plastic carrier bag in his hand. From it he took two T-shirts and gave them to Lisa and Michelle. The T-shirts had printed on them a head-and-shoulders picture of his brother, along with the words, 'Hostage' and 'Winston Emmanuel Silcott'. The sisters said they would wear them when they went outside to face the media. I couldn't believe they were serious. I didn't know whether Winston was innocent or guilty of the two murders, but I did know that now was not the time for the Taylors to link themselves with him. As they walked off to change, and out of George's earshot, I said: 'Look, are you sure this is a good idea? You're worried about Dick saying the wrong thing to the press, then you and Lisa go out to face them wearing T-shirts supporting someone they hate. They'll fucking slaughter you.'

Michelle and Lisa said they didn't care: they wanted to show their support for Winston because they believed he was the victim of a miscarriage of justice as appalling as the one to which they'd been subjected. It was their decision, so I said no more.

When they had put on the T-shirts a court official told them that if they wanted to avoid the media they could leave by a back exit. They said they wanted to leave by the

front. Perhaps ten yards away, well beyond the group of people who'd gathered to celebrate the Taylors' victory, I noticed two figures standing in a badly lit alcove. I realised with a start who they were: Detective Superintendent Chris Burke, the man who'd led the murder investigation, was talking to the mother of murdered Alison. Burke's face was etched with pain. He was moving his hands slowly as he talked. No doubt he was trying to explain to her how those he had assured her had murdered Alison were now deemed innocent. Alison's mother didn't seem to be listening. Her face was expressionless, as if she was in deep shock. At that moment I felt deeply sad for her. Her daughter was dead, and whoever had killed her was still free.

The Taylors were about to move out to face the waiting journalists. Lisa said: 'Come on, Bernie. Come with us.' I said it was probably best if I didn't: 'You don't want the press making too many links between us. You know what they're like.' Lisa nodded; Michelle shrugged her shoulders. Then the two of them turned to their family. The group started off towards the entrance. I lagged behind. Michelle and Lisa were laughing and joking as they walked.

Outside, the street seemed full of television crews and photographers. The audience greeted the sisters' arrival with a loud cheer, then fell silent as Michelle began to read from a prepared statement:

We have spent two years of our lives protesting our innocence and only now has the deliberate mistake by the police come to light. We will not say that by being released justice has been done, because we should not have been put in this position in the first place. We also want to thank our legal team for believing in us and working so hard to prove our innocence and also to thank the Lord who gave us strength.

I almost laughed. Surely this wasn't the same legal team that Michelle had angrily criticised in letters to me? I suppose the sisters were only being polite. As for the Lord, I hadn't remembered him cropping up much in conversations

over the last 11 months. Winston Silcott's face grinned at the crowd from the sisters' T-shirts. I cringed. It was bad enough that Michelle and Lisa were wearing the T-shirts, but the photo on them made everything worse. I assumed Winston's supporters wanted to get away from the police mug-shot photos that made him look like a machete-wielding psychopath. But in their attempt to portray him as a normal fun-loving sort of guy they'd gone too far the other way. Now he grinned inanely like a buoyantly over-enthusiastic game-show host. The sisters held hands and raised them in a joint clenched-fist salute. Their supporters responded with a cheer.

It was time for me to go. I slipped away, unnoticed.

## TWO

### *The Picture of Christ*

If my brother Paul hadn't been charged with wounding and assault I wouldn't have become involved with the Taylor sisters.

Paul had fallen out with a friend, and it had resulted in violence. He'd been remanded in custody to Belmarsh Prison in south-east London after police told magistrates they feared he might try to interfere with witnesses. I wanted to help my brother escape the charge, and I had every intention of interfering with the witnesses he was now prevented from visiting. I had a long list of convictions myself, and had served two prison sentences for wounding, so I knew the system. I knew what level of proof the police would need to secure a conviction. I also knew precisely what evidence would be needed to derail their case. I didn't know whether Paul was guilty or innocent. I wasn't even going to ask him: it didn't bother me. My job as a nightclub doorman meant I had plenty of free time during the day to find ways of discrediting what the police alleged. For me, any work I could do to undermine the police was a labour of love. I didn't mind using illegal methods because, as far as I was concerned, so did the police. From my own experience I knew how they could lie and cheat and use all sorts of illegalities to fit people up. I knew their tricks, but I'd learnt several of my own to counter them. In short, I hated the

bastards and would do anything in my power to defeat them.

Within a week or so I'd gathered together enough 'new evidence' to enable Paul to make a credible application for bail. He was given a date in July 1992 to have his application heard. The venue was the Old Bailey. I decided to attend the hearing. Like most people reading newspapers at that time I'd been following the Taylor sisters' trial. Reports had frequently made their way onto the front pages, with lurid follow-ups inside. I was used to violence, but I still found the case disturbing. I'd come across violent women before, but I just couldn't believe that such young women could carry out such a vicious attack on another woman. I could just about imagine a woman defending herself in such a frenzied way against a potential rapist, for instance, and I could just about imagine a woman in an extreme moment sticking a knife several times into another woman or an unfaithful lover, but 54 times? No way. Only a man could do something like that: I'd certainly encountered quite a few men who had that capability. From the newspaper photos the alleged murderers looked like ordinary south London girls. I prided myself on my ability to size people up quickly – to a large extent my job as a doorman depended on it – and to me the Taylor sisters didn't look hardened or potentially violent. They looked like ordinary girls, the sort of girls I met in droves several nights a week on the door at the nightclub. Perhaps because of my instinctive feeling that they couldn't have done it, I felt uncomfortable with the coverage in the tabloids. Several of them seemed to report the story as if the sisters' guilt was obvious. Yet I hadn't read anything that convinced me they were. There certainly didn't seem to be any so-called 'smoking-gun' evidence. Everything seemed circumstantial – and highly questionable. At the same time, it was all academic to me. I didn't personally know anyone involved with the case, and there were more important things on my mind.



The fact that the trial was taking place at the Old Bailey hadn't really registered with me. So when I arrived there for Paul's bail hearing I was intrigued by the long queue of people for the public gallery. I'd gone there with my brother's case in mind, nobody else's.

An elderly woman was standing at the back of the queue clutching what looked like a lunch box of sandwiches. I asked her what the queue was for. My ignorance displeased her. She said with irritation: 'It's those Taylor girls. The murder.' I walked towards the entrance, down past the mumbling line of murder groupies. Some of them must have thought they'd spotted a queue-jumper. I heard a few shouts: 'Oi, you! Get to the back!' and 'We've been here hours!' I politely told them to fuck off and walked to the other smaller queue that had formed for security clearance. A guard asked me several prepared questions regarding recording equipment, bags and mobile phones. Satisfied I had nothing on his list, he waved me through. I went in search of the court usher to find out which court my brother would be appearing in. A man in a well-ironed black gown almost sighed with boredom when I asked him for information. He asked me my brother's name and began to flick through his sheaf of listings. Then he looked up and said: 'It's been adjourned for seven days.' I asked him why. He said he didn't know. I can't say I was surprised. I'd often felt with my own cases that the legal process was one long adjournment. All the same, I felt exasperated by my wasted journey. I didn't have anything else to do for the rest of the day, so I decided on a whim to sit in on the Taylor sisters' trial for a few hours. I had, after all, managed to jump the queue for the public gallery, although I'd neglected to bring sandwiches.

I followed some people from the queue who were being let in a few at a time. An usher stood guarding the open door of the courtroom. He looked behind him to check for vacant spaces inside before letting us in. I spotted a gap in the

middle of a bench and squeezed past several pairs of bunched knees to secure my place in the packed courtroom. Before I sat down I noticed John Shaughnessy, the victim's husband, sitting directly behind me. I recognised him from the newspaper photos. Looking around I also spotted a few members of the Taylor family on a bench to my right. The proceedings had not yet started, but Michelle and Lisa were sitting in the dock. In the flesh they seemed even more unlikely as murderers. They just looked like nice ordinary girls, although there was one detail which, to my cynical eye, made Michelle seem a little more cunning and worldly than she might at first have appeared: she was holding a Bible, a picture of Jesus Christ and what looked like a chain with a small crucifix attached. Nice touch, I thought – a show of Christian piety for the benefit of the jurors. Seasoned criminals had over the years taught me several courtroom tactics for swaying gullible jurors – using a walking stick for sympathy; dressing nerdishly to destroy the image of hardened criminality; crying 'No! No! No!' when the victim gave particularly damaging evidence. I assumed Michelle had received similar guidance while on remand.

As I sat waiting for the proceedings to begin I read the latest instalment of the story in a discarded copy of *The Sun*. It helped me clarify in my mind the essential details that had so far emerged. The one thing not in dispute was that Alison Shaughnessy had been stabbed to death. Alison worked at Barclays Bank in The Strand. Her husband John, eight years her senior, worked as assistant purchasing manager and gardener at the Churchill Clinic, a private hospital opposite the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth, south London. Michelle Taylor was also employed at the clinic as a part-time domestic assistant. She lived in the staff accommodation, as John had before his marriage. Lisa Taylor, a window cleaner, had frequently stayed at the clinic with her sister.