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Still no charges in Lisa Dorrian murder three years on

(by Suzanne Breen, Sunday Tribune)

As the third anniversary of Lisa Dorrian's murder approaches, Suzanne Breen, Northern Editor, talks to her mother about the progress of the murder investigation and the family's continuing torment.

Sometimes, on a crisp clear night, the family creep into the garden to gaze at the north star. "We call it Lisa's star because it shines more brightly than the rest, just like she did. Looking at it is comforting. I know it's silly but, when you've so little left, you cling to anything," says Pat Dorrian.

It's nearly three years since Lisa Dorrian – crazy, kind, affectionate, impulsive Lisa who lived every day like it was her last – went missing. She was last seen alive at 5am on 28 February 2005 at Ballyhalbert caravan park, Co Down, after a drink- and drugs-fuelled party. Everyone knows she was murdered but no body has been found.

Her killer's name circulates freely in Co Down. While those responsible weren't paramilitaries themselves, some have Loyalist Volunteer Force family connections. Eleven people were at the party but none have talked meaningfully. Even a £10,000 reward, which the Dorrians – by no means wealthy people – scraped together hasn't loosened tongues.

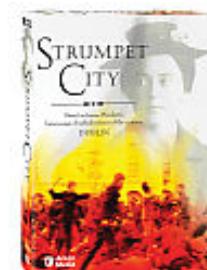
Next week, the family will again appeal for information about Lisa's murder. "If I'd a choice of having Lisa's body back or her killer convicted, I'd have my daughter home every time," says Pat.

"But I don't believe they'll find her in my lifetime. If the people at the party were going to talk, they'd have done so by now. Have they no conscience? And what about their mothers. My daughters tell me everything so these women must know something of what their children were up to. Have they no conscience either?"

All that is left of Lisa (25) sits in the Dorrian's attic: two suitcases of belongings collected from the rented house she shared with a friend. Lisa's three sisters – Joanne (25), Michelle

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(24), and Ciara (11) – insist nothing is thrown out.

Photographs of Lisa clutter the front room: looking stunning in a black bikini on holiday in Ibiza; at a wedding in a denim suit, a big white rose in her lapel; smiling in a low-cut black dress – "that dress is so out of fashion now, she'd be mortified!" says her mother.

"Lisa was so full of life. She's in my mind all the time. The young girls at work will be talking about what they've been up to at the weekend and I think, 'that should be Lisa'. I'll find a way of introducing her into the conversation, saying 'Oh, Lisa liked that' or 'Lisa went there'."

It's hard for all the family. During the *Sunday Tribune* interview, Pat receives word that her daughter Joanne has been in a car crash in Newry, although she's suffered only minor injuries. But Ciara, the youngest daughter, starts crying uncontrollably. "I don't want to lose another sister!" she screams. "Ciara has nightmares that she's locked in the house with Lisa's killer and he's trying to murder her," Pat says.

Until Lisa's disappearance, the Dorrians lived a happy, unremarkable life in Conlig, Co Down. Pat worked in an old people's home, her husband John was a driving instructor.

The Christmas before she disappeared, Lisa split up with her long-term boyfriend. Then, she met someone else. Her family disapproved. Her new man hung about with a bad crowd – one had 'scum' scrawled on his car bonnet – and Lisa began taking drugs.

The last time John saw her she was packing the car to head off to Ballyhalbert. "John said, 'Lisa don't take drugs' and she said 'no dad, I promise'," Pat recalls. They didn't hear from her over the weekend but that wasn't unusual. "If she was about, she'd ring and say 'I'll come to Sunday dinner if you make Yorkshire pudding!' But generally weekends were her party time," says Pat.

It was the middle of the next week – after numerous attempts at contact had failed – that her family became suspicious. Lisa's sister Joanne visited the caravan park. When the care-taker let her into the caravan where the party had been, Lisa's belongings were there but not Lisa.

The Dorrians went to the police. Ten days later, detectives turned the missing person's inquiry into a murder investigation. What happened at the party remains a mystery. There are reports that, by 5 am, everybody had left except Lisa and a 17-year-old male who was a friend of her boyfriend's. High on drugs, they went outside after hearing noises and Lisa "got lost", the teenager claims.



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Vital information on events earlier in the evening – who left the party when and in what state – hasn't been forthcoming. There are rumours Lisa had angered others by "stealing" speed and running up a huge drugs' bill. It has been reported that Lisa was taken from the caravan to a house in Ballyhalbert where she was assaulted before being driven to a house in Holywood where she was beaten even more severely.

Detectives believe Lisa's body was hidden in a shed or outhouse for six months before being moved to a boat and dumped at sea. But a huge police investigation involving sniffer dogs, air and sea search crews, divers and 150 officers, found nothing.

The caravan, a boat, and cars have been seized, and several men arrested and questioned, but it has all led nowhere. There has been a blue ribbon campaign to raise awareness of Lisa's disappearance. On the second anniversary of her murder last year, a massive poster and billboard campaign called for information.

Beer-mats with the words, 'Wherever you go, Lisa will be on your mind. No matter what you drink, Lisa will be on your mind', were distributed to the venues her friends frequented. But it led to no significant information. Some fear the investigation is at a standstill.

Only in the past year has Pat been able to return to work. "For two years, I was in a deep depression. Then I realised I had to pull myself together. There's only so long you can stay within four walls and there's only so much daytime TV you can watch.

"Going back to the old people's home has given me focus. The residents were so pleased to see me. 'We missed you,' they said. One woman never takes off Lisa's campaign blue ribbon from her clothes. Another, who had a stroke, asks me every day, 'Any word of Lisa?' And I'm the one meant to be looking after her!"

A bench and cherry tree in the grounds of Bangor town hall commemorate Lisa. "The tree will be coming into bloom soon and it'll be beautiful," Pat says. "I go there every now and then. People sit on the bench chatting. It's lovely and informal, as it should be."

Pat wants a funeral and a grave for her daughter, but not at any price. "If she's been in the sea for years, her body would be dismembered now. I want my daughter back intact or not at all. I don't want to be bury a bone. I don't want to bury something you'd buy your dog down at the butchers."

Dignity is important to the Dorrians. They will spend the day of Lisa's disappearance together, quietly remembering her. And

later, if the night is crisp and clear, they will go outside and look at the stars.

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