

# ABUSED MUM-OF-FIVE BACKS



# CAMPAIGN TO STOP CUTS TO SHELTERS



Appeal... Champion

## National winner's life pics torched

By SARAH RIDLEY

FORMER top jockey Bob Champion has revealed he lost thousands of irreplaceable photos in the Liverpool car park fire. The Grand National winner was set to deliver them for publication in his new autobiography. But they were destroyed along with his car and 1,400 other vehicles in the New Year's Eve inferno. They covered his victory on Aldamiti in 1991 – two years after being told cancer was killing him – his kids growing up and his MBE ceremony. "Before seeing my publisher I parked in the multi-storey to watch a horse show at the nearby arena," said Bob, 69. "The photos covered my life. My book will look empty now." He appealed to the public for any pictures they have of him.

## Nut boils 3 mogs

A SADIST who poured boiling water over the heads of three pet cats is being hunted by police. The latest, a tortoiseshell called Pip, is traumatised, in agony and had to be put on a drip. Its mother Lavender needed £700 of treatment after being scalded at Halloween in 2016. Her fur never grew back. The third was a neighbour's in Poole, Dorset. Other pets have vanished. Pip's owner Sarah Cutler said: "Someone very sick is on a campaign to damage cats."

**WINNIE'S WISDOM**

I AM fond of pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals.

## 'Stay in' hol Brits

HOLIDAY Brits in Montego Bay were yesterday warned to stay in their resorts while Jamaican soldiers crack down on violent crime. The Foreign Office said it expected "intensive law enforcement activities" after a state of emergency was declared on the sunshine island. About 200,000 Brits visit Jamaica every year. Many pick Montego Bay because of its beaches. But there were 335 murders in the district last year and gang killings are soaring.



CLOSE... Mandy with son Jahmene

By SHARON HENDRY

**A MUM-OF-FIVE who endured some of the worst domestic abuse on record has joined our Save Our Shelters campaign – with a stark message for Theresa May.**

Mandy Thomas, 52, asks the Prime Minister: "How many more women and children must die before you understand domestic violence? I've buried two sons because of one man." "The funding you propose to take away is the difference between life and death. Will you be able to sleep at night with deaths on your mind?" Mandy endured 18 years of hell at the hands of partner Eustace Douglas before he was jailed for nine years in 2009 for GBH with intent and false imprisonment – and also received a concurrent six-year term for rapes. But after just five years, he was released on a ten-year licence and shortly afterwards Mandy's eldest son Daniel, 22, took his own life.

She says: "We were let down by the system. He made threats on our lives. We were moved to a safe house. We lost our freedom and my son his life." Now Mandy is a Women's Aid Survivor Ambassador, along with son Jahmene, 26, a soul singer who wowed The X Factor in 2012, finishing second to James Arthur.

Mandy is backing The Sun on Sunday's Save Our Shelters campaign to scrap planned changes to refuge funding that would threaten thousands of women and children.

Ministers want to remove refuges from the welfare system, so women can no longer pay with the housing benefit that accounts for 53 per cent of funding. This would mean the last guaranteed income for refuges, run by charities such as Women's Aid, is lost.

Mandy has written an autobiography, You Can't Run, and she advised writers of Radio 4 soap The Archers on their controversial domestic violence storyline in 2016. She says: "Leaving a violent relationship is the most dangerous time. You need a plan, a back-up of services, refuges. Why can't ministers understand that without them women and children will die?"

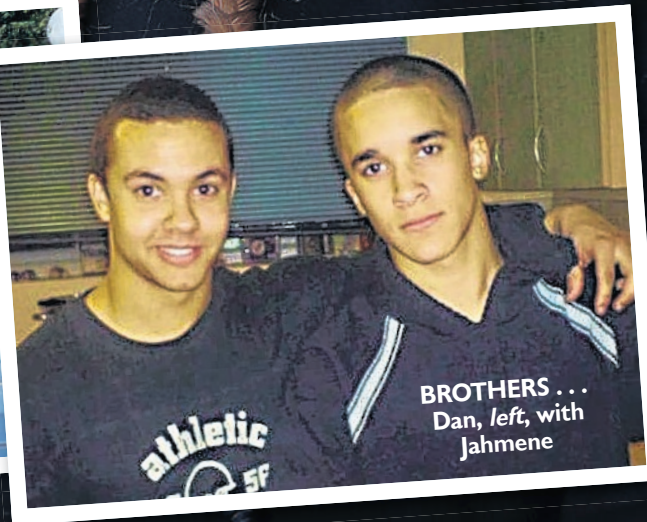
There's no protection for victims without avenues to fight to. But when she got pregnant, at 19, petty criminal Douglas's violence escalated. She says: "He once cut all my clothes off me and held the scissors to my throat. Then, two weeks after the birth, he held me down and raped me." He isolated Mandy from



SPEAKING OUT... Mandy's autobiography and, main shot, pictured this week



TRAGIC... Mandy's son Dan took his own life



BROTHERS... Dan, left, with Jahmene

her hair and threatened to kill her in front of their children. She says: "I'm probably only alive because my daughter told a teacher." The school alerted police, who rescued Mandy before arresting Douglas and driving the mum and children to a refuge where they assumed new identities. Mandy still believes she is in danger from Douglas and suffers post-traumatic stress including insomnia. But she bravely speaks out at public events. She says: "Lots of

people don't make it. I did and want to use my voice. "The Save Our Shelters campaign is vital. Refuges are no longer just places that physically protect people, they are places where women and children access professional help. If you take that away, you take away a person's chance of life. It hurts me that the Government is not taking this seriously. Domestic violence is not just a black eye, it's life-threatening." Currently, most women in refuges have fled their local

areas – but under new plans, councils will be tasked to "fund services that meet needs of their local area". So those who have fled will not be prioritised and will have nowhere to go. Women's Aid says the reforms would lead to 39 per cent of the 270 refuges in England closing and another 13 per cent offering fewer beds – cutting adrift 4,000 women and children each year. Join our Save Our Shelters appeal by filling in the panel, right, or pledge support by signing the online petition, also right.

thought it safer for us all if I stayed put." But the same year, Mandy lost another son. She says: "I was pregnant when my ex beat and raped me. Things came to a head in 2002 after Mandy got a job at the Post Office. She says: 'He said I'd never get a job but I did – and was promoted to manager. That pushed him over the edge.' He imprisoned Mandy in her bedroom for four days, branded her with a blowtorch, slashed her with knives, dragged her around naked by

# Dear PM I buried two sons over one man...our refuges mean life or death



CAMPAIGNERS... Mandy and Stella meet at Westminster

## MP STELLA JOINS WAR ON VIOLENCE

By SHARON HENDRY

CAMPAIGNING MP Stella Creasy vowed to help Mandy Thomas fight against refuge closures after meeting her in the House of Commons.

Ms Creasy invited Mandy to the Palace of Westminster this week after hearing about her story through The Sun on Sunday's Save Our Shelters Campaign. Women's Aid Ambassador Mandy told Ms Creasy, the Labour MP for Walthamstow, East London: "Refuges mean the chance between life and death. If you know you are going to be killed by your partner, you have to run – and if there is no support, it's like sending someone into a fire pit."

"I don't want to bury any more of my children but they have suicidal thoughts because of the horrors they saw. My ex is now free but my children and I continue to live with the legacy of his crimes every day. I haven't slept properly at night for years. Nobody seems to care about the victims of this crime. I want the system to change because human worth seems to be at the bottom of it. To run at the worst and most dangerous time of your life and be told there is no room at the inn is almost biblical. "Women and children are going to die if politicians don't start paying attention to this and stop ticking cost-cutting boxes." Ms Creasy replied: "Refuges are what we want and need. We need policies which mean women who have been through extreme trauma can be supported. "We have to change the current attitude which says it's about managing the risk of the offender rather than protecting the

women at the heart of this issue." Ms Creasy is making a name for herself as a "politician of the people", campaigning on issues such as payday loans, homelessness and women's rights. She is also a celebrated feminist and faced abuse on Twitter after supporting a successful campaign to put Jane Austen's portrait on the £10 note. Now Ms Creasy is wholeheartedly backing The Sun on Sunday's Save Our Shelters campaign and has promised to continue working to challenge proposed legislation to change the funding model for refuges. She has also promised to campaign for a specialist Violence Against Women Commissioner to help steer a joined-up approach to all such crimes, including domestic violence, in Government.

She added: "I urge people to write to their local MP and say there needs to be a Violence Against Women Commissioner. This is about cutting across government departments, thinking in a joined-up way. "Financial considerations should not come into the equation. "Running to a hostel is often the first time someone breaks the control their partner has had over them. The proposed supported housing model is frightening. "It doesn't work if it doesn't take away the risk. Everyone is well-meaning but there is an unconscious incompetence. "Ministers are aware of the issue but it's not moving forward. I will continue to champion the cause in any way I can."

are what we want and need. Write to your MP! -STELLA CREASY

**Dear Prime Minister,**

We demand that the Government urgently halts planned changes to funding for the UK's network of refuges. We call on you to find a suitable, long-term funding solution and ensure that every woman and child can safely escape domestic abuse.

Name.....  
Address.....  
Signature.....

Send to Save Our Shelters Campaign, The News Building, 1 London Bridge Street, London, SE1 9GF

Sign petition online: [38d.gs/WomensAid](http://38d.gs/WomensAid)

Picture: JON BOND