



Tragedy... Sandhurst

Hanged Army girl cadet in axe fear

By DAVID WILLETTTS

AN ARMY cadet found hanged at the Royal Military Academy had texted a friend saying she feared she was about to be thrown off an officer training course, a pre-hearing inquest heard.

Olivia Perks, 21, sent the message after being warned for failing to return to her barracks at the Sandhurst academy in Berkshire after a weekend party.

Her body was found in her room at the RMA on February 6. She had earlier been given a minor disciplinary warning.

Michael Rawlinson QC, for Olivia's mother, told the Reading hearing: "The concerns of the family - as perceived by them - are the failure to provide support to Olivia."

The review was adjourned until January.

Cut off... and fired

TV's Apprentice wannabes are barred from having phones, cash, diaries and even calculators during filming of the show.

The hopefuls are limited to two pieces of luggage in the house - and their clothing has to be approved by producers.

They agree to the rules under a contract revealed to The Sun on Sunday.

Its long prohibited list includes mobiles, tablets, cameras, calculators, cash, credit and debit cards.

A show source said: "The candidates basically sign their lives away."

Bill tunes chill pets

RADIO star Bill Turnbull will again play soothing sounds to keep pets calm in fireworks season.

The ex-BBC Breakfast host launched Pet Sounds on Classic FM last year.

The shows will return on November 2 and 5. Animal lover Bill, 63, said they will be a "radio refuge" for anxious pets.

He added: "I've been presenting to humans on Classic FM for 3 1/2 years, so I'm looking forward to some new four-legged listeners tuning in and enjoying the world's greatest music."

STAR ON LINGERING MEMORIES OF ABUSE ONE YEAR AFTER REFUGE VISIT

I woke up convinced Belafonte had cut off my finger

Says MEL B



EXCLUSIVE By SHARON HENDRY

TRAUMATISED Mel B is still crippled by terrifying flashbacks of abuse she claims she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband.

Spice Girl Mel - a year on from her emotional visit to a domestic violence refuge - today reveals how she recently woke screaming from a nightmare, convinced Stephen Belafonte had chopped off her finger.

She claims this is a threat he made in real life.

The 44-year-old had to be calmed by her mum Andrea and reassured it was a dream - triggered by crippling Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition which can cause disturbing flashbacks in trauma victims.

Mel, who made three suicide attempts during her marriage, was diagnosed with the condition after years of Belafonte's alleged abuse - which he strongly denies.

She wrote about her alleged torment in her book Brutally Honest. And she became a patron for domestic violence charity Women's Aid last year.

Mel also backed The Sun on Sunday's successful Save Our Shelters campaign, which secured funding for women's refuges.

In an exclusive interview, she said: "I came running down the stairs because I thought my ex had cut my finger off."

Pain and anxiety

"I thought it had actually happened because he was threatening to do that. I was convinced my finger was gone and my mum had to reassure me it was still there. I have to remind myself that I'm living in the present and that the flashback is my brain playing tricks on me.

"I've got a long way to go. It's baby steps. Everyone thinks it's fine when you leave but that's when the next battle really begins. No wonder women feel like they are going crazy and are tempted to go back (to an abuser), because life alone can seem so impossible. You may have had the strength to leave, but do you have the strength to stay away?"

Mel claims film producer Belafonte abused her on their wedding night in 2007 and continued a decade-long "reign of terror".

She revealed how the couple appeared to enjoy a Hollywood lifestyle, yet at home she says Belafonte subjected her to emotional abuse, branding her ugly, a slut, fat, stupid, a bitch, worthless, drunk and pathetic.

And she alleges she was repeatedly hit, strangled and abused in the marriage during scenes - including the couple having sex - that Belafonte recorded. He says the tapes, and the sex filmed, were consensual.

The couple had a daughter, Madison, eight. Mel also has daughters Phoenix, 20, from her marriage to dancer Jimmy Guizar, and Angel, 12, with Eddie Murphy. She began divorcing Belafonte in 2018 and their £10million fight played out

in public in an LA court. In August 2018 they reached a settlement which involved the abuse charges being dropped.

Mel, a team captain on TV's Celebrity Juice, is now living in Leeds with her mum and eldest daughters.

Madison, a US citizen, lives with Belafonte while a custody battle is resolved.

Mel said: "Even though you have left your abuser, there is a whole new way of trying to find yourself and trying to deal with your emotions and

PTSD or whatever mental illness you have. That pain and anxiety is always there."

She added: "I still wake up with night sweats. I know he's not there but I still have flashbacks and that's ongoing."

"No one understands what domestic violence survivors live with on a daily basis. The trauma lives in the body. It's like living on a battlefield."

"Something small and normal, like the kids yelling, 'Hurry up Mum, we're going to be late!' in a high-pitched voice can take me back there."

"I have to be really kind to myself and let people know when my anxiety levels are very high."

"EMDR (a trauma treatment which involves manipulating eye movements to release stored memories) and therapy softens the pain, but it's still there. It's good to talk about

it but you have to find ways of separating what was in the past from what is happening now."

"You feel frozen, pinned to the floor. For me, moving back to Leeds and being back with my mum and family has really helped keep my feet on the ground. But you go through waves of emotions that are so intense you can't even have words to describe it. Women still need help to get on with their lives and pick up the pieces."

Mel's battle with trauma is compounded by the agony of not being with Madison.

She explained: "With the exception of one random FaceTime call, I haven't seen Madison in over nine weeks and by the time I do see her it will be over 110 days."

"The US court system doesn't support women in my situation. I am a UK citizen but my baby is a US citizen."

"I used to sleep with her every night and now all I have is a FaceTime court

us apart has made us stick together. She has always been my rock. I'm only surrounded by women. Even my dog Cookie is a girl. I feel safer with women because I trust them a lot more."

"I'm not angry at men, I don't hate them, I'm just wary of what they can do."

Mel admits work has also been her saviour, although she reveals there were elements of this summer's Spice Girls tour she found challenging.

She said: "We all had to have 'inner ears' because, to be able to sing in a group, you have to be able to hear yourself and hear each other. But it was a big deal for me because my ex used to stick his fingers in my ears a lot and re-living that sensation freaked me out."

"It took me about three days to tell the other girls how bad my anxiety was. I said, 'I'm going to have to get a

Reiki healing lady to come in. I know it sounds really LA and cheesy but I'm not going to be able to calm myself down before I go on stage otherwise'. We found a good healer then everyone ended up having Reiki. I was on fire after that."

Mel also went on a tour to highlight the issues in her book. She said: "The book was a massive turning point because it helped me to remember events and clarify

the truth. If they weren't true, why didn't my ex sue?"

"On the tour I was in Birmingham and a 75-year-old lady with a walking stick revealed to me that her husband had died but she wanted me to know that he had abused her for years."

"She said nobody had ever known about her abuse until that moment. I started to cry because she seemed so happy she could share her secret."

"There were also a handful of women who showed up to one signing to buy the book. Then they showed up at another four weeks later and told me they had left their abusive partners. That was really, really, empowering."

Mel said she is committed to highlighting the importance of the Government delivering sustain-

able funding for domestic abuse services, so that every survivor can access support as part of the Domestic Abuse Bill which is going through Parliament.

"I am really proud to be part of Women's Aid. I want to be part of changes for women that make sense. Nine times out of ten an abuser is not going to give up, even when you've got away."

"They've had babies with you, they can still hack into your emails, infiltrate your friends and family, scare you from a distance and give you panic whether you've been in a refuge or not."

"Domestic violence is an epidemic. It is something that has to be sorted - and I won't give up until it is."

● Domestic violence and coercive control is against the law. You can get support at womensaid.org.uk or by calling 0808 2000 247 - a National Domestic Violence freephone 24-hour helpline run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.



SUPPORT... Mel sits next to survivor Rochelle Siviter at a women's refuge in Leeds last year



How YOU helped to save lives

THE Sun on Sunday last year had the successful campaign Our Shelters, which highlighted the danger of proposals to remove refuges from the welfare system, writes Sharon Hendry. After backing from our readers, Women's Aid and other campaigners, the Government announced funding would be retained. Proposed changes meant women and children fleeing violence would no longer be able to pay for refuge accommodation with housing benefit which makes up 53 per cent of refuges' funding.



The last guaranteed income for refuges, run by charities in the Women's Aid membership, was on the verge of being lost.

Women's Aid said the reforms would have led to 39 per cent of the 270 refuges surveyed in England closing.

Mel B supported our campaign and Women's Aid later invited her to become its patron.

She said: "I'm forever grateful to The Sun on Sunday readers for their continued support of Women's Aid and being so instrumental in bringing me together with this incredible body of women dedicated to support others dealing with abuse."

"The incredible backing has undoubtedly changed and saved lives."

Domestic abuse survivor Rochelle Siviter, who Mel met last year at a refuge in Leeds, said: "Domestic abuse created memories of torture, and

the goal for us is to create as many wonderful memories as we can, so that eventually it drowns the bad ones out.

"Spending time with Mel at the refuge, hearing her honesty and courage and inspiring each other gave us exactly that."

Nik Peasgood, the chief executive of Leeds Women's Aid, reflected on Mel's visit to the refuge, saying: "The Mel B effect was that all our residents were uplifted, and new women were contacting us saying, 'if Mel B could experience this then it made them realise that so could they'. Women were recognising signs of abuse in their relationship that either they hadn't identified before."

This week ministers announced an additional £15million for domestic abuse services in 2020/1, which councils can bid for.

Yet many organisations still run parts of their services without any dedicated funding.

"I've been presenting to humans on Classic FM for 3 1/2 years, so I'm looking forward to some new four-legged listeners tuning in and enjoying the world's greatest music."



CLOSE... with daughter Phoenix



BEFORE SPLIT... Mel with Belafonte at bash in 2016



TOUR... with Spice Girls in May

Picture: DAN CHARITY



POWER OF YOU... our campaign last year to save shelters