

Evening News  
Fri 6 May 2005



Lianne Keegan, who wrote a diary of how she was bullied.  
Picture: Esme Allen

## Years after the bullying, scars haven't healed

SANDRA DICK

Alone, frightened and haunted by her past, the 19-year-old shivers, petrified by the rowdy lads sitting at the back of her bus, fearful of the crowd of youths hanging around the local shop doorway and terrified of the group of girls gathered beside her bus stop.

"Mum," she whispers into her mobile phone, "can you come and meet me . . . I'm scared."

Nearly a decade has passed since her nightmare started. Lianne is no longer the quiet schoolgirl of the past. Today she is, on the surface at least, a confident young woman who was brave enough to ask her boyfriend out, who is now looking forward to their wedding day and content in her job.

But beneath it all, Lianne remains haunted by the ghosts of the bullies, thugs and attackers who made her schooldays hell.

"I'm still scared," she admits, her voice dropping to a near whisper. "I see groups of people and I end up walking the other way. I get scared when I'm out alone in the evening. I always phone mum to say where I am just in case anything happens. I phone her if there are people hanging about places where I'm going. Sometimes if there are a few people standing around the door of the shop, then I won't go in. I'm too frightened."

Lianne was nine when her harrowing story of despair and misery at the hands of playground bullies at Hailesland Primary School in Wester Hailes emerged in a shocking diary of abuse which catalogued every punch, threat and nasty name.

Spanning several weeks in the life of the primary seven pupil, it made desperate reading and dramatically alerted every city parent to a shocking culture of bullying in Edinburgh schools, that previously was largely hidden. It highlighted the woeful lack of support for victims and the apparent failure of the authorities to stamp it out.

Each entry was harrowing, not only for the scale of the abuse - almost every child in her class seemed to be involved - but also the seeming lack of response by the school and the personal agony of Lianne's mother, Marie.

"Pulled by the hair and kicked," read one day's entry from Lianne. "Got out early today because I

was going to be battered," read another. Perhaps most wretched of all, was the entry dated Wednesday, October 9, 1996: "Boy E spat on me," wrote Lianne in her childish scrawl. "He pointed a toy gun and said: 'I wished this gun had bullets in it so that I can shoot you'.

"Boy F stabbed a pencil into my side. I told him to stop it. But he done it again."

Marie, frustrated by the lack of action and fearful for her daughter, added her own entries. "I'm fed up with my child coming home crying her eyes out," she wrote after yet another day of abuse. No-one understands what I go through with Lianne after all this, such as not eating, crying all night, pretending she's not well because she is frightened to go to school."

The bullying eventually stopped when a new headteacher arrived at Hailesland - only for it to begin again when Lianne and her tormentors moved to high school, Wester Hailes Education Centre. It only halted when Marie took the drastic step of removing her daughter from the school, enrolling her at Broughton High and eventually moving to a new home in West Pilton Drive.

That should have been an end to it, except it wasn't.

"She still isn't over it," sighs Marie, 44. "There are times when she shakes like a leaf just because there are a group of people nearby. We sometimes go to visit friends in Wester Hailes and you can see her start to shake the closer we get.

"I say to her: 'It's all right, I'm here, I'm with you', but she is frightened, she's scared she will bump into the people who bullied her at school."

While the bullies of yesterday had their "fun", it is now clear their actions had an effect on more than just Lianne's young life. Lianne's mother, her sister Kimberly, who is now 17, and, to a much lesser extent her 15-year-old brother Shaun, all carry with them the emotional scars.

Marie explains: "I lived in fear for a long time that she would harm herself. Lianne admitted she was ready to take her own life.

"Kimberly was old enough at the time to know what was happening and I feel very sorry for her because it was hard for her to see me and her sister so upset. She is two years younger than Lianne but she is very, very protective of both her and her brother. She is extremely anti-bullying - what happened definitely moulded her character."

AND of course Lianne has never forgotten what she went through.

She has had more than her fair share of traumas in her short life. She was rushed into hospital at the age of 16, suffering meningococcal meningitis. She recovered yet still suffers recurring headaches as a result.

Despite her inner anxieties and fears, Lianne puts on a brave face. To the customers at the city centre shop where she works she is cheery and helpful. And it has not all been pain for Lianne. Six months ago she met and fell in love with Chris McDougall in circumstances which can only be described as bizarre. Both were strolling along Rose Street searching for the Real Radio Fugitive - the mystery character who, if correctly identified from a series of clues can lead to a bumper cash prize.

And although Lianne didn't get the fugitive, she did get her man.

She says: "I was with a friend. I spotted this bloke and thought he might be the fugitive. Of course, he wasn't - and it turned out that he knew the friend that I was with.

"I thought he was nice, so I asked my friend to get his number."

Lianne sent Chris a text message and suggesting they get together.

Chris, 21, who is studying business management at Napier University, laughs: "I thought it was a joke from my friend and ignored it. But then there were more texts and I realised it was genuine."

Soon the couple were an item - despite Lianne being a staunch Celtic fan and Craig supporting Rangers. Within six months they had decided to get engaged.

"He sent me a text message saying, did I want to get engaged. I thought he was kidding and asked him next day if he was serious.

"The worst of it is, I deleted his original message because I thought he was just having a laugh."

### Web links

- [Anti-bullying network](http://www.antibullying.net/)  
<http://www.antibullying.net/>
- [ChildLine](http://www.childline.org.uk/)  
<http://www.childline.org.uk/>

### Related topic

- [Bullying at school](http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=519)  
<http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=519>

**This article:** <http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=519&id=489002005>

**Last updated:** 06-May-05 11:01 GMT

---

## Gulf Hurricane Relief

Help Support Health Clinics Providing  
Critical Aid to Evacuees.

[www.DirectRelief.org](http://www.DirectRelief.org)

---

Public Service Ads by Google

---