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Sun woman

ESTHER LAUNCHES SCHOOL 'CITIZENSHIP' CLASSES

By AMANDA REVELL WALTON A WOMAN whose sister was killed in the 7/7 bombings is turning her loss into a positive force in Britain's schools.

Esther Hyman was told her sister Miriam escaped the 2005 London terror attack unscathed when she was evacuated from King's Cross Station following three blasts on the Tube.

But by a terrible twist of fate, the 32-year-old freelance picture editor, aged 32, was killed instantly when the double-decker bus she then boarded was blown up in Tavistock Square.

Now Esther has teamed up with the school to launch innovative 'citizenship' classes in her sister's memory to combat extremism.

Esther, 41, who refers to Miriam by her nickname 'Mim', says 'Mim wasn't just my sister, she was my closest friend and confidante. When I was told they'd identified Kingie, I felt like I'd been punched over the head. There were a few split seconds of nothingness before the pain started to set in.'

It would have been more than understandable for Esther to be consumed by feelings of hatred towards the al-Qaeda extremists who orchestrated the deadly July 7 attacks. But this was not the case for the former primary school teacher.

Esther, who lives in Oxford, explains: 'I just seemed so futile. I feel more a sense of gloom because it's about things we just grew up, got over, what divides us and instead concentrated on the years following the outrage. Esther has worked tirelessly to do something to prevent another 7/7.'

'She explains: "There are groups of people out there who would like to drive a big wedge as possible between communities. You determined not to allow that to happen."

'We want to help young people from seeing our cultural differences as something bad and start seeing them as interesting - to make young-ers enthusiastic about each others' differences, not fearful.'

'Mim never saw people as being of a particular religion. We have a dad from Sri Lanka in London and a mum originally from California in India and they're

7/7 bombers killed my sister... I'm telling kids of all cultures her story to stop terror attacks from happening again

both Jewish. Mim loved that we had all these mixed influences and we always have to celebrate them.'

The idea for the citizenship classes first took shape after Esther and a charity she and her parents set up in Mim's memory helped establish The Miriam Hyman Children's Eye Care Centre in Orissa, India, in July 2008.

'She says: "The centre is a fitting and lasting memorial to Mim, who was a brilliant artist and loved nature. She didn't discover she was short-sighted until she was in her teens and when she first wore glasses it was a revelation to her."

'She said she could see every jag on every tree for the first time. So we thought this would have been done to her heart. Since it opened, there have been more than 20,000 outpatients' appointments and more than 3,000 surgeries.'

After the hospital was up and running, Esther and those involved with the centre wanted to start addressing the issues behind

7/7. She explains: "We hold seminars and there was a lot of discussion on the need for society to focus on the tolerance of other cultures."

'These issues are very difficult to approach in school because they are very controversial. By doing it through a personal story it will be less controversial.'

'People will start understanding the area in India where the eye care centre is based. Esther explains: "They'll learn a little bit about the history and the geography of the area, how that influences the economy and look at the country's food, arts and religion."

'The aim is to get children to look around them and be interested in others who may have a different home life and background to themselves.'

'The classes will be piloted with Year 5 students and be woven into at least seven areas of the National Curriculum.'

'Esther says: "Mim and I went to visit the headteacher Jane Beaumont, two years ago. "Although it's single sex, the school is the perfect place for the classes to be developed as there is a real mixture of pupils from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths."

'Over the next year and a half, Esther and Mim had countless meetings with the head and together they worked out how a programme of lessons could fit in with the curriculum. Esther explains: "By hearing what happened to my sister, the children

will hopefully be able to see what can happen when there is hatred and intolerance of other cultures."

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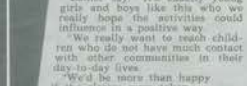
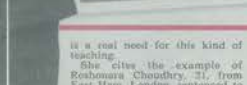
is a real need for this kind of teaching. She cites the example of Roshana Choudhry, 21, from East Ham London, sentenced to life imprisonment last month for stabbing former minister Stephen Timmins.

'Muslima Choudhry became radicalised after watching hate-filled teachings of extremist preachers on the internet. Esther says: "It's exactly young girls and boys like this who we really hope the activities could influence in a positive way."

'We really want to reach children who do not have much contact with other communities in their day-to-day lives. "We'd be more than happy if the classes were taken up in faith schools, where children are only surrounded by those from a very similar culture and religion - to their own."

Esther adds: "I have learned that you can't control what happens to you in response to it. "We hope Mim's legacy will be a better understanding of the culture we are more such others' friends or, if not friends, at least just respecting each others' rights. "That's a vision I would have related to."

'To donate to the Miriam Hyman Memorial Trust see miriam-hyman.com.'



SO CLOSE... (Inset, from top) Esther with tragic sister Miriam, with children of Capitol Hill School; and the bombed Tavistock Square bus on which Miriam died

which any educational institution will be able to download in the form of an electronic resource pack, will eventually be used throughout the UK in primary and secondary schools - and in English-speaking countries worldwide.

For Esther and her family, the launch of the pilot classes in memory of Mim has come at a time of sadness.

'The full horror of what happened on 7/7 is being relived daily in central London as an independent coroner's inquest, expected to last up to five months.

Esther, who was working as a medical secretary at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford at the time of the bombings, recalls that initially she wasn't too worried about her sister.

Her father John, 77, spoke to Mim shortly after the third bomb had gone off on the London underground.

'Esther recalls: "She told him she'd been evacuated at King's Cross and was going to go and have a coffee and try to get an idea of how the situation was panning out."

'Tragically, Mim instead jumped on the double-decker bus bound for Tavistock Square, 100m from the scene of the attack.

Over the next few days Esther and her family and friends desperately tried to find her, distributing photos to the media and putting up "missing" posters around London.

It took four days before Esther and her family were told that Miriam had definitely been on that bus.

Esther says: "Dad called and said, "I'm sorry darling, but Mim's been identified by the dental records. "I remember saying "OK" and putting the phone down."

Esther says she immediately knew "nothing would be the same again" but she realised she had to accept what had happened to her sister and do something positive and constructive.

'It was this decision which led her to attend an open day at her local mosque in Oxford just five weeks after 7/7.

She explains: "I went and introduced myself as the sister of one of the boys who died. "I said I was there to extend the hand of friendship and to make sure they knew that I didn't blame them for the actions of a radicalised few. "Esther adds: "I have learned that you can't control what happens to you in response to it. "We hope Mim's legacy will be a better understanding of the culture we are more such others' friends or, if not friends, at least just respecting each others' rights. "That's a vision I would have related to."

Sun.co.uk/parenting suns daughters

THE festive season has been a great excuse to spoil the kids. But Christmas stockings full of toys and computer games might not necessarily mean as much to them as you think. A recent survey from Toys for Kids shows children in the UK would rather go on a trip with family over all other treats, including the latest technology and fashion.

With the excitement of Christmas over, it can sometimes be a struggle to find things to keep the youngsters entertained in the run up to 2011.

So if your New Year resolution is to spend more time with your kids but the weather's been too cold, child development and educational expert JACQUELINE HARDING explains ways of getting round this for lots of family fun.

IDEAS FOR SOME FUN AND GAMES

BABIES

Jacqueline says: "Babies cannot survive without touch. They need cuddling and snuggling to."

THINGS TO DO: Playing simple games like Pat A Cake and Round and Round the Garden with your baby is great fun for them. Make sure you use lots of eye contact. Their footprints and handprints make thoughtful birthday presents for family members. Use brightly coloured card and glitter to decorate the finished articles.

AGED ONE TO THREE

Jacqueline says: "Spending time with little ones lets them know they belong. It lays down foundations for how they are going to relate to people for the rest of their lives."

THINGS TO DO: Try finger painting. Children will love the feeling of the paint on their hands and enjoy creating their own artwork. Also get them wrapped up against the cold and go to see the ducks if it's not too icy underneath. They will like the noise of the birds, seeing them in their natural environment and getting involved by feeding them.

THREE TO FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

Jacqueline says: "At this age, kids are developing a sense of who they are, so spending time with family is important."

THINGS TO DO: Make thank you cards. Buy some glitter and cotton wool and your little ones can have a go at creating their own letters of gratitude to generous friends and family. Create your own jigsaw puzzles. You can do this by taking a page from an old children's magazine, gluing a piece of cardboard to the back and drawing six huge wiggly pieces and

TEENAGERS

Jacqueline says: "Teens might say they don't want to spend time with you, but it's not true. Everything is spaced down on their world at this age and you need to make sure you squeeze time in with them."

THINGS TO DO: Transform your living room into a cinema. Turn off the lights and let the kids choose a DVD to watch. Pop some corn and this feels like a real treat as a sign of the cost of a trip to the pictures. Plan a three-course meal with your child for a special dinner party. Let them design the menu and creatively set the table. The family can dress up and you can have the fun of a meal out in your own home.



OF THE BEST THANK YOU CARDS

DON'T just send a text or email to say thanks - show your appreciation for your Christmas presents in style with a thank you letter.

HANNAH BARR picks out a selection of her favourite cards and you can see them all at thesun.co.uk/thankyoucards

1 Thank You Dog (X4.95 for ten cards, carolinegardner.com). Blank inside for a message of your choice and finished with thick white envelopes.

2 Illustrated Thank You Cards (X2 for 25 cards, honyerepublishing.com). A box of premium 400g cards with gold-inked envelopes.

3 DL & Co Thank You Card (X4 for 12 cards, michaeljohn.co.uk). Hand-finished Italian paper with gold-inked envelopes.

4 Quaint Blank Thank You Cards (X4 for 12 cards, seiscorvy.com). Illustrated, glossy designs.

5 Blue Thank You Card (X4 for 12 cards, seiscorvy.com). Available in different colours.

6 Simon Elvin Thank You Card (X4 for 12 cards, clintoncards.com). Traditional designs.

7 Personalised Thank You Card (X1.99, markandsonce.com). Customise with the name of the person you are thanking.

8 Rosehip Notecards (X7 for eight cards, berryandco.co.uk). Three cards and envelopes are 100 per cent recycled.

9 Runaway Coast Elephant Parade Notecards (X12 for 12 cards, runawaycoast.com). Includes six pink and six blue cards with the fun design.