

# BLESS YOU... LOVE MYRA

## They met and held hands

By TAMITH CAREY and AMANDA REVELL WALTON

**ALONE** in her cell, child killer Myra Hindley wrote to eight-year-old Sophie Chapman begging to see her again, and signing off "God bless you and lots of love."

Her letter followed an extraordinary day in which she and lesbian lover Nina Wilde had spent three hours strolling prison grounds hand in hand with Sophie, playing together in a deserted gym and fooling about by a pond where they caught a frog.

Enclosing a card picturing a kitten and puppy, the infamous Moors murderer wrote: "It was so nice to meet you yesterday and I hope you will come back soon to teach us some more gymnastics and games."

### Leaping

"I bet your man is glad you haven't got a pond in your garden because if you put that frog spawn in it like we've got, you would have frogs leaping around the kitchen."

"As you know when I ran away, I'm scared of frogs. But Nina is brave like you because she picked one up — ugh."

She ended with the words: "God bless you and take care. Lots of love, Myra."

Hindley, 56, killed four children with her then lover Ian Brady. When she was jailed for life in 1966 most people

## EXCLUSIVE

thought she would never be allowed near a child again. But incredibly Sophie's visit to Kent's Cookham Wood jail was set up by her stepfather Joe Chapman who claims it was cleared by then prison governor Chris Ellis.

Joe, 47 — a counsellor and former prison officer who now runs a charity for offenders — worked with Hindley as a therapist for more than a year.

He became so close to her that prison bosses wrote a security report on him after he was spotted kissing her hello and goodbye. He also gave the killer his home phone number.

Just over four years ago, he decided to take Sophie to Cookham Wood after she asked if she could see him at work. He claimed: "I asked Chris Ellis if it would be OK to bring Sophie down next time I was there for counselling sessions. She said 'No problem.'"

On the day of the visit Hindley, in her role as 'auntie', came into the governor's office where Joe was sitting with Sophie to offer a cup of coffee.

Joe said: "Myra already knew a little about Sophie from talking to me. She said 'hello' to her and started communicating straightaway. She was motherly, and spoke gently. Sophie was at ease almost immediately."

"The governor wanted to speak to me. So Myra said 'Would it be OK for me to take Sophie and sit down and do something in the hospital unit?'"

Dear Sophie,  
It was so nice to meet you yesterday (Sunday) and hope you will come back soon and teach us some more gymnastics and games. I bet your man is glad you haven't got a pond in your garden, because if you put that frogspawn in it, she might have frogs like we've got leaping around the kitchen.  
As you know, when I ran away, I'm scared of frogs, but Nina is brave like you, because she picked one up. Please let us know if Joe was able to glue that globe together for you. God bless and take care.  
Lots of love, Myra xx

GOD BLESS: The monster signs off with "lots of love" and two kisses



DADDY'S GIRL: Sophie with stepdad Joe who set up the visit that left her with Hindley



SICK: Multiple child killer Hindley



LOVER: Nina Wilde was only supervision

I was fine about her taking Sophie. And as the governor had sanctioned it, they went off together."

First, Hindley took Sophie to a health care centre. There they met Nina, a 33-year-old criminologist who formed a close relationship with Hindley after joining the jail on work experience the year before.

As a student, Nina had been given pass keys to areas of Cookham Wood although she did not have access to cells. Joe said: "They went to the hospital unit where they cut out and pasted a cardboard globe."

"Then Nina took Sophie and Myra down to the gym. It was common practice for Nina and Myra to go there when it was closed to other women."

"They all got mats out and were doing forward rolls and handstands. Finally, Myra took Sophie into the grounds to look at the fish pond."

"Sophie immediately seeing all the frogs and spawns, Nina getting hold of one the frogs and Myra legging it because she couldn't stand them."

"Sophie thoroughly enjoyed it. She came back absolutely knackered. They'd been racing around. She had a wonderful day and was over the moon."

Soon afterwards, Sophie received her letter from Hindley. In a different pen, Nina wrote: "It was so nice to have you here on Sunday. And if you come down again we will spend more time in the gym."

"The fish and the frogs are still doing fine and it won't be long till we've got millions of little tadpoles swimming around. Hope to see you again soon. Take care, Nina."

When Sophie fell ill with pneumonia some months later Hindley sent a get well

card, signing it with eight kisses and the words "lots of love from Myra and Nina."

Joe said: "After that, Myra sent Sophie a Christmas card and a birthday card. But the correspondence petered out."

Two years later, Sophie learned the shattering truth about the woman she'd met when she read a newspaper report.

Joe said: "I went through the article with her. It didn't horrify or disturb her. I explained that Myra was involved in the killing of children with Brady."

"She understands Myra being in prison. But she can't understand why, after all these years, there is so much dislike for her. Sophie does not relate to Myra in the way Myra is portrayed in the press."

### Risk

"Last year, Sophie asked if Myra could be her pen pal. But as I'd lost contact, I told her it wouldn't be a good idea."

Speaking at his modern Oxfordshire home, Joe is aware he will be accused of irresponsibility.

But both he and his wife, mother-of-three Wendy, insist they knew Sophie would not come to any harm. They say they would never have allowed her in the killer's company if they thought there was any risk.

Joe first met Hindley when he gave a talk at the jail about the treatment of female inmates and she asked him for help.

He then met her once a week for 18 months to talk through her life.

Today, he believes that trusting Hindley with his daughter helped her rehabilitation by letting her prove to herself that children were safe with her. Joe said: "I'd

seen Myra previously at a lifters' social, holding a baby in her arms. It looked like the most natural thing in the world for her to be doing. She likes children."

"Myra told me afterwards Sophie brought something back in her she thought had long since died. Meeting her reminded her of the decent person she once was before Brady."

"It was unheard of for her to meet someone who didn't know who she was and what she had done, and not be judged."

"I know people say paedophiles use a child's innocence. But I don't believe Myra was ever a paedophile. However, I didn't see this as any kind of test for Myra. I don't test my family on offenders."

Wendy added: "I know some might say how can you let your daughter meet the country's most notorious killer."

"But I've worked with prisoners and you don't see them as murderers or rapists or whatever. They are the same as people you bump into on the street."

Hindley — who has been told she must die behind bars — was jailed for killing Leslie Ann Downey, 10, and Edward Evans, 17, with Brady. The pair later admitted killing Pauline Reade, 16 and Keith Bennett, 12. Ms Ellis, 52, is now retired from the prison service. In her time at Cookham Wood she was known to be sympathetic to Hindley who she believed was unfairly treated.

After retirement, she publicly backed the campaign for Hindley's release. Last night, she was unavailable for comment. Hindley is now at Suffolk's Highpoint jail.

The Prison Service refused to comment on the case. But a spokesman said under rules tightened last year children could only enter jail to see a relative.

# ALL ALONE

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her prison counsellor father Joe on a visit to Cookham Wood jail, in Kent.

Joe, 47 — who worked with Hindley for 18 months — claimed the visit was cleared by then governor Chris Ellis, who has since left the prison service.

He said: "Some people will say I was irresponsible, but I absolutely trusted Myra — she's a natural with children. It was all very innocent."

His wife, Wendy, a mother of three, added: "I've met Myra and she doesn't frighten me."

"I had no worries Sophie was at risk in any way. I knew she wouldn't come to any harm otherwise I wouldn't have let her go."

Also present at the visit was Hindley's lover Nina Wilde. Mr Corbett said he would raise the issue with Mr Straw

when the minister is grilled on policing by the Home Affairs Committee.

Labour MP Phil Woolas, whose constituency includes Saddleworth Moor where Hindley's victims were buried, said: "She should be treated as the murderer she is and not made a special case."

Ann West, 69 — mother of victim Lesley Ann Downey, 10 — said at her Manchester home: "For a child killer to be so close to someone of a similar age to one of her victims is outrageous."

"Hindley can't be trusted. How anyone can allow her to be in the company of a child is beyond belief."

Harry Fletcher, of the National Association of Probation Officers, said: "Child protection is the first priority for the prison and probation services."

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