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Arkinsons condemn 'secret' inquiry

THE sister of murdered Castlederg teenager Arlene Arkinson has condemned the Public Prosecution Service for conducting a "secret" inquiry into its handling of the controversial case.

In the aftermath of last year's acquittal of convicted murderer Robert Howard on charges of Arlene's murder, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) launched an inquiry into how the man believed responsible for her death escaped conviction.

But the PPS failed to alert the Arkinson family to the inquiry and refused to release any details of its findings.

The PPS has also refused to reveal who conducted the inquiry, other than that it was a "retired official figure".

A video investigation for the Irish News website, Irishnews.com, Belfast production company Now The Radar discovered that the inquiry had been carried out after submitting a Freedom of Information request to the office of the Attorney General in London.

Only after approaching the PPS did it admit that it had already conducted a "review" into its own handling of the files linked to the psychopathic sex attacker who slipped through its fingers only to be caught in England.

The inquiry was completed nine months ago and will be published before Christmas.

The Police Ombudsman's office is already investigating Arkinson family complaints about alleged failings by the RUC and PSNI in



their investigation into Arlene's, left, disappearance.

Following the 15-year-old's murder in August 1994 her family told police they believed Robert Howard was responsible.

Serial sex offender Howard finally stood trial for the school-girl's murder last year but only after he had murdered Hannah Williams (14) in London in 2001.

On being told of the inquiry into the failings in the attempts to successfully prosecute Howard, Arlene's sister, Kathleen, questioned its independence.

"I knew nothing about it - no-one has asked us anything," she said.

"They could have let us know what is happening - we're entitled to know."

A spokesman for the PPS refused to say why it had not approached the Arkinson family during the course of its inquiry.

During the Hannah Williams murder trial prosecutors drew on "similar fact evidence" to prove to the jury that Howard had used the same techniques to kill his victim as he had used to kill Arlene in Castlederg seven years earlier.

According to the PPS, it did not attempt the same approach - and did not even try - because of doubts that the judge would accept it.

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View video content of this news story online at www.irishnews.com



■ **BROKEN-HEARTED:** Karen Kelly holds on to a picture of her son Martin Kelly, from Holywood, Co Down, who went missing on New Year's Day after going out with friends to Pat's Bar in Garmoye Street in the docks area of Belfast

PICTURE: Mal McCann

Mother's anguish for her lost son

By Bimpe Fatogun

THE grieving mother of a missing Co Down man has told how she was offered electric shock treatment to help dull the anguish of her loss.

As she prepares for her first Christmas without her son Martin, Karen Kelly speaks out in today's Irish News about the way the system is failing families whose loved ones have disappeared without a trace.

Mr Kelly was last seen leaving Pat's Bar in the docks area of Belfast on New Year's Day 2006.

Since then his family have mounted an exhaustive search for him or his body, a search which has taken its toll on them financially and on the delicate health of his mother.

Mrs Kelly suffered a heart attack in June during a tour in which she and her partner visited 14 cities across Britain looking for any trace of her son.

She is awaiting double by-pass surgery.

The family has also used a psychic to help them in their search for answers.

Police divers have carried out a number of searches along the River Lagan, including a number in the area where the psychic indicated she "felt" his body might be trapped.

Mrs Kelly's grief remains as raw as the day she discovered he had disappeared.

The anguish deepened to despair when officers informed her "part of a lower torso" which might be Martin's had been found on the Isle of Man - it later proved not to be.

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'I'm living from day to day but I'll



How do you begin to grieve for a lost child when you

have no idea whether he is alive or dead?

Bimpe Fatogun meets a mother "in limbo"

“NEVER want to see this year again.” Karen Kelly is worried that she sounds self-pitying but in truth the

utterance is the ultimate in understatement.

As Christmas draws close, the tastefully-decorated bungalow is entirely devoid of any decorations. “There isn’t going to be Christmas in this house,” she said.

“I’m going away to my daughter’s house in Galway. It’s on Lough Corrib and it’s really lovely there. “We’ll try to have a Christmas for the children but I’ve said to her I don’t know how I’ll be. If I stay in bed, just to leave me and get on with what they’re doing and not worry about me. I’ll be fine.”

This was to have been a wonderful year for the family.

“Of all years we had this one totally planned,” Mrs Kelly said.

“Most years you couldn’t really say what you were going to be doing but this was different.”

Her son Martin was finishing his apprenticeship as a plumber in June and was about to spread his wings and leave home for a year. He had chosen the trade because he wanted to return to Africa where he had spent nine months travelling after leaving school – three of those months spent working with the charity Raleigh International in Sudan.

Martin was hoping his skills as a plumber would help with charity work in the future.

His first plan, however, was to find work in London where his sister Suzanne was at university.

Mrs Kelly worried that the metropolis would be too dangerous for her youngest child and persuaded him instead to go instead to Australia.

“He had applied for a visa to work there and was heading out in September and [his sister] Fiona, her husband Paul and the kids were going in October for six months,” Ms Kelly said.

Fiona’s second child was due in April.

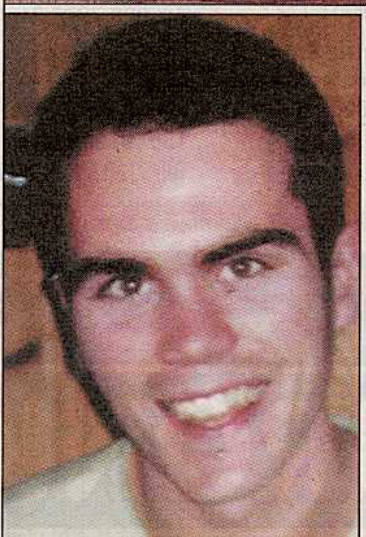
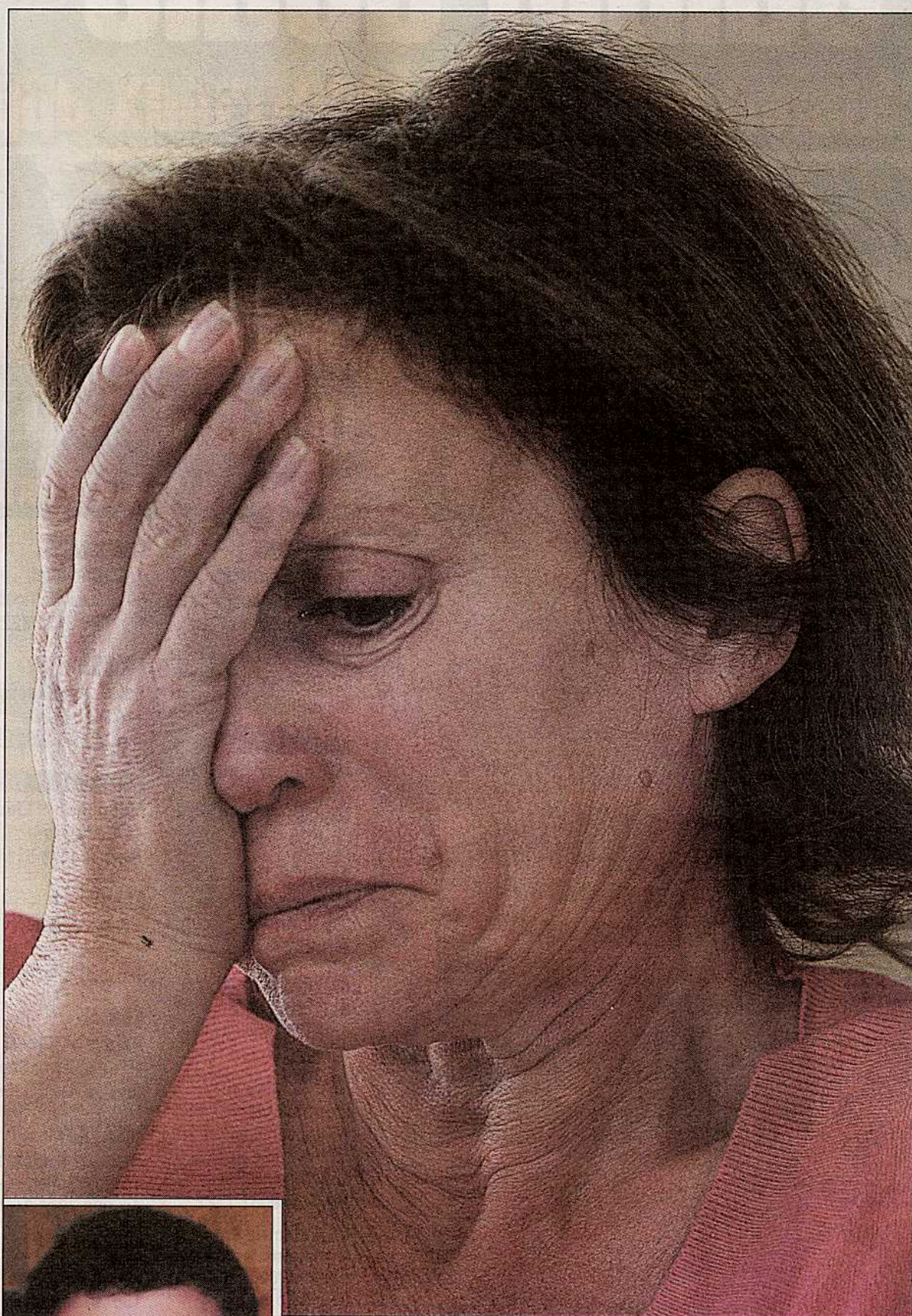
“They had talked about going for some time and this was an ideal time and Drew [Mrs Kelly’s partner] and I were heading out for Christmas for six weeks.”

Instead, the family has devoted 2006 to searching for Martin after he disappeared without a trace on New Year’s Day.

He was last seen leaving Pat’s Bar in the dock area of Belfast at around 7pm.

The 21-year-old was at the bar to watch a football match with his friends, who thought he had left it to return to his Hollywood home. CCTV footage showed him close to the water in the nearby harbour – his family believe he may have taken a wrong turn and become lost among the featureless docks.

Since then Martin’s family, led by



■ **DIFFICULT TIMES:** Karen Kelly, the mother of Martin Kelly, inset, from Hollywood, Co Down, who went missing on New Year’s Day after going out with friends to Pat’s Bar in Garmoyle Street in the docks area of Belfast **PICTURES:** Mal McCann

perhaps a head injury that had caused amnesia, or worse one that had incapacitated him in some way that meant he was trapped somewhere unable to get help. “We were so close. People were always envious of how close we were and would remark on it,” Mrs Kelly said.

As days without news turned into weeks, the Kellys began to push for more investigations of the water to be carried out by police divers and mounted their own searches with the help of friends.

In desperation, the family even turned to a psychic for help. Diane Lazarus travelled to Belfast from Wales in March – coincidentally on Martin’s 22nd birthday – to visit the place where he was last seen.

She told Mrs Kelly that Martin’s body was trapped in a cove close to where he disappeared and he “wants to be found”.

Although at the time Mrs Kelly accepted what the psychic told her – even persuading police to carry out fresh searches in the area indicated – she still clung to the hope that Martin was still alive. When she discovered that there had been a Stena Line sailing to Stranraer on New Year’s Day – having previously believed that it had not been running – she resolved to travel to Britain to see if she could find Martin there.

The family organised a fundraising concert in Hollywood, borrowed a motorhome and at the end of June she and Drew headed to Scotland.

“I’ll never stop looking. Just because he’s 22-years-old your love doesn’t get any smaller. It’s like leaving him in a nursery and coming back and them telling you he’s not there. You wouldn’t stop searching then. I won’t stop now”

Karen Kelly

They spent five weeks making their way down to London, taking in 14 cities where they visited hostels and made appeals on radio, hoping against hope for word of Martin.

“Drew was a rock through it all, God love him,” Mrs Kelly said.

“It was very, very hard in the motorhome because it was completely covered in the posters with Martin’s face we had taken to put up everywhere. It was everywhere you looked. It was just 24/7 all the time.”

The strain of the efforts took its toll on Mrs Kelly’s already fragile health and she suffered a heart attack while she was in London.

“I have had heart problems and unfortunately I took a heart attack,” she said.

“I have 60 per cent of one artery blocked and 30 per cent of the other and the muscle is not working properly.”

“I’m waiting to go in for double by-pass surgery. That will probably be in March.”

While she was in hospital Mrs Kelly developed a blood clot which would have prevented her flying home for six weeks.

“I discharged myself after three days to go home because Drew was leaving on the boat. When I explained my situation they were very understanding,” she said. Mrs Kelly’s ill health has continued and she has been in hospital three more times.

“I am basically housebound. I can’t be the granny I want to be,” she said.

“I live from day to day. If I do something then I have to sit down for half the day to recover.”

Mrs Kelly is determined that the search will go on, no matter how many years it takes.

“He hasn’t been found,” she said simply.

“Until we find him there’s still a chance that he can come home. There is still the theory that he did have a brain injury.”

“That is really the only thing I have, that hope that one day he will walk in. We’re in limbo.”

Perhaps most cruelly felt has been the anguish of being told remains have been found which might be Martin’s.

The first time this happened was just weeks after he disappeared. On January 16 the body of a young man was found in Dargan Crescent on the Harbour Estate. It turned out to be that of a 19-year-old from south Belfast.

However, more devastatingly still was a call received as Karen and Drew were on their way to the airport for a much needed holiday on August 30.

“Friends of mine have a place in Spain and we were heading off for a week,” Mrs Kelly said.

“My daughter had organised it as a

never stop searching for my son'

50th birthday present and we were on the way to the airport when I received a phonecall from police to say that the lower torso of a body had been found on the Isle of Man. "We turned the car back and came back and they came out here at around two o'clock and told me there was half a leg found and they thought it was Martin.

"I said to them Martin was badly burned as a baby and all they had to do was look at the skin grafts on the leg and they would know.

"That's when they told me there was no flesh on his legs, it was bones."

The revelations floored Mrs Kelly, who had been hoping if she could not have her son returned to her alive, at least some day she would have a body to bury.

"I hadn't thought until then about the possibility that he might not have any flesh," she explained.

"That hadn't crossed my mind and then I couldn't get the image out of my mind.

"I kept saying 'What am I going to do with one and a half legs?' And they told me I was going to have to prepare myself for two funerals."

And the agony did not end there. "They then told me we would have to wait for up to six weeks for DNA to be confirmed because the Isle of Man was a different jurisdiction," Mrs Kelly said.

In the end the process was "fast tracked" and she found out in three-and-a-half weeks that the remains did not belong to Martin. However, the wait took a further toll on her and the family.

"I said to them that from now on anybody that is found I'm not to be informed until the DNA has been proven," she said.

"Drew knew I was going to have a mental breakdown.

"This was the second time this had happened and the first time I was told that they were 99 per cent certain that it was Martin.

"Sometimes I don't know how I'm here.

"There should be a policy or something that you nearly have to be completely sure before you tell the family something like that.

"To come to someone's home and tell them is hard enough for a family but to tell them and not to be sure...

"They were even saying thing like: 'The body had been in the water for so many weeks' and I was saying 'But Martin's been missing for nine months'."

The family has tried to come to terms with their loss as best they can but as Mrs Kelly said "there is only so many times you can cry in front of friends before you feel really horrible".

"I have some great friends and they have all been very good. Everyone in Holywood has."

Professional counselling, however, has been harder to come by.

"My daughter Fiona is a bereavement counsellor and she phoned up Cruse [bereavement care] and they said 'There's nobody'. We don't know if he's dead or alive so if they counsel you for grieving and Martin walks in the door what happens?"

"With all that has happened I don't think there's any counsellors that want to take it on."

And she has been bewildered by the response of the health service.

"I was offered electric shock treatment in May," Mrs Kelly said.

"I've been taking [anti-depressant drug] diazepam every morning and some days are better than others



■ **HAPPY MEMORIES:** A montage of photographs of Martin, compiled by his mother

and [I was asked] 'What about electric shock treatment? It's very good for women'.

"I said I haven't lost my cat, I have lost my son. I was looking for my son. As far as I understand it - though it was never really explained - what electric shock treatment does is dull the brain.

"I didn't think they still used it and I

couldn't believe they were offering it to me."

Her psychiatric nurse at Ards Hospital is offering her valuable emotional support and her grandchildren Caoillín and Aidan, born in April give her a reason to keep going.

That and finding Martin. She has painstakingly recreated his

room in the house she and Drew have moved to since his disappearance.

"We bought this for Martin, because it had a roofspace he could make his own," she said.

A Gibson guitar she had shipped from Memphis, Tennessee for his 21st birthday lies on his bed.

Martin's smell, she said, is still

in the room, clinging to his treasured possessions.

"I'll never stop looking," she said. "Just because he's 22-years-old your love doesn't get any smaller.

"It's like leaving him off in nursery and coming back and them telling you he's not there.

"You wouldn't stop searching then. I won't stop now."