

28 March 2021

**Amanda and Richards story: Surviving an Anti-Social Behaviour
Nightmare**

On 22nd March 2021, The defendant pleaded guilty to the count of stalking causing serious alarm to Amanda and Richard. He was handed a prison sentence of 425 days. Due to the amount of time he had spent remanded in prison, the defendant has now served his sentence but was handed a lifetime restraining order preventing him from having any contact with Amanda and Richard.

The perpetrator is pictured below:



This is Amanda and Richard's story having suffered serious and persistent anti-social behaviour perpetrated by the defendant for 10 months.

Richard and Amanda have shared their story with ASB Help to show their support and solidarity to other victims of anti-social behaviour. It is their sincere hope that sharing their story will act as a force for good and encourage policy makers to recognise the urgent need to provide funding for support services for victims of anti-social behaviour.

WARNING: Some of the content of this story includes communications sent to them by the perpetrator. These communications include threats, foul and abusive language and reference to physical and sexual violence which may be upsetting and distressing. The story also includes reference to suicide. **Please be mindful of this before you continue reading.**

How the Story Began:

In 2018, Richard and Amanda believed they had realised their life's dream. They had sold their successful businesses and purchased a dilapidated farmhouse in rural Pembrokeshire. They knew they had their work cut out; the house did not even have a complete roof or functional staircase! But they saw every challenge as an opportunity. This was their forever home which they would love and cherish. And

they were set on using their land to give back to nature. They had plans to ethically regenerate the land and provide wildlife with a safe habitat.



They arrived at their farmhouse with an old double-decker bus which they had expertly converted into their temporary home while they renovated the farmhouse. They quickly settled into village life, making friends, and assimilating into the community. They were happily renovating their farmhouse and after long days of hard work, they would nip to their local for a pint. Life for Amanda and Richard was good, it was everything they wanted it to be.



When the defendant purchased the land adjacent to theirs, Richard and Amanda thought they had welcomed a nice new neighbour and soon engaged in a friendship with him. But after 9 months the cordiality dissipated.

In May 2019, Amanda and Richard had absolutely no idea they were facing 10 months of anti-social hell that would push them to the brink.

Like many victims of anti-social behaviour, they minimised the first few incidents and explained them away as issues they were mistaken about or as something that could be explained as a coincidence.

But by 29th May 2019, they began keeping a log of issues. We can only describe specific incidents which the defendant pleaded guilty to. However, we can say that in the following 10 months, Richard and Amanda recorded approximately 280 incidents of anti-social behaviour including noise, vehicle, dog, and light nuisance, damage to water pipes, harassment, intimidation, weapons, false allegations, and damage to property.

The impact of the anti-social behaviour on Amanda and Richard cannot be understated. Like many victims of anti-social behaviour, they lived it constantly in fear and in a state of hyper-vigilance.

Victim's experiences of terror and fear are unique to them. It is a very personal and intimate journey, which for Richard and Amanda became one of survival. And a

consistent feature of victims' journeys is that previous traumatic experiences come back to the surface. Amanda recalls that throughout the 10-months, she would regularly think of when her father died and this compounded her feelings of uncertainty and having no control over the anti-social behaviour being perpetrated against her and Richard.

For Richard, there was a constant feeling of frustration. He felt unable to protect his family and his home. 'What sort of husband cannot protect his wife from this terror?' was a continual burden for him. Whereas the emotional strain felt by Amanda was exacerbated by concerns about how Richard felt but also that the constant provocation could lead to a response which would identify them as perpetrators and not victims. That unrelenting feeling that you cannot defend yourself for fear of being labelled as an aggressor, is the most debilitating feeling that defies our human nature to protect ourselves and our property. These feelings of not being able to help oneself is a consistent feature of victim's stories who contact ASB Help.

For Richard and Amanda, these complex human feelings were compounded by the unrelenting anxiety, sleepless nights, and the physiological responses we produce when we are under significant stress which compromise our ability to function as we usually would or live normal lives.

And a source of much distress to Amanda and Richard was the impact on their much-loved dogs who were constantly shaking and anxious. To put this in perspective, even now, over a year since the last incident, if they hear certain noises on the TV which are similar to what they heard during the anti-social behaviour

campaign, they begin shaking again and Richard and Amanda have to turn the TV off and spend time with them to calm them. Sadly, one of their dogs, Archie, who was sleeping on the double-decker bus during the firebomb attack (discussed later), died shortly afterwards.



As Amanda referenced in her Victim Personal Statement, she would regularly recall the What's App message she received from the perpetrator which stated, 'I can literally put a sledge-hammer through someone's entire existence'. And as the anti-social campaign against her and her husband continued and escalated, she felt helpless and powerless. Because every time she thought it cannot get any worse, it did. Amanda knew she had become a broken woman and this was even more distressing when she saw the horror on family members faces who saw how she had physically and emotionally deteriorated.

In September 2019, 4 months into the anti-social behaviour campaign against them, Amanda tried to take her own life. She says she felt so distressed that she was unable to stop herself being constantly upset by the behaviour of the perpetrator and she blamed herself for letting herself become so distressed.

Throughout the 10-month ordeal, the defendant sent multiple threatening and distressing communications, sometimes using encrypted and untraceable platforms.

Some of these communications are distressing so please be aware of that before you read the rest of the story. These are some of the communications:

'Hi, There is poisoned bait left down by the river for mink, please be careful walking your dogs. It'd be a shame if one ate rat poison'.

'Remember how exposed you are in that bus, I wouldn't sleep well if I was you [reference to a third party removed], and I am still here.....when you least expect it.....'

' [third party reference removed] I've already set a pack of fuckin (sic) animals on you, you should run while you can. [third party reference removed]. LOL they'll gang rape your daughter and set her on fire in front of you. Our new access goes in soon, I'll be driving my V8 rally car by your house. Its (sic) already a campsite. You have no peace and quite (sic), no privacy, nothing u want. Leave now and I'll call off the animals. U have one week.'

'You will lose everything you love, and I will make you watch it'.

'bet that window cost a bit. You should save ur (sic) money, she is gonna (sic) need it without you. Soon'.

'If Richard was gone, you'd settle and leave. It makes financial sense to get rid of him. Lol'

'You're about to have the worst week of your life lol, I'm so excited. You're facing bankruptcy, and worse, And you don't even know why yet, lmao. Ya (sic) lost'.

This last communication was Amandas 'final straw'. Within seconds of reading it, she left the house, late at night, in icy weather, and walked to the river where she curled up and hoped to drift off and never wake up again. When Richard saw the email on the computer screen and couldn't find his partner, he instinctively knew that she couldn't take any more.

Richard alerted the police and a search ensued for 8 hours. By this time, Amanda was hypothermic which meant the police helicopter that had been deployed to the search could not locate her using their heat source technology. She was a matter of hours away from death.

Amanda recalls how the strangest event saved her life. A fox came to her and nudged her. When she came around, the fox sat there calmly watching her and possibly wondering who this person was in its territory. At this moment, she knew

she had to survive for her family and she had to keep fighting. She managed to find her way to a road where the police found her and she was given urgent medical assistance.

To compound matters, the anti-social behaviour campaign continued and escalated for a further terrifying two months.

Richard and Amanda cannot explain why the first night they spent in the farmhouse, rather than on the double-decker bus, was on the 27th March 2020. On reflection, they wonder if it was some form of spiritual intervention to protect them. Because, that was the night that **the defendant threw three firebombs** in the direction of the double-decker bus. Two of the firebombs did not detonate and the one that did fell short.

This was the culmination of 10 months of hell. It is the incident that led to the perpetrator being arrested and then remanded into custody. However, Amanda and Richard were left terrified by what those firebombs could have done. Like many victims of anti-social behaviour, they felt relief they were unharmed, but deeply traumatised by what could have happened, especially as the double-decker bus housed gas cannisters for cooking and heating and the bus is in close proximity to the farmhouse.

The perpetrator was arrested and charged with stalking and he entered a guilty plea to some of the counts. This included throwing the three firebombs (sometimes

referred to as Molotov cocktails) at the bus the Amanda and Richard were living in. He also pleaded guilty to sending the threatening and malicious communications.

The End of the Anti-Social Behaviour and Start of Legal Proceedings

Once the perpetrator was remanded into custody, the anti-social behaviour campaign ended. And a short time later Amanda and Richard welcomed the arrival of a baby jackdaw into their home who cannot fly because he has damaged feathers. Brian as he is called, or Briony, as the gender is not certain, is a valued member of the family home. Despite his predilection for pecking off keyboard keys and putting them into the printer, he has provided Richard and Amanda with a kind of unconventional emotional support.



Brian has helped Richard and Amanda to cope with the void between the anti-social behaviour ending and the criminal trial for the perpetrator beginning. As many victims

will attest, the anxiety does not subside once the anti-social behaviour ends. It is difficult for anyone to adjust to a normal way of living after surviving an extended period of living on the edge in a state of hyper-vigilance.

There is currently no national funding for support services for victims of anti-social behaviour which could have assisted Amanda and Richard.

And for them, the trauma of surviving 10-months of anti-social behaviour hell was compounded by preparing for the trial and the fears and questions that most victims face such as: will I be believed, will the defence barrister try to trick me, will I have to see the perpetrator, will he be convicted?

Indeed, the pandemic has fundamentally altered how victim's experience the court process. In this case, this meant the trial was delayed and those fears continued but were juxtaposed with the resumption of life being more normal because they had become more accustomed to living as they had before the anti-social behaviour campaign.

While waiting for the trial to begin, Richard and Amanda purchased the land next to them to effectively buy themselves protection. There are many hidden costs associated with anti-social behaviour and we usually assume the costs to be physical and emotional. However, in many cases, victims suffer significant financial loss also. In this case, buying their safety has cost Richard and Amanda in the region of £240,000 which has caused them significant financial detriment.

On the first day of the trial, the defendant changed his plea to guilty on the count of stalking causing serious alarm and distress. This change of plea meant that he received a 10% reduction in his sentence and was released from custody because of the time he had served on remand.

In sentencing the defendant, the Judge said: 'By your conduct, you propelled a civil dispute into a course of conduct properly described as stalking causing serious alarm and distress.....you took this to a higher level; a different level, by throwing three firebombs in the direction of the bus'. The Judge commended Amanda and Richard for providing the Court with victim impact statements which he described as 'eloquent descriptions of the impact' of the defendants crimes.

Why?

The million-dollar question that many people ask when considering any case of anti-social behaviour is: **WHY?** What happened for a friendship to transmogrify into a serious and persistent campaign of anti-social behaviour?

Without that clear motive, it is difficult to comprehend why someone commences a campaign of serious and persistent anti-social behaviour. There are multiple motives we could speculate about, but this is fruitless. Only the perpetrator knows why he behaved in the way he did. And we must focus on the harm caused by the actual anti-social behaviour.

ASB Help works directly with government departments and anti-social behaviour practitioners to promote best practice in anti-social behaviour management and to lobby for better rights for victims. To do this we seek to dispel the myth that anti-social behaviour is behaviour that is a lower level to criminal behaviour. Amanda and Richards case illustrates what anti-social behaviour can look like. Because, it is any behaviour that is serious and persistent in nature and causes its victims harassment, alarm, distress, nuisance, or annoyance.

Anti-social behaviour causes serious harm and it costs lives. It is not just about youths loitering on street corners. Therefore, we seek to instil in all practitioners the need to take a harm centred approach to case management to assess risk effectively and mitigate against escalation. It is unnecessary to establish a motive for anti-social behaviour but it is urgent that government deploy more resources to practitioners to enable them to robustly manage their anti-social behaviour caseloads.

Conclusion

Richard and Amanda have mixed feelings about the conclusion of the criminal case against their stalker. They are pleased he finally admitted his guilt and feel reassured by the imposition of a lifetime retraining order. But they both accept that the fear will never fully go away.

Although life for Amanda and Richard seems much more normal now, they remain deeply traumatised by the campaign of anti-social behaviour perpetrated by the defendant against them. They are humble, brave, and kind people whose outlook on

life is to contribute to community and nature. They are also survivors of one of the most extreme cases of anti-social behaviour that ASB Help is aware of. They are grateful to the police and their community for supporting them in securing justice. However, they recognise they have another personal journey of recovery to make to fully overcome the trauma caused to them.

If you have questions or comments you would like to make about this story, please email admin@asbhelp.co.uk

Amanda and Richards story is written by Rebecca Brown, Chief Executive Officer of ASB Help.

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