

SPECIAL THREE-PAGE REPORT ON PARENTAL ALIENATION

'If I was wearing a jumper she bought me, I'd have to take it off'

By MARIA PEPPER

'DON'T Hug Your Mother' is the title of a book written by brothers Fintan and Gareth Murphy, who experienced parental alienation as children and didn't see their mother for 18 years.

They were young boys of seven and nine years, with an older brother Shane, when their mother had to leave the family home after their father formed a new relationship. In the beginning, they would meet her every few evenings at the local Esso garage but would not be allowed to wear clothes she had bought them and were told not to hug her.

'If I was wearing a jumper that she had bought me I would have to take it off. We were told not to take a present from her. I was more inclined to accept a present whereas Gareth was more law-abiding and if she did give me a Beano comic or something he would have to tell on me.

'Shane would be told - "you're my main man and I'm relying on you to help me". We were told - "she doesn't love you, she's just trying to use you". None of it made any sense to me at the time. To me, he was the guy who wasn't being nice.

'What was really interesting was that when we grew up I recalled certain episodes that happened and Gareth would say I don't actually remember that.'

Some years later when Gareth was re-locating and taking personal possessions out of storage, he found a Roald Dahl diary from his childhood in which he had written about incidents as they occurred, and the memories came flooding back.

There was an instruction in the diary from the author, stating that it was to be used to tell the truth and, in between the usual entries about Manchester United playing Liverpool and happenings in school, he had written about things that were taking place at home. Excerpts from Gareth's diary are re-produced in 'Don't Hug Your Mother'.

'I had a diary too but I didn't write anything like that in it because I knew it was being read. Gareth's handwriting was so bad nobody could read it,' said Fintan.

In 1990, the boys went to live with their mother for a year that Fintan described as 'the best year of the whole time' but then they had to return to the family home.

'In the space of a few months, we weren't allowed to see my mother anymore. One of the last times we met her was when she took us to see Wayne's World in the cinema and afterwards brought us for cakes. We were an



'Don't Hug Your Mother' by Fintan and Gareth Murphy is available on Amazon.

hour late getting home and we were told that as punishment, if we loved her so much, we could spend the weekend with her in Carlow, where her family are from.

'We went down and had a great weekend. I remember my auntie Geraldine buying us Magnums and lemonade. Gareth kept looking for a pay phone to ring home. On Sunday, my auntie brought us to get videos, I picked out The Little Mermaid and Gareth chose 'Dances with Wolves'.

'He rang home and I was standing beside him in the phone box. My dad asked do you want to come home. Gareth said "no we're grand". Then I could see his face go white and he hung up. I said "what" and he said "they're coming to pick us up". I was crying. I said "but we have to watch the videos". They picked us up on the corner down from the house.

'That was the last time I saw my mother for 18 years. She tried to see us. She would call to the house but we weren't allowed to open the door to her. Over the years she would send regular cards to the house from different places. I came home from school one day and I was feeling depressed and angry and looking around at all these chores I had to do and I ripped up the card and put it in the bin. When my father found it, he was delighted with me.

'Gareth moved out first. When I eventually moved out, that changed everything. You didn't have these voices anymore.

'My dad was always talking about the good

times we had when we were young. Gareth was living in New York and he decided to ring him and tell him the truth, for both of us. He told him we don't look back on our childhood the way you do. After that my dad texted me to say he had said goodbye to Gar so I guess it's goodbye to you too. That was 12 years ago.'

Fintan was 28 when he was reunited with his mother and Gareth was 30. The reconciliation came about through Shane who revealed that he had been going down to Carlow on the train to visit her. 'We went down with him. He was delighted that he was bringing us back together.'

His mother's first words to him at the train station were: 'It's lovely to see you again.'

'It was very emotional. It brought back a lot of memories. I was a bit of a mammy's boy. I have a lot of memories of hanging out with her. There are a lot of years missing but we now meet up as often as we can although it wasn't easy recently because of Covid. She loves seeing her grandchildren whom she probably thought she would never see,' said Fintan, who is now a father himself.

It took Fintan and Gareth a few years to write the book. 'It was when we put it together that I started to look at what had happened. I discov-

ered the term Parental Alienation and realised that was what we had been through.

'At the time it seemed like it was only happening to us and couldn't possibly be happening to anyone else. I felt my childhood was normal for me, Fintan Murphy.'

'When I looked up Parental Alienation I learned about fathers and mothers going through it. Everything was so similar to what we had experienced.

'If you are a mother or father and you say "I don't see my children", the first reaction is people will think, oh there must be some reason there we don't know about. Your average, decent person who lives a normal life and does the right thing doesn't expect that kind of behaviour from anyone.'

Writing the book was 'hugely cathartic' for both brothers but it wasn't until half way through the project that they decided to publish it.

'We were writing it for ourselves to make some sense of what had happened but when we realised that parental alienation was a thing, we said we needed to publish this.

'We came across these mothers and fathers whose biggest problem was being believed and we thought - what if you heard it from a child? We needed people to see it through the eyes of a child.'

They were pleased with the reaction to the book when the

first edition was published in 2017. 'I had found a number of people going through parental alienation and it gave them a different insight into what their children might have been experiencing when the manipulation was happening,' said Fintan, who works as a public servant.

He thinks that he and Gareth, who is a solicitor currently based in Hong Kong, managed to survive their experience due to their childhood innocence, because they were so young when it started and were so close in age and had each other.

'There was always two of us going through it, even though our actual experience of it may have been different. It was the innocence of the young and not really knowing.'

'Don't Hug Your Mother' is available on Amazon.



'She has my little daughter poisoned and brainwashed against me'

A FATHER'S STORY:

I am a primary school teacher and a loving parent of two amazing children but I am going through severe Parental Alienation.

This is where a child sides strongly with one parent and rejects the other parent without justification and despite a previous loving relationship. It is just utterly heartbreaking. Someone once described it as like losing a child but having no grave to go to mourn.

I was a good husband and a good father but unfortunately when we separated five years ago my ex-wife turned my children against me for no reason only to hurt me, and in turn she is damaging the children so much.

It is a form of child abuse that goes unpunished. My only option was to go to the family courts just to see my

children. The 'in camera' rule prevents me from discussing this so I can not go into the details but I was granted access through the courts and my ex-wife then began to ignore the court access orders and breached the orders again and again with no repercussions for doing so.

She now has my little daughter poisoned and brainwashed against me. For nearly two years now, my daughter, who is now 10, won't come on access, which has really broken me.

Two birthdays and Christmases have passed without her, her presents thrown back at me or ripped up in front of me. Her mother stands beside her proudly and smiles and rewards her with treats and praise.

Her cousins cry to see her and ask me why they can't see her any more.

My elderly parents are devastated at not getting to see her grow up and like me, are missing all the milestones.

This is serious psychological and emotional abuse on such a little person but unfortunately there is little help for fathers and mothers like me, as parental alienation is not recognised in Ireland (20% of alienated parents are mothers).

Unfortunately when the children won't come, the Garda won't touch it as they say it is a civil matter and has to be dealt with by the courts. This takes months and then with the overloaded schedule the case gets adjourned over and over again.

It really is soul-destroying. I am five years going through the courts and it has cost over €30,000 in legal fees. I am emotionally and

financially broken.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has included Parental Alienation in the handbook of Classified Diseases ICD-11, but the outgoing Minister of State at the Department of Health was quoted as saying in 2019 that he only goes by the American Academy of Psychiatry and not the World Health Organisation. Previous to this in 2014, the Minister stated that as it was not included as an entity in the WHO's classification of diseases, he could not comment.

It is going around in circles to get a straight answer. A total of 24 Irish County Councils have now passed motions to recognise Parental Alienation as a form of child abuse so some progress has been made but we need to ensure the new Government

recognises it.

In October 2019, Parental Alienation was also recommended to be recognised under Recommendation 36 in the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality Report on the Reform of the Family Law System.

The La Dolce Vita Project, in Derry City is doing great work north of the border and CAF/CASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service) which represents the interests of children in cases in the UK, has now recognised Parental Alienation. Unfortunately TUSLA will not recognise it until The Government does.

There are thousands of mothers and fathers like me in Ireland. I even know an alienated child who has spoken about the pain it caused him growing up.