



The erasure of Claire and Charlotte Hart by the media

This letter was written by Paula Cleary in response to an article by journalist Amy Collett in the Fenland Citizen. Cleary originally posted this letter on her Facebook page and has asked for it be shared widely to honour the lives of Claire and Charlotte Hart who were murdered on the 19th of July in Spalding. Media coverage of the double homicide has focused on the perpetrator Lance Hart erasing the lives of Charlotte and Claire.

An open letter to Amy Collet regarding her article in the Fenland Citizen on Wednesday July 27th, regarding the double murder of Claire and Charlotte Hart, by Lance Hart in Spalding.

Dear Amy,

I'm not sure how long you have been a journalist, but as I read your piece covering the recent killings of Claire and Charlotte Hart in the swimming pool carpark in Spalding, by husband and father Lance Hart, I found myself getting angrier and angrier as the article progressed. The events that happened that fateful day are clearly an utterly tragic loss of life and a very sad story indeed. This is undeniable. Your reporting of these events however, was not only disappointing but frankly insulting to Claire and Charlotte's memory. Let me explain why.

When local people are killed, it seems a nice gesture to spend some time and effort to honour their memory and focus on telling their story, since they cannot speak for themselves.

I would like to think that if my husband 'flipped out' on myself and my daughter that the local paper would at least bother to find out a little about us, rather than write a glowing piece on how nice everyone thought my husband was. I think it would show some respect, decency, and solidarity for our lives and legacy. I would hope you would bother to ask a few people what I was like, report perhaps on my life's work, talk about my daughter and ask people what she was like, rather than (rather lazily) get a selection of quotes from an article in The Daily Mail about what a good neighbour and all round nice chappy my killer was. Never mind if he was my husband, it just seems like the decent thing to do, wouldn't you agree?

In light of comments made by Dr. Max Pemberton in his Daily Mail article about this story, where he describes a man killing a wife who chooses to leave him as being 'understandable' and your own failure to use the word 'murder' even once in your article, I cannot help but feel the media are really failing to address that Lance Hart was a man guilty of committing the worst crime and fully culpable and responsible for his own actions. He was not a cuddly, loveable tragic victim, but a man whose own ego was so inflated that he deemed his own needs more important than the lives of his wife Claire and his daughter Charlotte. This 'lovely' man failed to get psychiatric treatment for his mental health and instead consciously chose to murder his wife and daughter. The gun did not accidentally fall in his hands just seconds before the killing. He planned it.



I was so disappointed you did not tell us anything meaningful about Claire or Charlotte. I would have liked to know more about them, and what they were like. What job did Claire do? What did her childhood friends have to say about her? Was the most interesting and enlightening thing you reported about her in the tiny amount of column inches given to her over the endless quotes praising her killer, simply that she ended their marriage? Really? Could you not have done better than that?

What about Charlotte, who at age 19, had her whole life ahead of her? She was studying midwifery – could none of her midwifery student friends have given you a quote about her life? Or any of her tutors? She must presumably have had a lot of childhood friends you could have asked too? Schoolteachers? Instead of reporting about her, you told us practically zero about her, but told us all about how ‘lovely’ her Dad was. Do you see what a disservice you have done to her memory?

I can appreciate that you might feel a sense of local embarrassment that such a thing has happened here and want to play down the event and brush it under the carpet, by reinventing the story with a heavy sense of forgiveness and humanity and compassion for Lance – the local Fen boy nobody wants to admit had psychiatric problems. Is it not ok to just say that ultimately, no matter how nice he was to his neighbours, he had seriously controlling and classic textbook egomaniac tendencies? Is it for shame? Is it too embarrassing to just say it like it is? That Lance Hart committed a hate crime against the women in his life and that it is never excusable to single out women for murder no matter what the circumstances, whether they are your wife, or daughter, or indeed anyone at all? Did their lives matter less because they were women?

Any coverage of this story which focuses on Lance’s innocence and good character over and above condemning the crime he committed makes a mockery of Claire’s judgement and right to a happy life. She had chosen to move on from an unhappy marriage which did not meet her emotional needs for whatever reason. It is fair to assume that a man who shoots his wife and daughter will have been exhibiting some controlling and nasty behaviours behind closed doors leading up to this murder that none of us saw. But you chose instead to focus on quotes from people who had not seen him for 35 years, telling us that he was “friendly” and “one of the funniest guys you will ever meet”. Is it not fair to assume such character references might be a bit out of date? Completely irrelevant, even?

Does any woman’s choice to leave her partner make it ok, make it acceptable, understandable even, that he will ‘flip out’ and for articles to focus so much on justifying and preserving the good name and reputation of her killer? What message does this give out to both men and women about whose lives and legacy are more important? About what kind of violence is considered fair game and to be expected? The fact you are yourself a woman makes me question what values you hold about domestic and general violence to women by men whose egos get out of control. You seem pretty tolerant of it, judging by your article. Still, you are not alone. There are so many articles written daily around the planet, softening the stories we tell about male violence. It wasn’t so very long ago we heard all about the American teen rapist Brock Turner and how fast he could swim and what a promising student and all round nice guy he was.



I appreciate that yours is a fairly small newspaper with a fairly small circulation, but do you see that by including so few column inches about Claire and Charlotte you did not only a disservice to them, but a disservice to battered women everywhere? It's too late to do a better job of honouring their memory. But I ask in future that you revise your journalistic style to show as much grace and compassion to the victims of violence as you do to those who commit such hate crimes, stealing lives which were cut short, valid in their own right, and valuable to every person who knew them, even if you chose to write about their lives in a throwaway manner. Their lives mattered.

Note how different in tone this piece from The Telegraph
is: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/.../father-in-triple-shooting-thr.../>

Yours sincerely
Paula Cleary