



CAMPAIGN FOR FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO VANISHED MISSED

BY SEAN MURPHY

SINCE Ellen Coss Brown vanished in November 1999 aged 51, her heartbroken brother Thomas Brown has campaigned tirelessly to find her.

Now, as part of our MISSED campaign highlighting the tragedy of Ireland's missing people and the anguish of those left behind, he speaks to *The Star* about her case.

Tom, 66, discusses his never-ending search for Ellen, the false sightings of his sister, and how her disappearance pushed him to the brink of suicide.

In recent years, Tom — who admitted that he was “resigned to [his] beloved sister being at peace in heaven” — decided that he had all but given up making appeals and doing interviews as it is “too distressing”.

But he found the courage to tell us: “No matter how you look at it, you don't get closure. There are so many missing people, you really have to campaign a lot to get noticed.

“It led to a lot of misinformation being provided, like false sightings, which can give hope and then heartbreak. It is so hard.

“It's not like on TV, where they do their own detective work and find the person.”

Tom fears his sister's case did not receive maximum police focus because her disappearance involved travel between three countries and different jurisdictions.

He added: “The police in my sister's case were of no use to us. We relied on sightings from the public.

“There was a homeless woman in Dublin who was the double of Ellen, around 2001 or 2002 — but she wasn't Ellen.”

Tom even slept rough in the capital in a desperate attempt to find the homeless woman.

Tom previously told The Star: “I had to sleep rough to gain the trust of the homeless community and I wanted to see this woman. She was very like my sister but it was not her.”

ASHES

And he tells us this week: “I believe Ellen got no farther than Holyhead. I went around the streets of Holyhead and the whole area, trying to find Ellen.”

The last time he went to the Welsh port was in 2011.

“I went over and I took with me the ashes of my oldest brother, Roy, who died in 2004,” he recalls.

“I had been searching for Ellen and was up in the height in Holyhead and thought, ‘F**k this, I am going to jump into the sea; there's no point’.

“I was thinking that I'd either hit the rocks or the water. It was a culmination of factors, including the search, the investigation — and it was Ellen's anniversary.

“Then a helicopter went overhead and I didn't bother. The thought of going missing on Ellen's anniversary would've been hard for people.”

Ellen, from Ballyfermot in Dublin, simply disappeared after staying with her sister Bertha Lee in England for a few months.

She had been with her sister in Manchester following the death earlier that year of their mother, whose loss left Ellen heartbro-

TRAGIC LOSS
Ellen Coss Brown with her son Peter



WHERE IS SHE?
Tom Brown shows photo of his sister



My sister going missing pushed me to the brink



MYSTERY
James Brown

“I thought, ‘Fk this, I am going to jump into the sea; there is no point’**

TOM BROWN ON A DARK MOMENT IN HOLYHEAD

VISIT TO THE UK
Ellen was staying with sis in 1999

“They don't put up helplines for missing person cases. Give out the helpline!

TOM BROWN ON HOW MORE CAN BE DONE TO FIND VANISHED

news@irishmirror.ie

programme they don't always give out information numbers for people to call.”

He added: “Lots of TV shows have a storyline about someone going missing. Even Fair City had one.

“In any other storyline, if it's for drug addiction or suicide, or mental health, the shows put helpline numbers on the screen for people to call.

“But they don't do that for missing person cases. They have to take this seriously. Give out the helpline!”

Help can be provided to the UK's National

Missing Persons on its website missingpeople.org.uk, and to the UK's Crimestoppers on crimestoppers-uk.org, or by calling Greater Manchester Police on 0044 1618725050.

Anybody with information on any missing persons cases can contact the Garda Confidential Line on 1800 666 111 or the ‘National Missing Persons Help Bring Them Home’ Line on 1800 911 999

Tom reveals that his desperate search for Ellen

ken. The sisters left Bertha's home at Langley in Middleton, outside Manchester, and waved farewell to each other as Ellen caught a train at Piccadilly Rail Station.

She was heading for Holyhead Port to get the ferry to return home to Dublin.

The mum-of-one vanished with £20 on her

but had no passport. The planned trip home from Holyhead had been one that she had made several times because she preferred not to fly — but it would be her last as she has never been found, despite police searches in England, Wales and also Dublin.

Her son Peter, who was living in London at the time, revealed that his mother told him on the phone on the night before she disappeared that she loved him, something she would often tell

him. A body found in Bournemouth a year later was DNA-tested, but it turned out it was not Ellen.

In 2005, Bertha, who has since died, said she believed that her sister was still alive.

She said: “I don't know why, but I do think I'd sense it or know it if she was dead. I really do think they'd have found her body if she's died.”

Peter, who is now 55, said in 2019: “If she's still alive we would just be relieved she is OK

nearly led him to take his own life

and would just say to get in touch.”

He added: “If the worst has happened, and anyone who knows her or has information, then please just get in touch with the police.”

Tom reckons one simple change could help lead to people who have vanished off the face of the earth being found.

He wants television and movie storylines about missing people to include vital information about helplines.

Tom, whose brother James has also appealed for information about Ellen, believes that productions like television dramas, movies, documentaries, and podcasts should carry details of how members of the public can reach out to the authorities to share any evidence.

Tom said: “There are plenty of TV shows and podcasts and things like that that always talk about missing person cases, but after every



ON WAY HOME Ellen was getting ferry in Holyhead