

# My brother hired his friends TO KILL OUR MOTHER

RHONDALYNN KOROLAK MADE A NEW LIFE IN MELBOURNE AFTER HER FAMILY WAS TORN APART BY A DEVASTATING MURDER

WHEN I walked into my apartment and picked up the ringing phone, the last person I expected to speak to was the dean of my university in the Canadian city of Calgary.

It was the Easter holidays and I had been enjoying unusually mild weather in a break from my law degree. But in that moment my life changed forever.

"Where have you been?" the dean said, breathlessly, instructing me to sit down. "Don't turn on the news!" she urged. "I don't know how to tell you this, Rhondalynn..."

My legs gave way as I slumped onto the couch, trying to process her words.

"The police found your mother this morning...she's been stabbed and strangled...are you there?"

My shocked voice sounded tiny and faraway as I asked, "Have the police arrested my little brother?"

Since my last visit to our tiny home town of Medicine Hat, three hours' drive from Calgary, I'd known Mum's relationship with my only brother, Ron, 18, was strained. I'd witnessed his violent outbursts towards her, and suspected there was more to her broken finger than the "accident" she had related to me.

Blaming Mum for our father leaving 12 years earlier, Ron had grown into an angry, troublesome teen with little regard for anything or anyone. Kicked out of classes, he was skipping school with an even worse crowd of teenagers, and had written off his motorbike and Mum's car.

"Don't worry, Rhondalynn," our mother, Darlene, 43, assured me. "I'm organising help for him."

Now the mother I had always resembled so closely, and had been so close to, was being moved from a ditch beside a highway to our town morgue – and Ron was in custody.

By the time I arrived in Medicine Hat the following day, police had discovered that Ron had conspired with three friends, aged 15 and 16, to kill our mother as part of a bizarre plot to claim her insurance money and inherit the family home. All four were charged with conspiracy to murder, and one of the group faced a life sentence for murder.

With the story making headlines across the country, and my childhood home now a crime scene, I dodged the media for the privacy of a small motel.

At the age of 25, due to this single act of madness, I had lost my mum and my brother.

Investigations revealed Ron had been planning Mum's murder for months, his plotting attracting attention at school from classmates who thought it was some sick joke. They had no idea that Ron was supplying his friends with Mum's keys, as they put into action his fantasy plot.

Ron's mates broke into my family home around midnight, waking Mum with a disturbance. While my brother watched TV at one of their homes, the boys mounted a blitz attack on Mum, who fought for her life.

When their attempts to strangle her failed to kill her, one of the boys took a knife and stabbed her to death.

Later they loaded Mum's bloodied body into the boot of her Jeep and drove it to the country, where she was dumped like garbage in the gutter. ►



Mentoring others has helped Rhondalynn deal with her family tragedy



# Youths charged in Hat murder

## Murder role nets son 15 years

### Court trims Korolak's sentence

With Ron's help, the boys returned to clean the crime scene before going shopping for motorbikes and a trampoline. They became instant suspects when Mum's body was found by a passing motorist the next day.

"You're a lawyer, you must help your brother," urged my Christian grandparents, struggling with their own grief over their daughter's death.

"You must forgive him," they said.

Instead, I felt such rage I could have killed him myself.

It tortured me knowing that the last faces Mum ever saw were boys

the prison doors behind him was almost as painful as the shattered look on our grandparents' faces as they heard of Mum's dying moments.

Ron was found guilty of conspiring to murder and received 15 years in jail, reduced upon appeal to 10 years.

The two younger offenders, tried as juveniles, got three years. The boy who stabbed Mum to death was tried in the adult courts and jailed for life.

But the sentencing brought no closure for me, just more anguish.

When I was called to the bar a year later, my experience of courtrooms

Although I left him feeling empty, my rage and fear was gone and forgiveness gave me back my future.

In 2005, my marriage collapsed and a new job offer in Australia offered me a fresh start. Realising it was time to shed old baggage, I sold everything I owned – even Mum's china. I did not need a lifetime of treasures to remind me of a woman I missed every day. She'd come with me in my heart.

I arrived in Melbourne with two suitcases and new dreams. I made new friends, studied clinical hypnotherapy and neurolinguistic programming, and founded a counselling and mentoring business, Imagineering Unlimited. I finally realised the story I'd been trying to escape for years was a gift I could share to help others struggling with adversity.

Today, at 43, I'm the same age my mother was when she was murdered. As I've grown older, I look more like the caring, gentle, amazing woman who gave me life.

Not a day passes when I don't miss her. But after years of trying to make sense of something so senseless, I realise that for Mum's life to really mean something, I must stop clinging to my right to be a victim, and draw on my past truths to set myself free.

I've done that through writing my book, *On The Shoulder Of Giants*, a tribute to my mother in which the snapshots of my experiences that have made me who I am will hopefully teach other people it is possible to overcome major obstacles. ■

*"The last faces Mum ever saw were boys she had welcomed into her home – and she must have died knowing Ron was behind it all"*

she had cooked for and welcomed into her home. And she must have died knowing Ron was behind it all.

Loaded on Prozac and sleeping tablets, I buried myself in work and braced for four separate trials.

But by the time I completed my law articles two months after Mum's murder in April 1992, the shock had sent my weight plummeting from 53kg to a frail 43kg. Giving evidence at Ron's trial, I looked like I was dying too.

The agony of knowing my damning evidence of Ron's relationship with our mother would certainly help slam

had left me so traumatised I knew I could never set foot in court again, so I returned to my studies.

I was married and working as a taxation accountant when I learned of Ron's early release in 1998 for good behaviour. In six years, I'd never visited him in prison, but I knew it was time to face old demons.

When guards led a sickly, shuffling young man into the visiting room, I was so stunned not to even recognise my own brother, the anger I felt evaporated and I spent our entire visit in tears while Ron apologised and said he'd never intended it to happen.