

I married a murderer from Texas and I'll bring him to Ireland once he gets parole

By Ian Begley

A LIMERICK-based bus driver who married a convicted murderer from Texas plans to bring him home to Ireland once he's released.

Heike Phelan, a coach and tour operator, married William Matthew Schiffert in a prison ceremony in November 2012 after the couple had spent years writing to each other.

He is currently serving a 75-year sentence in the Michael Unit in Tennessee Colony, Texas, for his part in a fatal knife attack in 2001.

However, he could be out in ten years' time, when he becomes eligible for parole.

Speaking to the Irish Daily Mail, Ms Phelan, 51, insists her husband, also 51, is innocent and had nothing to do with the murder.

'It was the person William was with who committed this crime,' she said.

'He was waiting in a car when it happened and had no idea that his friend would kill this man.'

'One of the most honest people'

'But because they arrived together, they were deemed equally responsible. My husband got 75 years while the man who actually killed this person is already out on parole.'

'Since my husband is a repeat offender, the prosecutor was determined to get William a sentence as long as possible.'

'I just don't think it's fair to take his life away for something he had no direct involvement in.'

Ms Phelan, who was born in the UK but whose father is Irish, met her husband through a Christmas scheme on PrisonsTalk.com, a website where people can send cards to inmates around the world.

They eventually formed a close relationship and decided to tie the knot in 2012. The couple mostly stay in contact over the telephone and through letters, with Ms Phelan making the long journey across the Atlantic three or four

Wife says prisoner husband is now a 'totally different person'

Love behind bars: Heike Phelan and William Matthew Schiffert



times a year to visit him.

'When we first met, people would describe him as a stereotypical thug, but ten years on and he's a completely different person,' she continued.

'He's probably one of the most considerate and honest people I've ever met.'

And although her husband is still ten years away from being eligible for parole, Ms Phelan said she would like nothing more than to bring him to Ireland where he can start a new life. 'We talk about his release all the time and my plan would certainly be to try and get him over here,' she said. 'I know it would be a bit of a legal

battle due to the type of crime he was sentenced for, but that'll be just another bridge to cross.'

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the devoted wife said she cannot visit Mr Schiffert anymore and has grown increasingly

'I hope and pray he makes it through'

concerned for his safety.

'The Covid situation is out of control. It has spread like wildfire through his unit and well over 100 inmates and staff have tested positive,' she said.

'William is very vigilant in trying to stay safe, but it's nearly impossible to social distance from the rest of the inmates.'

'I can only hope and pray that he makes it through this pandemic without getting sick.'

Ms Phelan has been inspired to write three novels and two short stories based on her husband's time in prison.

Her three books - Child Convict, published in 2018, as well as Career Convict and Convict Code, both published in 2020 - are all based on her husband's time in jail.

The two short stories are due to be published this year.

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Naval bonus scheme attracts just 71 applicants

By John Drennan

A SCHEME whereby naval recruits get a €10,000 bonus for staying with Ireland's undermanned Naval Service has attracted just 71 applicants.

The figures emerged after Labour TD Ged Nash asked Minister for Defence Simon Coveney about the uptake of the new loyalty scheme, which offers a bonus of up to €10,000 over four years for sea-going duties. Minister Coveney said: 'The Naval Service Sea-Going Service Commitment Scheme was introduced with effect from 1st January 2021.'

'The scheme is targeted at retaining and incentivising Permanent Defence Force (PDF) personnel of the Naval Service who have accrued an appropriate level of service and experience.'

The scheme requires individuals to serve for an aggregate of 24 months at sea and undertake a minimum of 240 patrol days during the sea-going periods, over a maximum 48-month reference period.

Minister Coveney said: 'The military authorities have advised me that, to date, 71 applications for the Sea-Going Service Commitment Scheme are being processed.'

He added that the scheme 'remains open to further applicants as they commence their sea-going rotation'.

Ant and Dec keen on Roy for jungle

ANT and Dec have revealed that they would love to have Roy Keane appear in the next season of I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!.

The duo said they couldn't think of a more suitable candidate to cause a stir than former Ireland and Manchester United footballer Keane, 49.

Ant McPartlin said: 'It's always good to have people that will speak their mind and ruffle a few feathers. As much as we love people getting on and having fun, we also love a bit of conflict there.'

Declan Donnelly continued: 'I'd love to see [Keane] treat his fellow campmates with the same disdain he treats Gary Neville, Jamie Carragher and Jamie Redknapp.'



Tome: Sinéad O'Connor

US TV too nervous to book me, says Sinéad

SINÉAD O'Connor has criticised US TV, saying they are far too nervous to book her on their shows because they fear she is 'too emotional' and acts 'wack'.

And she added in a Twitter post that America has so much free speech that Donald Trump got away with inciting insurrection.

In her tweet, she referred to the time Tom Cruise famously jumped on a couch on Oprah Winfrey's show, declaring his love for then-partner Katie Holmes. She also referred to

By Emma Costello

her famous Saturday Night Live performance in 1992, when she tore up a photo of Pope John Paul II.

'Dear USA media outlets nervous of having me as a guest in case I jump about like Tom Cruise, or rip up photos of Miley Cyrus, or generally act "wack" I wouldn't have me on either if I were you because the teenager in me wouldn't be able to help f***in' with you for fun,' she said.

O'Connor, 54, added: 'This is to do

with promo for my book. I been told y'all over there (in the land of so much free speech that Trump just got away with inciting an insurrection) are worried I'll "be too emotional" or "say something wack".'

She is releasing her memoir, Rememberings, in June, which her publicists say will cover the singer's 'fraught childhood, musical triumphs and struggles with illness'.

In a statement, she said: 'This is my story, as I remember it. I had great fun writing it over the past few

years.' Deb Brody, the vice president and publisher at HMH Books & Media, added: 'Many years in the making, Sinéad O'Connor's Rememberings is a remarkably candid, intensely personal account of a life both charmed and troubled.'

O'Connor's latest TV appearance in Ireland was on The Tommy Tiernan Show last year, after which she was hailed by viewers. The singer spoke to the comedian about feeling lonely and not knowing who genuinely wanted to be her friend.