

(Update): “Don’t be afraid my darling...” - The horror of a farm attack | Middelburg Observer

5-7 minutes

Claire Taylor held onto her friend’s hand whilst whispering words of encouragement into her ear.

Sue Howarth is in a critical condition in the Midmed intensive care unit. Her husband, Robert Lynn, lies less than a hundred metres away in the surgical ward. Doctors are keeping him somewhat sedated.



The couple was overpowered in their home, tortured, loaded into their vehicle and dropped off for dead next to the road in a mountainous pass outside Belfast, on Sunday morning.

“Sue is such a powerful person. She is so strong. She is a straight shooter. She would have wanted the world to see what happened to her. What they did to her,” her friend Claire explains whilst accompanying journalists to the intensive care unit.

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Except for the farm the two friends share, they both share a passion for Border Collies and are regular competitors in the South African Sheep Dog Trials.

Before settling in Dullstroom, Sue was at the head of a

pharmaceutical company in Johannesburg. She kept her maiden name after marrying Robert who used to work as an electrical engineer for Eskom.

Whilst he gives permission for his wife and himself to be photographed from his hospital bed, Robert jokes: "I am not looking my best at the moment."

No one laughs. The horror of what happened is still too fresh in everyone's memory. It is etched into every cut and burn mark on Robert's body, as well as the bullet lodged in his neck, that doctors have decided not to remove for the time being.

Robert and Sue are the co-owners of a farm called Mash Land, just outside Dullstroom where Sue lives out her passion for Border Collies and their training. She has adopted three rescued dogs from the Border Collie Rescue Organisation.

Irene Thompson, of the organisation, describes Sue as a woman with a heart of gold who often donated money to them.

On Sunday morning, just after 02:00, Robert awoke in his bed to find Sue gone. There were men wearing balaclavas standing next to him. What followed was an horrendous attack on two people, the community describes as 'only being able to see the good in everyone'.

They were tortured with a blow torch and knives. A plastic bag was stuffed down Sue's throat and they attempted to strangle Robert with a black bag around his neck.

Robert gave their attackers their bank cards and pin numbers as they requested. They were not yet satisfied ...

An estimated three balaclava-clad attackers loaded the couple, still in their pajamas, into their Nissan Hardbody double cab with Border Collie stickers on the back.

One of the stickers read "You've got to have balls to own a Border Collie" and then displays a Border Collie playing with tennis balls.

They drove from the Mash Land farm through Belfast towards

Stoffberg. In the pass Sue was shot in the head twice before her attackers dragged her into the field next to the road.

Her breasts had what looked like burn marks and from the position in which Sue was discovered it looked like they dragged her on her stomach, causing her burnt breasts to drag over asphalt and soil and grass.

A few metres further it was Robert's turn. His attackers aimed for his head, pulled the trigger and pushed him out of the vehicle.

The couple was discovered shortly after 06:00 by two friends on their way to a fishing trip, when a visibly confused Robert flagged them down next to the road.

He had cuts and burn marks all over his body and a wound to his neck. A black bag was tied tightly around his neck and he could only properly speak once it was cut off. It remains unclear whether he was aware that he was shot at that time.

Sue was discovered amongst some trees, lying in a ditch. Her rescuers managed to find her by following her groans of pain and then noticing drag marks from the road into the field.

Her head was covered with a towel. Her eyes were swollen shut. She was partially clothed with just scraps of her shirt remaining.

Her breasts and upper body was bloody. The plastic bag, shoved down her throat, took some effort to remove because her jaw was clamped down tightly.





Sue Howarth with one of her rescued Border Collies a month ago during trials.

How she managed to breathe with the bag in her throat remains a mystery.

One of her rescuers later recalled how Sue was unresponsive except for the constant groaning. Whilst the man ran back to the road to see if an ambulance has not arrived yet, she managed to curl one of her arms around her breasts in a last attempt to protect herself.

The injured couple was rushed to the Belfast Hospital, from where they were moved to Life Midmed in Middelburg. Information has it, that it was only in Middelburg that doctors discovered the bullets lodged in Sue's head and Robert's neck.

Sue has not regained consciousness since the ordeal. When she was visited in hospital, a bright white towel once again covered her head.

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