

The 500 hate-filled and horrific poison pen letters tearing a community apart



by Jenny Friel

ABOUT halfway through our interview, Dave Plower has to slip off and go to work. He apologises profusely before leaving his wife Susan to share the rest of the details of the hell their family is going through.

A couple of minutes later, however, he bursts back into the kitchen, brandishing envelopes in his shaking hand.

"Look, there's post," he cries. "There's one here."

He holds out two letters, one is clearly a bill from an energy company, while the other has

'Letters have been sent to their home and workplaces'

handwriting on the envelope. Susan jumps up from the table to study it.

"No, it's not post," she says. "It doesn't have a stamp on it, there's a frank mark."

She sits back down, but Dave is still standing, his face white with tension. The word 'post' has become a byword for them, used to describe the poisonous pen letters they've been receiving for more than five years.

Dave exhales loudly. "All you see is the handwriting," he says quietly. "It's no way to start the day."

He leaves again and Susan opens the letter, which turns out to be a card from RTE presenter Joe Duffy, wishing them both well. Last week Susan gave a powerful interview on his Live-line radio show, explaining the effects these letters have been having on them, their extended family and many of their friends.

Dave's twin brother, Ciaran, and his wife Fiona were also interviewed by Duffy. They painted a grim picture of cruel persecution, which has infected an entire community.

Dave and Susan have been sent more than 500 of these letters, to their home and their workplaces. As the years have gone on, they've grown increasingly insulting and profane. Printed out photos of their faces have been glued onto pornographic images, while the latest letter

Since 2020 Susan and Dave Plower have endured a nightmarish campaign of abuse by a sinister letter writer who has targeted them and their family in a rural town with increasingly profane missives. So why are the authorities not doing more to catch the perpetrator?

sent on February 27 included a "used" condom. "They've got those before, and when tested by the gardai they were found to contain a 'soap-like substance'."

The couple, who live in a small townland about ten kilometres from Loughrea in Co Galway, say they have no clue as to who is behind this unrelenting harassment. But they believe it's someone who lives locally and has a decent knowledge of both their backgrounds.

"They know a lot about us, even from when we were young," says Susan.

From the beginning they have passed all the letters on to the gardai in the hope the letter writer will be identified. But they say their hope of this person being caught and prosecuted has significantly diminished in the last year or so, to the point where they now feel utterly alone.

"There's been no progress report from the gardai in a very long time," says Dave. "Susan has a trail worn going in and out to the garda station, but they tell us nothing."

Both are clearly exhausted and frustrated at this sinister campaign of hate that is being waged against them, and anyone who dares publicly show their sup-

port. Reading just a small selection of the letters, it's not hard to understand why. They are horrific, hate-filled missives. Many have accused Dave, 55, of being unfaithful, others have falsely claimed he stole money from his workplace. They've never been taken seriously.

Many have been abusive about Susan's appearance, others have insulted family occasions such as weddings and birthday parties, even funerals, calling them a 'joke' and 'a disgrace'. The Plowers believe the writer scours social media for their information and is close enough to them in the community to have attended either a wake or a funeral.

The first one they received was January 28, 2020, and from the start it caused huge upset in their family.

"I was surprised to see handwriting on the envelope because who sends written letters these days," says Susan, 52. "After I read it, our younger son Cillian was asking me what was wrong, I'd gone so pale."

It claimed to have come from someone who went to school with Dave, and stated that their older son, Calum who was 17 years old at the time, was buying

drugs and had offered them to the writer's own son. They said they hadn't told anyone else but advised them to 'have a word' with Calum.

Distraught, Susan 'turned the house upside-down' searching for drugs. When Dave asked his son about the accusations, Calum 'broke down in tears'.

'It doesn't matter what I do, the letters come anyway'

"I'm nearly shivering now at the memory of his reaction," says Dave. "And I'll never forgive this person for putting our son through that. He was heartbroken. But as parents, we needed to make sure there was nothing wrong."

They took the letter to the gardai, who 'told us to ignore it'. But the letters kept coming,

sometimes at the rate of three to four a week. The longest they've gone without receiving one is about six or seven weeks. Over the years they have become more deranged, packed with personal insults and vile language.

The Plowers say they've also felt threatened; one letter included a photograph of Dave taken while he was at the side of their house. Others have included their car registrations and exact locations where the writer has claimed to have been watching them.

"For the longest time I wouldn't go shopping in Loughrea, I'd go to Athenry or Oranmore," says Susan. "And I wouldn't go out at lunchtime during work, I'd hide in the office for the day and come home. I've stopped that now, because it doesn't matter where I go or what I do, the letters come anyway."

Susan and Dave are childhood sweethearts, who first went out together as teenagers at school in Loughrea, where both their families lived. They got together for good in 1995, married and had their two boys. They moved out from the town about 20 years ago, to this comfortable house in the countryside, which they



Years of torment: Dave and Susan Plower at their home in Loughrea where they have been sent abusive letters

share with their two dogs and five rescue cats. Both sons are currently doing apprenticeships to become electricians and still live at home.

While Susan works as a legal secretary, Dave is an assistant manager in a local supermarket. Their world has revolved around their kids, and they've led relatively quiet lives. Neither have any memory of any kind of row or altercation that might have sparked this disturbing and unrelenting vitriol.

"We're so boring and ordinary," says Susan with a small smile. "We can't understand why this person is so obsessed with us, nor can anyone else. Only last weekend one friend said to me, 'Susan, no offence, but of all the families to pick.'"

As you delve deeper into what they've dealt with in the last five years, the stress they've lived with becomes clearer. The guilt and responsibility they've felt as others have been dragged into this person's circle of hate. And their feeling of being ostracised by some in the community, who fear getting pulled in.

"About two years into getting the letters I got a text from my best friend asking if I could talk," says Dave. "I picked up the phone and said: 'You got a letter, didn't you?' We hadn't told anybody else at that stage."

"His letter said something along the lines of that I was going around telling everyone he was having affairs. My friend is smart enough to know it was rubbish, but he got a couple of them."

"About 12 to 14 different families, outside of ours, have been sent letters. All four of my brothers have got them, my eldest brother got about 20, and both of Susan's brothers have got them."

Sometimes the link to the Plowers has been extremely tenuous. "They sent a letter to the partner of our son's boss," says Susan. "She was devastated, it was all about her and her family. I called up to her to try and console her, I felt so responsible, even though I know it's not my fault."

Other times they have reached the closest and most vulnerable of their family members. Dave's parents were 82 years old when they were sent a letter three years ago, despite their sons' best efforts to shield them.

"We'd kept all of this from them, they didn't need to know," says Susan. "One of Dave's brothers lives next door to them and was filtering their post, but this one slipped through."

It claimed that Dave was cheating on his wife. "We reassured my dad that it was being dealt with," Dave's brother Ciaran told Joe Duffy. "But in the months before he died he asked if I knew anything about them, and said he wished he could help. He went to his grave knowing he couldn't."

Worse was to come when, in the weeks after Peter Plower's funeral, Susan and Dave received one of the most disturbing letters yet, including details of the room Peter had been waked in.

"In the sitting room where Dave's dad was laid out, there'd been a leak in the chimney and there was a mark," explains Susan. "Did they just guess? Were they actually in the house,

this on our own — the first garda sergeant in charge of the investigation was very good, very thorough and kept us in the loop. But she retired."

"They feel they've had no choice but to go public in the hope of shaming someone who knows something into coming forward."

"I've offered to give my phone to the guards, and give them access to my social media, even though I'm very careful about what I put up there now," says Susan. "We're not tech experts; we wouldn't know how to find anyone online."

"But were told to Google it and do it ourselves," says Dave. "Like do a Coleen Rooney on it or something."

In a statement to the Irish Daily Mail yesterday, a Garda spokesman said Gardai were continuing to investigate a report of harassment made in January 2020 but could not comment on a live investigation.

"The injured parties in this investigation have regularly been updated by the investigation team in relation to this matter and the investigative actions taken," he added, stating that members of the public who feel they don't receive proper service can write to their local Superintendent or make a complaint to the Ombudsman.

When Tánaiste Simon Harris was canvassing in Loughrea last year, the Plowers got to tell him about their case.

"His advisor got back to us afterwards and said they'd do their best to get the guards more resources for the investigation," says Dave. "But when we put that to the guards, they said they didn't need them."

"We met with a local politician a few weeks ago, and they're trying to organise a meeting with Jim O'Callaghan (Justice Minister) for us."

As they wait for the next letter to arrive, the Plowers live in fear that this inexplicable hatred directed towards them and their loved ones, might one day escalate, with tragic consequences.

"As Fiona, my sister-in-law, said on the radio, what is it going to take for something to happen?" says Susan. "And who is going to be held accountable if something happens to one of our kids, or one of us?"

Susan says people might be surprised to learn that she doesn't want the letters to stop. She wants them to keep coming until the writer is caught and prosecuted.

"If they stop, who's to say they won't start up again, or start getting sent to our kids," she says. "Besides, there has to be consequences, for everything that we, our family and our friends have been put through."

'The idea that they were at the wake and shook hands'