

'Caroline lit up my life, she was my rainbow'

After the jailing of her daughter's killer last week, Marjorie Marks-Stuttle, 56, recalls the life – and brutal death – of 19-year-old student Caroline

had begun with the promise of excitement and adventure.

Caroline had always loved travelling and it came as no surprise to Marjorie when she decided to take a gap year trip after finishing her A levels.

"She wanted to see the world before she started a psychology course at Manchester University," she says. "I encouraged her to follow her dream."

Caroline was saving up from her job as a waitress at a restaurant in York. It was there that she was introduced to Ian Nelson, a bank worker, now 23. They started dating in October 2000.

In February 2002, Marjorie drove her daughter to York station, so she could get the train to Heathrow with her best friend and travelling partner, Sarah Holiday, now 21. They were flying to Sydney together.

"It hurt to leave her," she admits. "Afterwards, she sent me a text that said: 'Thanks for being strong and not crying, Mum.' But I wept when I got home."

Caroline called three times a week. "She was travelling up the Gold Coast. She learnt to surf in Byron Bay."

In April, as Caroline was enjoying Australia, Marjorie was introduced to David Marks, a retail director, 58, by a mutual friend. "When he asked me out for lunch,

MARJORIE MARKS-STUTTLE HAD ONLY slept for an hour when she heard the knock on the door. At 3am, she knew with a sinking certainty that it was bad news. She began to fear the worst and thought it could be about her elderly mother. But she wasn't prepared for what she was about to hear.

With a sombre voice, one of the two police officers broke the dreadful news that her 19-year-old daughter, Caroline, on a gap year in Australia, was dead.

She'd been mugged and thrown 30ft to her death from a footbridge in a violent struggle over her handbag.

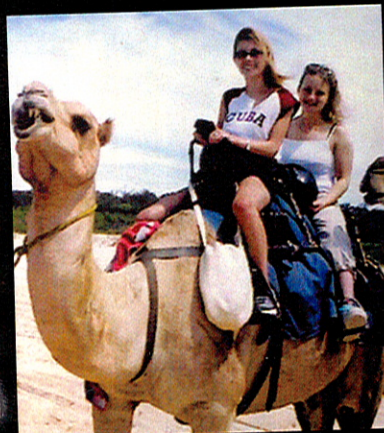
In an instant, the bright future that the lively, pretty teenager had ahead of her had been cut brutally short.

Last week, drug addict Ian Previte, 32, was jailed for life for her murder. But for Marjorie, 56, the grieving process goes on.

"She was talented, kind and loving – my best friend as well as my daughter," she says.

"When I heard the verdict, I burst into tears. It won't bring Caroline back, but it will stop him killing again."

Yet only two months before that fateful night, the teenager's journey



When Marjorie developed Caroline's film, she found

BACKPACKER MURDER

"I knew Caroline would have been happy for me," she says poignantly.

The three-week murder trial started last month at the Australian Supreme Court in Bundaberg. Although Alan and Richard attended, and Caroline's boyfriend Ian gave evidence, Marjorie stayed at home. "It would have been too painful," she says.

The jury heard that Previte, high on drugs, wanted to steal money. Caroline had called Sarah to let her know she was returning to the caravan park, and again moments later when she realised she was being followed.

But it was too late. As she struggled to hold on to her bag, Previte punched her in the face, lifted her over the railing and threw her to her death.

He showed no remorse as he was convicted of murder and robbery, and was jailed for life.

Marjorie is now committed to preserving her daughter's memory. Six months after her death, she founded Caroline's Rainbow Foundation – a charity that provides advice and support to young backpackers.

She and David now work for it full-time. "If it helps save one life it'll be worth it," says Marjorie. "After all, Caroline lit up my life."

She explains the naming of the charity was because Caroline loved rainbows: "She adored bright colours. I decorate her gravestone with bright roses."

Marjorie's still haunted by her daughter's death. "I wake at 3am every morning remembering. It hurts that I'll never see her grow up. Sarah's at university now, like Caroline should have been."

But Marjorie is determined to dwell on the good times. "Caroline's gravestone is engraved with the words: 'She only touched the world and the world was touched by her.' She might have only had a short life, but that's the kind of girl she was – special to everyone she met." ■

By Antonia Hoyle



Marjorie and husband David now run a charity to help other backpackers

I was delighted," she remembers.

Marjorie's artist husband Alan, now 65 and living in Scarborough, had left her in August 1998. "Caroline helped me survive the separation," she recalls. "She'd get into bed with me at night when I couldn't sleep. She even did my make-up when I eventually started dating again."

So, when Marjorie spoke to Caroline on 7 April, she told her about the upcoming lunch with David.

On the morning of the date, Marjorie received a text. "It said: 'Don't be nervous. Be yourself. He'll love you as you are.' It was typical Caroline – she wanted to boost my confidence." The lunch was a success. "We were meant to be together. I was relaxed around him," says Marjorie.

But that night, she couldn't sleep. "For some reason, I felt anxious," says Marjorie. She'd only dozed for an hour when she heard the knock on the door.

"I was in complete shock when the police officers told me Caroline was dead," she says. "The fact they'd found her body didn't register. I was hysterical."

It was two days before police told her that Caroline had been attacked. Devastated, she learnt the last moments of Caroline's life. She was staying with her friend Sarah at a caravan park in Bundaberg, northern Queensland, and had been making her way back across Burnett River Bridge after calling Ian from a public phone box.

It was then that she was attacked and, after refusing to let go of her handbag, was thrown 30ft to the ground below. She died

instantly from a broken skull and spine – still clinging to the handle of her bag.

She was discovered when a witness reported the incident to the police. "I didn't sleep that night," says Marjorie. "As dawn came, I sank into a haze of grief."

A mutual friend told David. "He wiped away my tears and handled the press," she says. "We'd only been on one date but his support kept me going."

Marjorie, Alan and their son, Richard, a chef, now 27, were inundated with cards. "Ian was a comfort and, when Sarah flew back from Australia after two days, we grieved together," she recalls. "Alan and I supported each other too."

Ten days later, Caroline's body was flown back to Britain. "Seeing her in the chapel broke my heart," says Marjorie.

Her funeral was held on 23 April. "There were 450 people at the church. We played Celine Dion's *My Heart Will Go On*. Caroline used to play it on the organ. We buried her in a favourite pink jumper and some cords she'd bought in Australia. They'd arrived in the post the day she died, along with photos I later developed. She looked so happy and carefree in them. I can barely bring myself to look at them."

In the midst of Marjorie's grief, in June 2002, David proposed. She accepted and moved to his house in Allerthorpe. "It might sound strange, but we'd fallen in love," she explains. "He'd never met Caroline, but he understood grief – he'd lost his first wife to cancer in 1999."

It was February 2003 before Previte, a drug addicted drifter from Bundaberg, was charged with the murder. He was serving a prison sentence for drug-related offences when police taped him confessing to the crime to fellow inmates. "I was overcome with relief that the killer was finally caught," she says.

Marjorie and David married in June 2004.

