



Happy time: Nicole (right) was helping big sister Bibaa celebrate her birthday

Mina Smallman, whose children Bibaa and Nicole were murdered in 2020, opens up her heart and faith in a moving one-off documentary

'The sunshine in the rain'

FACTUAL BBC2 • SUNDAY

TWO DAUGHTERS

One-off

It's clear Mina Smallman – Britain's first black female Archdeacon – is a force of nature, and was always so before an unimaginable tragedy put her in the public spotlight.

'I'm an activist, I've done that all my life,' she says at the press launch for the incredibly moving documentary, in which Stacey Dooley follows her and her husband Chris a year on from the murder of their daughters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman.

'I've done it as a teacher. I've done it as a priest. It's something, a

gift God has given me, that I can communicate well with people – that's my way.'

As she talks about the case, and the ramifications that continue to be felt from it, she exhibits a surprising sense of light. At several points, there's laughter. But it's also clear there's a battle to be fought.

'There's a bit in the film where I am so broken. But what I'm sure of is, if my girls could see me, they would wonder, "What's up with Mum? Because, normally, *don't poke the bear!*" People who don't know me might think I'm harmless, but... don't poke the bear! And so they'd be up there saying, "Go on, Mum! Go on!"

It was on 5 June 2020 that the sisters and a small group of friends spent the evening in north-west London's Fryent Country Park. With COVID-19 restrictions still in place, this was a safe way to celebrate Bibaa's birthday. As the night wore on, people drifted away, leaving the two girls alone.

They sent messages to loved ones saying they'd had a wonderful time and would soon be heading home.

Twenty-four hours later, they were reported missing to the Metropolitan Police, who didn't seem to consider the case a priority. In one call, the two were even referred to as 'suspects'. With no tangible police response, Mina's husband Chris set off for London from their home in Ramsgate, while Nicole's boyfriend Adam Stone, along with friends, began searching the park. And it was Adam who discovered their bodies.

They had been stabbed to death by 19-year-old Danyal Hussein, who thought he'd entered into a pact with a kind of demon that would bring him a lottery win in exchange for the death of 'six women every six months' – as he wrote in a note found in his bedroom.

'I want everyone to hear their story,' says Mina, who feels race has been a factor in both the police's handling of the case and its reporting.

'Within a couple of weeks, everyone knew who Sarah Everard was. But there was nothing about our girls. They only became of great interest with the scandal – the police taking the selfies.'

She's referring to the subsequent discovery that two officers – PCs Deniz Jaffer and Jamie Lewis – who were supposed to be safe-guarding the crime scene, had posed for



Precious memories: Mina and Chris bond with host Stacey Dooley



Fire and faith: Mina, Chris and Stacey with the Dean of Canterbury, Dr Robert Willis

there is no such thing as coincidence. These doors have just opened.

'By God's grace, I've been given the OK to forgive Hussein, and that is so difficult to explain. It's not

anything you can control or demand, it's at the depth of your darkness. Something just grabs you and takes it. The burden's gone. It's just gone. And I'm so grateful for that.'

Now she sees herself as not quite a figurehead for change, but a catalyst. 'Every knock I've sustained has made me the woman I am today. And there's no compensation for lived experience. Empathy is great, but when you've lived it, when you know what it is to go hungry, to know what it is to be tormented, when you know what it is to be rejected, there's no compensation. So I want everybody to get that fire in their belly – and don't see people as just "the other". Everyone matters.

'Help Victim Support, Reclaim These Streets and Million Women Rise. Join an organisation, write to your MP, bang the drum and say, "No, we're not having this."'

There's a phrase Mina uses that closes the documentary, and she invokes it again here as she talks of the love and support she has received from family, friends and even Stacey and the film crew. It sounds a bit of an aphorism, a self-help slogan – and her home sports many of them. But it works for her and sums up the way both she and Chris are coping.

'You have to look for the sunshine in the rain.'

Graham Kibble-White

photographs with the bodies, sending them to a Whatsapp group of colleagues.

While Mina has expressed forgiveness for Hussein, who she recognises has a profound mental illness, she cannot do so for them – and she reveals that in the past few days, she's heard remonstrations in court from Jaffer, appealing his jail sentence of two years and nine months. 'To find out he has two teenage daughters...', she sighs. 'How can you separate from that as a parent?'

For a mother to lose her children in this way seems an unbearable burden to carry. Mina says her faith has helped. 'I'm one of those fortunate Christians who has felt the supernatural presence of the Lord. And I've seen his footsteps very, very clearly.'

'In no way have I pushed on doors. But at my cheekiest, when I was asked if I'd make this documentary, I said the only person I would do it with was Stacey Dooley. The person I was talking to replied, "That could be a bit of a reach, but I'll try my best". However, Stacey's agent got back within 15 minutes to say, "She's there."'

'My husband is not a signed-up Christian – although I beg to differ because he supports everything I do, and if he doesn't get in somewhere nice by the end of it, I will be asking some serious questions! – but even he has seen that

Photos: Alamy, BBC