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TRAGEDY OF MUM KILLED IN FOREST

THE death of Valerie Armstrong after she was hit by a scrambler while walking in Colin Glen last Tuesday is all the more tragic because it was so preventable.

Three children have been left without a mother, and a husband without a wife, because of the dangers of scrambler bikes.

Coincidentally, I have some experience of the scourge of young men racing scramblers where they ought not to be.

In 2012, a close friend was pushing his baby in a pram along a narrow path on Cavehill when he was faced by a group of not youths, but men, on scramblers. After a heated exchange these supposed adults ignored his warnings and raced off to selfishly enjoy their day out.

I'd had a similar experience with mountain bikers a few weeks earlier, so we decided to approach Belfast City Council to see if anything could be done as both of us believed it wasn't a case of if, but when, someone would be seriously injured.

I was amazed when instead of a routine letter of reply, the then Lord Mayor Gavin Robinson agreed to meet us.

And so, one rather damp afternoon Lord Mayor Robinson arrived accompanied by a top City Hall administrator. We had a cup of tea and laid out our worries about scramblers and mountain bikers.

I distinctly remember my friend stating some innocent person would lose their life due to being hit by a scrambler.

The Mayor agreed scramblers had no place on the hill and assured us new signs would be put up and more regular police patrols would be started.

He proved to be a man of his word as both soon followed.

The death of Mrs Armstrong has tragically proved my friend's warning prophetic regarding scramblers in public parks. I'm now even more convinced that if Belfast City Council don't also ban mountain bikes from the Cavehill, then another preventable tragedy is inevitable.

There are now a number of custom-built and publically funded tracks created specifically for mountain biking.

Sex scandal fallout highlights political double standards in Northern Ireland

BELIEVE me when I say that – up until last weekend – I have never consciously thought about the sexual practices of our elected politicians.

Indeed, to even consider that some of them have sex is so unsettling as to induce nausea.

But seemingly MLAs do have a sex life – and in the case of UUP MLA Ross Hussey, *below*, it appears that involves posting images of his genitals onto websites with the aim of having anonymous sex with strangers.

Having been discovered in this activity by a local Sunday paper – not entrapped as some would argue, as he'd been openly advertising on the said site for some time – Hussey threw his hands up and admitted his misdeeds, describing them as “a terrible error of judgement”. No! Really? Do you think so?

He made it sound like he'd ordered a pasty supper when he really wanted fish and chips.

As an MLA, Hussey holds a number of important posts such as sitting on the Assembly Commission and it's Finance Committee.

He is also Chair of the Policing Board's Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Maybe he got confused and thought taking bizarre risks in his private life was part of that job description?

What struck me most, as the sad and sordid little story unfolded, was the virtual avalanche of commiseration and support Hussey received.

I couldn't help but compare this reaction with how young women such as 'Slane Girl' and 'Magaluf Girl' were vilified when caught up in similar stories.

The big difference between those young women and Ross Hussey was that they were possibly under the influence of drink and had been secretly filmed, whereas Hussey, an adult, had soberly sought out his sexual gratification in full knowledge of the consequences.

The only rational explanation for the difference in public reaction has to be that Northern Ireland is an inherently misogynistic society, where there's one rule for men and another for women.

Men caught in sex scandals by the media are victims whereas women are to be shamed and denounced.

Worse was the reaction of the UUP leadership to the revelations – arguing that politicians have a right to a private life and pointing out that no laws had been broken.

While no law was broken, Hussey, as a member of the Policing Board, signed up to rules that he would ‘not conduct himself in such a manner as to bring the Board into disrepute’.

Is Mike Nesbitt now saying that posting indecent images of oneself online, for the sole purpose of hooking up for sex with complete strangers, isn't disreputable?

I wasn't surprised either to discover that while Mr Hussey described himself on a gay website as 'bi-curious', he found no difficulty in voting against the gay marriage Bill when it came before the Assembly.

Caligula himself would have blushed – as Morrissey once put it – at the ability of our political

class to set standards for us which they don't live out themselves.

While IrisGate – Iris Robinson's affair with 19-year-old Kirk McCambley in 2008 where she procured £50,000 in loans for him to finance a start-up restaurant – is without doubt, our most famous local sex scandal of recent years, there have been others, and some of those involved are still active in politics.

Not all politicians get off so lightly.

When allegations were made against Paul Berry that he had met with male masseuse in a hotel, the then DUP leadership ensured his feet didn't touch the ground exiting their headquarters. Berry, who strongly denied the allegations, said afterwards that he felt he had been “thrown to the wolves” by his party.

Internationally, the Clinton presidency will forever be tarnished by his dalliance with intern Monica Lewinsky and US congressman Anthony Weiner, once tipped for the top, had images he'd posted online of his genitalia leaked in 2011 and his political career ended.

Luckily Ross Hussey is a man of many talents, as he is also a fully qualified insurance salesman.

I'd advise him to consider expediting a career change in that direction as quickly as possible and save himself the inevitable embarrassment of failing to live down his ‘moments of madness’.

The alternative is he ends up like poor Basil McCrea, gagging for water while being torn apart by Mark Carruthers.



AMERICA'S STRUGGLE WITH RACE

AFTER the spate of shootings in the US involving police and black men and then a number of retaliatory attacks, I decided to look up online the most dangerous job in the US.

The internet informed me that being a lumberjack was top of the list. But I'd argue being a black man going about his daily activities is as hazardous.

If proof of this were needed let's look at the recent case of Charles Kinsey, a behavioral therapist from Florida. Mr Kinsey found himself surrounded by police as he attempted to care for an autistic patient who'd wandered off and was found playing with a toy truck in a car park. In a video of the incident, Kinsey can be heard repeatedly shouting these facts to the surrounding officers.

Even though he was unarmed and was lying on the ground with his hands in the air, he still ended up in hospital with a gunshot wound to his leg after police shot him. Kinsey said after the incident that he was more worried about his patient, in case the police mistook his toy for some form of weapon. He said ‘as I was lying on the ground with my hands up, I never thought I'd get shot. Boy, was I wrong’.

Allegations of racism exist here too. The Home Office recently paid £2,000 to a black woman after she alleged an immigration officer at Belfast City Airport stopped her because she “looked foreign”.



Beckham kiss showing love

THE uproar from a picture of Victoria Beckham kissing her daughter on the lips proves just how barking our world has become.

A legion of self-appointed child therapists attacked her, arguing that kissing our children on the lips is utterly verboten. These uptight, right-on experts can kiss my a***.

There's not a day goes by that I don't hug and kiss my children on the lips and tell them I love them, and I'm not stopping. Well, not until they're big enough to fight me off.

God help us if we've got to the stage we can't show our own kids affection. If, God forbid, one of my kids someday needs counselling, I'm pretty sure it won't be because their mum and dad kissed them.

