THE DAY WE CHANGED FOREVER

Captives of madman shattered by ordeal

THE HOSTAGES
LEIGH VAN DEN BROOKE, BEN MCCLELLAN, LIA HARRIS

They began the day as strangers — only to become bonded for life.

A group of hostages, one of whom was pregnant. Two Indian IT workers. A Westpac manager. A university student on a part-time job.

Many were taking part in what is a rite of passage for Sydney office workers — a Monday morning coffee.

It was a ritual that turned to bloodshed in a busy Lindt chocolate shop cafe.

For 16 harrowing hours, 16 brave men and women endured an unimaginable ordeal confronted by a madman with a pump-action shotgun, toying with their lives.

First to escape was 83-year-old retiree John O'Brian. Wearing a blue blazer, the avid tennis player ran for it as heavily-armed police pointed their guns behind him.

His granddaughter Izy Perkins said he was “shaken”.

“He’s OK now. But we are just so happy to have him home,” she said.

Barristers Katrina Dawson, Stefan Balafoutis and Julie Taylor knew each other from around Sydney’s tight-knit legal circle.

Ms Dawson, a mother-of-three, would die — believed to be the last victim — along with 34-year-old cafe manager Toni Johnson.

Ms Taylor, a 35-year-old commercial law specialist who was pregnant, had been having coffee with Ms Dawson, who is understood to have tried to protect her friend from Monis.

A University of Western Australia graduate who was admitted to the NSW Bar in 2007, she worked out of 8 Selbourne Chambers.

She had been buying a coffee with fellow commercial law specialist, Mr Balafoutis, who works at the nearby Tenth Floor Chambers on Phillip St.

Mr Balafoutis, a barrister of 12 years, was among the first to make a bid for freedom, running into the arms of police.

One hostage, Fiona Ma, somehow managed to post Facebook updates from inside the cafe: “I’m getting your messages everyone! Thank you, you beautiful souls. Guys I love each and every one of you.”

Ms Ma, like fellow hostage and barista Elly Chen who was among the first to flee, was a high-achieving student who won a John Lincoln Youth Community award.

She was also a HSC Distinction Achiever and All-Round Achiever at James Ruse Agricultural College in Carlingford last year.

Ms Chen, 22, who was the second woman to escape, was forced to hold up the black Islamic flag. A family member at her Western Sydney home said she was recovering at home: “She’s OK.”

Four of the captives worked at Westpac, opposite the cafe. Marcia Mikhail, a 43-year-old mother from Glenwood in Sydney’s northwest, was forced to make a chilling video on behalf of Monis — and was later shot.

The Westpac project manager whom neighbours described as “outgoing” and kind was yesterday recovering from surgery to a wound to her leg at Royal North Shore Hospital.

Speaking after visiting her, family member George Mikhail said she was in shock.

“She just had an operation on both legs. I think for shrapnel. She’ll be here for a week. She requires skin grafts. She’s still in shock,” he said.

He said she had hid under the table for part of the ordeal.

“She was in the wrong place at the wrong time,” he said.

“She’s talking, she’s in shock, we try to change the subject,”

Ms Mikhail had been in the cafe with work colleague, software engineer Viswakanth Ankireddy, 32, from Bella Vista, also in Sydney’s northwest.

Mr Ankireddy, an outstanding student who made his mark in IT while working for multinational tech giant Infosys, was heading a project for Westpac with his friend Puspenda Ghosh.

His father Ankireddy Eswara Reddy told local Indian newspaper The Hindu he received a call from an Infosys staffer telling him Viswakanth was among the hostages.

Mr Ankireddy, who has a five-year-old daughter, attracted the attention of India’s Foreign Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who spoke directly to his wife Bonthu Shilpa as the siege unfolded.

Mr Ghosh also escaped unharmed.

PUSPENDU GHOSH
Originally from West Bengal in India, Mr Ghosh had worked for NAB and Telstra before starting work as a project manager at Westpac.

JULIE TAYLOR
A barrister and colleague of Katrina Dawson who was killed in siege. Ms Taylor worked at the same legal chambers as Ms Dawson.

STEFAN BALAFOUTIS
The barrister from Tenth Floor Chambers was the second to flee the cafe. His colleagues were sent an email informing them that he was safe.

MARCELLA MIKHAEL
The 43-year-old Westpac executive from Glenwood was shot in the leg during the siege and was taken to hospital for surgery.

STEFAN BALAFOUTIS
The 19-year-old University of Technology student from Bondi was forced to make a harrowing phone call to media to relay Monis’ demands. He spoke of having had a gun placed to his head. He was working part-time in the cafe.

TORI JOHNSON
(belonged to him)

The manager at the cafe. The 34-year-old reportedly died during a heroic final standoff with the gunman, attempting to wrestle the shotgun from his hands.

JARROD MORTON-HOFFMAN

The 19-year-old University of Technology student from Bondi was forced to make a harrowing phone call to media to relay Monis’ demands. He spoke of having had a gun placed to his head. He was working part-time in the cafe.

1. JARROD MORTON-HOFFMAN
2. TORI JOHNSON
(belonged to him)
3. JULIE TAYLOR
4. STEFAN BALAFOUTIS
5. MARCELLA MIKHAEL

Young family left heartbroken by barrister mum’s death

In a statement, Mr Smith and Mr Dawson said: “We are shocked and devastated by the tragic and senseless death of our darling Katrina.

“She was an amazing woman and the most loving and loved wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, in-law and blessed with a wonderful circle of friends and colleagues.”

They thanked “everyone who has provided their support and wishes over the past 48 hours.”

Ms Dawson, 38, was pronounced dead at hospital, after the siege concluded in a hail of gunfire.

Police are investigating the circumstances leading up to Ms Dawson’s death and whether she was protecting a pregnant friend and colleague Julie Taylor from gunfire.

Ms Dawson was at the cafe getting a routine coffee before 9am with Ms Taylor, her colleague at 8 Selbourne Chambers, and barrister Stefan Balafoutis.