

Last week 15-year-old Kiyon Prince was stabbed to death outside his school, echoing the shocking death of headmaster Philip Lawrence a decade ago. Here, Philip's daughter Unity, 24, speaks for the very first time about the terrible consequences of her father's brutal murder

Words: Andrea Thompson Main photo: David Woolfall

GRAZIA EXCLUSIVE

day, he took away the man who would walk me and my two sisters (now aged 29 and 30) down the aisle at our weddings, and the man who would have stood proudly at my university graduation this summer. Sadly, he'll never know that I chose to become a doctor or that my eldest sister just gave birth to a baby son. I often wonder if Learco realises the impact he has had on our family. When you take a life, it has an endless ripple effect on everyone who knew that person. And the pain never goes away. I was 14 when my father was killed. I'd just arrived home from school and was watching TV with my brother when the doorbell rang. As my mother answered it, I heard her say, "What? No!" There was something in her tone that made me realise something awful had happened. Within minutes, she was getting into a police car and we were sent to a neighbour's house. "Don't worry,

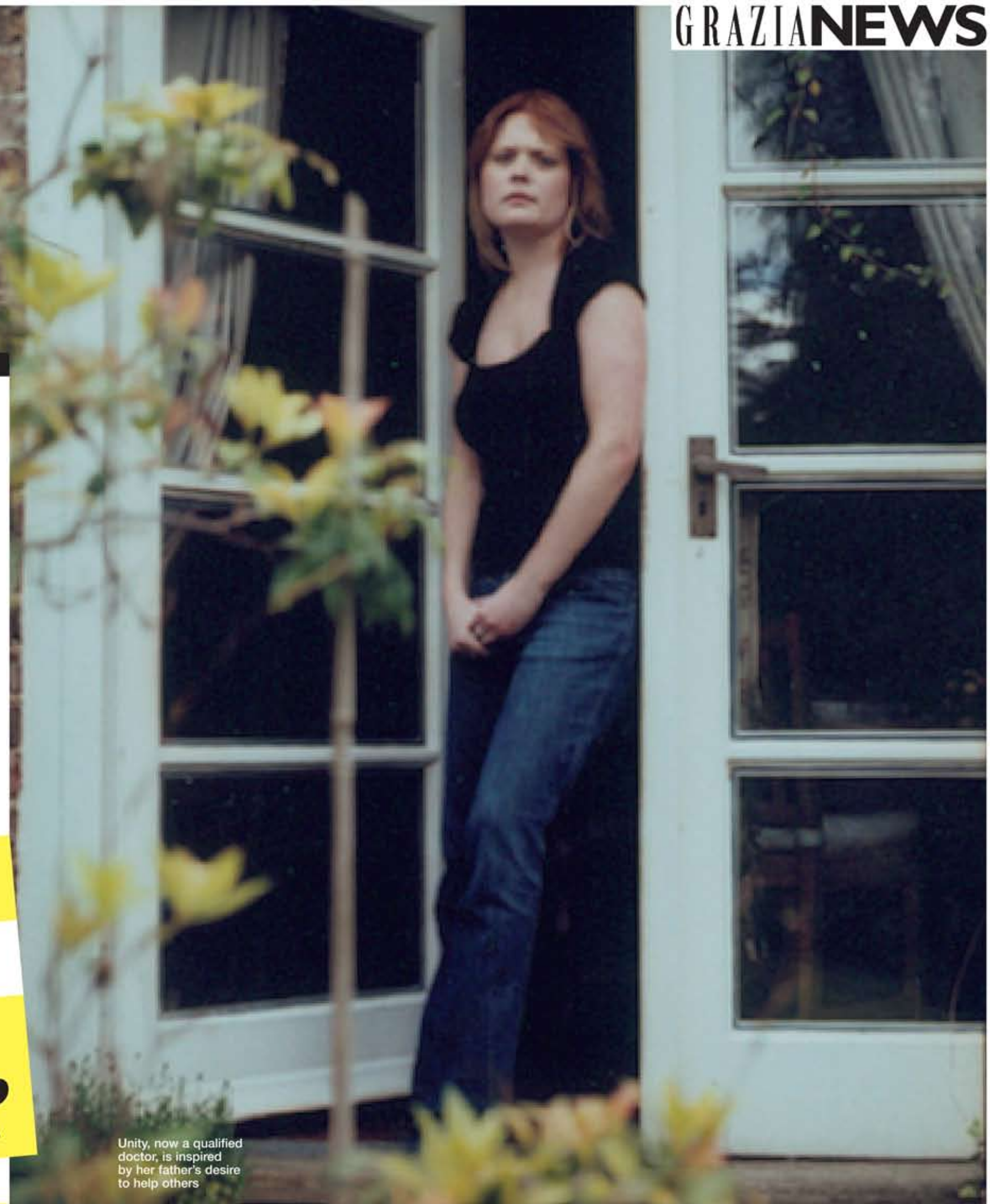
everything is fine – it's nothing to worry about," I remember her saying to me, unconvincingly. But the expression on her face told me otherwise. 'An hour later, my brother and I were by her side at the local hospital, waiting in A&E while doctors treated Dad. My two older sisters, both away at university, were summoned immediately. As the hours passed, I realised that it wasn't a broken leg we were here for. It was much more serious. As we sat in silence outside the theatre where doctors were trying to save Dad, my mother became increasingly distraught. It was surreal. There were hushed voices and looks of concern. The words "intensive care", "knife attack" and "serious" kept being repeated. I just couldn't make sense of it all. Finally, at midnight, we were told that despite the doctors' best efforts, my father had died of a wound to his chest. I never even got to see him before he died. ▶

'I LIVE IN FEAR OF MEETING DAD'S KILLER'

'When I heard about the stabbing of Kiyon Prince last week, my heart sank as I thought about his family's torment. Watching the television images of the flowers tied to the playground railings outside the school where the murder took place, I felt a sudden pang of despair and recognition. How could this tragedy strike another family 10 years after it happened to my own?'

'My father was stabbed in a similarly unprovoked attack after intervening to stop Learco Chindamo, a 15-year-old from another school, from hitting one of his pupils with an iron bar at the school gates. Learco was the head of a gang in Maida Vale seeking revenge on the child whom, he claimed, had upset him. My father was stabbed in the chest trying to defend his pupil. That day, he became one in a long line of innocent victims of Britain's knife culture. This week, as I watched Kiyon's family begin their grieving process, I was forced to relive the pain of losing my father.'

'Ten years on, when I think about the man who took my father's life, I feel no anger, and no desire to confront him. I just feel utter sadness and confusion. Why did this man have to take my dad's life and deprive four children of a father and a loving mother of her husband? That



Unity, now a qualified doctor, is inspired by her father's desire to help others



Left: Philip Lawrence with his family (Unity is next to her father). Below: Kiyan Prince. Bottom left: Philip's funeral – Unity is centre left



'AT DAD'S FUNERAL, I SAT LOOKING AT ALL THE PEOPLE I LOVED, CRYING'



'That night, I remember getting into bed and thinking, "I'll open my eyes in the morning and this will all be a dream." But when I looked out of the window the next day to see a crowd of photographers, I realised that a new future without my dad was a reality. The following weeks passed in a haze. I couldn't stop crying, Mum became withdrawn and my two sisters were very quiet. It was terrible. My clearest memory of this period was Christmas, two weeks later. We sat down to Christmas dinner without my dad who, because of the ongoing criminal investigation, hadn't even been buried yet. My little brother, who was eight, didn't really understand why Dad wasn't there and Mum remained subdued. 'When we were finally allowed a funeral, it was the most horrible day. I sat looking in disbelief at the people I loved most in the world, crying. I wondered why this boy had taken my father away and done this to us. I was very confused. 'In the following weeks, as the reality bit hard, there was a new challenge. After coming to terms with the shock and pain, we had to get on with our lives. My sisters went back to university and I went back to school. But the atmosphere at home had changed. Mealtimes were unbearable. I became withdrawn and my friends found it difficult to deal with. Although they tried to comfort me, they didn't know what to say – like me, they were only 14. 'There was a part of me that thought about drinking heavily and going off the rails, but I knew I couldn't do that to my mother. I couldn't face hurting her and had a duty to be as supportive as I could. 'As the years have passed, my greatest fear is bumping into Dad's killer. He's almost the same age as me and, despite being in prison, he's allowed out occasionally on day release. I dread the day he is released for

good, next year. I can't imagine what I'd do if I saw him again. My mother has campaigned hard for him to serve the full 12 years of his sentence and I agree with her entirely. I want him to realise how painful it was the day I looked at my sister's son for the first time knowing that he would never know his grandfather. 'I've tried hard not to live in the shadow of my father's murder, but there are mornings when I see a newspaper with a photo of Dad next to a new story of knife crime and I'm plunged into grief again. 'But Dad remains an inspiration to me. When I qualified as a doctor this year, I was delighted because I've always wanted to help others, like Dad did. As a doctor, I'm aware that I may have to treat victims of knife crime or even those who've wielded weapons. That will be tough. 'Seeing something positive come out of Dad's murder has helped. Mum has set up the Philip Lawrence Awards – a charity to help young people do positive things for their community and turn away from crime. It's in keeping with Dad's philosophy: "Every child is capable of greatness." He always tried to provide underprivileged kids with opportunities to fulfil their potential. I'll never forget how popular he was. He treated his pupils with respect and they respected him and their community in return. That's what the charity is about. 'Today, Mum is a spokesperson against crime and street violence. She could have let herself crumble, but we have made the decision as a family not be destroyed by Dad's death. You can't live your life in fear of being crime victims too. That would be letting people like my father's killer win the fight. I know Dad would want us to have full and happy lives.' ■ *For details of the Philip Lawrence Awards visit www.philiplawrenceawards.org.uk.*