

started to run it through her locks. Eventually, she was old enough to go to school and she could hardly wait to start. She ran up to me with her shopping bags. 'Look at my uniform!' she said and danced around, showing off her grey skirt and red tie.

'You're a big girl now, hen,' I said. The night before her first day stayed over at Lynne's. It felt like one of my own was starting school.

In the morning we were up early. Victoria put on her new uniform and I pinned her hair into a French plait. Lynne grabbed hold of her camera. 'Smile,' she said and Victoria posed for us on the doorstep.

It was a sunny day and we walked her to school, Lynne holding one hand, me the other. It took 20 minutes.

We led her into the classroom and she let go of our hands and skipped around. She was so excited she hardly noticed us leaving.

Lost without her, we wandered into town and whiled away the morning, hoping she was happy. Later we returned to collect her and she chattered all the way home.

'I've been painting and playing in the sand and my teacher is Mrs Mayor and...

Several weeks went by and Victoria found herself into my arms. 'I'm not going to be the baby any more,' she said proudly. 'I'm going to be a big sister!' Lynne was pregnant again.

Then came that unforgettable day. It was a spring morning. I was tidying up in my dressing gown, half watching the telly. Suddenly I saw the word *Newsflash*. I turned and listened. An announcer came on screen and began to speak...

'Reports are coming in of a serious incident. It involves a shooting. At least nine people are believed to be dead. Police are already at the primary school which is in Dunblane...'

Dunblane. I reeled back as if I'd been punched. The kids! I

Victoria as a baby



Wilma opened her Take a Break and suddenly she knew what she must do

A tree grows for Victoria

She had a tuft of hair



sobbing, demanding to know what a policeman inside. Then a policeman came out. It's Primary One... he said. Lynne let out a howl. 'That's Victoria's class.'

I almost collapsed

but I managed to hold on to her. 'Don't panic... I said.

The police guided us and all the Primary One relatives into one of the nearby houses. We sat crying and shaking.

Eventually we were led out to a minibus, ushered aboard and driven through

the school gates, past swarming reporters and armies of police. We huddled together but when the bus stopped Lynne froze.

'I can't do it, Wilma,' she said and clung to the seat, sobbing. 'You have to. I'm with you.'

We got out and stepped into a corridor. We were taken to the teachers' staff room. We clutched each other and wept as the minutes ticked by.

The door opened. Families were led off in twos and threes.

More time dragged by. All around people sat weeping and holding on to each other.

Finally the door opened again. A policeman came in and said: 'The family of Victoria Clyde-

dale, please.' We were led to a classroom. 'Please sit down,' a man said, adding that his name was Bill and he was a CID officer.

'I'm sorry to have to tell you... He didn't get to finish. Our screams drowned out his words.'

I heard my sobs filling the room and watched Lynne's face drain of colour. 'I want to go home,' she said.

We were taken home

Victoria in her classroom



seemed harder than the last. I'd do Lynne's cleaning while she sat staring at the carpet for hours. We'd talk, we'd cry.

At home I gazed at the photo showing Victoria on that first day at school, the one when we'd taken her. I broke down.

'Lynne, I've taken some pills,' I said. 'I... I can't cope.'

She threw her arms around me. 'Oh, Wilma, your children need you — and I need you. It was hard to be strong for me.'

A week before Victoria should have been six, Lynne went into labour. She gave birth to a son, Paul, and I knew we were both thinking the same thing.

'Victoria would have loved him, wouldn't she?' Lynne said.

'Aye,' I replied, 'she'd have been a wonderful big sister to him. She'd have bussed him about and adored him. We still can't take in the horror that denied her that, denied her everything.'

Sometimes my sister still expects Victoria to come bursting in from school, cheerily waving a painting.

This week, on 16 May, she would have been seven. We'd have organised the party together.

I was reading my *Take a Break* when I thought, 'I picked up a pen and started to write. I finished the letter and slipped it in the post.'

Days later we were contacted by *Take a Break* and they made a suggestion.

They collected me and I was driven out of Dunblane up into the Ochil Hills. We got out of the car and were met by Jill Aitken, a

...and planting the sapling

in memory of Victoria

Me (left) and Jill walking to the site



ranger with the Wood Trust. She led us up until we stood in Wood. A small hole dug and I knelt and put a fragile sapling of potted the soil into soft rain began to fall. I stood back and my head. This was no Victoria's Tree of life will grow and over years it will help us remember what a wonderful child she was.

Wilma Rorie, Ardorch Crest Dunblane

I dig a hole...



Lynne was my bridesmaid



Victoria was full of fun



First day at school

separately in police cars. Don't talk to the children the terrible news for us.

Victoria's big brother Lee was inconsolable. 'We left out this morning,' he said, 'but I promised her a kiss when she came home.'

Victoria's father Charlie Clyde-dale came to Lynne's house and she had to break the news to him. Their differences fell away as they wept together.

I went home and held my children Andrew and

Sharon. They were safe. How could Lynne's beautiful girl be gone?

We soon learnt the name of the madman who'd shot the 16 children and Gwen Mayor, their teacher. When his face appeared on telly I wanted to smash my fist through the screen.

I went to the funeral parlour. Victoria was lying there as if she was sleeping. I laid a rose on her chest and stroked her hair, the same silky hair she'd loved me to brush for her.

On the morning of the funeral Lynne looked dazed. I just can't face it, Wilma,' she whinged.

Again I took her hand and said: 'I'll be with you.'

Somehow we got through it together. After the service at Leperchroft Church near Bridge of Allen, we followed the hearse to Dunblane Cemetery.

Victoria was buried with our mum. As the coffin was lowered we went to pieces.

I just want my baby home,' Lynne sobbed. At that moment I wished I could have taken Victoria's place.

Afterwards every day