

I claimed to be rich just to bed women says '£180k con artist'



WIFE Caroline Morris



LOVER Anne Marshall

By Emily Kent Smith

A FLAMBOYANT 'conman' who allegedly fleeced five women out of £180,000 has denied trying to scam them – claiming he masqueraded as a millionaire so he could 'get them into bed'.

Matthew Samuels told of having a 'three-way relationship' with his wife and a stable girl before looking for partners online.

He described himself as a 'multimillionaire' with a string of properties across the globe when in fact he was a bankrupt car salesman with several failed businesses, it was alleged.

The 50-year-old is said to have duped the women into handing over cash by inventing family crises. He is accused of ten counts of fraud – but denies all the charges.

Giving evidence yesterday, Samuels told a court that he wasn't trying to con the women but simply wanted to build up 'physical relationships' with them. When asked why he had exaggerated his wealth, Samuels

'Build up a persona'

told Worcester Crown Court: 'To build up a persona with the objective of getting somebody into bed.'

Before meeting his alleged victims on dating websites, the former public schoolboy from Worcester was married to Caroline Morris, 48 – the mother of seven of his children.

He embarked on an affair with Anne Marshall in 2000, then a teenage stable girl, while the pair were still together.

Miss Morris, Miss Marshall and Samuels later became involved in a 'three-way relationship', the court heard. When asked about the love triangle yesterday, Samuels said: 'It started off as a relationship between the two of them. I became involved afterwards.'

The victims in the case, including a 79-year-old widow who lost more than £110,000, told the jury how



Accused: Matthew Samuels

Samuels had borrowed or allegedly invested money on their behalf.

When they asked when he would pay them back, he allegedly failed to answer his phone or told them he had cancer, his ex-wife was sick or that he had been robbed.

Referring to messages in which he claimed he was in hospital with health problems, Samuels said: 'Sometimes it was true, sometimes it was a lie to keep them at arm's length.'

He denied telling his alleged victims he was suffering from cancer and said he had been robbed on several occasions.

Single mother Nicola Hampshire was allegedly fleeced out of £12,000 after meeting Samuels online. She earlier told the court that she had lent him cash and her M&S credit card to pay a £46,000 tax bill.

According to Samuels, she had lent him the money of her 'own free will' in an attempt to 'mother' him.

Confronted with the fact that his victims had allegedly been left thousands out of pocket, Samuels said that, had it not been for his arrest, the women would have been paid back. He claimed that much of the money had been invested and he was unable to move it until a set date.

Samuels added that he had not done 'anything wrong' and that he felt 'hard done by'.

The trial continues.

life

THE autumn school term is in full swing and the nation's children, in neatly pressed uniforms complete with fiddly name tags, are settled into their new classes and routines.

All thoughts of jetting off to sun-drenched beaches have been banished for another year – or at least until the winter break.

Unless, of course, you're one of those families gearing up for their holiday now that everyone has settled back into work – in defiance of controversial new rules on unauthorised school absence which mean headteachers no longer have the discretionary powers to sanction term-time leave of up to ten days a year.

According to figures released by the Ministry of Justice, more than 16,000 parents have been prosecuted for failing to ensure their children went to school, a 25 per cent rise on the previous year.

And many of those charged initially refuse to pay the penalty – despite the fact that it rises the longer it remains unpaid.

Jenny and Roy Davies from Cheddar, Somerset, were aware of this when they took their two teenage children to Corfu for a week this time last year, days after the new school year started.

But they were not acting out of a selfish desire to take a cheaper getaway. After a turbulent two years of bereavement and ill health, which put the family under intolerable strain, they viewed the holiday as essential respite.

And the reason they took it in term-time is because Jenny was recovering from an operation in the long school summer holiday, during which she had to be cared for by her children. When the family returned to Britain, they were summoned to court.

'I was frightened at the prospect of going to jail but I felt so strongly that we hadn't done anything wrong I was prepared to do it,' says Jenny, a stay-at-home mother. 'Our circumstances were exceptional.'

A Government crackdown on truancy – imposed by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove in September 2013 – decreed only cases considered 'exceptional' are granted permission for term-time leave. But there is widespread confusion about what qualifies as 'exceptional'.

Schools are now encouraged to refer unauthorised absences to their Local Education Authority (LEA) to impose parental fines. If these aren't paid, parents face prosecution, penalties of up to £2,500 and a three-month prison sentence.

While it is hard to find sympathy for parents who simply want a cut-price holiday, there are many diligent middle-class parents who insist they should not be penalised for taking their children out of school for legitimate reasons and believe they are the

'I was scared of jail but we did nothing wrong'

unwitting victims of the Government's plan to tackle truancy.

'There is a clear difference between taking a child out of school for a week and truancy, and the two are being lumped together,' says Craig Langman, founder of the pressure group Parents Want A Say. 'The right to a family life is being severely compromised.'

It is a sentiment Jenny, 47, and Roy, 43 – who pleaded guilty in court and were spared prison but fined £340 – share.

In April 2013, Roy's father died of lung cancer leaving Roy, a welder, poleaxed with grief. Then, 12 days later, Jenny was rushed to hospital with an ovarian cyst. An operation later that week to remove the cyst, which turned out to be benign, left Jenny struggling to walk for months – and their children, Alistair, now 14, and Rhiannon, 13, caring for her.

'We usually go away for a sum-



Crisis: Shahnawaz Patel with sons Omar, left, and Eiad

by Antonia Hoyle

mer holiday, but instead the children spent their summer looking after me, while Roy was still destroyed by the loss of his dad,' says Jenny.

The family fared no better last year because Jenny had an operation to treat her arthritic toe in July that left her on crutches for the summer holidays.

'Yet again, the children had to look after me. I'd always prided myself on being a good mother and grew depressed,' she says.

By September last year, Roy and Jenny decided they needed to get away as a family.

'I was so down that Roy thought I would have a breakdown if he didn't take me away quickly,' Jenny recalls.

She called Rhiannon's head at Fairlands Middle School in Cheddar and Alistair's school Kings of Wessex Academy, also in Cheddar, to explain why they were taking their children away. Both refused to authorise the absence, with Alistair's school warning Jenny she could face a fine or 'more formal legal proceedings.'

'We decided to deal with it when we got back and had a wonderful time,' says Jenny. 'It was a bonding experience we all needed and nothing was said by either school when the children returned.'

But last November, both Jenny and Roy received a fine of £60 (each parent in charge of a child is liable for a fine) from Somerset County Council for Alistair's unauthorised absence. Yet they weren't fined for Rhiannon's absence, even though her school is subject to the same LEA.

'Presumably her school decided not to report it,' says Jenny. 'It struck us as unfair that there was a different rule for each child.'

'We decided that Alistair's school should have been less regimented so we dug our heels in and refused to pay the fine.'

After 21 days, their fines rose to £120 each, and 28 days after that – when they still hadn't paid – they were issued with a summons to Somerset Magistrates Court in February for breaching section 444 of the Education Act 1996, which stipulates that it is an offence for a child not to attend school regularly without reasonable justification.

'It was ridiculous that as law-abiding citizens we were being

subjected to such treatment,' says Jenny. 'We were adamant we wouldn't pay but couldn't afford legal representation.'

Of course, technically the Davieses aren't law-abiding in this case. But it seems unfair that they and many others who consider themselves upstanding members of the community are being lumbered with criminal records.

The couple only pleaded guilty because they believed they were admitting to not paying the fine – not breaching the Education Act. 'We knew we had done this but under the circumstances certainly didn't believe it was a crime,' says Jenny. At court, the magistrate imposed a £340 fine – which the couple are paying in weekly £5 instalments.

Magistrates' chairwoman, Charis Cavaghan-Pack, acknowledged the 'great disparity' in which the

'My father was ill. We just had to be there'

two schools had reacted to the absences could be considered 'unfair', but told the couple: 'We have to apply the law of the land.'

Kings of Wessex Academy declined to comment while a spokesman for Somerset County Council has said: 'We believe every child deserves the very best education and this is why we work closely with schools on attendance, which in a small number of cases results in penalty notices being issued.'

Jenny is still so angered she has decided to send Rhiannon – who was due to start at her brother's school in September – to a different senior school. But she says: 'If we needed a holiday in the same circumstances, I wouldn't hesitate to do the same again.'

Part of the problem is that it is not clear what circumstances are deemed 'exceptional' enough to justify school absence. Guidelines from trade union the National Association of Headteachers say 'children may need time to visit seriously ill relatives'.

But Shahnawaz Patel was prosecuted for taking his sons Omar, 11, and Eiad, eight, out of primary school to visit their desperately ill grandfather in Gujarat, India, in December last year.

'If we'd had any other choice we would have opted for it,' says Shahnawaz, 36, a paralegal from

Fed up with Frozen? This icy tale will melt hearts

IF YOUR children have spent the past year caterwauling 'Let it go', and if the thought of watching the Disney film *Frozen* even once more leaves you in despair, try keeping your little snowmen quiet with the book which inspired the film.

The *Snow Queen* by the Danish fairytale collector Hans Christian Anderson is published in a new translation, with eerily beautiful black-and-white illustrations

**Yes, they went away in term time.
But these families say they deserve
sympathy — not punishment**

Branded criminals just for taking our children on holiday

Preston, Lancashire. 'I don't think what we did was wrong.'

Shahnawaz's father Rafiq, 78, has been in poor health since being in a car crash in March 2012, which killed his wife. 'Shahnawaz, had spent two months in India looking after his father while his wife Sofiya, 38, remained with their sons in Britain.

Then in spring 2014, Rafiq suffered a fall, making it painful for him to walk. In that June his doctor told Shahnawaz his father need an operation that December to insert a steel rod into his leg.

'My father lives on his own and would have nobody to help him recuperate, which Sofiya and I wanted to do,' Rafiq recalls.

'At his age, I couldn't even be sure he would survive surgery and couldn't take the risk that my sons would never see him again.' So in

July 2014, Shahnawaz wrote to the headteacher at English Martyrs Catholic Primary in Preston explaining why he wanted to take his sons out in the December.

In September he received a letter from Lancashire council saying that if his children were removed from school he would be penalised.

'I requested a meeting with the headteacher,' he says. 'But she said they weren't exceptional circumstances. I asked what did constitute exceptional circumstances, and she said that was up to the council.'

So Shahnawaz asked Lancashire County Council who, he says, told him that they had no guidelines and was up to the head: 'They were passing the buck between each other.'

Such a shambolic process is far from unusual under the new regulations, says Craig Langman: 'The Government say the teachers have responsibility but the teachers blame their Local Education Authority, who in turn blame teachers.'

Shahnawaz says: 'We are good parents and not truants. Both boys excel at school and have never had unauthorised absence before. But I refused to deny them precious time with their grandfather.'

So he flew the family to India for ten days last December and says: 'The prospect of being penalised was always at the back of my mind.'

The penalty notice from the council arrived last January, fining Shahnawaz and Sofiya £120 — £60

**We're a special case:
Adeline Pilfold with sons
Milo, left, and Rocco**

per boy — each. 'We didn't want to go to court but I had to decide between sacrificing my father's treatment — that I was paying for — and paying the fine, which I couldn't afford,' says Shahnawaz.

After 21 days their fine doubled to £480. 'The stress built to boiling point,' says Shahnawaz. 'My wife wanted the misery over with whereas I decided we should fight because we hadn't done anything wrong.'

Twenty-eight days later they received a summons to Preston Magistrates Court. The hearing was eventually heard in July when the Patels pleaded guilty and were fined £650, which they are paying in instalments. 'I'm disappointed to have a criminal record,' says Shahnawaz. 'My bosses have been supportive but I don't know what effect it will have on my career.'

'I think there is something sinister behind these fines. It is part of the Government's austerity plan and another income source for them.'

Neither English Martyrs Catholic Primary nor Lancashire County Council wanted to comment, but there are others who believe the clampdown on unauthorised school absence is justified.

'There is clear evidence that even short breaks can have a detrimental



impact on academic results,' says Malcolm Trobe, Deputy General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.

'This may affect a pupil's future education and employment prospects. Schools recognise that pupils may have to take time off in exceptional circumstances.'

'However, absences should be avoided wherever possible, and

August,' explains Adeline, 39, an exhibition organiser from Camberley, Surrey. 'I certainly don't condone truancy but I believe holidays are educational and allow us to spend quality time together as a family.'

Her decision is also motivated by her son Rocco's autism. 'If I put him in a crowd he freaks out. He wouldn't cope with a busy airport in peak season,' she explains.

Adeline writes a letter to the head teacher at Hammond Community Junior School in Lightwater, Surrey every year asking permission.

In 2012 and 2013 the school authorised her request. But last year — after the Government's clamp down, they refused to authorise absence and this year, after the family's fortnight in a Spanish villa, they reported Adeline and Jason, 42, a construction manager, to Surrey council who issued the fine in August.

Adeline, who has paid the fine to avoid the stress of going to court, says: 'I don't blame the school — they're just doing as they have been told. But I'm infuriated and disappointed that the Government can't see when parents know what is best for their children.'

Until they do, ordinary parents will continue to be prosecuted.

'Our autistic son can't travel in holiday time'

holidays are not regarded as exceptional circumstances.'

The problem is that travel companies charge parents twice as much to go away in school holidays as in term time. Adeline and Jason Pilfold have just been fined £240 by Surrey County Council after taking sons Milo, nine, and Rocco, eight, who is autistic, out of school in the first fortnight of June for the fourth year running.

'We couldn't afford to go in

(Pushkin Children's Books, £6.99). It tells the story of friends Kai and Gerda and an evil Snow Queen. When she kidnaps Kai and spirits him away to her frozen kingdom, Gerda sets out to rescue him — and melt the shard of ice in his heart.

Challenge your children to spot the differences between the Disney and the Danish versions, while you relish the blissful snow-bound silence.