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# Paula Gilfoyle, 'Walter Mitty' and doubt over conviction

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They endured an unhappy marriage but did Paula Gilfoyle decide to put an end to her own torment or did her husband concoct a fiendish plot to kill her and their unborn baby?

She worked all her life in a spark-plug factory and supplemented her income by running a catalogue business.

He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, then became an auxiliary nurse at a Bupa hospital, preparing surgical instruments for operations.

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Gilfoyle took Paula as his second wife in 1989. After they bought a bigger home in 1991, she lived with her parents and he moved into the house to renovate it.

That summer he began a liaison with his coworker Sandra Davies, saying that he was separated and inviting her to live with him. Mrs Gilfoyle's pregnancy ended that dalliance. Mrs Davies, who had told her husband that she was leaving him for Gilfoyle, felt betrayed and dumped him. Gilfoyle confessed to his wife, who rang Mrs Davies and warned her off, moving in to their new home to prepare for the baby.

What happened next makes the difference between suicide and murder.

Notes in Mrs Gilfoyle's handwriting were produced at the trial. The first confessed to an affair and said the father of the unborn child was her secret lover's, a man called "Nigel", who has never been traced. The rest expressed an intention to commit suicide. Yet to family and friends, she seemed to be looking forward to the baby and making plans for the future.

After Mrs Gilfoyle's body was found in 1992, next to a stepladder presumably used in tying the rope to a beam, there was disbelief that she would kill herself two weeks before the birth.

Three friends went to the police and said that she had told a disturbing tale. Gilfoyle had dictated suicide notes to her, saying he needed them for a course at work, they said. Mrs Gilfoyle had said that he gave her a pen and paper and told her what to put down. One friend recalled that she had said that she was "a bit worried – Eddie's frightening me". As hearsay, the story was kept from the jury.

Police considered Gilfoyle was a “Walter Mitty character”. He served as an army ward orderly in the Falklands but may have painted himself as heroic. Joyce Preston, his boss in the Bupa hospital, said: “From what I gathered he was a stretcher-bearer, but you’d have thought he was a paramedic on some of the things [he said].”

Gilfoyle also exaggerated the importance of his civilian job, claiming to help in operations. He told police his wife admitted that the baby’s father was her sister’s husband. DNA tests showed the child was Gilfoyle’s.

At the trial, a video was played of a reconstruction with a pregnant policewoman standing on a stepladder. She managed to get the rope over the beam but was unable to tie a knot.

In 1993 Gilfoyle was unanimously found guilty by a jury at Liverpool Crown Court. Only when the Police Complaints Authority looked into the investigation in 1994 did formal concerns emerge. Its full report has not been released.

The authority took the unusual step of drawing the Crown Prosecution Service’s attention to doubts about the conviction. Three detectives were accused of neglect of duty. Two were cleared by the Chief Constable; the other had retired.

Gilfoyle lost his first appeal in 1995. Judges rejected the account of a witness, Maureen Piper, who claimed she saw Mrs Gilfoyle at 12.40pm the day of her death, which would have made it impossible for her husband to kill her before he went to work. Mrs Piper’s description of Mrs Gilfoyle’s light clothing suggested the sighting had been the previous Thursday, which had been fine, rather than the day of her death, which had been rainy.

A second appeal was thrown out in 2000 when expert evidence on pathology and knots was considered. Last year fresh doubt was thrown on that judgment, already regarded as contentious in legal circles, when it was revealed that the judges had thought the suicide note left by Mrs Gilfoyle had been typed when, in fact, it was handwritten.

Supporters have created a website, [eddiegilfoyle.co.uk](http://eddiegilfoyle.co.uk), to campaign to clear his name.