

It took a long time for him to commit to a relationship because he didn't want someone else dragged into the situation. Before he was sentenced in 1995, he thought he'd spend a long period in jail for what he'd done to Christopher. It wasn't until 1997 that we became serious.

I've never had a doubt about his innocence. But there's been a trial and a jury convicted him so, obviously, there are people who don't share my view.

Jeff has a fabulous sense of humour. It's his ability to cope through this dreadful tragedy and how he's been able to move his life forward that I respect and admire most. He's a kind, loving person. He's good fun.

Jeff proposed to me in January 1999 and we married in March 2000. Our wedding was a do-it-yourself affair in a garden; it was a lovely day. Jeff's Uncle Alf – the husband of his mother's sister – made a beautiful speech, I guess standing in for Jeff's parents, and he made a toast to Helen and Stephen. Jeff was really moved. It took us by surprise and he was quite emotional; he had to support himself against a wall while I made an impromptu speech.

We had a normal life. We both worked as engineers and we'd bought an old house that needed a lot of work, so our weekends focused around that. We'd have friends over for dinner, we'd visit family – pretty average stuff.

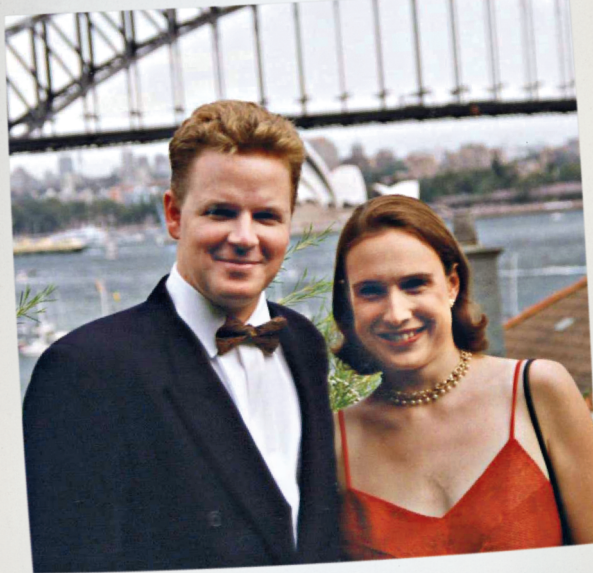
Our first daughter was born in 2002, the second in 2006, and the third in 2008. Jeff was always incredibly involved with them.

In November 2008, after spending two-and-a-half years on bail, Jeff was convicted of murdering his parents. When I heard the verdict, I remember looking at the foreman and saying to myself, you've got it wrong.

That was on a Friday and I didn't get to talk to him until Monday, when I visited him in Sydney's Silverwater prison. All I remember is the crying and hugging. We hadn't prepared for him being convicted. We hadn't said, "OK, if this happens, this is what we'll do." There was no plan; he was just plucked out of his life.

My eldest daughter was six at the time. I asked a friend, who's a school counsellor, how to explain it to her. We sat her down and told her there had been a dreadful mistake and Daddy wouldn't be coming home.

At first, I couldn't function. I'd force myself to eat, so I could breastfeed our youngest. I'd lie there at night waiting for her to wake for a feed.



(clockwise from left) Jeffrey and Rebecca started a relationship in the late '90s; on their wedding day; the birth of their second child in 2006.



"I believe Jeff will come home. Emotionally, I haven't prepared for that not happening"

I don't know if a baby was a distraction as such, but it was great to have a little bundle of love. She looks like Jeff; they all do – our three blonde girls [now aged three, five and nine].

We're honest with the girls. Our eldest was about four-and-a-half when she started asking what had happened. Jeff told her he had a brother, Christopher, who had killed their parents and he had killed Christopher. They took it away and processed it, then came back and asked more questions, most of all, "But why did Christopher kill his parents?" I told them his mind wasn't well – that was the best way I could express it to a child.

My parents divorced when I was nine, so I knew when I chose to get married, I'd be absolutely certain about the person. I had a fantastic husband who was a great father. It's devastating to have things happen that are completely out of your control in every way.

For everything I want to achieve in life, I work hard; you do what you have to do to make it happen. I guess I've treated this situation in the same way. I love Jeff. I think

our relationship has survived because I'm open with him about what's happening – good, bad or ugly. A good relationship is based on good communication. We've always had that.

I'm surviving as a single parent now, but I regard this as a temporary situation. I believe Jeff will come home. Emotionally, I haven't prepared for that not happening.

I talk to him most days; he's allowed six-minute phone calls. Jeff and I used to speak any number of times throughout the day, so it was an enormous change to have such a limited amount of contact.

I try to visit him [in Goulburn jail] every second week. The girls see him about once a month. Our eldest has been amazing. I've told her more than once, "Worse things than this can happen to us. We can still see Daddy." She's spouted those words back at me. She was old enough to know Jeff before he went to jail and she has a close bond with him. All the girls do. He was the one who got up in the middle of the night, who looked after them if they were sick or if they cut their knee. He was a very hands-on dad. Losing one of their primary carers and having the other fall apart at the same time has been difficult for them.

When we visit Jeff, our youngest runs across the visiting room, arms outstretched, yelling out "Daddy". That's not something I can make her do, it's only a relationship that he can generate with her. And obviously, she's feeding off the love the older girls and I have for him. It's not something you can create.

His relationship with our daughters is a comfort to him. I feel good that I've been able to provide an environment where they can maintain it. They're the biggest victims in this. They've had their wonderful father taken out of their lives.

I don't know what my children will end up doing. I think my second daughter would be a good lawyer. I hope I can teach them to stand up for what they believe in. ■

Gilham's appeal begins November 28.

