

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

# 'MELISSA CADDICK RUINED MY LIFE'

An elderly victim shares her pain after losing her life savings

**A**n Australian widowed pensioner is battling through her retirement and suffering "severe stress" after losing her life savings to fraudster Melissa Caddick.

Alice\*, a 71-year-old mum and grandmother who worked in education, had invested her superannuation with Melissa's financial services company in the hope it would provide a comfortable retirement for herself, and an inheritance for her adult children.

"It gets worse every day," Alice, who asked not to be identified, tells *Woman's Day*. "The worry is pulling my health down. After working hard for many years, my capacity to enjoy my senior years has been destroyed."

As revealed in the NSW coronial inquest into Melissa's crimes, the "Queen of the

Con" operated a sham investment scheme, raking in around \$23 million from at least 65 people, including family and friends, and promising them huge returns.

**TRUSTED FRIEND**

Instead, Melissa used these life savings to fund a lavish lifestyle with her husband, hairdresser Anthony Koletti, and her teenage son from a previous marriage. Anthony has vehemently denied any knowledge of his wife's crimes and has not been charged with any offence.

Melissa, 49, disappeared on November 12, 2020, the day after the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) raided her luxury eastern suburbs Sydney home.

Three months later, her decomposed foot was found on a remote NSW beach, leading police to believe she had taken her own life.

Last week, the deputy state coroner Elizabeth Ryan ruled that Melissa is dead, but the manner of her demise remains unknown.

With most of Melissa's assets now sold, her victims, including Alice, are expected to receive a return of around 30c for every dollar they invested. This week the

receivers' application for a court direction relating to the proposed distribution of assets is set to be heard.

"When I met Melissa, she was empathetic and interested in me and my problems," says Alice, who was recommended Melissa by a friend. "She was horrified to learn I had been widowed, and wanted to help me financially. I felt like she was someone to be trusted."

**'I trusted Melissa... All my money was in her name'**

After transferring her superannuation nest egg of \$475,000 to Melissa, Alice received what looked like monthly statements from CommSec, the Commonwealth Bank's online stockbroking firm.

But it was all an intricate scam of lies and false documents. Melissa was using the savings of hard-working Australians like Alice to fund a life of luxury that included a \$6.2 million harbourside mansion,



Alice says she's ashamed about what happened.

a \$300,000 Audi sports car for her husband, designer dresses, jewellery and skiing trips to the US.

When ASIC began investigating Melissa following a tip-off about her practices, Alice scoffed at the idea her "financial adviser" had done anything wrong. "I thought it couldn't be true," says Alice. "I trusted Melissa."

It wasn't until Alice's bank cards no longer worked that she realised she had fallen victim to a supreme con artist. "All my money was in her name, so my accounts were frozen," she says. "I felt utterly hopeless."

"My kids had to cover my living expenses. One of my kids borrowed money for me. It was hard and humiliating."

Since then, the battle over Melissa's assets has been another source of pain. Alice



only in Woman's Day



**MELISSA'S AUCTIONED BELONGINGS**

\$9.8 million

The mansion sold for a reported fortune.



\$565

Black satin Christian Louboutin mules



\$2700

Chanel boucle jacket with black silk lining



\$1227

Oscar de la Renta ball gown

Louis Vuitton Flame Twist MM bag



\$4909

\$920

Christian Dior patent slingbacks



is at a loss to understand why Melissa's parents Barb and Ted Grimley, who are also victims of their daughter, continue to live in the Sydney luxury apartment that Melissa helped purchase using stolen funds.

**SEVERE STRESS**

Melissa's victims argued that the apartment, estimated to be worth \$4.5 million, should be sold and the funds be added to the pool for the out-of-pocket investors.

The Grimleys, who are in their 80s, have reportedly offered to vacate the apartment for \$950,000, which would be a much higher return than the other compensated victims.

"I feel very sorry for her parents, but they should be treated the same," says Alice. She's heard Melissa's crimes have fractured the Grimley family, due to her relatives also investing with the fraudster.

"Melissa has broken up the whole family," she said. "The relatives are not talking to the parents any more."

Alice wonders if Melissa herself is still profiting from her crimes.

"Until the inquest, I felt that she was dead, but today I feel that maybe she's somewhere overseas," she says.

"I search on the internet to see if I can see an appearance of her somewhere overseas. Other victims are looking into it, too. People are hurting and clutching at straws."

Today, Alice is still struggling. "Melissa Caddick's actions have caused me severe stress," she says. "I'm ashamed of it. I will never understand what Melissa has done. I don't trust people like I did before."



\$295,000

Anthony's Audi, with personalised number plates.



Melissa's parents are among her victims.

\*Name has been changed. If you need help, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.