

# Parents offer reward to catch son's killers

Jacqui Goddard St Lucia

A British couple fighting to bring their son's murderers to justice in St Lucia announced a reward for information yesterday, describing it as their "last throw of the dice" after the governments of both countries left them to solve the case themselves.

Helen and Theo Gobat said that a lack of police resources in St Lucia meant that an official investigation had barely got off the ground in the seven months since their son Ollie, 38, a hotelier and entrepreneur, was shot by contract killers.

The British government has refused to send police to investigate because of its opposition to the death penalty, which St Lucia — a member of the Commonwealth — retains for murder.

"Getting justice for Ollie is like pushing water uphill," said Mrs Gobat, of Esher, Surrey.

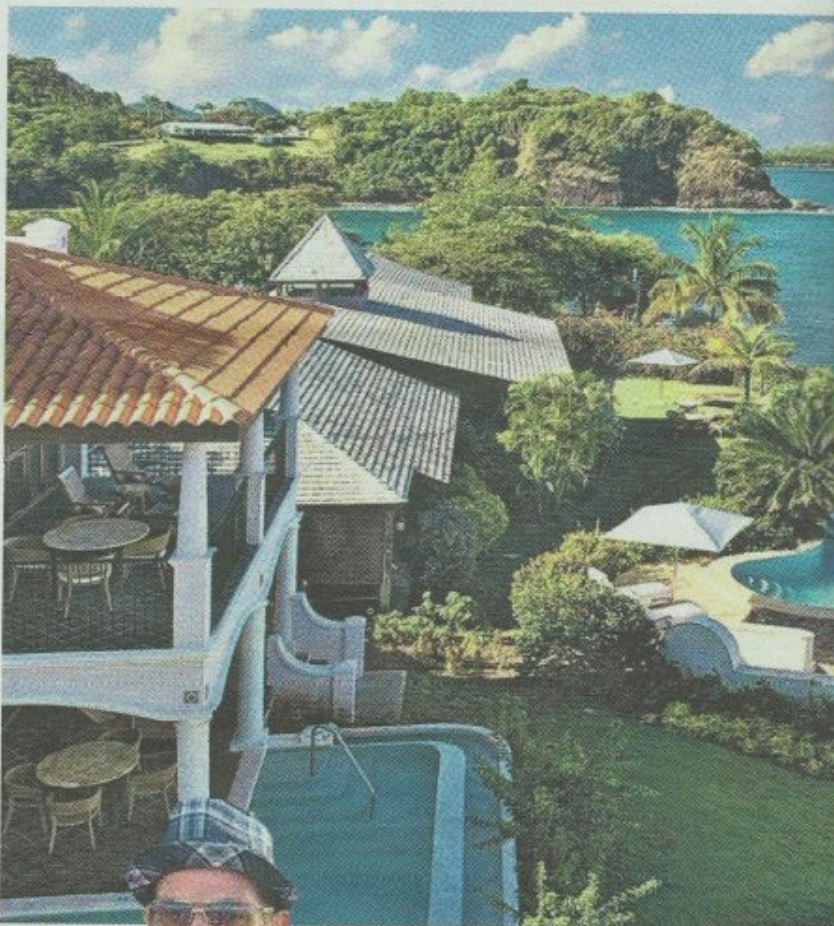
"Unless we can get an outside police force in, we face a big challenge. We've been pushing the British government to do it but they won't... There's nobody in the Foreign Office prepared to stick their neck on the line and say, 'We've got to do something about this.'"

Mr Gobat's death is one of hundreds of unsolved murders on St Lucia. The family has so far spent more than £100,000 on bringing in an external forensic science team to recover evidence missed by police and on launching a private investigation headed by a former member of the UK's Serious Organised Crime Agency. His efforts have turned up critical leads, brought forward witnesses and suggested potential persons of interest.

Conducted in the face of intimidation and death threats, the private investigation has suggested that Mr Gobat's legitimate business relating to a luxury resort called The Landings may have ruffled feathers in the criminal underworld.

"This is serious and organised crime, a contract killing," said the investigator, whose three decades of service in British law enforcement also included stints in Scotland Yard's elite special patrol group, anti-corruption squad and regional crime squad.

"But this case is solvable, it's do-able, and we're going to keep fighting," he

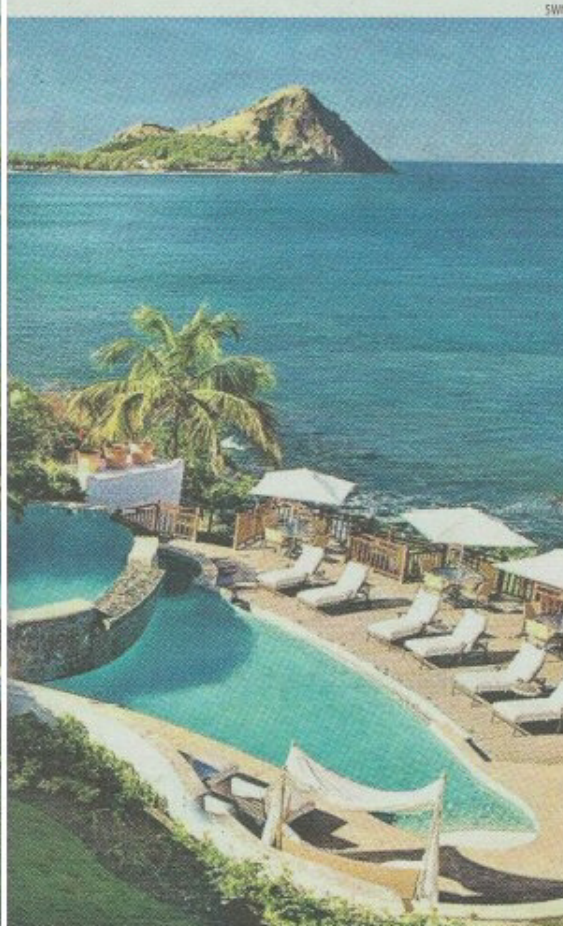


added. Mr Gobat survived cancer as a teenager and went on to pursue successful business ventures that included co-ownership with his parents and two brothers of St Lucia's exclusive Cap Maison hotel.

The family has created thousands of jobs and brought millions of pounds in investment and tourism to the Caribbean island over the past 42 years.

Mr Gobat's burning Range Rover, containing his burnt body, was found on an unpaved track on the Cap Estate on April 25. He had been shot in the head.

Police removed the body from the car, and the car from the crime scene, within hours, with minimal forensic examination. The crime scene was not sealed off and there was no public



Ollie Gobat's parents scatter his ashes; left, Cap Maison; below, Mr Gobat and sister-in-law Alexandra

'Getting justice for Ollie is like pushing water uphill'

appeal for witnesses. The St Lucian government asked the Foreign Office in July for help from British police. However, there is reluctance in Whitehall to get involved in the former British colony's law enforcement process because the death penalty is still the statutes.

Peter Foster, QC, Speaker of St Lucia's House of Assembly, said: "We feel the British have forgotten us in St Lucia. We need help with our police force, serious help."

"The fact is that although the death penalty is still in place here, it has not been used since 1995 and the Privy Council would never allow it to be. It's something that would never happen, yet it's standing in the way of progress on this case."

The Gobats estimate that their private investigation could ultimately

cost as much as £500,000 and fear that their efforts to uncover the truth about Ollie's murder have also made them and their other two sons potential targets. They now travel with protection.

"I never imagined I'd have to go swimming at a beach where I've been swimming for 30 years with an armed bodyguard," said Mr Gobat, 75.

"To think that I could go to the end of my days without knowing who killed Ollie and seeing them brought to justice... it's ghastly."

Local and international business and tourism contacts have contributed to a reward fund of 250,000 Eastern Caribbean dollars — about £60,000 — to bring forward leads and witnesses.

Mrs Gobat said: "I'd like to see the evil people who brought this upon Ollie brought to justice, for our sake, for Ollie's sake and for St Lucia's sake."