

*To: Justice Stephen Hall*

*In the matter of: Bradley Robert Edwards*

*Charge: Convicted of two counts of aggravated sexual penetration without consent and one count of deprivation of liberty*

**Victim Impact Statement:**

“They say you always remember your first. In my case, I consider my first is Chloe.”

After I read those words in the paper from a story found on the perpetrator’s computer — which appears were related to me — a little piece of me broke. I ended up having a panic attack so badly I nearly ran my car off the road. What made it so difficult for me to breathe was how someone could think so little of another human.

I pulled my car to the side of the road and was literally gasping for breath. My lungs constricted, my legs were shaking uncontrollably and I couldn’t feel one side of my face. I thought I was having a stroke. It took me days to recover.

That is a singular Victim Impact.

That moment happened 24 years after the most horrific night of my life, it is just one small moment of so many, many moments that have kept me caged inside this traumatising experience.

So how do you encapsulate pain that endures and you are made to relive for more than two decades so publicly? How do you explain how it is has impacted you? The truthful answer is you can’t, you can only shed light...and so I will try.

You don’t ever recover from sexual assault, it is a lifelong sentence, mine has just been more widely discussed and publicised than most.

When it came to writing this, I felt conflicted even attempting it, as I found even the idea of a Victim Impact statement a bizarre concept.

Why would you want to explain just how traumatic the worst night of your life made you feel knowing the person who inflicted the pain could read it or hear it? That to me, seemed ludicrous. But after much contemplation what I came to realise was that, for me, it was important to have a voice and that I really don’t care how someone, who to me is inhuman, responds...but I do care deeply about how other assault victims feel and how my family and friends feel so my statement is in their honour.

How do you encapsulate 25 years of Victim Impact, how should it be measured? For me it was a night of terror with so much associated pain in the aftermath that it his hard to know where to begin.

Should I start with the nights lost to sleeplessness, stress induced weight loss or the clumps of hair that have fallen out, the onset of panic attacks, breakdowns, fear of the dark, being on constant high alert or jumping when the phone rings wondering if they have found him?

I could use words like degraded, captured, unable to breathe, drowning in fear, indescribable fear...fear so bad you wished you weren’t breathing because then maybe it would stop. But these words don’t come close.

I will never be able to truly convey the impact of being captured and deprived of my liberty. I knew when it happened instantly I was in very real danger. By the time I was in his vehicle I was picturing my own gravesite... and that is a difficult concept to live with.

Not only have I had to face my own mortality, believing I wouldn’t survive...then I actually had to survive it. I have also sat in a courtroom and listened to a Judge and lawyers coolly discuss whether or not I was going to be murdered that night, that is not normal, and that has impact.

It would be far too easy for me to describe each step of the horror of that night and the subsequent fallout of something so terrifying happening to someone so young, but considering the level of detail already covered in this trial I don't need to revisit it, but the fallout was very real. It happened to me at such a young age, my youth was taken from me for no reason.

In fact, there is so much you lose in the aftermath of sexual assault. So much is taken from you so quickly and in such finality. Your dignity, your security, your ability to trust, but what I also felt was taken from me was my home.

Claremont was where I grew up, I know for most that is hugely privileged...and it is, but it was simply all that I knew. My parents didn't grow up with any wealth, they worked hard their whole lives for their family. I worked four part-time jobs straight out of school while I was studying at University which I paid for. Life wasn't given to me on a platter.

Claremont was just simply my world — it had been where I grew up, went to school, where my friends were, where I worked, where I shopped, where I learnt to drive, where I socialised it was my complete childhood. It was where I felt safe.

So imagine when all of that is taken from you...and you still have to live in it. Every single street, light post, flashing sign, car that passes, carpark, shopfront, edge of a building, dark alleyway, footpath, person who walks past, anything really — after that night it all meant something different. That has impact.

Sexual assault makes you feel like not only are you unsafe but you also don't belong like you did before. You don't look at people the same way, you don't touch people the same way, you lower your shoulders, eyes down, every shape and colour changes. For awhile anyway. Until you learn to fight again.

I will never pretend that night has not had a devastating impact on my life, because it did, and it has deeply affected my family. And cruelly has continued to do so. But I have always refused to ever let it define me.

As a victim it feels like you pay, and then you have to pay and then pay again even though you did nothing wrong.

I have always maintained that some of the worst parts of that horrific experience was the aftermath. You are obviously irrevocably scarred from the incident...but what you can't be prepared for is what you have to endure in it's wake. The tests, the interrogation, the medical fallout, the psychological fallout, the questioning, witness statements, police meetings...and for me due to the callous nature of the perpetrator's crimes committed for many families, the Macro meetings, DPP meetings and now the court case...and the emotional roller coaster of delays — all making you relive the worst night of your life over and over all because of something, someone else chose to do...and then was too gutless to own up to.

One of the worst aspects for me during all of this, was a close member of my family became ill during the trial, and had to seek treatment in Hollywood Hospital. That is not a place for me that holds memories I would ever want to revisit. So not only was I was having to visit this hospital in between attending court, I had to drive past Karrakatta Cemetery to do so. This cruel irony never failed to escape me and will haunt me forever. That has impact.

If you actually want to know what it feels like to experience all of this pain Your Honour — it is lonely...deep, gut-wrenching loneliness that literally no one else can understand because your experience is solitary.

It is also constantly having to fight to lead a normal life after a very abnormal experience. Learning how to trust people again; how to force yourself to eat when all you feel is nausea; how to put a brave face on because everyone else has moved on and hopes you have too; how you need to constantly pull yourself together every time you are triggered...for 25 years; learning how to NOT re-live that experience every night; how to not pass the pain on — it is exhausting and that has impact.

The toll that it has also taken on me is having to watch the immense pain etched on my family and friends' faces knowing how much I am suffering and not being able to take it away.

I have had to relive more than two decades of this ongoing nightmare but it is not me alone who has had to endure it. Not only does the victim have to go through the life-changing challenges such a terrifying act brings but its ripple effect is seemingly endless.

It affects the people who have guilt about whether they should have got you home safely - let me be very clear that was nobody's fault but the perpetrator's.

It affects the hospital staff who find you as a shaking mess trying to work out what has happened.

It affects the mother who has to wake her child in the middle of the night to take the morning after pill

It affects the father and sister who have to sit outside while you are interrogated by the police for hours on end, challenging what you are saying.

It affects parents who wait by the phone for AIDS test results hoping the nightmare doesn't get any worse than it already is.

It affects the husband who has to watch their wife crumbling when times are bad.

It affects the Macro police officers who have to witness the horror of the information that crosses their desk and then go home to their families at night.

It affects the legal team who spend nights worried if they have every detail right, because they can't have it on their heads, not to gain Justice

It affects anyone who knows you...and cares about you.

The rippling effect continues and I have spent my entire life trying to fight its spread and fight its impact.

So where should the measure start and where does it end? I have experienced all of these ramifications but it is not the measure of who I am. While all of this has happened to me, I have never let it rule me. Something can break you, but you can still survive it, and you can thrive. Just as I have.

As a victim of sexual assault I have always felt a sense of duty to myself to not let one more minute than need be wasted on being a victim any further. For me it was a choice, it was a choice to let that moment control me or fight every day to not let that happen. There is power in realising that, power in realising that you know the truth and that you don't have to prove it to anyone to find peace. That you have the power to not let that moment change you. That's the path I chose, but only with a lot of love and support.

In my family we have never referred to the Perpetrator by name. We used to refer to him as the monster, however since his capture I have realised he is not a monster at all, rather the definition of a coward. He preyed on weak, vulnerable young women who didn't stand a chance. How pathetic. It has been much easier in terms of impact to realise there was no evil genius at work here, he slipped through the cracks because he is unremarkable.

If having the opportunity of a Victim Impact Statement is being able to voice how it has made you feel...then the only way anyone could possibly understand, is to imagine all the despicable, torturous, harmful, terrifying deeds enacted and imagine it being done to someone you love. Your mother, your sister, your daughter. I am a mother, sister and daughter and this happened to me. So if you picture that happening to someone you love over and over and over and just imagine that kind of pain and torture. Then you might come close.

Far more resolved people than I will find the courage and foresight to forgive so they can move on with their lives and stop the impact. I have the utmost respect for that kind of bravery and compassion.

I, however, will never offer forgiveness and I am completely at peace with that. In fact I will find joy knowing you are locked behind bars, without freedom without choice, suffering for the rest of your life inside your own crippled mind.

I feel like the rippling effect of pain, for me, can stop now.

They say you always remember your first. Well in my case Edwards, I consider my first victory is you. You made me strong.

And now I will leave this behind. I will leave this courtroom and finally go and live my life without you in it. I will live it joyously, respectfully and gratefully for myself, my family and for the lives that were lost. I will live and you won't.

And as one of the victims of your crimes, I hope you are treated as well in prison as you have treated us.