

Experiences of domestic and sexual violence were recorded within my family many years before I was born, and it is likely that this is too the case for my parents. Rather than denouncing the perpetrator, or supporting and validating the survivor, the information disclosed was suppressed and became gossip among the extended family. So why was it then surprising when I came forward, openly and honestly disclosing my experiences of lifelong childhood domestic and sexual violence, members of my family network had a difficult time believing my accusations? It was not the wake-up call I hoped that it would be, but rather it perpetuated my anger toward the reality that had the survivors of childhood sexual violence within our family be protected some 30 years before me, I may have never been abused and tortured the way I had, and for as long as I was, at the hands of [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

I am now [REDACTED] years old, and I have not had any direct contact with my [REDACTED] as a parent, since I was 12, when he was still sexually abusing me; violence he has since been found guilty of, and received a sentence [REDACTED]. This results entirely from the calibre in which I provided my testimony and subsequent Victim Impact Statement (VIS), as both highlighted in His Honour's [REDACTED] page Judgement and Sentencing Remarks. I consider myself very fortunate to have received the support I did to achieve such results, however, this only came once I had the courage to disclose my trauma, and pursue the case, and while [REDACTED] was tried and found guilty on persistent child sexual abuse charges against me occurring for approximately the last six months of our contact, I have memory of sexual abuse perpetrated by him throughout my entire childhood, dating back as early as toddlerhood, as well as documented overt coercive control and emotional abuse my entire life.

The support I received from the police and the Attorney General's Department was infallible; they were affirming, validating, dedicated, and equally as desperate as I to have my [REDACTED] convicted. But what about the years before? Where were the people who had the power to change my fate? They were there, but they had blinkers on. Since my more public disclosures, not one person has been surprised, and while this is incredibly empowering to know that I am seen as a survivor [REDACTED], it leaves me questioning why not one person stepped in.

I disclosed my abuse when I had just turned 16 and decided to have [REDACTED] charged within six months from my initial outcry. It took three years to get to trial, and another six months before we heard closing arguments. It was a trial by judge alone, meaning we would be notified in due time when His Honour was ready to hand his verdict down, which meant it was just shy of a year from my testimony before the judgement was provided and [REDACTED] was subsequently remanded; followed by another three months before sentencing was complete, which was in October 2023. Before the sentence had even been handed down, appeals were already in motion, but for the time being, my [REDACTED] is an incarcerated child sex offender, against his only daughter.

I appreciate that as judiciary, there is a Presumption of Innocence toward the accused and the Burden of Proof is at the standard it is, of Beyond Reasonable Doubt, but while my experience within the criminal justice system was relatively smooth, supportive and validating, it was still incredibly exhausting, discouraging and vilifying at times. I had 19 years of my life placed under a microscope and was questioned on each and every decision I had made until that point. I was blamed by the defence, who ultimately, while simultaneously maintaining my father's innocence, also concluded that I was simply a nasty little girl, who wanted to victimise her [REDACTED] for leaving her family some 12 years prior. My entire medical history was questioned, including but not limited to being asked whether I attended each individual regular medical screening, as well as other more specialised appointments, dating back 5+ years.

To my memory, I provided roughly [REDACTED] police statements during the course of the proceedings. [REDACTED] had one interview with the police upon his arrest, and another failed attempt in later months. It was only at Sentencing, where, after I had not only had my medical and inpatient records referenced within the Judgement, as well as my VIS detailing my ongoing experiences with Complex PTSD and [REDACTED], did the defence make any mention to my [REDACTED] past (which was still objectively inaccurate, but that's their cross to bear), of which the judge was rather unsympathetic by comparison.

I held really very high hopes for the Sentencing Submissions, for I believed this would be where all of the pieces would come together. [REDACTED] would disclose his history of domestic abuse, and that of those before him. Alas, he did not and my pursuit for an answer continues.

While there certainly was some improvement within my mental and physical wellness after [REDACTED] incarceration and subsequent sentence, none of it was lasting. Within a matter of weeks to months, I began experiencing a significant deterioration, or regression, of both my physical and mental health. Within [REDACTED] sentence, I made the decision to cease contact with the majority of [REDACTED], for their victim blaming was too much for me to fight, whilst trying to be more open and unadulterated about my experiences. I'm sure their beliefs have only strengthened, which is both validating my decision and crippling me.

In saying this, while I'm incredibly unwell [REDACTED] and its significant influence by my [REDACTED], I am determined to have my voice and story heard, so that I know that the cycle stops with me. I'm taking back my power.